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THE DARK PLACES

PERCEVAL GIBBON

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THE DARK PLACES

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BY THE SAME AUTHOR

MARGARET HARDING

THE SECOND-CLASS PASSENGER

THE DARK PLACES

A VOLUME OF STORIES

BY

PERCEVAL GIBBON

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CONTENTS

	PAGE
THE ENGLISH TUTOR	1
SAINT FLOSSIE	93
PROXY	109
SPOTLESS	131
THE MAN OF SCIENCE	147
THE DARK RIDE	231

TO
MY WIFE

THE DARK PLACES

THE ENGLISH TUTOR

THE bitter miles of the road, rough with frost-crisped mud that bruised his feet through the broken soles of his shoes, had taken toll of his endurance; the early dark of the Russian November afternoon, venomous with cold, had gathered in about him over the featureless and desert lands. Somewhere in that solitude and desolation there lurked the house which he had come forth to seek—the fabled criminal house, whose directions had been given to him in a flutter of whispers—where food was to be had, a sackful for a diamond ring, a truckload for a pair of sound boots. The rumour of its existence had currency in the misery of Moscow like a tale of buried treasure.

"There are no other houses near it. The village is farther on. It stands alone."

It was the woman whom once or twice he had seen and passed on the stairs of the great appartement-building which housed him who had told him that. He had never before spoken to her, but he thought he remembered to have heard that she was a nun, escaped with her life, at least, from the plunder and destruction of her convent. She had been coming down the stairs when he returned from his shuddering day-long wait in the four-deep queue at one of the Soviet's depôts of edible garbage. He had a loaf in the pocket of his overcoat; as they neared each other her eyes went to the bulge it made and rose thence to his face. He smiled faintly and ruefully and drew aside to let her pass.

Instead of passing she stood still on the step above him and continued to look at him.

Godfrey Hope was a youth in the middle twenties. He wore the wreck of a quilted overcoat and a baldish old astrakan cap; his shoes were bound together with ropeyarns, and he had a sack folded shawl-fashion about his neck. And for all that, he was as English as afternoon tea. Yes, afternoon tea: the same gentle and genteel amenity, the same small and taking formality that goes properly with the silver vessels and the pretty china. He was of the middle height, slender to the point of flimsiness, small and delicate in feature, and when he made way for a lady, or raised his hat, or performed any minor courtesy, the scenery of a drawing-room seemed to shape in the air about him.

The nun, if she was one, stood some seconds ere she spoke, surveying him with a swiftly narrowed interest.

"Bread?" she asked suddenly.

"Yes," he said, and drew forth the loaf to show her—a thing roughly globular, about the size of two large fists, mud-coloured and seemingly made of mud.

It had to suffice for himself and two others who awaited him, huddled in their fireless room above, but he knew he would not deny her a share if she needed it. He was seeking words in which to say so, when her gesture put the thing from her.

"Wait!" she said. "I'll tell you. Wait!"

She bent over the stair-rail, scouting with wary eyes for possible eavesdroppers. Above them the skylight was opaque with grime; from the hallway below the light of the open street-door rose languidly to show them to each other—he, undisguisable, of a personal quality as fixed and recognisable as his sex; she, tragically grotesque with her dirt-crusted face, her

costume of stained khaki trousers and stinking sheepskin jacket, and all her effect of a thing brutally defaced and clumsily patched. They had the stairway to themselves for the moment; and across the great gulf of purpose and experience that parted them, she reached as it were a hand, crippled and defiled, yet tendering a gift. She spoke and he listened intently.

"There *is* such a place, then?"

He stared at her, thrilled yet incredulous, though she had given to him, in whispered snatches of speech, between glances up and down the well of the stairway, directions as detailed and precise as marching orders.

"Truly—truly!" she declared, still in a whisper, but with a manner of passionate assertion. "Would I tell you in jest? Bread—not like that loaf you have there; and potatoes; and sometimes other things! I have been there. Why do you doubt me?"

"I don't," he answered; "since you assure me," he added. "I am awfully grateful. But I can't help wondering why you have told it to me, of all people."

Again she steadied her look upon him. She did not smile; it was unthinkable that a smile should ever break upon the breathless tensity of her face. But a sort of bitterness of mirth flickered in the smoulder of her eyes.

She shrugged. "Oh—just politeness!" she answered, and moved away. When he would have called thanks after her, she turned and laid an urgent finger on her lips.

"Then I will call on you to-morrow when I return," he promised.

She nodded. "*Do svidania*—till we meet!" floated back to him. Her boots, huge and wooden-soled, climped like hoofs on a pavement as she passed on;

he watched her to the hall and till she disappeared through the street-door. He never saw her again.

Godfrey Hope had been English tutor to the little grandson of Prince and Princess Orlovsky, living with his employers in their great old country house among the woods of Kaluga. The boy's father and mother had fetched him away before the moment when Russia went rabid ; Hope had stayed on through the *jacquerie*, when the season of murder and rapine was opened and it was too late to get out of the country. He had smuggled his Prince and Princess to Moscow, with their jewellery and their worthless store of money hidden on their bodies ; he was still with them, finding them food as he could, interposing the little he had of strength and resource between them and the blessings of the Red Millennium, comforting them and drugging them to tranquillity with his little forms of deference and decorum of manners. They were old, and the times had multiplied their years—old and simple and helpless. They had never known the rough surfaces of life ; to desert them would be worse than brutal and cowardly—it would have been " caddish ! "

" That damned house ! "

He came to a standstill on the dark road, baffled ; all the afternoon he had limped and trudged upon his quest, and now, at last, he was ready to turn back, spent and empty-handed, to the familiar misery whence he had come. He began to do so ; he was in the act of turning, when the house itself seemed suddenly to stand up in the darkness, actual and near, its thatched roof humped like a stooped back against the lesser gloom of the sky—as though it crouched there in hiding.

" It stands alone ! " The nun had made a point of that ; and it seemed to him now, when he approached

it and paused to take stock of it, that no other house had ever been so alone. It stood like a tombstone in a desert. Before it, the dreary road dragged its empty miles into the void of night; the darkness crowded in upon it; over it the sky was starless; and to the north, where once Moscow had blazed and boiled, dimming the altar-candles of her thousand churches with gayer and more gaudy fires, there was again only the blackness of the night, dire with omens.

No light showed at any chink in sealed door and windows; only the single chimney breathed forth a slim spire of smoke that poised straight as a rod, ghost-like and steady in the windless air. Save for an occasional handful of live charcoal in a dish, Godfrey Hope had not seen a fire for many weeks. It needed no more; this was the place. He raised his hand and beat upon the door.

Through the thickness of its planks there came to him no stir of movement within. The door fell open without warning. The shape of a man filled its place, a mere bulk of lowered peering head and massive body silhouetted against a glow of light inside the cottage.

"*Shto takoe?*" demanded the man. "What is it?"

The sudden opening of the door took him by surprise. He had prepared for this moment a little battery of words, discreet and conciliatory, but now he baulked and stammered.

"*Prostitye*—forgive me! I—er I—came—I was told that you—er——"

"*Nu!*" The man in the door broke in upon him. He had a deep voice that boomed with cracks of a shriller harshness in it. "It's food, of course! You want to buy food, eh?"

Impatience and angry contempt were in his tone. With his lighted hearth at his back and his stores of

food, he had power ; the trumpet of his voice was a vaunt and a threat ; and Hope, trembling in the naked road before him, was afraid. For in Russia, to have power is to use it for cruelty.

" Yes," he faltered feebly. " I—er——"

" Of course ! " boomed the other. " I knew it ! Another cursed bourgeois come begging ! "

He was slouched forward between the doorposts to peer at his visitor, and now he jerked upright. Godfrey Hope had a spasm of agony; it looked as though the man were going to close the door and the subject together.

In mere desperation he took a quick step forward.

" No ! " he cried urgently. " No—I'm not. I'm—I'm an Englishman."

It was not what he had wanted to say, but in that stress he had to take words as they came to him ; and even as he babbled them forth he was aware of their irrelevance. But the other man stopped short and bent to stare at him again.

" Englishman ? " he repeated stupidly.

It was a moment of respite, at any rate ; and Hope gathered himself to profit by it.

" Yes," he answered, " an Englishman ; and I've brought some very fine things to show you if you'll let me come in for a minute. Just a minute ! " he urged, with a sudden force, for while he had been standing still the cold had gnawed into him and he yearned to that glowing indoors he could see beyond the peasant's bulky shoulders. " Beautiful things they are ; they belong to a prince. You'll want them when you see them ! "

The mujik grunted his indifference to all fine and beautiful things. But his mind hung as on a hook upon the other matters.

"An Englishman!" he said again. "I thought they were all dead. Come inside and let us have a look at you!"

"*Sei chas*—immediately!" gasped Hope, and found, when he moved, that his legs were weak under him.

The odorous, breath-laden, heat-saturated air of the interior received him like a bath. The flat-topped brick stove, with tumbled bedding and bundles stowed upon it, stood with its door open; there was a lamp, too, upon a table; and at the table sat people—a woman, a young girl, and a small boy, who raised slow-witted faces to stare at him. He blinked and smiled at them dumbly, relaxed in a mere passivity of comfort.

The mujik who had admitted him explained him to the rest.

"An Englishman," he said; "come for food! Are you hungry, Englishman?"

There were bowls upon the table, which enriched the room's population of odours with the bouquet of *stchi*, that cabbage-soup which is to Russia what macaroni is to Italy, at once an institution and a symbol. Hope had evidently come upon the family at supper. The smell of the good, coarse, belly-filling stuff made him actually dizzy.

The mujik accompanied his words with a jerked thumb of contemptuous invitation towards the table. Seen in the light, he was a thick-set, blunt-faced man of middle age with a short brindled beard. There was a sneer on his lips as he waved the stranger to the food. It was nothing to him, this stuff that gave life and strength. He had fed other hungry gentlemen—yes, and famished ladies, too. He had seen them pick up crusts from the floor and tear them like dogs.

But it was an invitation of sorts, and to Godfrey

Hope an invitation was like a cue to an actor. Desire was ravenous throughout all his body; but he smiled deprecatingly.

"That's awfully good of you," he said. "But I couldn't think of disturbing your supper."

"Eh?"

The big mujik did not understand. He frowned in an effort of thought, hanging midway between embarrassment and resentment. Then the explanation occurred to him. He nodded to his wife.

"I told you—he is an Englishman," he said, and sat down to his own steaming bowl.

There was a wooden stool near the open fire-door of the stove, and Hope, unwinding the sack from his neck, sat down upon it. He was weaker and more weary than he had known; in that balm of warmth, he could have dropped his head and slumbered forthwith; but, like the goads that kept the victim awake in the torture of The Vigil—a fine old mediæval third-degree which the Extraordinary Commission has revived—those avid stares from the folk at the table, those eyes that gluttonised upon him, wrenched him back from the blessed torpor.

"Englishmen don't eat *stchi!*"

It was the girl. She made the statement as though she were giving the answer to a riddle. He had to look round, and, of course, he looked round smiling. She sat facing him, with the boy, a dirty urchin of about ten, at her side. She herself was, perhaps, fifteen, skinny armed, with disproportionately large knuckles to the bony hand that poised the wooden spoon before her ready-opened mouth. Her neck was meagre to the point of deformity, a mere stringy stalk for her head and for the sheer wonder of the perfect

face, a long oval—the Madonna shape—that fronted him. She had fair hair with brown shades in it, like scorched flax; and the blue eyes under the broad and serene brow seemed to flicker and waver as though the light that shone through them were an unsteady one.

At Hope's smile she dropped her spoon and her loveliness broke into an idiot grin. From lips like rose-petals there jarred a cackle of witless mirth.

"Oh, *Matushka!*" she giggled. "Look at the Englishman! He's smiling at me—he's smiling at me!"

"Hush!" The stolid mother put out a thick arm, took the girl by her thin shoulder and shook her gently. "Quiet, now! The Englishman will think you're a fool. Quiet!"

She rocked her to and fro for a few seconds, and the girl seemed to fall back to tranquillity under the movement. Her face settled again to its still, strange beauty—and she resumed her eating. The peasant woman let her arm fall; she turned to Hope and spoke for the first time since he had entered.

"We've got another daughter," she said.

Hope did not understand. "Ah, yes!" he answered vaguely. "Another daughter, have you?"

"Yes," said the woman, "we have. A clever one, too! Tell him, Pavel Ivan'itch; haven't we got a clever daughter?"

The mujik had finished his meal. He signified as much by leaning back on his bench and stretching himself voluptuously.

"Clever!" he said. "H'm!" His eye came round to Hope with a new arrogance; he had more to boast of than mere edible wealth. "*Uchitelnitsa!*" he said impressively. "She was a school-teacher. She had her certificates. That's what she was!"

"Had she really?" Hope, of course, showed the interest that was required of him. "That's splendid! But you said she *was* a teacher; isn't she one still?"

Husband and wife exchanged a swift look.

"Well—no!" said the mujik slowly. "When our revolution started she went to Moscow to work for the Soviet. She's there now."

Again that swift glance passed; Hope saw it, but could not guess its implication. He would have questioned further in pure amiability, but the mujik rose.

"Nu!" he said. "To business! Let us see what you've got."

He lounged forward, his flat hands stuck inside his leather belt. He was disdainful and arrogant still, but with an undernote of indulgence, a good Samaritan who despised his traveller. His big supper was doing its best for Hope.

"Yes," agreed Hope, "certainly; I will show you at once."

What he had to show was in a knotted handkerchief stowed inside his shirt. He had to unbutton and dig in his bosom for it. The woman was clearing away the supper-gear meanwhile; the idiot girl was rummaging in a far corner; the boy drew near, a thumb in his mouth, to watch.

"Now, this is a very wonderful thing," began Hope.

He laid the handkerchief upon the stool where he had been sitting and produced from it a gold watch, a big fob-distending packet of machinery which had come to Prince Orlovsky from his father. It *was* a wonderful thing, with the Orlovsky arms splendidly blazoned upon the case and embroidered in faded silk upon the old-fashioned watch-lining between the inner and outer cases, and its large, frank face, with the

slim, brown figures raised delicately upon it in gold and the minute filigree ornamentation of its hands. It came of a day when watches were made to be heirlooms, to tick their faithful way from deathbed to deathbed of the passing generations. The hands that pointed the hour of Napoleon's fall pointed also that of the fall of Nicholas; its mortal owner carried an immortality in his pocket.

"You see?" said Godfrey Hope. "Gold, of course; and the workmanship—I tell you, there are kings who have not such a watch as that: And more! It is now seven o'clock. Listen!"

He pressed the repeater-catch. Little and sweet, true in tone and prompt, the bells responded. The maker had copied the famous chimes of some Flemish belfry or other, since silenced for good by shellfire; like spirit voices, still, small voices from the world of shades, the watch evoked them. The last of the Orlovsky line was starving; and thus it sang for his supper.

"Isn't it charming?" said Hope. "Have you ever known a watch like this before?"

He glanced up, full of assurance. The big mujik had his lips tight-closed upon a smile.

"I've got three of them," he answered. "I don't want any more. Yes!" he said, when Hope would have broken in. "Better ones than that! What else have you got?"

"Three of these!" gasped Hope. "But—you can't——"

"Huh!" The man laughed in a short, loud shout. He had the best of it this time and he was enjoying it. "I've had them crawling here at midnight and waiting in the road till I got up in the morning. I've

seen them kneeling, like the beggars outside the churches, with their hands full of finer things than that old clock of yours. Kneeling and weeping—yes! Hi!" He called to his wife. "Let the *Anglichanin* see some of the pretty trash we've got! Bring it over here!"

"But, wait!" begged Hope. "I've got a ring, too; a very valuable ring."

It was the great cabochon emerald of the old princess; ponderous, priceless! A pope might have worn it without dishonour to St. Peter.

But the mujik waved it away.

"You just see *my* rings!" he jeered. "*I'll* show you rings!"

He did—strewed forth upon the seat of a deal bench, from wrappings of sweat-stained rags and cheap little boxes such as pedlars used to sell in the streets to tourists and children. Rings and brooches, bracelets and necklaces; toys of the dressing-table and the desk; gems, gold and silver; the débris of lives which had been stamped into the blood-mud of the revolution! The stove-fire and the lamplight set the litter of it a-sparkle. Like that which oozes between the floor-boards when the executioners come laughing and talking together from the slaughter-chamber—harlots and Chinamen and Russians who partake of the nature of both—all this had come trickling down to be at last the price of bread and to shine under the thatch of the bread-seller.

"Eh?" The mujik ploughed through the mass with a great spade-ended finger. "I'm a rich man, Englishman! What do I want with your belfry-watch? Do you think I need toys like that? Why, if I——"

He broke off abruptly and stared. Hope thought

it was at himself. They were all around him. He looked vaguely from side to side to see what was the matter, when a hand caught him by the sleeve. Startled, he jerked around. The grave, lovely face of the idiot girl was at his shoulder, with its will-o'-the-wisp eyes.

She was tendering something to him with her other hand.

"For you!" she was saying. "For my Englishman!"

Hope was at a loss. She was trying to make him take something.

"Nice!" she crooned. For you—nice!"

"Tanya!" The mother moved to take hold of her with a glare of defiance and challenge at Hope. The dirty urchin was sniggering. Then from the mujik came the spirit of an oath.

"Don't touch her! Don't touch her!" he cried to his wife. The woman came to a standstill. "She's taken a liking to him. Don't you see?"

He thrust the snuffling boy from his path and came swiftly forward.

"What has she got?" he said. "Never mind what it is! Take it, Englishman; she gives it to you. You mustn't refuse her! Take it; it's yours!"

"Er——" Hope hesitated. The lovely face of the idiot seemed to implore him gently; the brutal iron muzzle of the big mujik besought him. Even in the dull and heavy countenance of the woman there was something that dared him not to comply. He found the gift pressed into his hand—a little oblong cardboard box, such as once one bought with its contents anywhere in Russia for twenty kopecks, which had grown now unfamiliar.

"Oh—I couldn't!" The phrase was merely automatic, part of a code of politeness. But it might have

been a curse ; for the girl began, as it were, to wilt under it ; her soul reeled visibly under the blow. He hastened to make amends in a silly patter of words. " It's *too* good of you ! I can't thank you enough. Why, I haven't seen any for ever so long. But—are you sure you can spare all these ? "

It was the mujik who now touched his arm.

" Quick ! " he said. " Take one ; let her see you ! Quick—and you shall have some food to take away."

He bent and reached to the fire-door and drew forth in his iron fingers a piece of glowing wood. The idiot girl clapped her skeleton hands and her beautiful face was radiant and elfin with delight. Hope ran a thumb-nail along the edge of the little box, took from it one of the twenty cigarettes it contained and lighted it.

The girl squeaked with delight, and her mother took her. " My Englishman is smoking," she was chattering. " He smiled at me, and now he is smoking. Oh, *matushka*, isn't he pretty ! "

The mujik laid back his fire-stick. " That's good, eh ? " he said. Then in a lower voice : " You know—she's one of those that see things. She sees things that we can't see. We never thwart her. She's taken a fancy to you."

Hope was smiling. Facts were no longer true, and values had ceased to exist. The lunatic drama which is Russia had condensed itself into that single room. Like everyone else from the White to the Black Sea, his fate hung on the whim of a maniac. Who, by taking thought, could add an hour to the span of his hair-hung life ? The delicious anæsthetic of the smoke worked within him ; he was warm ; food to take home had been promised him. He ceased to think, and let the wayward tide of events carry him as it list.

It was nine o'clock in the evening when, at last, the door of the cottage closed behind him, shutting him out to the dreary inhospitality of the road. The sack which he had worn over his neck was now slung over his shoulder. The idiot girl had hovered round him to the last, gambolling on lean ankles and ungainly feet, and her favour abode with him while the mujik stocked his sack. The gold watch and the historic ring had nobly proved their worth. The first had fetched something like fifteen pounds of bread, a bucket-full of potatoes, and a slab of some whitish animal substance, the Russian name of which conveyed nothing to him, which was probably dripping. The ring—that was an heirloom, too; Captain Prince Orlovsky, of the Body-guard, had given it to the Princess, then a Maid of Honour, upon her betrothal—had also been valuable. It had fetched eleven eggs and the remains of a joint of beef.

The night that had been filling the earth had now settled down upon it in a stagnation of windless dark. The cold that had bitten at him on his way out from Moscow now entered his body and inhabited him like a strong-rooted disease; and the sack, the sack of life that he bore, burdened him to the limit of his strength. There were eleven good footsore miles to go—the whole eleven that he had already traversed. If the dawn saw him back at home, he would have done well; later than that the streets of the city were not safe for men who carried sacks.

"Upsy-daisy!" said Godfrey Hope, cheerily, and slung his burden where he could best carry it. "Come on, grub! It's probably worse than this in the trenches!"

Long hauls and short rests till shorter hauls and longer rests forced themselves upon him! Twice, in that desert where solitude was the only safety, he saw

human beings—and slid and scuffled down to the roadside ditch to let them pass. The first showed afar off a point of light that grew swiftly as it approached, split into two, and became the headlights of a motor-car. The thin ice in the ditch-bottom broke under Hope's hurried feet and the water stung him through his broken boots like an adder. The ruts of the road kept the speed of the car down; with eyes peering over the rim of the ditch, Hope had a brief view of its occupants; the leather-clad soldier-chauffeur at the wheel, and, in the lit interior of the body, the two passengers. One was plainly an underling, the profile of a rat, with all the rat's character of wary viciousness and mean acuteness, a face that receded in degenerate slopes from an eager carrion-questing nose. Beside him, with a peak cap jammed down on his brow and a collar turned up about his ears, was the obvious master, with brows that bulged and overshadowed the eyes, high cheek-bones, pug-nose, and wide sensual mouth. Hope had never seen them before, but he knew who they were. Only the hierarchs of the charnel-house went a-wheel; their slaughterers walked. Here, upon who can tell what mission of horror, went Death and his pimp, Fear, weaving through the night their secret web, the go-betweens of tyranny and doom.

The others he saw an hour later. He was resting so that he heard their footsteps on the road and had time to get to the ditch before they could be aware of him. These had no lights; he saw them only as vague shapes moving in the dark, one tall, the other no taller than himself. They trudged painfully upon their way, talking in brief snatches as they went. It was not till they were quite close that he could hear them clearly. At the first words that he distinguished he moved in a start of uncontrollable surprise.

The taller figure was talking in the low and hoarse voice of a man with a heavy cold on his chest.

"We can't miss it," he said. "It stands alone. There are no other houses near it."

"Ye-es!" The voice of the smaller wanderer was that of a woman. "But if they shouldn't be willing to sell, after all! I am so afraid we'll get nothing."

"Hush, dear," said the man. "They're just peasants, you know. They probably never saw a gold watch in their lives before."

And so talking, they passed on with their gold watch, their mortal need, and their vain hope, seeking the house of the idiot girl, the house that stood alone.

II

There used to be a painting by Verestchagin showing horses of Napoleon's cavalry stabled in that fantastic, Coney-Island-looking church which faces the length of the Red Square in Moscow. The horses and their gear and their litter were crowded into the labyrinth of little, dark, wooden-pillared chapels; the troopers lounged among them; and the church, St. Basil's, is there to this day to show that they did it no particular harm. There is a historical affinity, after all, between an altar and a manger. Verestchagin is dead; his place is vacant for the painter who shall be moved to set on canvas Moscow itself, the White-walled, the Sacred City, now that those who held it holy have got it to themselves. Trotsky and his cattle in the Kremlin, for instance; the shrine of the Iberian Virgin, where once the pickpockets worked all the twenty-four hours round among the thronged devotees, now violated and despoiled; the palaces, old and new, where the Kommissars and their women and their brigands have hived

themselves together! And the dirt and the misery and the failure of it all—a revolution that triumphs in rags and scrapes the gutters for crusts to celebrate with!

Just behind the splendours of the Tverskaya, and close to the buildings of the Old University, was the house that Rinaldescu, the great Rumanian millionaire, had built for himself. He had other houses scattered here and there about Europe; he moved from city to city ceaselessly, taking each in its brief yearly season of perfect bloom, and died soon after the armistice of ptomaine poisoning contracted in a dining-car. It was a marble-fronted building upon the model of a Venetian palace, with a loggia of slender pillars fronting the street, a beautiful arched doorway, and a paved courtyard in the middle. He had been a collector of stained glass, among many other things; the best of it was framed in the eight tall windows that fronted the street above the loggia. At night, when the great room within was lighted up, they shone forth to the filth and darkness of the crippled city with a ripe and tender glow, as though their mild and shining saints would signal: "This is the house of a Kommissar; walk wide of it!"

It was not yet dawn, but the grey forerunner of day was in the east and the lights in the windows were extinguished, when the sentry huddled in the loggia was aware of one who approached. He would have paid little attention, for malefactors never came this way, if the passer-by had simply passed by. The sentry poked his head forth between the pillars to look at him.

The man was behaving strangely. He seemed to have a large bundle of some kind, and suddenly he let it down upon the pavement, fell on his knees beside it and bowed his head upon it. The sentry disengaged an ear from under his cap and became alert. The man was

praying! Presently he saw him rise, struggle with his burden, and stagger forward with it; and all the time there came from him a rising and falling mutter of speech. The sentry had had a pious upbringing, but he recognised no word of any prayer that he knew. The man was abreast of him when down went the burden and its bearer with it, groaning his unceasing prayer.

"Hi!" called the sentry then. "What's all this?"

The other's head was resting on the sack. He did not raise it at the summons. He was still praying, with no word that was intelligible. The sentry hesitated, then stepped from the foot-high terrace of the loggia and shook the man smartly by the shoulder.

"Now, then!" he demanded. "What do you mean by it?"

The crouching man lifted his heavy head, and in the gloom his thin and beardless face showed white like a shine of water. And still he prayed.

"Long—long way—to—Tipp'rary!" he was saying, feebly.

The sentry released the limp shoulder. "*Inostranets!*" he said with disgust. "A foreigner!" He gave the foreigner a Russian kick. "Stay there, you!"

His second or third shout fetched out the sergeant of the guard and a comrade with a lantern.

"A foreigner," explained the sentry. "Flops down and prays over that bundle; can't understand a word he says."

"Prays, eh?" The sergeant showed interest. "Better see what he's praying about. Open the bundle, one of you!"

When the sentry released him, Hope's head had fallen forward once more. His "praying" had ceased at last. Physically a weakling to begin with, miserably

under-nourished for a long period, he had stretched his endurance to the uttermost. He had covered the last miles in a delirium, hunted along from collapse to collapse only by an unflagging will. While the soldiers stood around and talked above him, he slept with his face flattened on the sack.

But when the sentry bent to pull the sack away, his hands were yet clenched upon it and hung on.

"Well," said the sergeant, "there's a vicious devil for you! No, don't bayonet him; we may want him."

His skilful foot—he had been a gendarme in the old days—kicked the outworn body aside. It lay, writhed for a second, and was still again. Hope was asleep once more. They opened the sack, up-ended it, and spilled its contents forth upon the pavement. The lantern was lowered to illuminate them.

Like the jewels on the mujik's bench they lay heaped on the dirty pavement! The bread, the meat, the smashed eggs, and the rest, bought with the insignia of pride and honour, and carried hither with what bitter labour!

The sergeant grimaced and scratched his chin. "H'm!" he reflected. "A food speculator! Better take three of those loaves and the meat—and the dripping, of course—to the guardroom. That'll be our share; the rest is evidence. Put the prisoner in the cell. Tickle his tail with the bayonet if he's inclined to be lazy."

Rinaldescu's Venetian palace had its Russian dungeon, a large, arched storeroom opening from the cloisters of the court. It was closed with massive double doors artistically studded with copper nails; over them a curved transom of ground glass gave a little light when there was any to give. Hope was widely enough awake when the wicket in the big doors

was set ajar for him; he tumbled through it just not quickly enough to escape a final humorous prod from the long, three-edged bayonet that had awakened him. The wicket slammed behind him; the lantern was hung up in some place that let the dregs of its light leak through the transom; and he fell on his face on the stone floor, sobbing. Not weeping; just sobbing! For a while he could do nothing else.

There were others in the place, the nightly bag of the Kommissar's huntsmen. When he had come to mastery of himself he was aware of them, stirring and breathing in the gloom. They seemed to be huddled together upon the ground in a far corner of the place.

Then one of them spoke.

"Have they hurt you, *tovarish*—comrade?"

It was a woman's voice, husky like an old drunkard's, with cracks and quavers in it.

"Yes," said Hope. "They—they drove me in with a bayonet. I seem to be bleeding."

The stickiness and warmth of it were spreading under his clothes. His side hurt him, too, where the sergeant had kicked him. All these disasters had happened to him while his senses were yet clogged with weariness and slumber. He was like a man who returns to consciousness, sick and racked with pain, after an operation.

"Come over here," said the woman; "come close and you'll be the warmer. There are three of us here."

Hope stifled a groan as he wrenched himself up; there was not a cell of his body that was not the home of an ache. "Thank you," he managed to say; "that's very kind of you."

He tottered across and sank down into that little communion of surely the wretchedest people on earth.

"You're a foreigner, aren't you?" asked the

woman. "Well," she sighed, "it doesn't matter nowadays. You'd be better off if you were a Russian. Look at us three! That young man stole a pair of boots. This old fellow next to me—why, he hasn't done anything. He's been a church-door beggar all his life, and now his leprosy has gone to his eyes and he's blind. What's the sense of executing a poor old fellow like him? And me! What harm have I done?"

She seemed to await an answer. "None, I am sure," said Hope.

"They told us—they told us in so many words—that we girls needn't have 'yellow tickets' any more. And then they arrest us!"

"Yellow tickets" were the permits issued by the police to women to practise as courtesans in Moscow.

"Do they expect us to sit still and starve?" she demanded.

Hope sighed. He was leaning against her, his shoulder to hers; she had had the blind leper on her other side; and the stench of them made a faint illusion of indoor warmth. He had a vision of the old Prince and Princess in their fireless chamber, awaiting his return, dying by hours, believing at the last that he had deserted them, taking with him the ring and the watch. And they would not blame him; often they had urged him to go and save himself.

"I think they do," he said to the woman. "But as we haven't, what do you think they'll do to us?"

She shook her head and sighed in her turn.

"Who can tell?" she answered. "There's nothing to go by. The Kommissar is in a hurry, perhaps, or his corns are hurting him. The death-warrants are before him, all signed; he has only to scribble your name and you are disposed of. Then they take you

out to wait for the dead-cart, and when it comes they knock you on the head and throw you in. That's if they don't save you up for the cellars."

"Ah!" said Hope. He had heard of the cellars and had not believed in them. "The cellars, eh? You don't seem to be terribly afraid of them, though?"

"That's the only thing I am afraid of," she answered. "If it's men I have to deal with, I'll be all right. But these damned women and their cellar-parties, and everybody drunk but the poor devil who's dragged in to furnish the fun—that scares me. Yes, you may think they'll be careful what they do to a foreigner; and perhaps they would be; but not if some little darling with a baby-face comes smiling up and says: 'Oh, is that an Englishman. Do let us see how an Englishman dies!' Then—the cellar-party! You'll hear the music from the dance upstairs, and presently they'll come down to you, all giggling and whispering. There'll be drinks—you'll probably get some—and they'll chat with you. You'll never tell anyone what they say to you. Oh, I've heard it all from people who've been there; it's true as gospel. And then, the one who's won you—you'll see her, with the pistol in her hand; and if she's a good shot you'll never see anything else at all. And that's what the cellars mean!"

"I see," said Hope, wearily.

"Do you?" The woman spoke sharply. "Well, I don't. What's the matter with people, anyhow—tossing death about like confetti? The Tsar is executed and the people are in power; what more do they want? Why can't they leave us in peace?"

"I don't know," answered Hope. "They're like a boy with a knife, I suppose. They must have something to cut."

To neither of them did it suggest itself that all the error and the wrong, the crime and the failure, were rooted in the heart and ran in the blood of the people. God had been ceremonially exorcised; the Tsar, with his sick child in his arms, had been murdered; the idle rich, the busy rich, the bureaucrats, the bourgeois, and the intelligentsia, all that hampered the development of the much-advertised soul of the Russian, had been stamped out. There remained only that sterling manhood which starves by millions in the granary of Europe and freezes to death in a country of forests. And their sole contribution to civilisation and the cause of mankind was the hysteric philosophy, the madhouse economics, and the monkey-morality of Bolshevism.

"Huh!" The woman grunted and was still. The old leper and the thief had spoken not at all. Hope, despite his wounds and his many pains, found himself drowsy again. His head drooped and presently came to rest upon the shoulder of the prostitute. Daylight crawled up and showed grimy and stale upon the stones of their prison; and the four of them, expecting and dreading death, slumbered together as though sleep were not itself the better and more blessed part of death.

III

Dimitri Pavlovitch Botkin had been a clerk in the Moscow showrooms of a German firm of automobile manufacturers which specialised in a 100-horse-power Juggernaut for the gilded-youth market. Daily before his eyes they had lounged and postured, the exquisite young men of wealth or debts, with their English clothes and their piquant companions, their slang, and their manners. He himself was the son of a village schoolmaster who had done his poor best for

him in the way of education; but his university was the showroom with the two great shining cars in the middle of the floor, his professors the spendthrifts and millionaires who walked round them, criticised them, and sometimes bought them. By 1914, when the army sucked him in and rolled him in the crudities of the Polish front, he needed only money to demonstrate himself as accomplished and showy a waster as the most eminent of the gilded ones.

In 1917 he had shot in cold blood the captain of his company with his own hand and went into politics.

He was a tallish man of about thirty, long-limbed and herring-gutted, with a long face, womanishly smooth, sleek black hair, and a comic little smudge of black moustache. He had a well-selected repertoire of noticeable attitudes and an impressive languor of speech; the cant-word "comrade" in his mouth sounded like a witticism. He considered it characteristic of his taste and personality that he had selected the Rinaldescu palace for his headquarters as Kommissar, when he might have taken the Hotel de Paris.

It was towards eleven o'clock in the morning when he came into the great room with the stained glass windows, drooping at the shoulders, a hand sunk in a trousers pocket, a cigarette gummed to his lip. People were there already awaiting him.

"Hallo, everybody!" he greeted them languidly. "Hope you're all feeling as rotten as I am. That you, Sashenka?"

The girl who sat in the narrow recess of one of the tall windows lifted her head so that her profile had its dull-glowing colours for a background. She wore furs, and boots that rose to the hem of her short skirt. She nodded to him carelessly.

Botkin let himself down in the chair behind the wide desk. His secretary, a fat, bald little man in spectacles, trotted to his side with papers.

The dandy Kommissar leaned back from the documents.

"My dear fellow," he said protestingly, "you're a very nice chap, but don't try me too far. Is there anything in all these papers that I really must see? Statistics? Damn the statistics! Personal memo? You can leave that. Report of proceedings—file it. Wireless news? Yes; I'll look at that. Anything else?"

"These communications must be acknowledged. But I can do that!"

"Of course you can, my dear old chap. That's what I keep you for. Off you trot and do it!"

The girl in the window-recess looked up again. "Why don't you do some work sometimes?" she said. "You're only an ornament; little Postnik there is the real Kommissar. He does everything."

"Ye-es," drawled Botkin, and Postnik, the secretary, quaked as a sleepy eye rested on him, for the Kommissar had his Neronic moments. "But don't encourage him to think so. It wouldn't be good for him. You can go, Postnik."

"Yes, Excellency!" truckled Postnik, and vanished thankfully.

The sergeant and commander-in-chief of the Kommissar's army of twelve strode across the parquet, big and soldierly.

"Four prisoners, comrade!" he announced. "Shall I bring them in?"

"Prisoners, eh? In that case we'd better have Postnik back," said the Kommissar. He pressed a bell-button. "All right, sergeant; fetch 'em in."

They had been given a glass of tea apiece, but nothing to eat. They came in all their distress and disrepair, escorted by two soldiers with fixed bayonets, up Rinaldescu's marble staircase with its wonderful bronze rail, past his world-famous Venus Anadyomene, through the splendour of the ante-room, and so into the presence. The thief went first, a burly-bodied, half-human creature, with an inch-wide forehead and no chin. After him limped Hope; and last came the woman with the old blind leper tottering beside her, hanging to her arm. The group of them dragged their way across the shining floor till they stood some ten paces from the desk.

"The prisoners," reported the sergeant.

The Kommissar, leaning back in his chair, cigarette in his mouth, one knee raised to rest against the edge of the desk, surveyed them with a supercilious weariness. The girl in the window rose and came and leaned her hip against the corner of his desk to look at them.

"Really, sergeant!" said the Kommissar. "You do collect the most extraordinary specimens. What on earth is that old creature there?"

He gestured with his head towards the old beggar. For years the old man had lived on the utter horror of his appearance; it had been his working capital. But capitalism is a crime under the Bolsheviks.

"Public nuisance," replied the sergeant promptly. "Squats in doorways to beg and refuses to move on. Professional beggar; blind; a leper; and——"

"Eh?"

The Kommissar jerked upright in his chair and the cigarette fell from his lip.

"A—a leper! What the devil do you mean by bringing a leper in here, damn you? Take him out—

d'you hear ?—right outside, clear of the place ? What shall you do with him ? Kill him, you stupid fool—and don't leave the carcass lying about ! Postnik will give you the warrant afterwards. Hurry now ! "

One of the soldiers swung the old man round and headed him for the door. It is probable that he understood nothing of what was passing. He went out with his armed companion and executioner and they heard his shuffling descent of the stairs, his cautious move from step to step lest in his blindness he should fall and break his neck.

" If ever you bring a leper in here again, sergeant," said the Kommissar, " I'll deal with you in a way that'll startle you. Remember that ! "

" Very good, comrade," answered the sergeant.

The Kommissar lit a fresh cigarette. " Well, who's the woman ? "

The street-walker stepped forward and spoke her name, gazing with eyes of alarm from the man to the girl and back again. She was a thick-set blowsy creature, with a fat face that one would have called honest. The charge against her was some complicated matter of registration.

" H'm ! " The Kommissar nodded. " Got anything to say about it ? " he asked of the woman.

She moistened her lips with her tongue.

" I didn't understand about the papers," she answered in her hoarse voice. " The laws keep changing so ; nobody understands. I haven't done anything to be killed for ! "

The Kommissar smiled and exchanged an amused glance with the girl beside the desk.

" You think you can't be spared ? " he suggested.

" In the old days they used to fine us," went on the

woman. "At the worst, it was a week in jail. It isn't as if I'd done any harm. What's the use of killing a poor girl for what she can't help? The soldiers have taken all my money; isn't that punishment enough?"

Again the Kommissar smiled. He was enjoying this, the rapier-play of what he esteemed to be his wit against the clumsy bludgeon of the woman's desperate defence.

"It isn't a question of punishment," he drawled. "You don't understand the law and therefore can't obey it. So the question is whether we're not better off without you."

She needed a moment to understand this.

"I *can* obey it!" she cried. "Tell me what it is and I'll obey it, I swear!"

"We-ell!" He affected to deliberate. The victim, her face rigid in a grimace of suspense, hardly breathed. The Kommissar turned to the girl. "What do you think, Sashenka? Ought we——"

The wretched woman awaiting judgment uttered a cry. She fell on her knees and stretched her arms to him in a supplication.

"For God's sake, Excellency! Not her—not her; don't ask her! You are the judge, Excellency. *You* can be merciful! Don't listen to her, Excellency; she'll only tell you to send me to be shot. Excellency—Excellency——"

Her voice choked to a standstill; she remained kneeling, gulping painfully.

"Set a woman to catch a woman, Sashenka," remarked the Kommissar. "How you dear things know each other!"

The girl wrinkled her nose disgustedly. "That isn't a woman," she said. "It's only another sort of leper!"

"I prefer this sort to the other," said the Kommissar.

"Still, I'd better write her a prescription for her trouble." He picked up a pen and wrote; a rubber-stamp completed the death-warrant. "For all her troubles, in fact," he added. "Now, who's next?"

The thief showed no sport; he lasted just thirty seconds and then the pen and the rubber-stamp disposed of him.

"And this fellow?"

Hope stood forward. There was an oval mirror on the wall behind the Kommissar, and his own face looked back at him, white through its dirt, with blue shadows in the hollows and unfamiliar strained lines. He knew what he had to encounter. Here was no justice, no law, not even the sober pursuit of any particular policy; only the freakish and vanity-eaten personality of the Kommissar. He made a little bow.

"Godfrey Hope," he announced himself. "An Englishman."

"Ah!" It was a soft exclamation of interest from the girl. She hoisted herself so that she half-sat upon the corner of the desk, with one foot swinging and the other upon the ground. The little secretary, standing behind his master's shoulder, became alert behind his spectacles.

The Kommissar crossed his knees elegantly and prepared to make use of his opportunities. The sergeant declaimed the charge.

"Well, Mister Hope"—the Kommissar used the English word—"this is very unfortunate. I hope you will be able to explain satisfactorily. Perhaps you would like to sit down?"

"You are very kind," said Hope. "I *am* rather tired."

It was one of the Kommissar's little tricks. He often invited a victim to hear his doom sitting down. But always they protested that they were only too willing to remain standing.

"Give the gentleman a chair, sergeant! And take those other two prisoners out."

Hope seated himself thankfully on one of Rinaldescu's tapestry-covered chairs. He found nothing either sinister or surprising in the Kommissar's civility; he was always civil himself.

The woman and the thief went out and with them went the bayonet and the papers. It is possible that, owing to the Kommissar's manner of doing business, they did not know whither they were going.

"Now, Mister Hope," said the Kommissar, "what are you, an Englishman, doing in Moscow?"

Hope shrugged and smiled faintly.

"Starving!" he answered.

He had intended nothing in the nature of a repartee, but the girl suddenly laughed.

"Really?" The Kommissar took his cigarette from his lips with a slow flourish, making a gesture of the movement. "But it would certainly seem that you know where to get supplies. There is enough in that sack for half a dozen people."

He waved to the sack. That *corpus delicti*, skimmed of its cream by the sergeant, had been brought into the room and lay, obscene and incongruous, upon the polished parquet, with a cabbage in its mouth.

Hope shook his head. "For three people," he replied. "Myself and two others—to last as long as possible. It would have saved their lives."

"Yes!" The Kommissar waved the cigarette again. "No doubt your intentions were excellent. But you must have been aware that this illicit traffic is strictly forbidden, and that by engaging in it you incurred a certain penalty?"

He watched his prisoner under lowered lids. The

fellow was altogether too much at his ease. He liked to see them writhe and gasp.

"Oh, yes!" answered Hope. "Oh, yes! I knew that, of course."

The girl smiled and, still smiling, turned and looked at the Kommissar.

"Ah! You did. Then I must ask you to tell me from whom you bought those provisions."

"From whom I bought them!" Hope's eyebrows rose in an expression of amused surprise. The Kommissar marked it; gentlemen in the showroom had looked at him like that sometimes, as though he and his vices and his virtues, his life or death, his pain or pleasure were dim, far-off, trivial things. He reddened, and the avid beast within him raised its terrible head.

"Yes," he said shortly. "You heard me correctly. Who sold you this food?"

Hope's faint smile showed again. "Sorry," he said. "I can't say anything about that."

"You mean you refuse to answer willingly? Because, Mister Hope"—he paused and released a mouthful of smoke—"because you will be obliged to answer, willingly or not."

Hope was silent, but the look which infuriated the Kommissar still lingered on his face. The official's soul clamoured for ugly words that should set a gape of terror in its place.

"Come, Mister Hope; your feelings and the names you call them by—honour, loyalty, and so forth—we can take for granted. But they are not things which can be allowed to stand in the way of our administration. You must see that. And since sooner or later you will answer—Oh, I assure you that you will answer!—stronger men than you have refused to answer, and

yet——" He paused and shrugged. "They babbled like delirious women in the end," he said slowly.

Hope pursed his lips thoughtfully. The Kommissar and the girl were both watching him, the latter leaning forward, propped on a closed hand, with a look as of gay excitement. But though he seemed to ponder, he was actually not thinking at all. There was nothing to think about. He only knew one way of behaving, a very simple and obvious way. It is ignorance such as his that sends men to the stake.

"You mean"—he began, and hesitated as at an indecent word—"you mean—torture?" The Kommissar continued to gaze at him, all his sallow face charged with deadly meaning. But he answered nothing. "Yes," said Hope, "I heard torture was being used. But I didn't believe it."

Still they were silent. They knew, *they* knew how to let a man's own thoughts do their work for them. The word had been skirted, shied at, dodged, till the victim had been forced to speak it—"torture"—and now would come the visions it would evoke, the frail flesh and the remorseless irons, the searching, crushing and needless pain.

He lifted his face and returned their stare.

"No!" he said. "Sorry, but I can't tell you anything."

"Then," began the Kommissar, slowly, while his full red lips widened to a smile, "in that case——"

"*Chort!*" The girl's sharp oath interrupted him. She had swung round to look at him. "Don't be a damned fool, Botkin! You've played and lost. And you know already where he got the grub. You're only play-acting!"

The Kommissar's careful outwardness dissolved in mere human anger. "Look here, Sashenka——"

"Bosh!" she snapped. "Don't try that on with me. You aren't big enough." The movement of her shoulder as she turned it on him was like the slamming of a door in his face.

"So you won't tell where you got it, Englishman? Well, shall *I* tell *you!*"

She wore a fur cap that hid her hair; under the brim of it her small face, cream-pale, was impish and piquante, a girl-Puck, aflutter in the dark forest of the midwinter-night's fever-dream. Hope had seen her so far only as a part of the great splendid room, a living bibelot among the other treasures of the place.

He turned to her with just the right little start of prompt attention and half-smile of pleased interest. He did these things as he breathed, automatically. Actually he was surveying her with what acuteness he could muster. There was something in her—he laboured to identify it and failed—which seemed familiar.

"Shall *I* tell *you,*" she repeated, "where you bought all that muck?"

"If you like," answered Hope. "But you mustn't ask me afterwards if you're right."

She smiled at that. The Kommissar was at work with his pen and his rubber stamp; the little secretary, timidly insistent, was bending beside him, whispering and pointing with a black-nailed finger to something in a type-written paper which he had. Neither Hope nor the girl looked at them.

"Listen!" said the girl. "A little thatched house, all by itself! A big mujik with a beard, a nice fat wife, a little boy, and a queer daughter! What do you say to that?"

"Nothing," answered Hope, "except that it sounds very nice."

She laughed. "That is the place you would not betray. But we know all about that place. It has nothing to fear ; a very strong arm protects it. Look ! " she cried, clenched her fist and went through the motions of flexing her biceps and feeling the muscle. " If one straw of its thatch were harmed, I'd set fire to Moscow."

He recognised it then, the thing in her which he had sought to identify. It was her eyes of clear pale blue and the dancing precarious light of them, like windows of a draughty room in which a fire leaps and sinks. Not fifteen hours ago he had seen such eyes in the face of the idiot girl. After all, it was not such a crashing coincidence, since she " worked for the Soviet " in Moscow. She was the *uchitelnitsa*, the clever daughter ; she made safe the traffic of the house that stood alone—a pretty little bird of prey, a pet carrion-canary in the ghoulish aviary of the Kommissars, a figure of note in the dances and the " cellar-parties." Lucky, indeed, was the father of such a daughter, now that women were going so cheaply !

" Well ? " she demanded.

He smiled and shook his head. " No use asking me," he replied.

There was argument between the Kommissar and the secretary.

" I only call your attention to it, Excellency," the latter was saying, sweating visibly. " It is a positive order and we acknowledged receipt of it. I shall be blamed, Excellency."

The Kommissar looked at him with a feral side-long droop of the mouth.

" Yes," he answered. " You will ! "

" B-but, Excellency, it is not my fault." The

secretary cast despairing eyes around him. "The young lady is witness that I begged your Excellency ——"

"Shut up!" interrupted Botkin savagely.

But the girl had heard. She turned sharply.

"I'm a witness all right," she said briskly. "What's he trying to do to you, Postnik? What's the game, Botkin?"

The Kommissar snarled. "You mind your own business if you've got any."

She gave him a look that calmed him as a splash of cold water calms an hysteric.

"Right!" she said. "I will. You're a rotten brute, Botkin, and you've lasted too long in this job. That's the business I'm going to mind to-day."

She slipped down from the desk, and, still looking at him, began to draw on her gauntlets.

"Don't be silly!" The Kommissar moved awkwardly in his chair. He knew the kind of thing she could do to him; he had seen it done to others. She had only to find or create the right moment and the right mood to speak, pungently and adroitly, the needful poisoned words—smile them, perhaps, across the rim of a champagne glass—to this bloated potentate or that; and the thing was done. The head of a Kommissar on a charger was cheap enough.

"Sit down again," he urged. "It's nothing really—simply something I ought to have known before which this fool springs on me at the last moment like this. Sit down, Sashenka."

She curled a scornful lip. "That's right—blame Postnik!"

"Damn Postnik!" cried the Kommissar.

It was an order from Lenin himself, signed with his

own august hand, that all cases involving foreigners of certain specified nationalities were to be referred to the Kommissar for Foreign Affairs. Litvinoff, the Bolshevist emissary, was not finding himself very comfortable in London; people whose friends or relatives had been murdered by his employers were narrow enough to be stand-offish; and even in Government offices, where broader views might have been expected, there was no real cordiality. France, too, was stubbornly obtuse to the Red evangel; and an execution volley in Moscow echoed and re-echoed from seaboard to seaboard of the United States. The order, therefore, was peremptory.

"Now, Mister Hope, listen to me." Hope sat up and obeyed. "I cannot tell you whether you are fortunate or otherwise in that your case is to be decided elsewhere. As a foreigner, you are remitted to the Commission for Foreign Affairs. I can't, however, advise you to found hopes on that. Your crime is a serious one and is becoming much too common. You will, therefore, go to prison until your fate is decided."

Hope rose from his chair and bowed gravely.

"Meantime I have a request to make," he said.

The Kommissar frowned irritably. The prisoner's manner was impressing him and he resented it.

"You are not in a position to make requests," he said shortly.

"But this is not an official matter," persisted Hope. "It's a personal thing, as between gentlemen. You can't possibly refuse it."

The girl made some queer little noise, between a word and a laugh. The Kommissar compressed his lips.

"Make your request, then," he said.

Hope bowed again, gravely as before.

"The people with whom I have been living were

expecting me back before daylight. They will be in great fear and distress. They are very old and feeble, and I should be deeply grateful if you would cause them to be told what has happened to me."

"H'h!" The Kommissar slowly lit another cigarette and sat for some moments in thought. "Who are these people?" he asked.

"The Prince and Princess Orlovsky," replied Hope, and gave the address.

The Kommissar nodded and noted it on a pad.

"You lived with them?" Hope nodded. "In what capacity? *Sluga*, perhaps? A flunkey?"

Hope smiled pleasantly. "Something of the kind," he agreed. "I was a tutor in the family."

"A tutor!" repeated the Kommissar. A very royal contempt was in his tone. He had suspected the fellow of being a man of position, an aristocrat, one of those who lounge into show-rooms to look at cars. As to tutors, he knew all about them; his father, one recalls, was a village schoolmaster.

But the girl repeated the word, too. "*Uchitel!*" she cried. "A teacher—you too!" She clapped her hands and her laughter rang in the great room. "Oh, I must certainly ask the people who sold you the food about you. This is wonderful!"

The Kommissar waited grimly for her to finish.

"Well," he said to Hope, "the people you speak of shall be informed of your arrest. You have nothing else to say? Good! Sergeant—remove the prisoner."

"Good morning," said Hope politely, as the sergeant took him by the arm.

The Kommissar grunted involuntarily. He had not the temper to play his own game to the end.

But the girl laughed once more.

"*Do svidania!*" she called. "Till we meet again!"

Hope smiled mechanically. And while he smiled he wondered when the next meeting would take place—at what hour and in what cellar!

IV

There were prisons enough in Moscow in the days of the Tsar, and, as prisons go, they were not very terrible. The prisoners gambled a good deal; they bought liquor and tobacco from the warders; and a few, like Dostoievsky and Gorky, made a profit out of the record of their experiences. But in the year 1918 there was a shortage, not only of food and fuel, of boots and medicines, but of jails. They had to be extemporised all over the city like hospitals in war time, wherever there were stout walls and strong locks. Churches, private houses, wine cellars and stables were pressed into service; people passing along any shabby, unclean street might hear suddenly the outbreak of singing, men's and women's voices in chorus, that would tell them that a jail was close by. For only the prisoners in those days were free enough to sing.

The prison to which Godfrey Hope was marched, a single armed man trudging at his heels to guard him, had been a German boarding-house. A tortuously-carved hat rack and an oleograph of a girl with flaxen pigtails still remained in the entrance, where a fat old man, in a mixture of workman's clothes and soldier's uniform, struggled, grunting, from a broken rocking chair to receive him into custody.

"*Anglichanin?*" he repeated, when the escort had gone through the forms of handing over his prisoner. "Is he rich?"

"Him!" The soldier sneered. "Look at him.

I've been through every pocket he's got, and there wasn't a kopek. I'll bet he's starving at this moment."

He grunted and went off. The old man hobbled close to Hope and felt him up and down in the pretence of a search. He might have been anything between sixty and eighty, a shameful old bladder of a creature, useless and horrible as a snake, who yet found the means to be fat. Some tangled string in the confusion of the times had been pulled, and here he was in office. Perhaps, he too, had a pretty and clever daughter.

His patting, seeking hands found nothing, of course.

"Bad—bad!" he groaned. "It is bad to be without money in these days. Me—I have only my rations to keep me alive; a little bread, a little soup, a little tea; and I am an old, old man. Those soldiers, they are thieves. They robbed you, eh?"

"They took all I had," answered Hope truthfully.

"Ah, the brigands! And you heard what that liar said? But you have friends who will get permission to visit you—yes? A gentleman can be very comfortable here if his friends are good to him."

"Perhaps," said Hope vaguely.

"Of course," said the jailer. "And when you want something—why, here I am! Now I will call a man to take you to your quarters."

There was a suite of rooms on the second floor, cut off from the rest of the house by a single door with numbers painted upon it. A short corridor was within, with windows opening on the street on one side and two small rooms on the other; at the further end was a single large room. Some débris of furniture remained in it, cheap wooden stuff that retained in its decay and wreckage the unmistakable boarding-house character.

"Go in," said the jailer who had brought him up the stairs, standing at the opened door.

The place was full of voices, but not noisy. Folk were talking in all three of the rooms in ordinary voices, though there was one no in the corridor. Hope was aware that he expected something different, a cowed silence broken by groans, perhaps, or an uproar of desperation. He hesitated with a sense of trespass.

"Go in, will you!" ordered the jailer. "You can squat down where you like. No reserved places here!"

He gave Hope a shove and thrust him into the short passage. The door slammed at his back—and its bolts and bars jangled into place.

Those in the rooms heard it, for talk halted. Folk appeared in the doorways to look at him. From the large room at the end a tall man came towards him.

"A new prisoner?" he asked pleasantly.

He had a thin shaven face, with the remains of deep weather-stain upon the high cheeks, and thick grey hair. He was dressed in the worn uniform of an infantry officer, with the badges removed.

"Yes," said Hope. "I was arrested this morning."

The other nodded. "An Englishman, aren't you? I noticed your accent. Better come into this furthest room. They called rather a long list of us yesterday, and we've got more room than the others. Come along!"

Hope followed him. The large room extended through the front wing of the house and had windows both upon the street and the courtyard. There were perhaps twenty people in it, men and women both, lying on their bundles by the walls or seated in groups.

"By the way, my name is Volkov," said the man who had greeted him. Hope spoke his own name, pronouncing it, according to the local convention,

" Gope." For there is no " H " in Russian and " G " does duty for it. The late Kaiser was called " Wilgelm Gogenzollern."

" Well," said the officer, " I'll postpone the introductions. You look awfully tired. When did you have a meal last ? "

Hope shook his head. " Meals haven't come my way lately," he said. " I know I had nothing yesterday. The day before I had some bread. But I'm all right, really. I suppose they sometimes feed one here, don't they ? "

Volkov took his arm. " Come and sit down," he said. " We needn't wait for the ration. God be thanked, our jailer is bribable. As Trubin said, it's only the bad Bolsheviks who make life possible in Russia."

He found Hope a seat on the floor against the wall and gave him a folded uniform greatcoat to sit on. A girl sitting a few feet away turned to the newcomer. Volkov spoke to her.

" Here's an Englishman for you, Elena ! Look after him, will you, while I get him some food."

" An Englishman ? " repeated the girl and hitched nearer.

" Yes, said Volkov. " One of those who Trubin called ' the envy of the world and the despair of Heaven.' Just talk to him while I knock for *kipyutok* to make tea."

He moved away. Hope found the girl beside him, looking at him with an effect of piercing intentness. She had a thin, dead-white face, broad across the brows and running sharply to a point at her chin, and dense black hair cropped at the level of her ears. He knew her for what she was as surely as if she had been labelled ; a part of that leaven of sore hearts and fretful

moments, of strained capacity and fevered ideals, which has always forced a ferment in the heavy dough of Russia. Young folk who would remedy with bombs or with bombast those evils which other nations have cured in themselves by the healing operation of centuries!

"Too tired to talk?" she asked.

"Oh, not at all," said Hope. "Only too pleased, of course."

She considered him. "Needn't trouble to be polite," she said curtly. "Waste of time, here, when a list may be called at any moment. Who are you?"

He told her that he was an English tutor employed by the Orlovskys. She shook her head.

"In Russia a tutor may be little more than a servant," she remarked. "In England perhaps it's different. Are you a person about whose death your Government will make a fuss?"

"I don't know," he said doubtfully. "I have an uncle who is an important sort of person; my mother would try to work him up to something. But, you see, about a million better men than I have been killed in the war. What's one unfit Englishman among so many?"

She frowned. "Yes, but—Trubin said that wars were fought by the fit for the unfit, and ultimatums were invariably drafted by elderly gentlemen subject to boils. He said it was safer to insult a foreign flag than a foreign woman, and that all wars were just a slopping-over of accumulated sentimentality."

Hope smiled. "He was a philosopher," he said. "I never heard of him before, though."

"Of whom? Trubin?" asked the girl. "He wasn't the kind of philosopher who writes books. He was just one of us here. You're sitting in his place. They called his name yesterday."

"Er—called his name? You mean——"

The girl went on. "They come in every day with a list and read it out. Those whose names are called stand up and are taken away. We thought they'd arrived when the door was opened for you. Yesterday they called eight, and Trubin was first. He was a priest, you know—but a Roman Catholic one. He talked a lot."

"Somebody might get into trouble for killing a Catholic priest," suggested Hope.

"Perhaps," said the girl wearily. "I hope so. We're all ready for anything; most of us have had a bad time and nobody's afraid. But—they might have left us Trubin; I'll forgive them for killing me when the time comes, but Trubin"—she paused and seemed to seek for a word, and gave it up. She sighed. "He told me," she went off at a tangent, "that I'd get some good out of praying if I'd realise that God was a jolly God and not just a solemn priest. Solemn!"

She fell silent, and Hope had nothing to say. He felt, but had not words in which to tell himself, that here was proof of the futility of all the jailing and the killing. It was wasted sin. The man who yesterday had been summoned to the slaughter yet lived; the room whence he had been taken was yet full of his presence; his words endured. What shall it profit the assassin if, in dealing death, he but confers an immortality, raising up witnesses against himself of heroic tradition and enduring faith, which no prison can confine and no violence can silence?

Volkov returned presently. He brought with him steaming tea, a thick slice of bread and two withered apples, and laid them beside Hope.

"It's all I could manage to get for the moment,"

he said. "I had to hurry because it's about time for the list to be called. Still, it's better than nothing."

Hope flushed. "It's—it's more than I can thank you for," he said hesitatingly. "I oughtn't to let you——"

Volkov interrupted him. "You're not depriving anybody of anything," he assured him. "We have everything in common here. It's better stuff than the Soviet serves out because we buy it from the thieves who looted it. Whenever Trubin bought food he used to say he had ransomed it. So just you tuck in!"

It was what Hope had needed. The tea was hot, the bread was eatable, and the apples were pleasant. He had been reaching that stage of fasting when the appetite grows numb; the food and the hot liquid stimulated him like wine. He was drinking the last of the tea when Volkov to one side of him and the girl on the other suddenly lifted their heads. The other people in the room looked up at the same moment. The door was being opened with a jangle of fastenings.

"It's the list," Volkov told Hope. "It's good form here to take no notice unless your own name is called. Just look on calmly."

The feet of the messenger of death and his companions rang loud on the boards of the passage. The people in the room resumed their talk and their other occupations. All over the old and splendid city the same dire ceremony was being performed. If it be true that misery loves company, many a most miserable man and woman might take the comfort of knowing that he or she was not alone, but one of a great host.

The officer in charge of the armed party strode into the room, burly, with fresh pink cheeks, point-device with sword and uniform and the red armlet of the

Soviet. His troops were in the passage; a couple of them—one a khaki-clad Chinaman—stood in the door to watch the naming of the doomed.

"Pay attention!" barked the officer, just as if it were possible for those quiet people, for all their careful calm, to ignore him. "Those whose names are called will stand up and pass out to the passage."

He paused, produced a paper from the breast of his coat, and scanned it.

"Kazakov," he read.

A bearded young man in the uniform of a University student rose at the end of the room and walked the length of it to the door. His face had gone corpse-white, but his gait was steady enough. As he passed he nodded to the girl by Hope's side and his face constricted in an attempt at a smile. Poor hero, he had prepared himself for that, primed his mind through long agonies of foreboding. He came to the door and the soldiers let him through.

"Sorokin!"

A middle-aged man who had been stout—his clothes were baggy about him—looked up over his spectacles and rose deliberately. There was no bravado here, no compulsion of resistant limbs. Placidly, soberly, he got to his feet and went to the door, looking neither to the right nor the left. He went to his death as he might have gone to his barber.

Two more names were called. One was that of a woman. She was tall, long in the face, sharp at the corners, not unlike the conventional boarding-house landlady of the comic papers. The burly officer with the list might have been the angel Ithuriel with his spear, he who unmasks and reveals the true form of whatsoever he touches. At the sound of her name she

looked up and a tide of strong living colour suffused its sallowness ; and suddenly she was beautiful. Her tall figure seemed to float to uprightness and she showed a face that was radiant—charged and overflowing with that more than human inner power that upholds martyrs and makes them mighty and terrible. Like a queen to the pomp of her bridal she passed down the room ; with her head high and her eyes shining she turned and went out at the door.

Hope had followed her with fascinated eyes. Pain he knew and had endured ; courage, tenacity, patience he had experienced. But that rapt ecstasy of sacrifice was new to him ; it thrilled him and somewhat daunted him. He turned to his neighbours with a whispered comment when the last name was read out.

" Volkov ! "

The whisper died on his lips. The grey-haired man gave him a small grimace of a smile, deprecatory and humorous, and began to rise to his feet. Hope's jaw dropped ; his mind staggered. He heard the other speak as from a distance.

" Elena will show you the ropes," said Volkov.

He nodded to the girl, who nodded carelessly back at him. It was the convention of the place ; there is many a great principle crystallised in a convention. Then he swung away, going with the easy, loose strides of a soldier off duty. For this was not a parade ; it was a rendezvous.

The burly officer put away his list, patted his belt to its precise position, and turned to go. Exits were not his strong point ; he called men out to die robustly enough ; but he lumbered through the door with the back view of one who retires worsted from an encounter.

" Here ! " said the girl Elena sharply to Hope.

"Take a cigarette; it'll quiet you! I know how you feel."

Dumbly he took it. All round the room people were lighting cigarettes.

"Trubin said that a cigarette was to a cigar what good intentions are to good works," she remarked presently. Then, as her manner was, she dashed off on a new traverse. "I should like to stand by the death-bed of a Kommissar," she said. "One who died sober and was conscious to the last; I want to know what death means to a man like that. I want to be sure of what they really are."

"Aren't you sure?" asked Hope. "Isn't it clear what they are?"

"No!" she frowned. "It isn't clear. Blood-lust, you'd say; but when generals in the war were fattening the fields of Europe with dead bodies, one didn't speak of blood-lust. Volkov was a general. No; mere killing isn't the test. But is there, behind all the bloodshed and the horror, some real compelling inspiration? Oh, a wrong one, if you like—wrong, futile, crazy—what does that matter? Men can be sincere in their errors; one doesn't need to be right to be heroic."

"I'm afraid I can't help you," said Hope. "A man, for me, is wrong when he does wrong, just as a man is dirty when there is dirt on him. It's not a very subtle argument, I know; but the distinction between right and wrong has never seemed to me to be a subtle one."

"But it can be a subtle one," retorted the girl. "That is why judging and condemning others is so frightfully dangerous. Trubin said that if you think any man is fit to judge another you have only to look at our judges."

"Well," said Hope, in a momentary access of unusual

acuteness, "isn't it as dangerous to acquit as to condemn?"

She liked that and turned to him quickly. "It depends upon whether——"

She broke off abruptly. The fastenings of the outer door were clanking again. Everybody was looking up. They heard the door open and the noise of footsteps on the bare boards. Once before a list had been called twice in the same day. But those who came along the passage had not the hasty and heavy tread of soldiers.

Two figures appeared in the doorway of the room: a tall, frail old man with a forked, white beard and a high, thin nose; and upon his arm the silvery ghost of an old lady. They came forward, slowly and uncertainly.

"Two prisoners," murmured the girl.

But Hope sprang up with a cry and hastened to meet them. It was the Prince and Princess Orlovsky. Thus the Kommissar Botkin had carried out his promise to inform them.

He bent to kiss the Princess's hand.

"Ah, my dear boy," the old Prince was saying; "this is a great comfort, a great comfort. I do not know what we should do without our dear boy!"

V

Godfrey Hope never learned in full detail the manner of the arrest of the Orlovskys, with its little touches of Kommissar Botkin's distinctive style. The moment of their arrival was not one for questions and explanations. The Princess, who had walked in upon her husband's arm in an heroic masquerade of nonchalance, her face corpse-white and famine-thin, but gentle and benign yet, came to the end of her powers at the moment that Hope bent to kiss her hand. She swayed towards him

as though in the motion of a slow bow, and but for the feeble support of the Prince's arm and Hope's swift clasp of her, she would have sunk down. She breathed a sigh, in which words were borne faintly.

"Unaccustomed . . . forgive an old woman . . . our dear boy . . ."

The girl Elena appeared swiftly beside Hope. "Let me!" she said, and her arm relieved that of the frail old Prince with her young nervous strength. "My place—help her over to it!"

Together they supported the old lady across the floor and eased her down till she lay upon a spread of coats and blankets, her head, beautiful yet with its coif of silver hair, pillowed upon a bundle. There was no lack of willing helpers; the women in the room were quickly about her and Hope was pressed aside to make way for their ministry. She continued to murmur, in a ghost of a voice and with a flutter of little smiles, her broken phrases of gratitude and apology.

Elena, upon her knees beside her, leaned up and spoke to Hope.

"Leave her to us," she bade. "Go and look after the old gentleman. I'll send for something to eat at once."

The Prince, at Hope's invitation, sat himself down in the angle of the floor and the wall and accepted a cigarette. In spite of his height and the forked flow of his white beard, his unconscious dignity of carriage and his age, there was a simplicity in him, a sincerity of manner and bearing, that made it possible for him thus to squat like a church-door beggar and yet be fine and reverend even the dreadful attitudes of crucifixion once failed to make a man ridiculous. He seemed bent on excusing his wife's weakness.

"At her age," he said. "And so suddenly, too;

I am sure you understand, my dear boy! Everything so sudden; even the great pleasure of seeing you again—I assure you, I feel the effects of the shock myself! But in every other respect, she has been wonderful—wonderful! I have been full of admiration. Her concern was all for you till those men arrived. Really, that young Kommissar is a very deplorable creature!"

"Ah!" exclaimed Hope. "He promised to let you know what had become of me; I hoped there had been some mistake in carrying out his orders. But you saw him yourself?"

"He came in person with his—er—janissaries," said the Prince. "I could not understand him at all. He was like—like something mechanical; a figure that you wind up and set going and laugh at because it moves like a man and yet obviously is not one. A marionette, shall we say?—a marionette dressed for the part of a gentleman, whose strings are pulled by a lackey? Yes, that conveys it."

"Ye-es!" Hope smiled. "That conveys it admirably, Excellency."

He had glimpses—he ear-marked them for future conversations with such as Elena—of a Trotsky trying to make Napoleon behave with probability, a Lenin fumbling with the strings of Mirabeau, a Litvinoff in a hopeless tangle with Talleyrand.

"Was he—were they—rough?" he asked.

"Oh, no," answered the Prince. "He was weirdly polite. He took his cigarette from his mouth and waved it gently to and fro—there is a character in the *Revizor* who does it exactly like that—while he informed us, with his eyes half-closed, like that nasty fellow in *La Dame aux Camelias*, that we need no longer fear a death by starvation. We did not answer, of course,

and he asked us if we understood. It was then that the Princess spoke. 'Perfectly,' she replied. 'Nor death from old age, either, I presume!'"

Hope nodded.

"Strange how that reply seemed to disconcert him," went on the Prince. "The marionette visibly stuck for a moment. He snarled an order to his janissaries and we were taken out. I cannot say that our progress through the streets was agreeable; we were forced to walk rather faster than was easy for us; but we expected a much worse destination than this. Least of all did we expect to find you. We had feared—ah, we had feared——"

He shook his head, implying something of the night-long torture of apprehension through which the pair of them had lived, huddled for warmth and companionship in a single arm-chair, waiting in doubt and dread, through the hours, picturing to themselves tragedy, horror, the small-change of the life of the time in Russia.

"I will tell you my adventures later, Excellency," said Hope. "I see some food coming now. I have only been here a few hours and I don't understand this place yet. But it seems that there are means of getting a few comforts."

The Prince smiled. "A few comforts," he repeated. "Just when we had learned to do without them! It makes me feel rich again."

The food came, a tin bowl of *stchi* and a manchet of bread. A young man, brown-haired, brown-bearded and brown-eyed—an effect of hairy softness, like a Russian village priest or a retriever dog—brought it. He smiled shyly as he set it down before the Prince.

"I can only say for it that it is hot," he said.

"I could say more than that," answered the Prince; "but all my thanks would take a long time."

The young man waved the thanks from him. "I have done nothing but carry it," he protested. "It is not my gift; I wish it were."

"Whose, then?" asked the Prince.

The other smiled again and shrugged vaguely. "Ah!" said the Prince, as though all were now quite clear to him, and began to eat. He knew his Russia, knew it as a wise husband knows the dark mind of a whimsical wife, the insincerity of its visible processes, the secrecy and tortuosity of its realities. Somewhere, ambushed in the mad disorder of the revolution, a tenacious goodwill towards such prisoners as he had dug itself in; money trickled from hand to thievish hand, diminishing as it went; lies were told, treachery subsidised, theft condoned that an old man, halting at the last but one station of his cross, might have a bowl of cabbage-soup. It was only one of the thousand ways in which the great ideal of the world revolution, whence should arise the apotheosis of labour, was being bought and sold daily. The trumpeters who menaced the walls of the capitalist Jericho scrambled for the pennies thrown to them from the battlements.

The early evening filled the windows and the night came upon its heels. Around the large room groups of prisoners lit candles; the little flames of them, scattered about the place, had the look of a nursery illumination, a suggestion of a Christmas festivity. An evening meal of bread and tea was issued, and over it the voices weaved back and forth pleasantly. There was even a little laughter. Why not? In the Jewish legend, even the flames of Hell subside on the Sabbath; so

surely Death may sheathe his sting and the grave forego its victory at meal-times.

Hope crossed the room to where the Princess lay. She was asleep. One hand was under her cheek, and upon her worn face, surrendered to rest, there dwelt, as it were, a fugitive recollection of girlishness and prettiness. He stooped, looking at it, and was aware of the girl Elena seated close by and making signs to him. He nodded and went to sit beside her.

"She'll be all right, now," said the girl.

"Yes," said Hope. "Better off than she's been for a long time. I didn't contrive things very well for them, I'm afraid, and there was nobody else to look after them."

Her thin face jerked round to look full at him.

"Don't," she said. "Don't talk like that. She's been telling us about you. 'Our dear boy,' she calls you. She says that she and the Prince implored you, ordered you—all but knelt to you—to abandon them when you could have saved yourself. You wouldn't! *Why* wouldn't you?"

Hope moved uneasily. "Oh," he said awkwardly; "couldn't do that, you know!"

"No!" her face came nearer to his, the heavy brows contracted, the big eyes afire. "Of course you couldn't. It wouldn't have been *you* that you saved—not *you*, the loyal, the brave, the strong—but some deserter, some coward, some traitor, wearing your name."

"I say!" protested Hope, startled. "I can't let you think that I——"

Her short hair slashed to and fro over the nape of her neck to the vehement shake of her head.

"Oh, I know!" she interrupted. "But can't you see? You are—well, a nobody, just a very ordinary young man of your class. This thing that you have

done comes naturally to you ; you couldn't have done otherwise. That is so ? Well, tell me, how *can* these Bolsheviks conquer—ever ? Torture, starvation, death—they have no other weapons ; and against them is all the honour, the sacrifice, the—the *love*—of the world ! Savages with tomahawks against guns and aeroplanes ! Don't you—don't you pity them ? "

Hope stared at her. He was not a hero and he knew it ; but he was a gentleman and he knew that, too. Curious that the distinction was not as plain to her as it was to him.

" Pity them—pity these blood-drinkers ! " he exclaimed. " No, I don't ! "

" I do," she said. " From my heart I pity them, ' for they know not what they do ! ' All that we hoped for our great people and for the world—and they have put back the clock of democracy by a hundred years ! "

The candles on the floor spilled their light abroad over the bare boards ; the sparks of cigarettes showed as though floating above that pool of mild radiance, and faces were dim and grotesquely pitted with shadows, The night was dense without by now, and the room had ceased to suggest to Hope an effect of a lighted nursery ; rather it reminded him of one of those sweat-and-rags scented chapels of the city where all night long the worshippers and the tramps and the thieves throng amid the lighted ikons. The girl had fallen silent beside him, savouring who knows what tormenting ferment of wild altruism and remorseless intellect. The Prince came across, kneeled, and very gently kissed the brow of his sleeping wife, gave a bow to Hope's companion, and went back to his place. People were settling down for sleep here and there ; the voices of the others fell low and infrequent ; the room darkened

as one candle after another was put out. Before Hope's eyes, brooding upon the gloom, ghosts began to walk. The woman of that morning who, when her name was called, had stood up transfigured and beautified, passed before him again, moving with that high carriage with which she had advanced upon her doom; he saw her raised face, tranquil and abrim with peace. Others came with her—General Volkov, still smiling, and yet others, men and women, whom he did not know. One, tall, but plump in the face, with merry wrinkles and quick, roguish eyes, was assuredly, the oft-quoted Trubin. They moved before him, a company of that great host which he was to join, pioneers who had explored the way for him and found it easy.

"'Gentlemen unafraid!'" he quoted to himself, and was unaware that he had spoken audibly. But the girl had heard. He felt her shoulder press against his as she leaned to him.

"You see them, too?" she whispered, in a single gasp. "You see them, too?"

"Eh?" He was startled. He had seen, he knew, creations of his fancy; in other words, he had seen nothing. "See—what?"

Her thin shoulder pressed closer. "Them!" she answered, still whispering. "They were going through the room, scores of them; Volkov was among them. You saw them? Oh, tell me if you saw them?"

The need to answer broke up his mood of vision. He felt the embarrassment of a boy caught writing verses. Men of his kind talk neither of their dreams nor their prayers. He would have liked to withdraw the shoulder against which she leaned.

"Tell me!" she persisted.

"There was nothing to see," he said, protestingly. "I was just—thinking."

She murmured something inarticulate and continued to rest against him. She was silent for a space of seconds; then:

"I saw them, too!" she breathed.

"I tell you," said Hope, "there was nothing to see. You're letting your imagination run away with you. And, excuse me—my shoulder——"

He moved to disengage himself. But an arm flung round behind him, caught and held him.

"Wait!" The low voice compelled him. "I want to tell you something—since you have seen them, too!" He stirred at this, but the clinging arm restrained him. "To-morrow morning they will call my name. I know it!"

"How do you know?"

Her head was close to him; her hair brushed his cheek.

"I don't know how I know it, but I know it. I know it certainly and surely; I think—*they*—told me. Listen to me! I am sure of it; and to-morrow night, when they pass through, I will be with them. You shall see me."

"But——"

The arm tightened again. "Are you afraid of me?" came the whisper. "Surely, in all the world there is nobody you need be less afraid of than me—now! My arm? I can't drag you with me. You would lend your shoulder—wouldn't you?—to any woman who was going down a steep place! It is all I want, and you make me beg for it."

"Oh, I say!" Hope was shocked. "It—it isn't that, really. It's simply that I can't believe this—this presentiment of yours. You're—er—overwrought; that's what it is. And I only wanted——"

He paused, saving himself only just in time from blunt bathos.

"Yes? You only wanted—what?"

"Well——" Hope hesitated. "It's the Prince. He's old, you know, and rather stiff in the joints, and lately, you see—well, I was going to take his boots off for him, as a matter of fact, and just bed him down for the night. Then I should have come back."

"Ah!" The arm that clung released him. "Go and take his boots off, then. But you will come back?"

"I promise," said Hope.

He moved over to the other side of the room to render to the old man the little services which had become habitual since their flight to Moscow. The girl's whispered talk and that hungry, clinging arm had disturbed him in an unaccustomed fashion; he felt that she had compromised him in his own eyes, trapped him into sharing an attitude which revolted him, spied upon his secret and untellable thoughts; and yet, that harsh whispering, the crush of the thin shoulder against his, the dimness and the stillness had pricked through his crust and touched the depths of him.

"You have found a friend?" asked the old Prince, as Hope knelt at his feet.

"I don't even know her surname," answered Hope. "Queer girl; got a lot of mixed-up ideas." He drew off a boot. "Is that comfortable, sir?"

"It is a relief," said the old gentleman. "You, too, have a lot of mixed-up ideas, Godfrey. You call yourself a gentleman and here you are serving me as a valet."

"Rotten valet, I'm afraid, Excellency," said Hope, busy with the straps of the other *sapog*.

The Prince's white beard swayed to and fro in the gloom as he gently shook his head. "The best in the

world," he said. "For there is no servant so good as a son."

"Here she comes!" said Hope, hurriedly, as he eased the boot from the weary foot. "Now, let's see about making it comfortable for you to lie down. Don't move, sir; I can manage."

He busied himself with what coverings he could find. "He'll kiss me if I give him a chance," he thought. He felt bitter; why couldn't these people stew in the juice of their own feelings without splashing it over him.

He put the Prince to bed briskly, giving him no further openings for embarrassing talk.

"If you want anything in the night," he said finally, "just call out. I'll be somewhere near."

The girl was sitting where he had left her, her arms clasped around her knees, her head bowed above them. She did not look up at his return; he hesitated, lest she had fallen asleep, then sat down beside her.

"Well?" he said. He spoke low, for the sake of those who slumbered about him, but with an effort at a cheery and stimulating tone. "Well? Feeling better now?"

For some seconds yet she remained as she was; then she raised her head slowly.

"Ah!" she said. "You don't understand at all. You don't even believe that I know. You think I have a presentiment and that I am frightened. Don't you think that I am frightened?"

"Er——" Hope temporised. "Not frightened, of course. Just—er——"

"You do!" she interrupted him, fierceness thrilling through her whisper. "You *do* think I'm frightened, and all you do is to sneer at me!"

"Look here!" Hope sat upright with a jerk. "I swear I don't sneer at you. I never sneered at any-

body in my life. And if you really believe in that—that presentiment of yours, I don't see why you shouldn't be frightened. I'm certain *I* should be. But it's only a presentiment, of course."

"Oh!" she shrugged. "Presentiment! I *can't* make you believe. And if I could—if I could—it would be no use. You wouldn't help me."

"I assure you, I'd do anything on earth," protested Hope.

"Would you—would you be gentle and comforting to a girl who never had and never needed gentleness and comfort? Would you let her know how it feels to be—to be folded close from fear and harm? To pass her burden to another and be passive and safe? Would you do that?"

"If I could," faltered Hope. "I'm awfully sorry, but I'm not much good at that sort of thing. Still, if I can help you at all ——"

Her shoulder was against his again, and with it the full weight of her.

"Hold me, then!" she whispered. "Hold me in your arms."

She lay there, with her head on his breast, his arms about her, as he leaned back against the wall. Both were silent for a long space. When next she spoke he realised with a start of his consciousness that he had been dozing.

"Yes," she murmured; "this is what I wanted—just once! If I had really been frightened, this would have helped me."

"Eh? You weren't——"

"Don't move," she said. "Stay as you are. No; I've never been frightened of anything. I've never felt any of the proper things. Too late to feel them now—except this. Don't move!"

Her murmuring voice wandered on. The low breathed sing-song of it was a lullaby.

" Incomplete ! " it said. " Half a mind and no soul ; not even completely a woman. Can't hurt and can't help—time to finish with it—can't even hate or love completely—a neutral—an alien——"

It continued, down there on his bosom. His arms framed a confessional ; his breast was a Gethsemane. And Hope, like others who could not watch the while of a passion, drooped his head in utter weariness and sank to sleep.

He did not wake even when he rolled over and she perforce raised her head from where it rested. He slept on while she put his folded coat under his head for a pillow and spread a mantle of her own over him. He never knew how she sat through the night, smoking cigarette after cigarette, turning at intervals to bend over him and look intently into his face, candid and self-revealing in the abandon of slumber.

When he awoke to the tarnished prison daylight she was not beside him. He sat up, swallowing a groan at the pains of his stiffened muscles, and saw that without the windows at each end of the room snow was falling in great leisurely flakes, looking black against the sky. To his left, the Princess still slept, and across the room the Prince had not roused yet. Many of the other prisoners were also asleep, but a few had procured tea and were gathered in groups to drink it. In a corner, the young brown-haired man who had served the Prince on the previous evening had propped a tiny ikon against the wall and was kneeling before it. The air was foul with the night's use and the smoke and smell of many cigarettes ; but at least it was warm, and in Moscow warmth was all but wealth.

While he sat, gathering energy to get up, the girl appeared from the corridor and came towards him. She had a glass of tea in each hand, paper-wrapped for the protection of her fingers, and clamped between her elbow and her side was a slab of bread. She walked slowly, that she might not spill the tea ; he had time to remark her boyish slimness and a certain careless grace in her gait.

" I was going to wake you," she said. " Catch hold of this glass, will you ? I knew you'd want to be up when the Prince wakes."

" You shouldn't have troubled to fetch this," said Hope.

" No trouble ! " She sat down. " When you want to get anything here, you go and knock on the door. The sentry'll open the peep-hole and call that old thief of a doorkeeper. Order what you want, and when he says he hasn't got any—he always says that—you swear at him."

" Thanks," said Hope, sipping at his tea. He knew she was looking at him, and he was unwilling to return her gaze. " I'll remember that—especially the swearing."

" Do," she said. " It's important ! And talking of remembering——" (she paused, hesitated as though in thought) " do you remember last night ? "

He felt that he was reddening furiously. " No," he answered. " I don't remember anything you don't want me to. Not a thing ! "

She smiled. " You were wonderfully good to me," she said. " You understand now, don't you ? "

His reply made it very clear that he had understood nothing at all.

" Quite ! " he answered. " Jolly glad I was able to help, you know. Beastly things, those presentiments !

My mother has them, and, though nothing ever happens, they often worry her a lot. And my old nurse claimed to have 'second-sight.' Awful lies she used to tell."

"But——" She stared in frank amaze. "Presentiments! Again! My poor boy, *that* wasn't a presentiment! That was—that is—just cast-iron truth. And all the time you were thinking—oh, what a shame! You did all that for me and never knew what you were doing. I'm ever so sorry."

"I suppose I'm a fool," said Hope, resignedly. With broad daylight for his ally he wasn't going to be trapped into glamorous and crepuscular moods. "The day before yesterday I met a village idiot, and she found her affinity in me at once. And it's perfectly true that I only understand one word in three of all you say."

"All right," she said. "I won't say anything more about it till you know."

Her nod pointed her words.

"I don't know!" retorted Hope. "It's all so—so blooming silly."

"Isn't it?" she agreed. "But we're a silly people and this is a silly country. And there's your silly Prince waking up. You attend to him and I'll take charge of the old lady."

The Prince had slept well, and was mildly cheerful, with a touch of that humour of old age which knows that life has nearly exhausted its ammunition both of good and evil.

"Really," he observed, "one might be worse off than here. After all one has heard of prisons in sewers and stokeholds, one might be much worse off. The end, of course, is the same in any case; that one allows for; but even a sailor cast away upon a cannibal

island must find the fattening process agreeable. Apropos of fattening—there is to be breakfast ? Yes ? "

" I'll get it for you," answered Hope. " I'll bring it over to the Princess, shall I ? You'd like to have it with her."

The old Prince beamed at him. " And you will join us ? Our little domesticity remains ? Now *that* is charming."

Elena's instructions how to obtain food proved sound. Others had been before him on the same business and the door to the landing stood ajar. The sentry lounged against the balustrade, smoking, and the fat old man from the doorway below, wearing a Cossack caftan with a rope round his equator and looking like a monk run to seed, raised a lamentable outcry at Hope's demands.

" Tea, you say ! Plenty of tea ! And bread ! And everything else there is ! Oh, Redeemer, he thinks I keep a restaurant ! And not a penny of money does he offer me—me, with nothing but my rations ! A poor old man, starving and freezing, and he expects——"

He raised both arms, with the great work-deformed hands and the curved talons of fingers at the end of them, and lifted his foul old face in a wonderful gesture of appeal to heaven. Behind his back the sentry grinned amusedly.

" Hurry, now ! " commanded Hope.

" What ? " The prayerful arms dropped. The Judas-eye stabbed at his searchingly, and found nothing dangerous. " What ? You are giving me orders, you half-corpse ? You, with the worms clamouring because you keep them waiting ! You won't be so high and mighty with them."

Hope's pupil had been an anæmic child of eleven, who had passed too much time about the stables and

the servants' quarters, and the tutor's first duty had been to reduce the red corpuscles of his vocabulary. Elena had told him to swear ; he swore.

" You old——! " The first epithet was a word of power. In the full spate of his denunciation the bloated old jail-flunkey jarred to staggered silence. Coming from Hope, with his mild and comely face, whereon seemliness was stamped as though with a die, it was as though a wax doll had spoken. " You God-forgotten —— of a ——! "

There is a sensuousness, a luxury of release from trammels, in a certain sort of cursing. Hope, having dipped his toes in the mud of it, decided to take a mud-bath, and prattled like a drunken *istvostchik*. The sentry stood upright to listen and chuckled aloud ; the subject of the discourse sagged and shrivelled.

" But—but—I am going as quickly as I can ! Doesn't your honour see that I am eager to obey ? All that I can get—*siu minutu ! Bozhe moi !* What a tongue—what a tongue ! "

He flapped off upon his errand distractedly. From behind Hope's shoulder sounded a choked giggle and he turned to find the dark thin face of Elena.

" You are an artist," she said. " It was wonderful. Fancy *you*, of all people ! "

" I had no idea you were within hearing," said Hope. " I'm awfully sorry."

She made a small grimace. " You'd say that if I happened to catch you undressed. Only God may know you when you're unbuttoned. You've got buttons on your soul."

" Oh, have I ? "

" Yes," she jeered. " Pretty little pearly buttons all up and down in rows, and pink ribbons tied in

bows, and lace round the edges! Well," and she nodded her sharp significant nod to him; "take care; I'll tear all those buttons open for you this morning."

"Now you're beginning all over again," complained Hope, uncomfortably.

She laughed quietly. "After I promised I wouldn't, too," she rejoined. "All right, I'll be good now. I suppose you won't wait and swear at him for me?"

"Hardly necessary, is it?" suggested he. "You can madden him enough without swearing."

"Poor boy!" was her answer.

The Princess, too, was the better for her repose, for the time being, at any rate. She sat against the wall amid the coats and coverlets, and contrived to have the effect of a gentle hostess, abolishing with her presence and the infection of her delicacy and amiability all that was frantic and fantastic in that bivouac on the steps of the scaffold.

"It snows, I see," remarked the Prince. "I wonder if they will clear the streets. Dirty stuff, snow! Just mud in the making."

"They will clear some streets for their own sakes," said Elena. "And one they will keep passable for ours."

"Eh? For ours?" The Prince seemed not to understand; then suddenly it came to him. "Ah, yes! I see. Quite so!"

"I oughtn't to have spoken of it," said the girl; "but I didn't know whether Mister Hope had told you how things are arranged. We have a sort of etiquette, and it is as well you should be warned of it in time."

"Assuredly, assuredly!" agreed the Prince. "One wishes to be in the fashion. Is it not so, my dear?"

The Princess smiled softly. "One would certainly

not choose that one's last step should be a *faux pas,*" she agreed.

The girl went on to explain briefly, much as Volkov had explained to Hope, the convention of a stiff upper-lip that obtained when the daily list was called. The old couple nodded.

" Oh, that is understood," said the Prince. " It is very much the private affair of each person concerned. I should not dream of intruding myself upon a man at such a moment. I hope, though, that they do not—er—separate husband and wife ? "

" If they do, they soon reunite them," said the Princess, still with her soft smile.

The girl looked from one to the other as they spoke, seeming to study them and to turn over their words for buried meanings. Her unrest of mind could not understand their suave and uncritical acceptance of facts and conditions. She seemed about to speak, when her eyes rested on Hope, who was watching her, and she checked herself.

" My dear, you will take a cigarette ? " inquired the Prince.

" I really think I might," decided the Princess. " So long since I have smoked, isn't it ? "

He gave her one and held the paper match while she lit it. She leaned back, drew upon it, then closed her eyes while she inhaled the smoke, the cigarette meanwhile poised between fingers not too clean, but still long and dainty of contour. Then she released the smoke in a slow out-breath that sent it forth in a cloud that floated before her face.

" It is very bad for me," she said, smiling through the mist of it. " My doctor used to warn me. ' It is poison for you,' he used to tell me. And later, he himself

died through falling into a well when he was drunk."

She was talking yet when there sounded the heart-catching alarm that was the apex of the prison door —the clatter of the door being opened. They had not noticed among themselves how talk in the room had died down as one after the other fell silent in an expectancy of nervous strain. The loud-booted feet of the officer and his mamelukes rang on the boards of the corridor; faces, ashen, with mouths that twitched uncontrollably, or quelled to a stony calm, lifted to the doorway.

"The list, I suppose?" asked the Prince.

The girl nodded. She was seated at the feet of the Princess, who had Hope on the other side. She bent forward now to catch his eye; her own was alight with a queer, humorous malice. She had the look of one who prepares a taunt for a friend's discomfiture, the "what-did-I-tell-you?" look. And suddenly Hope, who could find no overmastering thrill in the possibility that he might hear his own name called out—the days that were passed had dulled and familiarised his capacity for fear as pain will dull an overworked nerve —felt a sickness take possession of him. It settled within him like a physical ill; the face with which he returned her look was blanched and stricken. He could not see clearly enough to mark how she softened at that token of his distress; he had to pass his hand over his eyes to look plainly at the solid bulk of the tight-belted officer who stamped into his accustomed position.

He struggled with his weakness. His normal consciousness railed at him. *She* had done this to him with her twilight murmurings, her ghosts, and her presentiments. She had found an unexpected breach in his matter-of-fact armour and stabbed him through

it. Just let her wait till this ghastly business was over !

The stout officer produced from the bosom of his uniform overcoat the folded paper of names. He made a business of getting his fur-lined gauntlet off and tucking it within his belt, frowning the while in profound official reserve, his plump face rosy from the air, his short beard glistening here and there where snowflakes had melted upon it. Sixteen men and five women watched him the while, with hearts that limped and faces stiffened to masks.

He finished with his glove, settled his sword with a wagtail twitch of his haunch, cleared his throat as though for a speech, and unfolded the paper. Still frowning, he scanned it, while hell-fire eternities spun their length and renewed themselves.

Then he spoke a name.

" Maximova ! "

A great gust of breaths released sounded in the room, and eyes travelled about it to mark the owner of the name. There was a fraction of an instant during which none responded. Then, unhurried, with no outward perturbation, Elena rose to her feet.

She seemed taller than ever to Hope, sitting on the floor and looking up at her. He had never heard her *familia,* her surname, before, and when it was called he had known a warmth of relief. Now, he could only stare, with hanging jaw, and a voiceless agony numbing his faculties, as she stood. It all passed in a second or two ; there was no indecorous delay ; yet for him each movement of hers was a separate event, occupying its own isolated compartment of time, cut off from that which went before and that which followed. He saw her bend her gaze, full of meaning, of many meanings

that later he laboured to decipher, upon him where he crouched; he marked the slowly widening curve of her lips. They were like unrelated happenings set far apart in a grotesque history. Then she bent towards him, swaying down as though to kneel upon one knee and her hand was on his shoulder. Her face came close, vivid as a thing seen by lightning. She spoke; her low words crept in upon his sense.

"Remember!" said the whisper. "I shall be there. To-night! Remember!"

Her face came closer still. It touched his. Soft cool lips pressed themselves upon his nerveless mouth for a long instant; and then she was upright again. She turned and walked towards the door.

"No—no!" He thought he was shouting it furiously; he tore at himself to rise and go after her. Only the Princess heard that cry and saw the vain surge of inhibited muscles. She put out a gentle hand and laid it on his arm, and at her touch he collapsed and leaned sideways against her knee. At the door, a tall ragamuffin of a soldier put out an arm and drew the girl into the corridor.

"Tropinin!" barked the officer. Someone rose and went out. Another name—another exit; four in all to join that company whereof Elena was one. Then the clumsy departure of the officer, and it was over, and the occupants of the room sank back, slack with strain, to the contemplation of another twenty-four hours of life in jail. And some, perhaps, to follow in fascinated imagination those elected four through the new snow to the bleak yard where they should look their last through slow-floating flakes upon the black sky that bends over Russia.

When it was time for the midday meal Hope rose,

fetched the rations, and went through the motions of service to his companions. They did not speak to him save for trivial talk when their very silence tended to become burdensome with significance; Elena's name was not spoken. They knew, all three of them, that ere they broke bread she had been freed of her shackles for ever and the tempestuous mind lulled to an unending calm.

Did she come as she had promised, when the candles were being put out and the voices sank, when night filled the windows and the sills were swelling cushions of snow? He sat by himself, unmoving through the hours, eyes looking unwinkingly before him. No dreams, now; no hospitality of the drowsy mind for shapes fashioned out of shadows and memories! Her presence was all about him; the shape of her lips was moulded upon his. She had indeed ripped the buttons off his tight-laced soul.

In the night the Princess woke and murmured his name. He went quickly to her. She was thirsty, and he brought her a pannikin of water.

"You do not sleep?" she asked him when she had drunk. "Oh, my dear, you should sleep, for in sleep we are very near to those we love. Do you know, Godfrey, I feel that there is happiness in store for you yet!"

"There is no happiness for blundering fools," he answered.

"Hush!" she said. "I saw what you blundered into, dear boy. You had—and you gave—one great moment. For an instant you soared like a great strong-winged angel; you can never come down to the old level again. At least you have lived."

"I don't want to live," he said. "I'm not fit to live. I'm not a man at all. I'm just a blind prim

parasite that is left at home when real men go out to fight. An old maid—yes, that's what I am—sterile and profitless and absurd!"

Her hands closed on his wrist. "Ah," she said; "good men should be thankful that they have not to judge themselves. But when you are judged I shall be there to testify—I and my dear husband. You know him, Godfrey; all his long life he has lived in stainless honour, in kindness, and in courage. And to-night he told me that whenever you knelt to help him with his boots, he felt so humble that he had to talk to keep himself from weeping. He said that to me himself."

Hope sighed miserably. "It's like a conspiracy to comfort me," he said. "But I know myself." He paused. Then, drearily: "I hardly understood a word she said and *then* I didn't believe it."

The old Princess made little noises of sympathy. He kissed her hand upon his sleeve and went back to his vigil. The grey was in the sky ere sleep stole upon him.

It still snowed that morning; winter had arrived in state. Of two new prisoners who arrived, both starving students, one had a frostbitten foot following a night in Kommissar Botkin's cold-storage chamber, and could only sit rocking himself to and fro and moaning with the agony of the returned blood. The other reported that Red soldiers had made a house-to-house perquisition for emergency snow-shovellers, and that men, women and children were labouring in the chief streets under armed overseers. The new ballet at the once Imperial Opera House was said to be a revelation of consummate art. An attempt to assassinate Trotsky had failed.

The bearer of tidings had a glass of tea in his hand, and sipped from it between items of information. His

bleached-white face was silly with self-importance; he patronised the prisoners gathered round to listen to him like a city man bragging before rustics.

"Oh, yes," he said; "the world is very lively just now. Nuisance being stuck in here just at this moment! Shan't be here long though; Botkin told me himself—Botkin the Kommissar, you know—he said to me: 'It's only for a day or two,' he said. 'You'll be quite comfortable there. You'll be sorry when your time comes to leave!' But don't you get any news here at all?"

"Yes!" It was Hope who answered him. His ear had caught the first of the bolts of the outer door being drawn back. "Every morning we get news. You'll find it thrilling. Here it comes now!"

The prisoners scattered to their places; Hope went over and sat down by the Prince and Princess. All were silent except the new prisoner with his glass in his hand.

"What's it all about?" he was demanding; "what's the idea?"

The tramp of feet, the thud of rifles grounded on the boards of the passage, and the entry of the officer silenced him. He remained, gaping apprehensively, while the usual lunatic ritual achieved itself.

The gloves, the belt, the folded paper, the portentous frown, the preliminary cough!

"Like a trained pig!" murmured Hope. "If the gloves were missing he wouldn't be able to go on!"

The Princess smiled at him and exchanged a look with the Prince. Godfrey Hope was sitting with crossed legs and an unmistakable sneer of mere contempt on his face. There was a manner of impatience about him, too, that boded ill for the convention of calm silence if he were kept waiting much longer.

The paper rustled in the thick fingers. The officer stared at it and seemed for a moment to hesitate. He looked at it more closely, then tentatively read aloud :

" Gope ! "

" Huh ! " Hope snorted. " Didn't know how to pronounce it, the fool ! "

He heaved up, took the Princess's hand and kissed it. The Prince gripped his other hand.

" One of those others will take care of you," he said, nodded, and walked to the door.

VI

The short passage from the room to the outer door was full of soldiers, and there were more on the landing ; a grandiose escort for four or five meek and unresisting prisoners. The stench of them filled the narrow place like a noxious vapour. Hope, as they thrust him onward between them towards the door, had a confused impression of a character that was common to all of them and salient in each. It was something akin to putrefaction, a foul disintegration of the human and civilised semblance of man, so that an inward horror of soul-rot was visible as an outward bestiality of countenance. Their broken clothes were supplemented with odds and ends of uniform, and each had his rifle with its permanently fixed bayonet and the red armlet of the Soviet. There were two Chinamen among them.

It was to such as these, the hard-working journeymen of the execution squads, that Elena had gone out ; to the ruined, gleeful faces, the great, black-nailed hands, the cesspool vileness that were to be the last she should see and feel of her country and her countrymen.

They shoved him out upon the landing. The stairs above and those below had their knots of onlookers,

for parts of the house still harboured civilian occupants, and he was aware of their eyes, rising over him in tiers, alight with a fearful and excited pleasure in the spectacle of men brought out to die. There was a scuffling behind him and another victim shoved forth. It was the brown-bearded young man who prayed each morning before the tiny ikon. He had managed the walk to the door composedly enough, but the actual hands upon him had unmanned him; his face was blue and white in blotches and his lips writhed.

"Cheer up!" said Hope. "Think of the women who've gone through this!"

The other gasped and staggered against the banisters to which he clung with both hands.

The others whose names had been called joined them one by one, till five of them stood there, ringed in by their gruesome guards. There were no women this morning. The officer came forth last.

"Take 'em down, comrades!" he commanded.

The armed men shuffled to their work. A Chinaman took Hope by one arm; a weazened creature with an impishly portentous manner of face such as one sees sometimes in hunchbacks, fastened on to the other. To each prisoner there were two chaperons, and in this order they made their descent of the stairs to the hallway below, where the pot-bellied keeper of the door rose from his chair to behold them. Snow fell yet in the street, and the chill of the air flowed in to meet them.

There was a closed van backed to the kerb with two miserable frameworks of horses hitched to it. Its doors were open, showing its empty interior and the mud upon its floors. It had been found politic in Moscow to carry out the executions with less parade than heretofore; the effect upon large sections of the public of seeing

just such men and women as themselves being hounded to their graves had not been all that was hoped for it. Hence this carriage-exercise for the doomed.

"Well," cried the officer, "what are we waiting for? In with them!"

He himself was busy with that everlasting glove of his, stroking each finger of it separately into place. He stood with feet wide apart as he did so, looking on while the first three of the dead-cart's load were shoved aboard. Then something occurred to him.

"Hold on a minute!" he called. "Where's that comrade from the Kommissar's headquarters?"

A young soldier, completely uniformed from cap to boots, had been standing by the van looking on. He came forward now.

"I was forgetting you," said the officer. "Let me see now—the Anglichanin! Gope was his name. Which of you swine is Gope?"

Hope answered. "Me, comrade!"

"Eh?" The officer needed room for his wits to turn in ere he saw the point of the retort. The dwarfish creature who held Hope by the left arm cackled with laughter.

"Call me 'comrade,' you damned bourgeois!"

The back-handed blow in the face knocked Hope backwards, so that, but for his held arms, he would have fallen. The two guards hoisted him up and heaved him forward for the remainder of an inhuman thrashing, when the young soldier intervened.

"My orders were," he remarked, "that the Kommissar particularly wanted him all in one piece."

He spoke in the voice of an educated man; his face was that of a man of breeding. He looked at the officer coolly.

"Damn the Kommissar!" blustered the other.

"Right; I'll give him your message," said the soldier indifferently. He lifted his rifle, turned and began to walk away.

"Here, curse you!" called the officer uneasily. "Wait a second, can't you?"

He strode after the soldier and the two stood for some minutes in talk under the snow. Meanwhile, the dead-cart waited with its shuddering load, and the executioners stamped their feet and swore at the delay.

The officer and the soldier came back together. "Let him go!" commanded the former. "The Kommissar wants to keep him as a pet, it seems. Lot of blasted silly nonsense! Get ready to start that van, there!"

The final victim was thrust in and the doors shut. The poor wrecks of horses were bludgeoned into activity; the armed men slouched beside the conveyance, and the whole arrangement departed, dragging its way along the snow-muffled street like the nightmare of a funeral. Hope was left alone with the soldier.

"Come on," said the latter. "Let's be moving!"

Hope remained where he was. "Where to?" he demanded.

"Headquarters," replied the other. "Surprised, are you? Thought you were bound for the pits, eh?"

Still Hope did not move. He found himself unable to think. He was being swirled here and there like the snowflakes that fell outside upon winds that blew whither they listed. Here was a respite; but respite was not what he had desired. Of emotion, of repercussion to his fate, he knew only an angry and vicious resentment.

"Come on!" said the soldier again.

Hope turned his head and looked at him across his shoulder.

"Suppose I won't?" he challenged.

The soldier pursed his lips. "Oh, I think you'd better," he answered. "You'll only put me to the trouble of dragging you there."

He was a big youth, about twice the bulk of Hope, lightly bronzed, with well-shaped and regular features.

"It's for you to choose, of course," he added indifferently. "But if you take my advice you'll come on."

"I'll come," said Hope finally.

He was without cap or overcoat, and his boots were wide open to the snow of the side-walk. It was the custom in the prison to leave one's superfluities for those who remained. But the pain and discomfort of the cold were only further aggravations of his mood of bitterness and rebellion.

They overtook and passed the dead-cart floundering along the unswept street with its macabre escort about it and the officer striding abreast of it on the footpath. The driver was using a fixed bayonet as a goad to torture his dying horses along. From within the closed box of the vehicle there came no sound.

"Might have let me have a cab for you on a day like this," remarked the soldier. "Still, even walking's better than *that?*" He made a motion of his head towards the van. "I narrowly missed a ride in that thing myself."

Hope showed no interest. "Arrested for being too well dressed," persisted the soldier. "Anybody whose shirt-tail isn't sticking out of his pants is a bourgeois for these people. I only managed to volunteer at the last moment; my name was actually down for the next cellar-party!"

"What?" Hope looked at him. "You volunteered?"

"I did," answered the other cheerfully. "Enlisted under good old Botkin, who used to hold the door open for me at a motor showroom. That's what you're doing, isn't it?"

Into Hope's face there rose all the disgust he choked down in shame at the villainy and ugliness.

"You filthy swine!" he said distinctly. "You false hound!"

But words could not jar the composure of the young man who had made the great betrayal without twitching an eyelid. He gave a half-smile, and looked down at Hope under supercilious brows. The Kommissar Botkin had that trick too.

"Oho!" he said. "So that's the kind of talk! I didn't know I had the honour of escorting a martyr. Well, my friend, you can count on dear old Botkin and his lady friends to give you all the martyrdoms you want. Personally, I'd rather go out to the pits and have it over; but there's no accounting for tastes."

"Shut your accursed mouth!" cried Hope.

"As you please!" agreed the other. "Not surprised you want to think things over in peace. Only thinking won't improve 'em—as you'll see!"

But he was silent thenceforward, save that at times he whistled jauntily to himself, moving along at Hope's side in his well-fitting uniform with the lounging stride of a boulevardier.

The Venus Anadyomene, naked in marble, beamed with sightless eyes over Hope's head as he ascended the splendid sweep of Rinaldescu's staircase. The great double doors of the room with the coloured windows let him in to the intimate glories of Kommissar Botkin; and the Kommissar himself, in a velvet dressing-jacket, was there to receive him. This time,

though, his chair at the desk was occupied by a girl whom Hope had seen before in that room. Sashenka—he remembered her name with an effort. The Kommissar sat on a corner of the big desk in talk with her; he hitched round as Hope entered.

"Ah!" he cried; "it is Mister Hope! How are you, Mister Hope?"

His sallow face, meanly handsome, like cheap imitation jewellery, put on a mask of light-hearted sauvity. The usual cigarette was gummed to his lip. He had been using some strong scent, for that kind of Russian deems it necessary to be odorous, and Hope, advancing from the door, found himself walking into the sickly reek of it with a sense of sinking into an abominable embrace. He halted some paces from the desk; and once more the gilt-framed mirror behind the big chair showed him his own face, gaunt, strained, stained with blood from his nose and discoloured on one cheek where the officer had struck him.

The girl in the big chair was staring at him.

"What have they been doing to him?" she asked. "You fool, you've had him knocked about till she won't know him."

"My dear Sasha, you heard my orders." The Kommissar turned to the soldier, who was still standing at the door, with a curt question.

"None of my doing," answered the soldier. He related briefly the facts of Hope's encounter with the officer.

"You can go," said Botkin briefly. "You see, my dear, it's an accident. She'll know him all right. But we can wash him, if you like; a bucket and a scrubbing-brush will make him as good as new. Shall we?"

The girl uttered a snap of sound that resembled, and probably was, an oath, and continued to stare at Hope. There was in their regard, in their manner of talking of him in his presence and their appearance of judging him as to his suitability for some unknown purpose, the impersonality with which they might have viewed his dead body.

" Let him alone," said the girl. " You've done quite enough to him."

Botkin smiled easily and rolled his body round upon his tail so that he leaned upon one elbow before her. With a smoke-stained forefinger he tapped her soft cheek.

" I've done what I agreed to do, Sasha," he said. " You wanted him and you've got him. There he is for you ! "

The girl did not withdraw from his caress. Her face, pretty and sullen, seemed to brood discontentedly.

" Well," she said at last, doubtfully, " I'll fetch her. But if she doesn't know him, Botkin——"

She had risen while she spoke and now stood scowling the rest of her half-spoken threat.

" Of course she'll know him ! " laughed the Kommissar. " Bring her in and see for yourself ! "

The girl walked to the door without replying and went out from the room. The Kommissar heaved himself from the desk and straddled, hands deep in trouser-pockets, in a *dégagé* attitude beside it.

" Sit down, Mister Hope ; sit down ! " he urged. " No need for a lot of damned formality this time ! How did you find your friends, the Orlovskys ? "

There were chairs handy and the cushioned seats in each window recess, but Hope remained standing where he was.

" Whom has that girl gone to fetch ? " he demanded.

While he listened to them speaking, wild thoughts had surged in his brain of Elena, miraculously spared like himself ; but upon the heels of them had come the dull assurance of their futility. As she had known that her name would be called, eavesdropping, as it were, upon destiny, so now, out of the infinite where truth dwells eternally, there descended upon him the sure knowledge that she would never again answer to a call.

" Who is it ? " he repeated. " What have you brought me here for ? "

" You'll see," answered the Kommissar. He grinned suddenly. " It would seem that you are a lady-killer, Mister Hope. Once they have seen you they can't forget you. You are a dangerous man."

" You're up to one of your foul tricks," Hope said. " D'you think I don't know it ? Some piece of dirty work behind the backs of your masters ! "

The Kommissar's roguish eye hardened and his posture became less debonnair.

" You'll find it profitable to use a little more civility," he said, stiffly. " Your tone——"

" Oh, go to hell ! " snapped Hope. " D'you think I care ? What the devil do you——"

He broke off at the opening of the door. Botkin shrugged contemptuously and turned towards those who entered. Hope answered the shrug with a snort of defiance, turning to look likewise. It was the girl he knew as Sasha, or Sashenka, standing between the parted leaves of the door like a showman, ushering in another person to the room and the spectacle of its contents.

" See ; there he is," she was saying.

The newcomer wore a huge wrap of furs that muffled

her from the face to the very feet, a royal-looking garment upon which the tinted lights of the windows shifted as she moved as upon a surface of shining metal. It was hugely too big for the figure it clad, making it a mere perambulating bundle. A cap of the same priceless fur surmounted it, so that what there was visible of the wearer showed merely as eyes looking forth like the eyes of an owl in the hollow of a tree. Only feet that kicked in and out below the fringes of the cloak—large flat feet in coarse boots—definitely indicated that the thing was human.

It bore down upon him, seeming to advance hesitatingly and with circumspection, till it paused half a dozen paces away.

" Well ? " demanded Sashenka. " Isn't that he ? "

For answer, there was a bubbling among the furs that clarified to an unmistakable giggle. The living creature within the great cocoon raised its head and the big collar of the cloak fell open. Strange eyes wherein the light moved like a staggering flame and a face of blank, unmeaning beauty came to sight.

" O-oh, sister, it is my Englishman ; the Englishman that smiled at me ! Look at him, sister. Isn't he pretty ? "

Hope gasped. He felt as drowning men are said to feel, with his whole past life reeling off before him. This was the idiot girl from the house that stood alone. Four whole days had not elapsed since he had seen her ladling cabbage-soup into her lovely mouth ; yet ages seemed to have elapsed since then, ages crowded and hectic with history, and the world to have changed shape and meaning.

" She knows him, you see," the Kommissar said to the other girl. " I told you it would be all right."

Sashenka had come to her sister's side and taken her arm. She looked extraordinarily trim and dainty by contrast with that bale of skins. She wore knee-boots of claret-colour leather and a skirt as brief as a kilt of a deeper tone. She had the kind of prettiness that Kirschner found piquant and left commonplace, and in her gaze, too, there was a suggestion of the other's instability ; but there was none of the idiot's perfection of sheer beauty. For the moment, as she lingered by her sister, her manner had a touch of the maternal.

" I told you he was quite well and safe," she said. " And there he is, you see."

She looked across at Hope. " She's been dreaming about you—or something. They haven't been able to do anything with her. You'd better speak to her."

Hope jerked forth a bitter spit of laughter.

" I see," he said. " In my country there was an old superstition about the healing power of a dead man's touch. Here, though, you don't wait till the man's properly dead. You body-snatch him while he's living."

" Hush ! Hush ! " Sashenka got quickly in front of her sister. " Damn you, don't let her see you looking like that ! Do you want her to have a fit ? Tell him, Botkin, you fool ! Come over here with me, Tanya, and see the funny pictures on the window ! "

She led the idiot farther down the room towards one of the alcoves. Botkin came over to Hope.

" You don't know when you're in luck," said the Kommissar. " That lunatic's people have got a notion that there's something supernatural about her, that she sees visions and all that. She's had nightmares about you—dreamed of you with a hole in your head and soldiers throwing you into a trench. Went from one fit into another ! "

"Well?" demanded Hope. "What if she did? What's it got to do with me?"

"To do with you?" The Kommissar stared, forgetting his man-about-town manner for the moment. "But, of course, you don't know that the Commission of Foreign Affairs has thrown you overboard—remitted you back to me to deal with! Well, it has; and it rests with me whether you leave here on your feet or in the dead-cart. That's how much it has to do with you, *durak!*"

"Oh, Lord!" Hope cried out in bored impatience. "What's it all about? Where does the other idiot come into all this?"

"I'm telling you, you uncivil brute," protested the Kommissar. "Why don't you listen? They're convinced that if I send you where I ought to—and that's out to the pits—they're convinced that she'll know. She'll see it in dreams. So Sashenka, her sister there, who actually believes all this rot herself, wants me to let you go."

"Where?" put in Hope curtly.

"Where?" repeated the Kommissar. "Why, back to your own country. There's a party leaving at midnight for the Finnish frontier. What's the matter with the man? Don't you *want* to go?"

For Hope's white, bruised face seemed to have turned to stone. That antic devil, the Kommissar, had taken him up to a high place and showed him all the kingdoms and the cities of the world of his desire. His mother's house with its square-walled garden at Hampstead, high above London, where from the window of the bedroom that had been his since childhood, he could look out over smoke-softened miles of city, with the spires and the factory-chimneys rising from them like

masts of ships in harbour; the heath and its sophisticated dales and hillocks; the order, the security and comfort, the propriety and graciousness of it all! There, jails were places one read of and death was a thing to be accomplished privately, like birth. Moscow was a fable, fanciful as Lyonesse; the New Jerusalem was much more real. All his for the taking—his, at the whim of an idiot!

"Well?" said the Kommissar. "Why don't you answer?"

Hope returned blinking to the present.

"There's one thing," he said. "What about the Orlovskys? You wouldn't have arrested them but for me."

"Never mind them," said the Kommissar. "You can't take them with you. The Orlovskys have got nothing to do with it."

"Well," said Hope, "you can release them anyhow and I'll stay and look after them. Or I'll go back to that jail and do it."

"You're likely to go somewhere that you won't like, if you keep this up," threatened the Kommissar. "Don't you understand? I'm telling you that I'll send you home."

"Ye-es!" Hope pondered for some seconds. "Yes, I know you are. Why?"

"Eh?"

"Why? You're not doing a thing like that for nothing. You're getting something out of it. I heard you talking when I came here; you've made a bargain about me with that girl. I want to know what it is?"

The Kommissar lowered a furious face to his.

"You mind your own business, curse you! I'll have you shoved on board that train in irons."

"Not you!" jeered Hope. "That couldn't be kept quiet—a foreigner refusing to be released from your beastly country! You'd have to answer for embezzling a Soviet prisoner for your private ends, and you know you daren't face it."

"Blast you!" fumed the Kommissar and jerked away from him. "Sasha!" he called. "Sasha! Just come here for a moment."

The girl rose and came down the room. The fur-swaddled lunatic followed her more slowly, making little grimaces of coyness at Hope.

"Here's a thing for you!" the Kommissar broke out. "He won't go!"

"Won't go?"

The girl slewed round and stared at Hope incredulously.

"No! Wants to stay here and be dry-nurse to those old Orlovskys. He'd be snapped up again in an hour, and ten to one I'd be asked about it. Can't have that, you know!"

She puckered her delicate brows in wonder.

"But—*why* won't you go?" she asked at length.

"Rather go back to jail," Hope answered shortly. "Those old people need me. It's a question of honour; you wouldn't understand!"

The sting missed her. She walked slowly over to him. Her exquisite little face was serious, with a suggestion of puzzled hurt, as though refusals were new to her.

"It's the child," she said; "it's Tanya! She's queer, you know; and when things go wrong with her, it brings bad luck. Oh, it's true; we've proved it! I've promised her you shall go home free to your own country, and if you don't, she'll know! She'll

dream and then she'll have fits. She's terrible when she's like that. You won't disappoint her, will you ? "

" Afraid I must ! " The voice and the words were those of the old Hope, the diffidently courteous, the sweetly formal ; but their effect was a sneering repulse.

She flinched from it, but with a vicious tightening of the lips.

" Because of those Orlovskys ? " she cried.

" Yes," he replied. " Because of those Orlovskys ! "

She gave him a long look ; he could all but see her rat's brain working, groping for an expedient by which to thwart him. Then she turned away and drew the Kommissar to a conference at the corner of the big desk. The idiot was hovering in the offing, making little mewing noises to attract Hope's attention. He turned his back and sat down in the nearest window-seat, watching the whispered debate between Botkin and the girl.

The Russians are one of the gesticulating peoples ; they talk with every part of them except their brains. There was a dumb-show drama going on. The girl spoke, nodding and wagging a stiff finger. Botkin considered, shrugged and protruded a dubious upper lip. She stamped an insistent foot ; he shook his head gloomily, brightened and spread a hand that offered a feasible amendment. She stared, incredulous, then both laughed together and glanced at Hope. " That'll settle *him !* " they said to each other as plainly as though they had shouted it. But it was not finished. Botkin put both hands on the girl's shoulders and bent a face that was dark and challenging to hers. He asked a question. She half-turned her head away and nodded rapidly. " You mean it ? " demanded his eyebrows and the jut of his chin. A slower nod

answered him. He released her; the bargain was confirmed. They passed together to the small door by which, during Hope's previous visit, the little fat secretary had come and gone, and went out.

The idiot had sat herself down on the floor, and mewed and giggled there to herself. Hope sat still; she could do without attention from him, she for whom death was bound or let loose at her imbecile whim.

The Kommissar returned to the room alone, closing the door behind him. He went and sat down at his desk. He was biting on a smile; he wore the look of a man who keeps his countenance with difficulty while a practical joke works up to its climax. For a further evil portent, he had recovered his geniality.

"A cigarette, Mister Hope?"

"No!" said Hope.

The Kommissar raised his eyebrows in deprecation of this grossness and lit a cigarette for himself. A little desk-clock ticked faintly and rapidly, and the idiot fidgeted; save for these, the great room was still. At first the Kommissar gazed at his prisoner with an excellent expression of tolerant amusement; the man's face was the fancy-dress of his foolish mind; but Hope's unwinking eyes—he was gazing beyond the figure of the Kommissar—were uncomfortable to stare at, and he set to examining his polished finger nails.

Something touched Hope's knee and he looked down with a start. The idiot had crawled close to him and was reaching up a hand towards his. She had something in it and was trying to give it to him as once she had given him the packet of cigarettes.

"For my Englishman!" she crooned. "For my pretty Englishman!"

The Kommissar bent forward. "Take it, man,"

he urged. "Take it quick! Don't let's have any of her fits here."

She had fumbled it into his hand and now scuttled away along the wall on hands and knees, squeaking with excitement. Hope opened his hand and looked at the gift. He shook his head—Fate was so childish! —and smiled.

"He's laughing! My Englishman is laughing!" crowed the idiot.

She had given him Prince Orlovsky's great gold watch.

Then silence again till at length there sounded the patter of brisk, light feet on the stairs and the double doors parted their lips to admit Sashenka. Glowing with the fresh air, with snow-flakes in her hair and a will-o'-the-wisp flame in her eyes, she went with a step that was half a dance to the Kommissar at the big desk, flinging Hope a grimace as she passed. Dainty enough to dance for the prize of a saint's head on a charger, a morsel worth its price to any gallant Kommissar, she came into that factory of wrong and oppression, smiled to the man-eating mountebank who ruled there, like a figure out of a poet's ecstatic dream—a poet diseased and pervert, but a poet!

She had a paper in her glove; she plucked it out and cast it on the desk before the Kommissar.

"It's done?" he smiled, taking it.

"Of course it's done!" she answered in a voice that trilled.

He was looking at the paper. "But you must sign this, Sasha!"

"Where? Here? Give me a pen."

The Kommissar took the paper from her and dried it on his blotting-pad with a smack of his fist. He rose, holding it.

"Now, Mister Hope," he said, "you have given trouble enough. Postnik, my secretary, will tell you about the pass, the ticket, and so forth; and to-night you leave us. Yes, I assure you; to-night you leave us—one way or the other—homeward or heavenward! And before you decide in which direction you will travel, you had better cast your eye over this document."

He came round the desk as he spoke and gave the paper to Hope. Then he returned to his place and put a finger on a bell-push. Hope glanced at the document, started violently, and began to read it feverishly.

It was a printed form with spaces filled in with a pen.

"To—so and so," it read. "You are directed to proceed at once with the execution by"—there followed the written word "shooting"—"of"—and then, in the ample space left for the names, clearly set down—"Vladimir Alexandrovitch Orlovsky and Ekaterina Vasilievna Orlovsky, and to certify to me that this order has been carried out." Then the impression of the official rubber stamp and the Kommissar's signature. And below appeared another line of print: "I certify that the above order has been duly carried out by me."

The ink was still fresh where the girl had signed her name at the bottom. When he looked up, she was laughing at him; the Kommissar's arm was round her waist.

"You see," said Botkin, "all your objections are removed. *Bon voyage,* Mister Hope!"

The secretary was waiting in the door for him to come forth. With hands that groped, like a man blinded, he staggered towards him.

* * * *

Two o'clock in the morning, and the "midnight" train for Petrograd was just pulling clear of Moscow. The land stretched in silver to either side of the line, shining under a frigid moon. Packed into his compartment, Hope stared through a broken window-pane upon that vastness of desolation. Holy Russia, whose harvests fatten on the blood of martyrs! Who shall redeem it—who?

For Godfrey Hope there limned itself a vision, born of a heart made wise in torment. It shaped itself till it stood great and clear upon the snow-floor of the empty world—a virgin, slim and young, with the face that for ever should be vivid to him, weak, brave and of enduring patience, folding in compassionate arms an idiot child.

SAINT FLOSSIE

SEEN from its entrance, the discreet little saloon bar, upon that dull evening of early winter, had the effect of an ornate shrine. Its nearer lights were subdued, but in the background the strong electroliers shone upon that popular altar, the bar, in a blaze and dazzle of glass and brass, with a plump and golden-haired priestess moving deftly in the celebration of its rites. Upon the plush settees quiet people sat in a still content; a town traveller was entertaining a shopkeeper in a corner; and the noises of the street reached them only as the clamour of the world might reach a hermitage.

Even the town traveller remarked upon the hush and tranquillity of the place.

"Quiet little pub!" he said. "Restful, I call it, after a day of——" He broke off and stared. "Hallo! Who's this comin' in?"

A large woman had thrust open the swing door and was moving across the room to the bar. In her very gait she was noticeable; there was a sort of showmanship in it, as of a thing performed consciously for the public eye. Under her large and elaborate hat there were brass-hued curls; her great face, with its peach-bloom complexion, its blood-lined mouth and skilfully enhanced eyes, looked over a fur stole that exaggerated the vastness of her bosom. Trinkets clinked about her as she moved; she had—she has still—a positive aura of lavishness and overpowering self-consequence. The low-toned conversation on the settees died; everyone paid her the tribute of stares. In that little assembly

of simple folk, all with a day's work behind them, she was as conspicuous as a clown in a cathedral.

She brought up alongside the bar like a steamer at a wharf; it was plain at once that she had an excellent bar-side manner. She gave to the barmaid a smile of mingled *camaraderie* and condescension.

"Evenin', dear," she said. "A drop o' the usual, if you please. Cold evenin', isn't it?"

The barmaid acknowledged the salute with gratification. The newcomer drew off her gloves, laid them and her handbag on the bar, and received her potion of water-coloured spirits. She leaned upon an elbow while she sipped it, gossiped with the barmaid, and gazed blandly about her.

"I must say," she confided, "I must say, all things considered, I find gin's the best thing for keeping your figure. And I've tried most things, too."

All were listening; only the shopkeeper, in a careful whisper, gave information to his companion.

"That's Miss Floyd," he said. "Customer o' mine. Retired actress, she is."

"Floyd!" repeated the traveller, thoughtfully. He started and stared at his guest, honestly aghast. "You don't meant to say—good Lord, d'you mean to tell me that *that's* all that's left of Flossie Floyd? Flossie—whose photographs used to sell all over London like postage-stamps? Why, I remember I used to have one in my room—only burnt it when I got married! It can't be her!"

"It's her all right," affirmed the other. "I never saw her myself till she moved down this way last year; but I 'eard she'd been good-lookin' in her time."

"Good-looking!" The town traveller's whisper threatened to become a shout. "She was the loveliest

thing that ever smiled over the footlights. Couldn't act, couldn't sing, couldn't dance; her face and her shape was all she had—and it was enough! And that's her now—that gin-tippling old hag over there! Pity she didn't die!"

"She's a good customer," said the shopkeeper, defensively.

The lady at the bar caused her drink to be renewed, and continued to philosophise to an audience that hung on her every word.

"Champagne, now!" she observed. "I've seen the day when I could ha' swum in it; but it never suited me constitution. An' beer's fattenin'. So I say again—an' I don't care who says different—that, all things considered, the best——"

She rambled on uninterrupted, the focus of all eyes and ears. It is in the saloon bar that the qualities which the fresh-air world rejects come into their own. Save for reservations by the town traveller, none of her spell-bound audience beheld the tragic monstrosity of her, the profitless and meretricious thing which her life had made of her. Only the town traveller's lips moved noiselessly while he gazed at her dumbly, and strove to trace in all her bulk some least lineament of the golden, glowing, holy-faced creature of five-and-twenty years before.

"Flossie Floyd!" he was repeating inwardly, over and over again. "Flossie Floyd! My God!"

For his memory had not played him false. There *had* been a day when she could have "swum in champagne," when she wore, like a bloom upon the startling perfection of her beauty, a seeming of wistful innocence; when her photographs spread like a pest over the world of young men. The Universities and public schools were rotten with them; attic bedrooms

and cabins of warships were glorified by them ; they spread abroad over the world upon the heels of war and commerce. Young David Baines took one with him when he left Cambridge and returned to his home in St. Petersburg. He found a frame for it, a heavy old thing of tarnished gilt about a foot square, and set it on the wall in the huge old Baines house in the Galernaya.

It was still there, dimmed by age and the smoke of the cigarettes of twenty-five years, never looked at, but lovely still, until that evening when the town traveller identified Flossie Floyd.

For it was upon that night that the Kommissar Baranov, reaching out from his commandeered palace in the Millionnaya, that gloomy street of frowning, fortress-like palaces, sent his private army upon a " domiciliary visit " to the home of the Baines.

There had been Baineses in St. Petersburg for over a century, prospering handsomely and honourably, worthy members of that strong British colony which had the trading functions of the ancient " English factory." Theirs was one of the great rambling houses opening by way of a walled courtyard and a tall arched gate into the long cobbled street which is called the Galernaya. It sheltered now David Baines, his young wife, and his widowed mother. There were also a couple of female servants who had known service and dependence too long to discard them easily. And even while Flossie Floyd in her London drink-shop was sipping and babbling, there came to these five the stamp of heavy feet upon the stones of the court, the shine of lanterns upon the windows, and a thunder of gun-butts beating upon the house-door.

" Open there, you bourgeois ! " came in a roar

of command and menace. "By order of the Soviet —open, will you?"

Baines, his wife, and the old lady, had been sitting together by the light of a single candle. The young woman cried out; the old one put a hand to her bosom; from deeper within the house sounded the squealing of the two terrified servants.

David Baines rose. He frowned in a moment's indecision.

"I must let them in," he said. "It isn't as if we could keep them out. Don't resist them or oppose them. After all, it's the Soviet—not a mob!"

He bent and kissed both women; his wife clung to him. The noise below increased. He put her from him very gently.

"Stay with mother, dear," he said. "I'll come back to you here."

He passed down the stone stairs in the darkness; he had been born in that house and needed no light. Voices without bawled threats and curses—for the Bolshevik has always kept enough of God to swear by.

"I'm coming!" he shouted, fumbling at the elaborate door fastenings. "Have a little patience."

"Hear that?" It was the renegade ex-sergeant of Guards who led the party. "Patience!" he shouted. "I'll give you patience!"

David Baines, of course, could see nothing; he was still tugging at great, old-fashioned bolts. So when the leader outside stepped forward with his rifle levelled and, at a distance of a foot, sent a nickel jacketed German bullet through the centre of the door, he received it in the heart. His knees gave under him and he collapsed, sinking to a heap against the foot of the door and just within his own threshold.

"Well?" bellowed the sergeant. "Are you going to open it, or must we blow it in?" He paused for an answer. "I must have got him with that shot," he said, turning to his men. "Get out a grenade, one of you! It's cold standing about here."

"Let me come! Stand away from the door, comrades!" A German ex-prisoner of war produced a hand-bomb of the old type with a fuse, and stooped to the doorstep. He looked up at the sergeant with a grin. "*Tak tozhe!*" he said. "You got him; here's blood coming under the door."

He lit the fuse from a lantern, placed the bomb in position, and retired to cover with the rest outside the gate. Half a minute later the stillness of the sorrowful and danger-laden night was rent by the roar of the explosion; a momentary glamour of fire filled the arch of the gate. In the candle-lit room upstairs the two women, the young one and the old, clasped each other in an agony of terror; in hundreds of darkened rooms along the street hearts froze with fear upon the noise of the detonation.

"Now, come on!" ordered the sergeant. "Lanterns ahead! Find the people first; we'll have plenty of time to go through the house after we've got our prisoners. In with you!"

The lanterns led the way through the gap where the door lay in splinters and what was left of David Baines sprawled broken among the wreckage. And the women, scarce breathing, rose to confront them as they stamped in a throng into the drawing room, bringing their own lights with them to supplement the one candle.

"Good evening," said the sergeant, facetiously. "You are arrested, both of you. Who else is in the house?"

Baranov's private army consisted of nine individuals

beside the sergeant. It was like a hideous nightmare to the women. There were four burly Russians of the lowest slum type in sheepskins, the German in the leather lining of a motor-overcoat, two Chinese, swathed like mummies, a huge blue-jacket in uniform, and a slim blond young man, who stared at the room and its equipment with open mouth, who had no visible mark of nationality or calling.

"Where is my husband?" asked David Baines' widow.

"The man who came down to the door?" She nodded; the sergeant winked to his followers. "Oh! he's safe enough; you'll see him in the hall as you go out. Now, who else is in the house?"

It took only a few minutes to complete the arrests. The two servants, imbecile with terror, were dragged forth from their foolish hiding-places; all four prisoners were put under the guard of the sailor and one of the Chinamen; and the looting of the great house commenced.

"This," cried the sergeant gaily, "goes with me."

He scooped a collection of small silver bric-a-brac off a table; there was a roar of laughter from the others, and they scattered shouting about the house. Only one, the tall blond youth, hesitated and seemed uncertain. There was a curious air of indecision as his eyes rested on the prisoners—the younger lady supporting the elder, the two servants kneeling at their feet and clinging to their skirts.

"Aren't you going to get your share, you fool?" shouted the sergeant at him.

The youth started. "Yes," he said, after a pause. He picked up his lantern, turned, and went from the room.

The real difficulty in running a revolution is that a

leader can never be sure that his revolutionaries want the same thing as himself. Lenin and Trotsky struck for something which they nicknamed an ideal; but too many of their supporters struck only for food. This youth—Pavel they called him—was such an one. When work, black bread, and cabbage-soup came to an end together, he accepted the revolution and its rations as the next best thing. He did not know what people meant by liberty or the bourgeoisie or even the proletariat. Of course, he could neither read nor write; in short, he was a typical Russian peasant, ignorant, docile, and kindly, driven by economic stress to unskilled labour in the towns.

He went slowly up a farther flight of stairs, came to a closed door, and paused, hesitating. At length he pushed it open and, raising his lantern, entered. There was a table in the middle of the room; he set the light and his rifle upon it and looked round.

A desk with a typewriter, three or four full bookshelves, the escutcheon of a Cambridge college, a few small athletic cups, big leather armchairs, photographs—he had wandered into what was still David Baines' den. Half its contents had no meaning for Pavel; he wandered from one to the other uncomprehending. A photograph in a silver frame he thought he recognised as a picture of the younger lady downstairs; it was at least an intelligible object, and he turned to the other photograph with a faint curiosity. And a moment later he saw it.

A tarnished gold frame with a wide mounting surrounding a dim face that smiled with a half-seriousness forth at him. He had to take the lantern in hand to make it out plainly, and his first full apprehension of it made him catch his breath. That perfect beauty, with its purity and appeal—he recognised it! He spoke aloud.

"An ikon!" he breathed. "A saint!"

He put down the lantern, and, bowing himself as he had been taught in his childhood, he went through the complicated motions by which an orthodox Russian crosses himself.

Thrice he did this. Then, glancing behind him to see that none observed, he lifted the portrait of Flossie Floyd from the wall and tucked it beneath his cloth coat, well up under his armpit. He found that in that manner he could carry it fairly inconspicuously. He helped himself to nothing else.

He was last of the party to descend when they took the prisoners away; but he was not needed in the struggle to drag them forth when the sergeant made good his word and Mrs. Baines saw her husband.

Kommissar Baranov's stolen palace in the Millionnaya had a sweep of marble stairs to the grand salons up which twelve men might march abreast; its state apartments were a vista of great rooms running the length of its front, panelled between gold pilasters with tapestries; it had housed a Prince whose blood was yet caked upon the floor of the cellar where they had done him to death. And the general atmosphere of it now was that of a mausoleum. It was splendid and gruesome on a gigantic scale. Yet it sank to the insignificance of a background by contrast with its tenant, Baranov.

They dragged the almost unconscious women to the room in which he was accustomed to work, a great chamber fitted with high bookshelves, and paused outside the door.

"Order, now!" counselled the sergeant, and the men fidgeted and shuffled. The sergeant knocked. "*Iti suda!*" summoned a clear voice from within. The sergeant opened the door and the prisoners and their escort passed into the presence.

The terrible Kommissar looked up from the documents spread before him upon the desk at which he sat with his secretary. His eye rested on the four women, the two unmistakably mistresses, the other two as unmistakably servants, and travelled thence over the faces of the men. At that daunting scrutiny there was more fidgeting.

" Well ? " demanded Baranov.

The ex-sergeant all but came to attention, but recovered himself in time.

" We carried out orders, comrade," he began, and went on to recite the events of the evening, while Baranov sat listening immovably, and the men stared one and all at him.

He was a tallish man, something over forty years of age, black-haired and clean shaven. His features were of a characterless regularity, the eyes cold, the mouth commonly rigid. It was not in his outward appearance that his quality was expressed. Rather it was a matter of demeanour ; his attitude, his slightest gestures, his tones, even his occasional smiles, were charged, as the electric current charges an accumulator, with that Thing within the man which had made him what he was. One had only to watch him to understand and believe the stories that made him notorious. He had had his phase of Nihilism, of anarchism ; he had served in the French Foreign Legion and successfully deserted ; he had been in prison in England and a German spy during the war. Since the outbreak of the revolution he had been more Bolshevist than the Bolsheviks ; his influence with the Petrograd Soviet was paramount ; and his rule had been a grisly horror. None, save his victims and his slaughterers, knew when or where or why he killed.

At the end of the sergeant's recital he nodded.

" Good ! " he said. " Lock them up for the night. They shall be interrogated in the morning."

He turned to his papers again, calmly, as a man resumes work after a trivial telephone call. It was a gesture entirely in his own manner. His fat little bearded secretary glanced at him curiously and then at the women. He knew what that indifference, that unstudied nonchalance, meant. Living folk mattered to Baranov ; to them he gave his attention ; but the dead were done with.

Presently Pavel was able to be alone. The private army of Baranov, when not on duty, dwelt in the top-floor of the palace, a great attic-loft honeycombed with little rooms. One of these, with a straw mattress, a bucket for his ablutions, and a packing-case table, Pavel had to himself. As a member of the garrison he drew a ration of candles. He made a light, closed the door, and drew forth his loot.

He placed it on the packing-case, leaning against the wall, with the candle-flame shining upon it. For convenience of close inspection he knelt before the table and pored upon the picture. He wanted not only to confirm but to renew his impression of it. In his childhood he had liked the saints he knew—those in the church of his village, gorgeously embalmed in pinckbeck and sham jewels. Religion had been the one mystery of his life ; and of late, without it, life had been a little barren and obvious. But here, at last, was a saint again, clad in loveliness instead of glass diamonds for a heavenly glory. He remained staring.

And presently, still kneeling, he crossed himself thrice. A moment or two later, his eyes fixed on the pictured face before him, he recited that prayer which begins : " O, little mother of great mercy ! "

And allowing for the difference in longitude between Pavel's private chapel in Petrograd and Flossie's London pub, it was at that moment that Miss Floyd, having donned her gloves and found her handbag, bade her friend the barmaid an affectionate good-night, swept a devastating smile over the company, and walked to the door with a gait even a little more pronounced than she intended. And as she pulled the door open she hiccuped.

Three floors below the garret in which the boy knelt before the old photograph, Baranov sat suddenly back in his chair and gazed, as if upon a sudden thought, at his secretary. The little fat man became anxiously alert.

"Yes," he said, nervously. He knew enough of Baranov to fear his inspirations, but not enough to guess them. He was himself the mildest man that ever made out an order for a throat to be cut.

"Give me Lenin's letter again," directed the Kommissar. There was silence for a while as he ran through its many pages. Then he laid it down.

"The position is this," said Baranov, slowly, while the secretary craned over the desk in eagerness to hear, "Litvinoff reports that opinion in England, even proletariat opinion, is adversely affected by our treatment of the bourgeois, and may be fatally affected by our treatment of British subjects. Lenin trusts Litvinoff, and urges his views on me—urges them peremptorily, even. You see?"

"Yes." The secretary nodded. "But—to-night!"

Baranov considered him. "The Englishman Baines is dead. That is true. But it is better that he should not be dead. He escaped; we know no more. That is our story. Do you understand?"

"No," replied the secretary, frankly. "I don't. The women will tell a different story and——"

He fell silent as Baranov shook his head.

"The women escaped with him," said the Kommissar. "By the same road!"

His chill eyes had a flicker of mere amusement as he viewed the little man's face of consternation.

"Send me that sergeant-fellow!" he ordered.

The secretary hesitated; but it was impossible for him to disobey Baranov. Shuddering, he went upon his errand. Baranov, leaning back in his chair, the tips of his fingers joined, waited in deep thought.

He looked up as the big sergeant entered and marched towards the desk, and his eyes flickered past him to where the secretary hovered in the offing.

He began to speak so suddenly that both his hearers started.

"It was you who executed the Prince downstairs, was it not?"

"Yes, comrade—me and another comrade—we——"

The sergeant was going on to give details. There was eagerness in his great gross face; but Baranov stopped him.

"There is another execution for you to-night," he said, in level tones. "You will need three other comrades this time, men who can hold their tongues. And it is to be a quiet affair—no shooting!"

"I see," replied the sergeant. "In that case, the bayonet, eh?"

They might have been—in fact they were—discussing the ways and means for an everyday transaction.

Baranov shrugged. "That is your affair. Who are the three men you will take with you? They must be silent fellows, you understand!"

The sergeant nodded thoughtfully. "Well, the two Chinamen," he suggested. "They're all right. And for the other one—what about the youngster? Quiet fellow—hardly ever opens his mouth!"

Baranov considered. "All right," he said. "Go and bring them here—with their weapons—and I'll give you your orders."

The secretary walked hastily aside to give the man passage; Baranov, watching, smiled faintly. There was a while of silence in the great room, till it was broken by the sergeant's returning feet. He entered alone.

"Well?" Baranov demanded. "Where are the others?"

The secretary crept nearer to hear the reply, for the sergeant spoke in a low voice of confidence.

"It's about that young fellow, Pavel, comrade," he said. "I thought I ought to tell you about that before I take him with us. What do you think I found him doing?"

"How should I know? *What* was he doing?"

The sergeant wagged his head humorously.

"I went up quietly, so as not to rouse the others, seeing it's to be a silent affair, and just pushed his door open. And may I never eat bread again if there he wasn't down on his knees on the floor, with a candle alight and all, praying before an ikon!"

The sergeant got his hoped-for effect, for the Kommissar sat up sharply. He frowned.

"An ikon! Here—in this house? I thought I'd ordered them all to be thrown out. Where did he find it?"

"I *think*, comrade, he must have got it in that house in the Galernaya."

"The fool! Well, go and fetch it here—and him

with it," ordered the Kommissar. "This kind of thing is dangerous. I'll talk to him myself."

He was really perturbed. He was a fanatic enemy of religion, and believed—probably with justice—that it was the most redoubtable force arrayed against Bolshevism. He rose from his chair and began to pace the floor.

"It is a symptom!" he declaimed, in his frigid voice that yet could warm to oratorical ardours. "A symptom of the old corruption that yet lives in us. Shall we have to breed a new generation which has never known slavery of the mind or the body before we can claim a victory for the Revolution? Sometimes I almost fear it!"

"He is only a boy, comrade," ventured the secretary. "If you talk to him——"

"I will talk to him," said Baranov, darkly.

The sergeant marched in a scared Pavel, rifle on shoulder, cap on head, himself carrying the ikon at his heels, in the most approved military manner.

"Halt!" he barked, and Pavel halted, his eyes fixed on the dreaded countenance of the Kommissar. "Present arms!" But Pavel knew nothing of that. "Here is the ikon, comrade."

Baranov reached out a hand for it, glanced from it to Pavel, then back to it again. He seemed for an instant bewildered; he stared at it incredulously; then suddenly he laughed briefly.

"So this is your ikon, eh? You brought it from the Galernaya and you have been praying before it?"

There was a gaiety in his manner which none of them had seen there before. Pavel trembled.

"Yes, Excellency," he stammered.

Again Baranov laughed. He turned the frame

over, opened the back, and drew out the photograph of Flossie Floyd.

"Now see," he said to Pavel, "where your silly superstition has led you! You have been kneeling to this, crossing yourself and praying before *this!* You fool! This is no saint!"

Pavel uttered no word, but his blunt blond face hardened.

"These things come from England, the stronghold of capitalism. I remember when they sold them there in the streets, and young fools bought them. But you are surely the first to pray before the thing!"

He shook his head at Pavel not unkindly.

"It is my saint," said Pavel. "Give it back to me!" He was trembling as he spoke.

"Saint!" exploded Baranov. "I tell you, fool, this is a wanton, a dancing-girl, any rich man's girl——"

Pavel moved a step. "Stop!" he said.

"Just a costly vice, a money-sink, a rot in the body of the community," continued Baranov. "But since you are set on having the thing—here you are!"

With a quick motion he tore the card across, and made to toss the halves towards Pavel.

But he did not get so far, for at that moment Pavel shot him through the body.

It was four months before the Baines' ladies were released. They never knew Pavel, of course; nobody ever will again. But it is a pity that Miss Floyd, at least, nightly visiting the hushed shrine of her choice, cannot know how for an hour she reigned in that bare attic high over the Millionnaya.

PROXY

THEIR prison was a stone floored, low-vaulted chamber in the basement of the great gloomy Moscow palace which had been commandeered by the Extraordinary Commission. Its furniture was a low stone bench that ran round three sides of it; its fourth side gave space to the massive double doors through which new arrivals were kicked or bowed in, according to the taste and fancy of their escorts; through which, too, daily, those whose names were called passed forth to the merry band of executioners—women and men—who waited with their revolvers in the death-cellar.

Over the double doors a wide arch of fanlight, conforming to the contours of the ceiling, allowed a dirt-tempered light to filter through to the big chamber. So that the shabby guard within the room, lounging in his scraps of uniform, with his putrefying sheepskin over all, his German rifle and hoop-iron bayonet for ever tumbling with a crash from the wall where he had leaned it, could see, pale against the shadow of the place, the thirty odd faces of those who bivouacked upon or at the foot of the stone bench—the splendid Viking countenance of the man-o'-war's-man in the corner nearest to him; the great gorgeous Jew merchant, some places distant; the youth with the down of a new-born beard on cheeks and chin, barefooted, but otherwise clad in the uniform of a University student; great hulking peasants, stinking and stolid;

shopkeepers, silent and alert; a doddering gentle old imbecile who had been a Prince and a general before the "Chaika"—for the Extraordinary Commission, like Beelzebub, has a nickname!—promoted him to be a martyr.

In the furthest corner to the guard's left hand camped the three English. In the angle of the wall was Mrs. Welland, a Russian by birth, an Englishwoman by virtue of her marriage to Tommy Welland before the Revolution. The guards had seen her once or twice at close quarters, when she came to the door in the mornings to hand over letters to be duly read and destroyed by the censor. They saw her as normally a handsome armful of soft femininity, a little fined down by prison diet and conditions; they were not the men to appreciate those eyes of Irma Welland's, alight with the ardour and patience of candles devoted upon an altar, her lips that joined to withhold the fire of her speech, her stillness of countenance that embalmed the fervours of her soul.

At the side of her, in that shameless ante-room of death, where privacies were denied to those appointed to be buried in one common grave, was the place of her husband, Tommy Welland. The guards knew him too—a pale-haired man of about thirty, an Englishman born in Moscow, who spoke better Russian than they. And one night, while the others slumbered, Tommy Welland had come tiptoeing across the stone floor to speak to the man on watch. In his hand he held something which he protruded, not like a weapon, but like a shield; and his harsh-breathed word was ahead of him.

"Brother!" he whispered. "Brother!"

The leaning rifle fell with its customary crash.

The sleepers were used to it; some stirred but none woke. The guard stooped, grunting, to recover the rifle.

"Damn you!" he said, or words to that effect, for the phrase he used cannot, and shouldn't be, translated. "I am not the brother of any cursed bourgeois!"

"Yes—yes!" The words came windily in quick gasps. Tommy Welland was close to him; his face worked in a disorder of panic and stress; his eyes looked as big as eggs in it. "We are brothers! Remember—we are brothers! This is for you! Take it—I give it to you! But remember—we are brothers! Take it!"

His hand shuddered itself into the guard's great automatically-ready palm. It was a thousand-rouble note; and this was before the rouble had gone the way of the Gadarene swine; it would still buy! The guard, whose pay consisted of his rations and what he could blackmail from his prisoners, was much moved.

"Brother!" he said cordially.

He would have kissed Tommy Welland; they have Judas' own gift of kissing, those Russians! But Welland, hushing him with a finger to his lips, slunk back to his place between his sleeping wife and the other *Anglichanin*, John Waring.

The guards had seen little of Waring. *He* did not dispense thousand-rouble notes or any other notes. He asked neither favours nor questions; they seldom heard his voice, and he moved about the place as little as possible. They saw him mainly, at the shadowy far end of the room, as a tall, poker-backed silhouette, speaking rarely to anyone save to Tommy and his wife, and more to Mrs. Welland than her husband.

In the thronged promiscuity of that lobby to the charnel-house, he managed to be aloof. He was insistently an alien in that dull community of fear and despair; he was like a damned soul being snobbish in Hell.

Upon the morning that this Waring received his visitor, the day broke grimily, leaking through the dirt of the fanlight like sewage through a filter. The black apartment grew grey; figures contorted upon the stone bench, or below it, groaned, wheezed, and tortured themselves into wakefulness. Then came light into the place, grimed with filth, advancing direfully like a masked robber.

They woke with acrobatics of cramped muscles like men released from the rack; it was wonderful and terrible to see the big Jew merchant, with his splendid eagle-face, realise that he was alive and kicking, and forthwith pull himself back, in one contraction of consciousness, to the dignity of the age-old tradition of his race. The one woman, there, Mrs. Welland, opened her eyes and did not move.

The *Anglichanin* on her left, John Waring, sat up, yawned like a baby, smiled in apology, and spoke.

"Slept well?" he asked.

Irma Welland pushed away the rug—John Waring's rug—under which she was sleeping, and sat up. Their end of the room was an unchanging dusk; but he saw her smile.

"Thank you, kind sir!" she said, in her slangy, too-perfect English. "I will give you back now your rug. What time have you—did you put that over me?"

She was still smiling; and upon the other side of her, Tommy Welland was coming to life with unlovely snorts and chokings.

"Don't know," answered Waring. "I felt too hot. S'pose I chucked it over on to you. Sorry!"

She laughed for nearly a second, a big gurgle of mirth. She laughed—and in an hour they would be calling out the names of those elected to be targets for the merry revolver practice of the dilettanti Bolsheviki and their lady friends in the death-cellar. Yet—she laughed!

"You are a good chucker!" she said. "You chuck it so well that it is wrapped all round me!"

He grinned. His thin face in that darkness showed a gleam of teeth and eyeball; and no formal question having been asked, he made no answer. He took the rug, folded it and laid it aside; and then seemed to devote his interest to Welland's throaty processes of awakening.

Tommy Welland sat up at last. "Curse!" he said. "Oh, hell! My neck! Broken, very near!" He turned to his wife! Even in that bastard daylight that filched its way through the panes above the door, his face showed its surrendered, white-flag quality. His morning greeting confirmed the effect.

"You took my pillow!" he said.

Waring looked the other way, affecting a yawn. He heard her low-voiced protest, the silly jangle of Welland's argument. "You took my pillow; my neck——" "Dear Tommy, I didn't——" "You've got it now; how's a man to——" "I didn't take it!"

Waring turned his head.

"*I* took your pillow, Tommy!"

There was a pause. "Oh!" said Tommy Welland at last. "*You* did!"

Waring nodded emphatically. "*I* did!"

Another pause. "Oh!" said Tommy Welland, again.

And then another pause, that might have led to anything; but, ere it ended, one leaf of the great double doors was opened, clanging back on its screeching old hinges, and the gentlemen—two of them, one formerly a sewerer and the other an ex-warder in a very infamous gaol—employed by the "Chaika" for the purpose—threw in the rest of the morning ration that was left after they had sucked the blood out of the concession.

"You get it, Tommy!" ordered Waring. And Tommy, with his wife hearing the curt order and watching his obedience, went and got it. Funny, isn't it? That streak of yellow, that vein of softness, that weakness in the essence, that makes it dangerous for a man to be Russian!

The ration was bread—it must have been bread, since we have invented no other name for it! Corn-husks, an admixture of belly-clotting clay, and some ferment—not yeast—that blew the accursed stuff into the form of loaves! That was the ration; but those with money could purchase *kiputok* at a rouble a pot (*kiputok* is only boiling water, such as they used to sell at railway-stations for a tenth of a cent for as much as you wanted), and could make tea, if they had any tea. They could also get cheese; but there was a rumour that the cheese came from the German *Kadaververvaltungsanstalten*—churned up stuff from the blubber of peasant infantrymen driven before their officers' Mauser pistols to death across the parapets, and thence, by the superb Prussian organisation, to the dairies of their people and the powder-factories. For, after all, a man must serve his country somehow, in this age of war!

"What do think of?" said Irma Welland to John

Waring, when Tommy had brought back their three slabs of vileness to eat.

" Not thinking just now," answered Waring. " Just eating ! Funny, isn't it ?—with garbage like this !—how the habit of eating persists ! Starving, now, can't be much beastlier ! "

They were sitting, hip to haunch, together on the stone bench, in that place there were no delicacies ; you found a piece of granite between your teeth and you spat it out.

" You like 'im, then ? " chaffed Irma Welland.

" Yes," said Waring. " I like 'im. Me, much I like 'im ! "

He bowed, and again his narrow smile was white in the thin, austere shape of his face. She lowered her gaze under the shadow-veiled satire of his " Yes ! "

" All right ! " she said. " I understand. I will talk English now."

He grinned again, but more narrowly. Those six-foot-two Englishmen, with their tooth-brush moustaches and the black hair on the back of their hands, with their smiles that coffin their souls, and their dire heritage of mastership over fate and domination over all in sight !

" Russian, if you like," he said, and repeated it, with an accent of emphasis on the last three words. " *If you like!* Or French—or German ! " He grinned again. " Or even English ! " he concluded.

She answered his smile. Now, this is the quality of Welland. Through all this talk he had sat on the other side of his wife, eaten his corn-clay brick, and said nothing at all. Now he sat up.

" Talk English ! " he said. He turned abruptly to his wife. " You used to be proud enough of being English ! "

She breathed a second or two distressfully. Then—"Tommy!" she said.

"That be damned!" said Tommy, aloud.

There was a silence then. It was a silence that pervaded the whole room. Waring turned away.

"I know," babbled Tommy. "You two—you've got an understanding! Yes! If I go to the death-cellar—yes, if *I* go——"

Waring leaned up upon his elbow.

"Tommy!"

Tommy began to roar. "Now, look here! You an' her—you think, just because——!"

"Tommy!" began Waring, quietly. Mrs. Welland put forth two imploring hands. Then the silly business ceased. The big man-o'-war's-man, in the corner nearest the door, began to sing. He had a splendid great organ-bass voice such as the long-haired, bearded priests sing with in the Russian cathedrals, such as stirred the Russian regiments, when Russia was not yet Trotsky's harem and slaughter-house, to go up to battle and annihilation. The words were trash; the melody and the voice were an infection of battle and gallantry. He sang; others joined with him; and that grisly waiting-room of the tomb became loud and melodious.

Waring smiled again; those people would smile below the gallows; and Irma Welland, being Russian, of those people who never smile save beneath the gallows, smiled back. Tommy Welland watched them—and didn't smile at all!

The big sailor's voice swung up and down like a heavy pendulum. The bearded, barefooted youth in the silly student's uniform slunk along those ranks of the damned—by esteemed favour of Mr. Trotsky—

and cadged food and shavings of soap, and cigarettes—especially cigarettes! He halted in front of John Waring.

"One cigarette!" he suggested, gently.

Waring was lying back on the bench. His hands were behind his head. His cigarette was between his lips. He stared slowly at the man who begged from him.

"Go to hell!" he said, in Russian.

The bare-footed, quite shameless, mendicant bowed. "God be with you!" he said, nastily, in the manner of one who makes a crushing repartee, and passed on.

"One cig——"

He was begging from Mrs. Welland. Waring was arising to kick him back to his place—and kicks in Russia are *kicks*. They break bones and rupture bowels. They are the one speciality of Russia, since other countries can also produce caviare and tainted incomprehensible literature!

But he was interrupted. The one great sacred occasion of the day trespassed upon his purpose. There was a noise as of ironmongery being rattled in the dice-box; mechanical tragedies were overcome forcibly and noisily in the locks of the great double doors. Most rose to their feet. The student stopped short in his horrible mendicant fluency; Waring didn't wait, but sat down again; Welland rose, gasping, to his feet; Mrs. Welland did not move.

The big sailor stood up, very splendid in his jumper and slacks, and especially in a certain bravado of his posture. But even he stood silent, as upon an order, when the two leaves of the great, grim doors fell open and there appeared the Lieutenant of the Imperial Guard—same old uniform, same old sword at his side, same old cowardly soul within him since he took the

Godless oath to our Mr. Trotsky to save his tenth-generation nobility of hide. Just a traitor to mankind and mankind's cause! Behind him, in the revelation of frank daylight released by the open doors, stood his fellow-felons—the pot-bellied old men, the two fur-booted, daintily-manicured young Amazons—who chaperoned the victims down to the merry séances in the death-cellar.

They were merry, you know? Or, if you don't, you ought to know these things! As well-bred English ladies used to go, as to a matinée, to see the unfortunates whipped with rods in Bridewell, so the little Moscow ladies, Feo and the Countess Vanya and the rest of them, go along and—well, imagine the rest for yourselves!

A stricture of silence added itself to the gloom. From the open double doors a light like an indecent eye poured its gaze upon the prisoners. Only two were not upon their feet—Mrs. Welland and the man, John Waring. The sailor who had been singing stood to attention in the presence of the renegade officer; the big Jew stood slouching and smiling secretly; oppression and martyrdom were no new things to him; the peasants ducked in servile bows, awaiting their orders. Tommy Welland spoke indistinctly under his breath; he seemed to say something urgently; but neither could hear him. He rose to his feet and made to move forward. Waring's hand stopped him.

"Eh!"

He turned, in a disorder of will. "What?"

Irma Welland answered him. "Tommy!" He turned at her voice with a face wrinkled into a snarl. "Sit down, Tommy! This isn't the time——"

Waring had time to notice how now she spoke English. Tommy, it seemed, had not. At any rate, he turned, with a hand near his mouth, and strove to hush her.

"Damn you!" he said to Irma Welland. "Shut up! D'you want to call attention——"

It wasn't the stiffening of Waring, nor the swift, shrinking movement of his wife that arrested the pitiful spate of his speech. The voice of the renegade Lieutenant in the doors sounded sudden and brief; all eyes turned to him. Poor Tommy Welland came round like a moth on a pin to stare and gape and gasp and listen.

"Kharhkov!" barked the Lieutenant. He was back-grounded by sunlight. Behind him was a corridor with windows to the stale winter green of the immense courtyard, where butterfly ladies had been used to sip tea, coloured like amber, with wafers of thin sliced lemons in it. Noble virgins had been exiled to this corridor to pace in muslins and develop their mothers' imaginations; convent-bred, fragile Excellencies had strolled where now the very beastly janissaries lounged and spat and stank as only Bolsheviks and skunks can stink.

"Kharhkov!" called the erstwhile Lieutenant of the Imperial Guard.

"Zdes!" answered the big sailor who had been singing. As he answered, he rose, took the ritual four paces forward and stood to attention.

The officer surveyed him with a swift glance—and looked back at his list! He was a tall, limber young man, apparently specially designed by God to show off a uniform; and he no more liked killing than he liked the risk of being killed. He dropped his eyes

to his type-written list of victims. The sailor, singing no longer, stood yet to attention with a placid, high face of courageous indifference. For death, mark you, is only an incident to the valiant!

"Blum!" read the Lieutenant next, a little explosively. One might almost have guessed, by his manner of reading, that he did not like his job—that something had suggested to him that he had sold his soul too cheaply. He scowled direfully as the great Jew, clean, despite his imprisonment, as a bride on the day of her marriage, bearded like a Babylonian bull, with the fierce calm of a prophet and the huge, daunting manner of pride that has baffled the kings and inquisitors of all ages, rose and took his place beside the sailor.

The Lieutenant spat copiously on the floor. Manners are manners, even in Bolshevist circles; and every decent heathen spits at a Jew. It is etiquette!

Two more names were called. A big peasant got up wordlessly and joined the others. A comic little shopkeeper—a really funny little man, who knelt and prayed and had to be dragged downstairs and have the revolver-barrel absolutely snuggled into his ear—was the last. Not such a bad morning; there were seldom less than six.

The Lieutenant, with his list, stood inside the wide doors; his hired assassins slouched on their grounded rifles outside—except when three shabby old beasts among them—they were all a little elderly and moth-eaten, since the young ones of the Red Army were out on the frontier being thrashed to rags by the Poles or by anyone else who wanted the cheap diversion of a week-end victory—paddled in on their rag-swathed feet to drag out the poor little shopkeeper.

Images he had sold! Effigies of the most Clement Virgin in her most varied manifestations! Poor Christian! He had better have sold black idols; the Bolsheviki might have bought 'em. Or perhaps not; at any rate, he knows *now!*

With the Lieutenant, but only upon the threshold of the double doors, unseen by most of the prisoners, as the chaplain is not seen by the condemned man when once he has glimpsed the hangman, was another. A little man, he was, with a stature only greater than dwarfish, with a vast humpback like a Spanish clown. He had a fur coat, the collar of which was like the edges of a nest about his ears; his face, beaked like a vulture's, looked over the rim of it like some awful man-eating fowl, a thing hatched out of a devil's egg by the patriotic ardours of Mr. Trotsky.

He was one of those who watched the exit of the elected four. But not as their fellows did! The prisoners—and even the most export tormentors in the service of Mr. Trotsky (I am forced to call him by that name since I have forgotten the name under which he was last convicted for felony) not excepted, since most of them were escaped or amnestied convicts, like the original Jack Ketch—watched that exit as folk sitting a round death-bed might recognise the final croak in the throat.

But this man looked at them as some farmer might look at his pigs, ripe for slaughter, seeing them merely as elected hams and flitches. A judging eye. He liked the look of the big heroic Jew; he didn't trouble about the huge *moujik* trudging to his doom; but he *did* enjoy the dragging out of the wretched little shopkeeper who thought his precarious life and livelihood

were worth yelling about. Yes; he liked that; his mother had screamed in the same way when a Cossack dragged her forth from her hiding-hole in Kishineff. He had mourned over her dead body till the police had beaten him off. But now—well, even in Russia, a man must have some fun; and it was his turn!

"Forward—march!"

The greasy *blasé* old guards closed about the prisoners, three of them romping clumsily with the frantic little shopkeeper. For some moments they showed vividly in the light of the corridor, as figures of Russian dancers are seen on a stage from a darkened auditorium. The liveliness of the day ended; there were twenty-four more hours to live anyhow, for those who remained. The great doors swung to, shutting out the day-lit view of the little ugly procession towards the landing at the end of the corridor, and the turn in the slimy iron hand-rails that led down to the final dark. But the locks did not jar to their usual clinch, for the *aasvogel* hunchback was still within.

"Over there!" the sentry directed him, with a pointing finger. "In that corner, *tovarish!* Those are the English!"

The little human carrion-fowl pecked its way across the floor; its deformity made it move with shifts and jerks of the head like a questing hen. Tommy Welland had sat down now and was biting his nails in a shuddering relief from the terrors of the daily list of names; Waring and Mrs. Welland had not risen at all; the little tangle-bodied Jew minced up to them and had to stand in their presence, like a servant before his betters. And for a further offence, since it was dark in their corner, he fumbled for, found, and produced his pince-nez, saddled them on his nose, dropped them and smashed them on the stone floor.

"Damn!" he said, and stooped and recovered the framework of the things.

Waring laughed, slowly and distinctly. The hunchback came upright with a jerk at the affront of that sound.

"Ach!" he said. "Fonny, aind't it?"

He had the blurred but plentiful English of the German-American Jew. He glared down into the shadow where they squatted, looking in dull silhouette like a Doré illustration of the *Contes Drolatiques.*

"Vich of youse is Varing?" he demanded.

"Me," answered the owner of that name, not moving. "And what the deuce has it got to do with you?"

The little man moved in his fur-lined envelope as a snake might move in a sack.

"Yew'll pardon me," he said. "Yew'll pardon *me!* Your friendt, which has wrote us a letter—Mister Reverend Trosley——"

"Oh!" Waring stirred and half-sat up. The name was that of the heroic and indefatigable parson who, unauthorised, without official backing, with no battalions to summon and no Treasury to call upon, constituted himself the bulwark of British lives and fortunes in that devil-defiled city. Waring had been in touch with him; they had been two white men together in a community of souls scorched brown in the flames of Mr. Trotsky's home-made hell.

"That's right!" said the hunchback. "Wrote to us, he did. Goin' back home soon, he is, an' he wants you should go wit 'im."

Waring did not move. "Well?" he drawled.

The hunch-backed Jew grew lively. "Vell!" he repeated. "I tell you dis and you say 'Vell!' Vot

der hell you mean, Gott dam' youse! Unstead of shot, ve let you go back home an' you say 'Vell?' Youse bourgeois is all de same—lousy swine, all o' youse! I don't waste no more talk on youse; be damn!"

"That's good!" Welland's hand, reaching across his wife's lap, closed on Waring's knee, rebuking and imploring. "There's a lady here," said Waring. "Upon what date are you going to murder her? Can't she go home instead of me? Because I don't want your beastly mercy, you know. I don't eat after dogs, as a general thing. But if you want to do something for us, tell us what you're going to do with her—and when!"

They could see the hunchback grin; the white of his teeth was like a new-moon paring of light through the straggle of his blue-black moustache and his sparse beard; and the effect of it was that of an indecent exposure.

"De lady!" He uttered a vile little cackle of laughter. "Oh, we dond't hurt no preddy li'l ladies! You take her vid youse ven you go, if y' likes! Nice girl—yes? No?"

Waring did not move at all this time. There *is* a fashion of chivalry which invites a home-made hoop-iron bayonet jabbed through one's unprotected abdomen with a German nickel-jacketted bullet to follow. But it was not Waring's kind. He only spoke—one word!

A Russian word! Mrs. Welland, a Russian herself, had never heard it and was not offended by it; Tommy Welland, who had used it himself, upon *istvostchiki* and others who could not resent it, jerked upright at the sound of it in that place, and to that person. Really, the Russian is a language of great resources;

one can bestialise one's emotions in it more easily than in any other Christian tongue. The word staggered even the blood-lusty hunchback.

"Me!" He fell back in a rigour of shocked amaze. "Me! Is it *me* what you say that to?"

Waring, in his quiet, toneless voice, repeated it.

"All righd," said the Jew. "All righd, Mister bloomin' Waring" (he pronounced it "Vahring")! "Now I don't talk to you no more—see? Now I don't talk to you no more!"

"Right!" said Waring. He was sitting sideways on the stone bench, and now he made as to lie down. "You can get out as soon as you like," he said, and turned away.

"Hot dam'!" said the Jew. He fluttered a moment on itching feet. Then, with the awful dignity of a hunchback, the protective colouring of a weak thing in a strong and cruel world, he turned and pecked his way back to the door. He spoke there a moment or two to the guard, with motions of indignation towards the corner; the doors were pulled open to let him slide through; then they jarred together and Mr. Trotsky's guests were alone again.

Welland's voice was querulous. "What d'you want to insult him for?" he asked. "Here we are—in their power—helpless——"

Waring shook his head. "I'm not in their power; I'm not helpless."

Mrs. Welland turned and looked at him. Welland made a noise in his throat as of angry disgust.

"Not in their power? They can kill you, can't they?" he demanded.

"A microbe can do that," said Waring. "That's all it can do, though."

Irma Welland did not speak ; she continued to look at him and a light like a radiance of glad understanding and assent was in her face.

" All very well for you to talk like that," grumbled Welland, with the note of a whine in his voice. " Trosley'll get you out an' send you home. But us ! We've got to wait here—yes, wait till our names are called—Irma's an' mine—and then—and then——"

It was a whimper he broke off with. His wife, after a moment of hesitation, put out a hand to him. " Tommy ! " she breathed. He shrugged away from her.

" Go to blazes ! " he said miserably. " They won't shoot *you*. It's me they'll murder, down there in the cellar. Some dam' girl with short skirts or some greasy, stinking beast with a club ! It's me, I tell you ; I know it ! I can feel it coming. And I'd rather kill myself than go on waiting for it. An' you two both safe—you an' Waring ! Safe ! I—I can't bear it ! "

He was on the edge of hysterics. Waring spoke brutally.

" That's the idea ! " he said. " Kill yourself and stop this exhibition ! I'll lend you my razor."

" O-oh ! " It was a long quavering groan of fury and impotence. Tommy Welland lay down on the bench with his arm over his face and was silent, shutting himself in with his terrors and his shame.

" Sorry ! " Waring leaned to Irma Welland and spoke quietly. " But you understand, I'm sure."

She nodded. " Yes," she answered slowly. " Poor Tommy ! I understand."

She had the quality, as rare in Russians as in niggers, and not common in any people, of a sort of eloquent reticence. Speech was truly a means with her of

concealing her thoughts; she conveyed herself most comprehensively by the fact and manner of her being. She looked at Waring as she spoke, and he understood forthwith her complete knowledge of and her loyalty to the husband who crouched beside her, his face hidden, his breath coming and going irregularly between his shudderings.

A prison is a grave upon which the living go to and fro about their affairs, and those within know naught of them. Waring and the Wellands endured the day in the customary gloom; the student begged from them again and was again driven off; the stone walls and the great doors sealed them from the fret and fever of the city at whose heart they waited. Mr. Trotsky foamed at his lunatic height; Mr. Lenin dreamed dreams and translated them into nightmares; Trosley, the chaplain, pulled wires of aid and refuge; and the little hunchback Jew went to and fro in his fur coat, sore from the epithet with which Waring had seared him, seeking in this bureau and that committee the only balm that could heal the smart of it. He was an efficient intriguer; he had his value to the blunter and coarser blood-drinkers of the *regime;* and it was not much to ask—just a bourgeois' life to plaster a wound. Cheap, too; there were plenty of them available, and the "Chaika" had to live up to its name.

So, upon the following morning, before even the ration of black bread was thrown in, the Lieutenant entered the prison and came directly to the corner where the three English lay. They were yet sleeping, the two tall men and the young woman; he stood for a space of seconds looking down on them. He actually did not like to wake them for the job he had in hand.

He lifted a foot and stirred the man who huddled in the middle. The sleeper groaned, writhed in the throes of waking, and lifted a startled face. The woman at his side moved too.

" You are Vahring ? " demanded the officer.

The other goggled at him. " Eh ? "

" Get up, Vahring ! " commanded the officer, " and come with me ! "

" Vahring ! "

Welland rose to a sitting posture, comprehension sweeping like a tide across his consciousness. His wife, beside him, opened her eyes, and was fully awake forthwith. Waring, his head pillowed on his arm, slept tranquilly with his face to the wall.

" You hear me ? You are to get up and come with me at once ! " reiterated the Lieutenant. " At once, Vahring ! "

That was the moment when the plan, full grown, came alive in Tommy Welland's mind. The fiery splendour of it dazzled him. Here was salvation. Trosley had succeeded ; none would know him from Waring till he was on the train for the frontier and then none would betray him.

" Yes," he said gaspingly. " Yes, I am Vahring. I will come ! " And he rose.

" Tommy ! "

He turned. Irma had sat up.

" Hush ! " he said. " You'll be all right. It's a chance, don't you see ? It's a chance for me. I—I must. Irma ! I must ! "

He spoke to her in English ; the Lieutenant, for all the putrefaction of his soul, had the manners of his class ; he turned away from what he conceived to be a tender, leave-taking.

"But, Tommy—oh, you can't! You shan't! It's—it's—I'm going to wake him!"

She made to spring up and reach an arm towards the sleeping figure of Waring.

Tommy Welland swore viciously—just a spit of sound, venomous with terror and anger. He swung a hand, and the back of it took Irma across the lips—heavily, effectually. She shrank back upon her rug, staring at him.

The last he saw of her was her eyes, great, still, and dreadfully full of understanding, eyes like the eyes of God in judgment before which no man can veil the ulcer that is his soul.

And the last she saw of him was his back as the door opened to let him out to the corridor, flooded with a chill, early light, where a little group of figures awaited him. Then the door closed between them.

"Ach!"

Tommy Welland found the little hunchbacked Jew before him. There were a couple of grisly old guards at hand, and further along the passage a girl stood, looking towards him and smiling.

"Ach! It is Vahring—yes?" The hunchback peered up at him. "Yesterday I don't see you so vell, ven you call me——! Now I see you fine. An' you see me, eh? An' you see dot nice young lady as vait for you? You goin' to have nice little visit mit her—down in der nice cool cellar, aindt it?"

Tommy Welland stared at him and involuntarily stepped back. Forthwith the guards closed in on him and pinned him. The girl—he could see her clearly—made a small, disgusted grimace.

"What d'you mean?" cried Tommy.

"Vot I mean!" The hunchback flashed into a whole semaphore code of gesticulations, with long

misshapen arms that brandished before the prisoner's face. "Vot I mean! I mean a blenty, Mister Vahring, you dam' ole Johnny Bull! Ve let der Englishers go—yes! Vot for we keep dem; hey? Go 'ome mit deir dam' Reverends—yes! But you stop 'ere, Mister Vahring—stop 'ere a long, long times. Dat young lady, mit her nice little revolver—she persuade you to stop. Teach you call dirty names to gentlemans like me!"

Then in Russian to the Lieutenant: "Take him along!"

"Stop!" screamed Tommy Welland. "Stop! I'm not Waring at all! It's a mistake—a mistake, I tell you. I'm Welland, you fools. I'm Welland!"

He struggled and choked. The Jew laughed delightedly. The girl turned and went down the stairs that led to the cellars. As they thrust him down, still screaming and resisting, he saw her waiting below, the revolver in her hand. She was still smiling—the courteous, formal smile of a dealer who receives a customer.

The Lieutenant and the Jew returned together up the stairs.

"Well," said the Lieutenant. "That's over. She's a wonder, that girl! Pretty, too! And now I suppose you're off?"

"In a minute," answered the Jew. "I've just got to tell the other two English that they'll be fetched to-night. Their cursed Reverend is taking the whole lot away—curse them all!"

"Curse them all," agreed the officer perfunctorily.

SPOTLESS

THE homeward-bound Black Sea transport, aboard which he was to lunch, lay moored alongside the Galata Quay, and to the young American, travelling to join a relief mission in Armenia and treading for the first time those outlying shores of the war, it seemed as he approached her as if she were full-freighted with shoreward gazing eyes. Even the armed sentries at the foot of her steep gangways seemed lost in a mere preoccupation of gazing; and along her rail, from the forecastle where the seamen took their midday leisure, through the throng of khaki-clad soldiers and the midship crowd of refugees, to the quarter-deck where the officers leaned and smoked, half a thousand faces seemed to pore in a silent intensity of earnestness upon the roofs and minarets and gardens of Constantinople. So definite a thing was that still stare of many eyes that he half paused, embarrassed and uncertain; he had yet to learn that drag of hearts and eyes towards a world that is stable, where power is the weapon of right and law is king.

His host, a gaunt man, trim in the uniform of a British captain of infantry, waved to him from among the group of motley refugees at the head of the midship gangway; the younger man waved back, and went forward quickly to climb into the silence of that multitude of starers.

"You're in good time," the British captain assured him. "Lunch won't be for ten minutes yet. Let's go aft to the smoking-room and get a cocktail, shall we?"

He moved to lead the way through the groups about

them of those silent confidants of the horror in the North, threading his way with care to disturb or displace none of them. To the American it was a little like passing in a festive dress among the mourners at a funeral; there was in them, in their silence, in their gravity and a sort of fatigued inertia of attitude, the suggestion of an aloofness of woe which no human sympathy could penetrate.

"Refugees, aren't they?" he asked awkwardly of his host. The other nodded. "From Odessa?"

The Englishman turned his thin face, weary and dark, upon him. "From Hell!" he answered without particular emphasis. "Kieff—Odessa—Nikolaiev—all over the place!"

He paused at a vacant place on the rail. "Don't let 'em see you staring at them," he said; "but take a look all the same."

He produced his cigarette-case; and while the American lit a cigarette he had time to confirm his first impression. It was not their strange nor ragged clothing that touched upon one's sense, nor the fact that among the worst-clad of them were men and women with fine and cultured faces; it was still their effect of being initiates in a knowledge and experience in which he could never participate.

"That old chap"—the Englishman's quiet voice spoke at his ear—"old man with the beard and the patch over his eye—he was a prince."

"Which one?" The other gazed with pitying intent. "Him? But say! See—just beyond him—what a perfectly beautiful girl!"

His host glanced carelessly. "So I'm told," he answered with a deliberation of indifference in his tone. "Well dressed, too, eh? Quite an expensive young female, that!"

"But——" the American protested, and flushed. His host was smiling a narrow, tight smile that was strangely bitter and hateful. But the younger man was staunch.

"I don't know what you mean," he said. "But she's about the sweetest and daintiest thing I've seen since I left home. And I don't see why, just because she's smart and spotless——"

"Spotless!" The elder man nodded. "That's what she is—you've hit it! She's come to me out of that hell of outrage and murder utterly unsoiled—body and soul. She's spotless, entirely spotless!"

The other stared at him in doubt, then let his eyes travel back to the girl of whom they spoke. She had been sitting in a deck-chair, her hands clasped in her lap, her bare head, with its coils of bronze hair, a little drooped forward as she gazed upon the city. Now she rose, unfolding from her almost prostrate position in the chair to the stature of a tall, slim girl of about twenty years of age. Her clothes, a frock of sober grey, hung trimly about her, enhancing the virginal quality she had; in all things she was girlish and exquisite, and as she turned to move along the crowded deck towards them the American had for the first time a view of her full-face.

"Huh!" It was a snort of indignation at his companion's comments. Wide eyes of an ineffable composure looked from under serene brows; a mouth sweet and pure as childhood itself was tranquil as the eyes; in all the face, like a seal set upon its beauty, there was the quiet of unawakened and unalarmed maidenhood.

She was making for a door in the superstructure that lay a little beyond the two men, and by reason of those who stood and sat about she would have little room in which to pass them. With that upright and girlish

dignity of hers she approached; the American, nearest to her, crushed back against the rail to give her space; her gentle and calm eyes rested, with no flicker of expression, for a moment upon his face. Then it was the Englishman's turn to give way, but he did not move.

One elbow on the rail, cigarette between his fingers, a gaitered ankle crossed over the other, he held his posture without shifting a muscle. Not even his wearily saturnine face, aged in the years of the war, altered by a shade.

The girl hesitated for an instant; in her hesitation only was there visible a moment of bewilderment. Then squeezing against a group of silent refugees, she passed and went her way. The American, red-faced and indignant, turned to his host. He was the other's guest; he knew all about that; but the thing had been as gross as an indecency.

The Englishman jerked his head with a little hopeless motion and laughed shortly. "That was rotten of me," he said. "You'd think I was a Hun! Only—that dam spotlessness! You see, I had the job of embarking 'em and learning what I could about 'em—and I found out what that spotlessness, as you call it, cost to keep up. I'm no good at telling a story, or I'd try and explain. However—let's go and get that cocktail before the bugle goes for lunch!"

If the British captain who railed against spotlessness had been a better hand at a tale, and if he had known it all, doubtless he would have begun with an account of that innate Russian incapacity for prompt and discreet action which was the chief of the Count Udiloff's attributes. An old man who had lived for sixty years upon the greatness of his name and the pomp of his appearance—before the Bolsheviks mashed him to a pulp upon the stones of the street his

fine old aquiline face had regarded over long silver Dundreary whiskers—he had ignored "the mob" and its temper till it was too late safely to attempt to get his family out of Kieff, and then he had attempted it. And always with the showy ineffectuality with which he had made his mark upon his generation.

His family numbered four—himself, his wife and his two daughters—and there were besides a widowed cousin of his own and a nephew from the country, a silent youth who had been studying agricultural science in the city. And with these and various baggage packed into two carriages he purposed to drive to Vasilkou, where he had a summer villa.

So, upon an evening when noises of shooting from distant parts of the city were like voices urging haste and secrecy upon them, the two carriages, conspicuous as cannon in that hate-crazed town, came round to the door of the apartment-house where the Count had his dwelling, and were duly loaded. First was a closed landau with two horses and a padded and booted coachman of much splendour; in this went the Count, his wife, his widowed cousin, and his elder daughter. Baggage, like loot dangled before the eyes of robbers, was piled on outside. Second was a hooded victoria, with a junior coachman and a showy black stallion, and in this the Count's younger daughter Elena, and Emilian the nephew, were to sit among bags and parcels and follow the wake of the landau.

There was all the fuss and business of loading up which might easily have brought about then what did happen later, for loafers collected to stare; but at last the landau thundered off, its iron tyres and the hoofs of the big horses noisy in the half-lighted streets, and Emilian was helping his cousin Elena to her place in the victoria.

A dim light came forth from the arched gate of the house behind them, and he watched her face as, bareheaded, he handed her to her seat. She had a large travelling cloak about her, and the fur of its collar made a soft frame to her countenance. She returned his look calmly—the calm of one to whom service, protection, deference have always been due and forthcoming, who for lack of the need to fear has never known fear. With extreme care and gentleness he inserted himself into the little carriage beside her, gave the word to the coachman, and they were off.

The Kreshtchatik, the street which is to South Russia what the Cannebière of Marseilles is to South France, its offspring and its ornament, was forlorn as a slum in its darkness and emptiness. The centre of attraction for the crowd was elsewhere that evening, and it seemed to Emilian, peering forth under the hood and listening to the growing sound of the shooting, that they were heading towards it. Their wheels crashed once or twice through a litter of broken glass from some yawning shop-front; they swung out of the Kreshtchatik and towards the hill that should take them down past the station and forth of the city. And still the noise grew louder, and presently they were around a bend and Emilian could see forward under the coachman's elbow.

He had it for a singular gift in Russia, the native land of expletives, that he was not prone to ejaculations. But he gave a swift glance back at the soft shine of the girl's face under the hood of the carriage, and turned away again as swiftly.

Before them, some three hundred yards ahead, the great landau, with its blazing lamps, its high-stepping team and its splendorous coachman, was bowling down the hill towards what awaited it at

the bottom. For where the arch of filigree iron that spells "Welcome" to arrivals from the station spans the road, there were folk moving as boiling water moves, a mob that seethed and broke asunder and fell together again in aimless combat. A burning house sent ebbs and flows of ruddy light over it; flurries of shooting woke and died; and already, above the noise of their wheels on the paving and the crash of their horse's shoes, Emilian could hear the quavering voice of a mob with unglutted mob-appetities.

He glanced back once more to the girl, then spoke to the coachman. "Go slower," he ordered. "Let the landau pass through first." And he was aware within himself, with surprise, of a motion of admiration for that terrific phenomenon the Count Udiloff, who would thus make war upon the millions of Russia with only a word of command and a pair of silver whiskers.

The landau came to the iron arch and passed under it, and now it was sunk to the height of its windows and the horses' withers in the lives of the crowd. And at once they were upon it. The light of the burning house was too unsteady for Emilian to be sure of any detail of what followed, but he saw the old coachman standing up in his place; he thought he saw the Count's white beard come forth; then one of the horses reared and went down again, and next the black shapes of the mob were piled high over carriage and occupants.

"Halt!" commanded Emilian of the driver. They had closed in while he watched, and were now no more than a hundred yards or so from where the landau had been overwhelmed. The man pulled the stallion to a slow walk, and at that moment came another flurry of shooting. The horse, hit somewhere by a flying bullet, bounded and fought with the bit;

something tore the top of the hood rendingly, and the coachman, with a noise like a squeal, dropped his reins and dived from his seat to the road.

Emilian, scrambling fiercely, was over the low rail at the back of the box and in his place in a matter of seconds. By good luck he recovered the reins ere they were tangled under the horse's hoofs, and set himself to stop and turn the frantic animal. He laid his strength to it and hauled, when at length on the very fringes of the crowd, a by-way opened to the right, running steeply uphill between gardens, while he was conscious of men who ran beside him and screamed threats and orders to stop, he managed to tear the stallion's head round, put him at the turning and let him go.

The horse fled like a thing in torment, dying on his flying feet; the little victoria leaped and bounded at his heels. Very soon they were out of reach of the crowd, and whoever it was that had been firing sent no bullets after them. The top of the hill was at hand when the animal first faltered and began to fail; then, without warning, he went down, and the little carriage ran upon him, to the noise of the splintering shafts, lurched, and came to a standstill without upsetting.

Emilian descended from his seat and took stock of the situation. He realised that actually they were in a position of more safety without the carriage than with it. He went to the side, and spoke into the darkness under the hood.

"There is nothing to do but walk home," he said. "Will you come, Elena?"

She murmured acquiescence. "But the other carriage—what happened?" she asked. She, of course, had seen nothing.

"We cannot hope to catch it up now," he answered. "There is nothing to do but to walk home for the present. There we can decide what is best to be done."

He held out his hand to help her forth, and she alighted, and together they threaded the by-streets till they stood again before the dwelling that had been her secure and untroubled home. Already, though the riots and the general looting had not yet spread to this quarter, some of its customary sheltering aspect had disappeared. The *dvornik*, the official doorkeeper, was no longer at his post; the street-number lamp had been smashed by a stone, and the only lights visible in its vast façade of windows were a few that leaked through closed shutters. But in the apartment itself, Masha, the *ekonomka*—cook and housekeeper—was not yet gone.

She received them with no change in her customary genial calm, straightening up from the cedarwood chest in which she was packing away household linen. She was a large, apple-cheeked woman of the better peasant class of South Russia; her parents had been serfs of the Count's father, and she had been born and bred on his land. She had served him since before the birth of his two daughters; for them she had always been there.

"You are come back, then?" was her greeting. "And the Count—the others—where are they?"

"There are riots by the station," explained Emilian, "and our horse was shot."

"Ah!" She gave him a single searching look, but for the moment inquired no further. She turned to relieve the girl of her travelling-cloak and cap.

It was not remarkable that Elena should scarcely have spoken since she had alighted from the carriage. It was her way to be a serene and beautiful presence

speaking and smiling seldom, expressing herself rather by her existence than by her actions. She showed now, after her adventure, a calm no wise discomposed, a gracious and tender young beauty, of which tranquillity was as much a part and a feature as the bronze sheen of her hair or the curve and bow of her lips. When Masha had taken her cloak, she sank into a near-by chair and seemed to wait, not eagerly nor anxiously, but with faith and complete assurance, while these her ministers should readjust her world for her.

Emilian gazed at her thoughtfully. In him there was no question of her. Always he had known her like that, sufficient in her beauty and the fragrance of her girlhood as a flower. He was perhaps twenty-five, a dark youth, long in the limb, black-haired, and with a longish, serious face, content like her to be largely silent in the company of his kind. That night in the carriage had been the first time he had been alone with her.

"You will be safe here, Elena," he said," and Masha will look after you."

"Yes," agreed Elena, like one who accepts a statement of commonplace truth.

"So, if you don't want me just now, I'll go out and see how things are, so that we can decide on something."

"Yes," she said again, and no more. Masha stood apart, staring with quiet interest from one to the other; and presently he took his leave and went out to the mystery and chaos of the streets.

Riots have always been a feature of the life of the Russian people; they were the safety-valves of the system, so that from time to time they were provoked and encouraged by those in authority for the relief of political and revolutionary steam-pressure. A good deal of drinking, a little looting, and a sportive murder

or two were wonderfully cooling to an occasionally feverish populace. But when, in the early hours of the morning, Emilian returned to the *appartement* he knew already that what was taking place in Kieff was no mere riot. There were looting and drunkenness, outrage and murder enough; but whereas before these things had been incidents of the commotion, now they seemed to be taking place upon some recognised and accepted principle. There were catchwords, too, that went from mouth to mouth like sparks in a burning thatch, the phrases which are the vermin infesting popular thought: "Down with the bourgeoisie!" "Down with religion!" Hurrah for the Red Revolution and the triumph of the proletariat!" He had seen a mob invade a hotel and drag its shrieking inhabitants forth, men and women both, and deal with them in its own fashion. He had seen girls as young as Elena. . . .

That was the thought that would not let him sleep the while he lay on his bed in the dawn.

Elena was still asleep in her room in the morning while he sat with Masha in the kitchen and told her the true tale of the fate of the occupants of the landau. She should, in the manner of her race and class, have wept noisily; but instead she only bowed her head for some seconds in silence, then gave herself to the matter in hand.

"And the *barishnaya*, the young lady?" she asked, with a motion of her head towards Elena's room. "What will you do about her? For, you know, they are searching all the good houses, and they will come here."

For answer he only returned her look gloomily, with a kind of dark anger.

"There is Piotr Ivan'itch Denischuk," she continued. "He was a *dvornik;* now he is a leader among them. If *he* knew she were here—— What will you do?"

He sighed, and moved wearily on the wooden kitchen chair. "I have been thinking," he said uncertainly. "Elena—nothing must happen to her, whatever else happens. She's so—so——"

He did not complete his sentence, but sighed and made to rise.

"But," persisted Masha, "what will you *do?* That lamb, that little queen—you *must* do something. You are a man; for you it is only killing and you are done with your troubles. But for her—— Listen! I will tell you what they will do if they get their hands on her. You shall understand at least what is waiting for that sweet and pretty innocence that we have guarded like a saint's relic. Listen!"

He had paused by the door, and he raised his hand and silenced her. He was remembering the fate of the young girls which he had witnessed the evening before, and there was that in his eyes that told her she had no need to speak further.

"Yes," he said, "you are right, Masha. I will do something."

"But what?" she demanded. "*What* will you do, Emilian Alexievitch?"

"I will join them," he said in loud tones, and went out and left her staring.

Over their cocktails in the smoking-room of the Black Sea transport the British captain continued to talk jerkily, disconnectedly, to his young guests. He had the little glass of liquor between his fingers, on the way to his lips, when he paused and asked irrelevantly:

"Ever hear of the Demon Commissary of Kieff?"

"Yes," said the American; 'I've read about him in the papers—kind of blood-drinking Bolshevik Jack-the-Ripper, wasn't he? Did you ever see him?"

The Englishman nodded and drank. "Her cousin," he said briefly. "That girl's out there, I mean. Had a chat with him when he brought her down to the coast. Ah, there's the bugle. Lunch at last!"

Emilian's decision was made easy for him within an hour. He had been fretting to and fro in the two great salons of the apartment when from below, within the house, he heard uproar, the noise of shouts and footsteps that ascended. He dashed for the front door and opened it to reconnoitre the matter, and was scarcely outside upon the landing when a hatless man tore up the last flight of stairs and flung himself upon him. Several flights below, the noise of the pursuers was augmenting.

"Let me in—let me hide!" implored the fugitive, desperately trying to thrust past him into the open door. "They're after me; they'll kill me!"

Emilian recognised the man as a bookseller in the same street. He gripped him and thrust him back from the door.

"You can't come in here," he answered. "They'd follow you in and find——"

The fugitive's bearded face, disordered with terror and appeal, gibbered at him. "They'll kill me—they'll kill me!" he quavered deliriously.

"At least they shall kill no one else," said Emilian. His own words had evoked in his racing brain a lightning vision of that smashing, plundering hunt through the big, still rooms, of the murder among the broken, overturned furniture, of the discovery of Elena in her bed, of horror unspeakable. The pursuers were near at hand. His grip tightened on the desperate man he held, and his voice went echoing down the well of the staircase.

"I have him, comrades!" he shouted. "I've caught the bourgeois for you!"

The bookseller's ghastly face showed a sudden terrible surprise. Even in the confusion of his mazed and terrified faculties, *this* was astonishing. And as though his surprise were a tonic upon the brink of his doom, even while the rabble with their knives and bludgeons stormed into view at the turn of the stair below, a twist of contempt threaded a sneer among his fear-slackened features.

"Judas!" he breathed as Emilian forced him backwards.

"Take him, comrades!" shouted Emilian, and hurled him backwards down the steps to those who sought him. It was fortunate for Emilian—or was it, perhaps, the most tragic of his misfortunes?—that they were too busy for the next minute or so to look up to where he stood and mark his face. Then one glanced up.

"What have you got up there, comrade?" he called. "Something good, eh?"

Emilian came down the steps towards them. He laughed in their faces.

"We've come too late," he said. "Others have been before us. But I know one place where we'll be first and there ought to be liquor there! Come along, comrades!"

The lure of drink was a sure one. He plunged through them and down the stairs, and they followed, yelling, leaving on the landing behind them a wreckage that had no longer even the shape of the bookseller.

It was from the wrecking and plundering of a friend's house and cellars—the friends, it happened, were gone, but there was a slaughter of old servants—that Emilian returned home. He had had some trouble in escaping from his new acquaintances, for he had led them to abundant liquor, and he was high in their esteem and good will; he was already on the

threshold of that hectic destiny which was accomplished during the five weeks in which he came to the knowledge of a sickened and incredulous world as the Demon Commissary of Kieff. There was yet food to be had, and Elena had not delayed the midday meal for him. She sat at the table in a white frock that was the fit envelope for her slim grace and dignity.

"You are late, Emilian," she remarked.

"I'm sorry," he said. "I had several things to do, and there is still rioting in the streets."

Over Elena's head, Masha's eyes were fixed on his face.

"I think," he went on, "that you will not be troubled here. But as the Count decided you should all leave, it might be well not to let people know that you are still here. D'you mind, Elena?"

"Mind?" she queried. "You mean I must stay indoors? Will it be for long?"

"I hope not," he answered. "But at present travelling is—disorganised!"

"Well," she agreed, "you must keep me company, or I shall be very dull. You weren't meaning to go out and leave me again this afternoon?"

"I must, I'm afraid;" "I have several things to do!"

It was thus there rose to view and to power that new force of direction and action in the days of the horror in Kieff. Only Russia breeds those self-martyrs who devote themselves open-eyed to their own damnation like saints to salvation. Who shall tell—and to what end?—of the prominence and activity of the new sub-chief of the Extraordinary Commission; of the lives that fell before him like cornstalks before a scythe; of the legends that grew up about him concerning his secret life in the *apparement* of the late Count Udiloff, where Red Guards stood sentry outside and none penetrated save himself?

Passers-by in the street looked up at the lighted windows of that home of mystery, and shuddered or sniggered according to the fashion of their souls and their politics; while within, Emilian would be sitting at table opposite to Elena, apologising that his affairs took him out so much, and dwelling for ever upon her quiet, the beauty of her face and shape, and the girlish purity and innocence that were radiant in all her being.

"The Demon Commissary?" repeated the British captain, as lunch came to a close. "Oh, there wasn't anything very wonderful about him; you wouldn't know by looking at him that he was anything out of the way. Dark, bony sort of chap, something under thirty, I should say. Not much of a talker; he was chiefly anxious to hand that young woman over. H'd smuggled her and himself out of Kieff when the Bolshies were driven out by Denikin's lot."

"And what happened to him?" demanded the American. "He must have a thousand murders to answer for. Did you hang him?"

The Englishman smiled and shook his head. "Oh, no," he said. "Fact is, he was pretty badly worn out, and I—well, I stood him a drink in my quarters. I'm no hand at spinning a yarn, but what he wanted was to get back to Kieff."

"But"—the other was all at sea—"wouldn't Denikin hang him when he got him there?"

"Oh, yes," said the other. "That's why he wanted to go, I gathered. So I wrote him a railway-pass and sent him off. Will you have a cigar with your coffee? Mine are all spotted with mildew, but they're quite smokable. I like things—and people—not to be *quite* unspotted!"

His languid eye, fatigued with on-looking at the kaleidoscope of life and death, was humorous and merciful.

THE MAN OF SCIENCE

I

THE asylum was a vast far-flung affair of red brick, set well back from the smooth main road which threads its way through the pleasant woods—fir, and larch, and tall, palm-like pine—which flow up towards Berlin on its eastern side. From the road it was hardly visible, on account of the high red wall which surrounded it at some couple of hundred yards from the building itself, pierced by a high-arched gate with nobly-designed doors, enormous, iron-studded, palpably massive and impregnable, with an armed guard of the *Wehr Polizei* standing beside them, as though pauper lunatics were things of worth.

They were.

The motor-lorry, which came humming through the long green avenues of the woods—it was piled with such stores as horse-flesh and dog-flesh and black bread—halted at the great gate while the big shabby driver, the trained soldier showing as through rents in his dilapidated garments, leaned aside to show his permit to the guard. That official peered at the paper short-sightedly, rather as though he were smelling it. Beside the chauffeur on the driving-seat, a small elderly man, primly black-clad, with rigid lips that did not widen and eyes that yet twinkled as though in a kind and wise mirth, watched the proceedings in silence.

The guard withdrew his eyes and nose from the printed form.

"You can pass," he said, with that strained manner of reluctance which every German official has when he is obliged to give a permission. "I will ring for you."

"Ring, then!" answered the driver curtly.

And presently the great iron-studded doors were swung apart. The men who swung them wore civilian clothes; they were serious men, middle-aged, responsible and worthy, not at all the kind one would expect to find as gate-attendants at a lunatic asylum. The lorry grunted and passed in and they raised their hats in salute; but it was plain that they saluted not the great stalwart driver who skippered the machine. It was not the splendour of his glorious physique, nor his high, handsome slave's face, to which they paid honour. It was to the little black-clad man, with the merry eyes—jolly eyes that twinkled like stars on a windy night from under the shadow of his broad brimmed black hat, that they made their conventional gesture of deference.

The lorry stopped before the great front door of the building, a great arch of red brick variegated with yellow, designed by a world-famous architect for the entrance of pauper lunatics and the exit of their coffins. A shallow flight of wide marble steps led up to the entry, so that a pauper lunatic standing upon them had the attitude of a king upon a dais. Clumsily, and with purely German grunts, the little black-clad man eased himself from the high seat of the lorry to the ground. He ignored, or did not see, the obsequious salute of the driver, but went at once, with a strange gait that was something between the burlesque of a trot and the imitation of a slow waddle, towards the big marble-prefaced doors.

It has been emphasised that the little black-clad man was *little*. He was actually less than that; in black clothes which had a touch of the clerical about them, a knee length coat and horrid trousers, the ends of which were continually trodden under his heels, a collar as limp as a frill, he was flimsy and puny. He could have been negligible and despicable but for the rigid set of the narrow lips and the unceasing sparkle of the eyes, shining with the olympian and pitiless hilarity of the erudite who rejoice over the ignorance of the multitude. They glittered and twinkled from a paste-white face as unpliant as a death mask, the screen of a life's emotions—or, maybe, of a life without emotions. He carried in his left hand a little black bag such as doctors used to carry, a cheap and shabby little thing of cracked patent leather.

He looked strangely insignificant at the head of those marble steps, waiting under the handsome arch and facing the ornate doors, while the bell-push aroused for him within the great building a deep-pealing gong. But the stout uniformed porter who opened for him saw nothing of this; at sight of him, he lifted his badged cap, in the showy German fashion —he did not salute since the visitor was a civilian— and bent himself above the bulk of his abdomen in a bow of formal respect.

The little black-clad man nodded. "The Herr Direktor?" he enquired.

"At once, Herr Professor!" The Germans, at their best, have really a very convincing manner of politeness, of goodwill and alacrity in service. The fat porter might have been a Court chamberlain as he ushered the visitor forwards and then moved lumberingly to open a door for him.

"Der Herr Professor Conradi!" he intoned magnificently, and the little man trotted and waddled in.

It was a vast and splendid room, such as commonly only charitable institutions can afford for their officials. Its ceiling was arched and groined, its floor was of foot-betraying parquet, and its great windows looked southward to the red wall and the solemn trees that showed above it, across a garden chequered with flower-beds, as neat and precise as a chessboard.

A tall man rose from his chair at a writing-table. He had a beard the colour of new straw and a moustache that hid his mouth, and eyes—there was something about those eyes, an anxiety, an appeal, that might have been called timidity—of palest china-blue. He, too, bowed.

"Ah, Herr Professor," and he began on the formal greetings and all that etiquette of politeness which is the curse of human intercourse.

But the little man with the dead face and the lively eyes was not an addict of the drug of punctilio. He put his little black bag down on the wide shining desk of the Herr Direktor and, uninvited, and leaving the tall, handsome, feeble man standing, he got to business with no more than a preliminary "Good-day! How goes it with you?"

The Herr Direktor was actually going to answer the question. But the little man whom they called Herr Professor was not interested in the indigestion of the Herr Direktor. He cut him short as the tall man put a loving hand upon the seat of his complaint and showed signs of being willing to expatiate.

"I see my committee this afternoon," he said. "It will be the first time that I have seen them all

together. I shall be asked to make a statement of results. For myself"—the twinkle of his eyes, that dance and shimmer that might have been mirth but was not mirth, quickened for a couple of moments —" I know the results! But it is well I should be able to quote cases. For they are not men of science! No!"

" Quite so, Herr Professor!" The tall blond man cringed, as it were, in eager acquiescence. He was himself a physician of exalted qualifications; his degrees and diplomas were impressive; and he was of no distinction whatever. And he was aware that the little man before him, the flimsy unsmiling little phantom whom he could have tossed into the air and caught again like a yearling baby, regarded him as " not a man of science."

The " Professor"—he was no more a professor of any university than many other Germans, mostly Jews, of world-famous achievement and eternal renown: but a German must have some title or other —cut him short with a nod.

" So," he went on, " I will glance over your returns. I will look at a case or so in the One Month category, in the Third, and in the Last. But, before going into these details, I would like your impressions. There have been no failures—no?"

His eyes, that were so merry without mercy or humour, lifted and fixed themselves on the tall, fair man, who nominally governed a colony of twelve hundred adults of both sexes who could not call their souls their own—even supposing they had souls! The tall Direktor did not meet that twinkling regard. He had not sat down but had remained standing behind the No-Man's-Land of his wide glass-surfaced

desk-top. Now he dropped his deferential hands to the pockets of his trousers, walked five yards in front of the great radiant window, overlooking the patterned garden, and walked back again before he answered. Then, still with hands in pockets, he paused and turned to face his questioner.

"Herr Professor!" he said. "There are none of the last category."

The paste-face of the little man moved at last; eyebrows jutted forward over eyes that had ceased to twinkle and taken on the stare and chill of distant ice.

"Eh—Then——"

The tall doctor, the Direktor, was master of the conversation for one moment. He withdrew his hands from his pockets and made a hushing gesture. And for that one moment there showed in him in the face that he bent across the wide desk and a steadiness of the pale blue eyes, some of the power that should have been his as an ordained minister of healing.

He spoke; so far he had only babbled.

"Last category!" he repeated. "There are none of the last category! He paused; he had spoken the few words firmly and manfully, throwing them down into the little wrinkle-guttered face opposite to him. The merry remorseless eyes did not shift from his; they held him like the fabled hypnotic stare of a snake; and he crumpled. The assumption and bravado of his attitude went to pieces. One could have perceived that under the screen of his moustache his mouth was sagging in surrender. He flung out his hands in a gesture which was eloquent and imploring. Professor Conradi did not move.

"Herr Professor!" said the tall man. "The last

category—we are burying three of them now; the last three! Herr Professor—they are dying like flies!"

Professor Conradi said nothing for some seconds. He seemed to be bringing an entirely neutral and merely scientific interest to bear upon the tall doctor's spasm of emotion.

"Like flies!" he said at last. "It is strange that you should say that. It was upon the common house-fly that I made my first effective experiments. And they died, most satisfactorily. Then rabbits and guinea-pigs. They died. Now cheap and useless idiots, and they die according to plan. But you, and your staff, are immune. There has been no case among the staff? No?"

The Herr Direktor listened to him with a manner as of fascination. "The staff—no!" he answered. "But two hundred and sixty deaths in two months! What can I——"

The little man sat upright. "You can hand me those returns for which I asked you," he said, with a certain crispness. "And the graphs which I instructed you to make. And afterwards I will see some of the—er—patients. Let us not waste time because"—his eyes resumed their trivial jollity; they were obviously surveying an aspect of life which was agreeable to him—"my niece is meeting me for lunch." His mouth did not widen, but he made the effect of one who smiles indulgently.

The tall yellow-bearded man stared at him with something like desperation. He was, himself, like a man caught in a vast machine, whirled round by the belting, chewed by the gears or fed as fuel to the furnaces. He did not even know who were his masters, whose was the omniscience and omnipotence that had

found him, and, because of his real capacity in his profession, and still more because of his meagre and unresistant personality, had scooped him out of his quiet private practice and installed him at four times his previous income, in the post of Direktor of the asylum for pauper lunatics. The thing had just happened to him, even as marriage may happen to a careless or uninstructed youth. But though he did not know who were his masters, he knew very thoroughly that he had masters. And one of them was sitting before him, little and dangerous as a rattle-snake.

He sucked in his lips under his handsome moustache.

"Ah!" he spoke slowly. "Your niece—we must not keep her waiting for her lunch. The returns" —he indicated book-bound files upon the big desk— "and the graphs are here. Will you take this chair?"

"Thank you!"

The Professor moved to the padded swivel-chair; the Herr Direktor walked apart into the bay of the big window. He was seeing, with eyes more far-seeing than the eyes in his head, that which the Professor saw not at all. Three pitiful bodies, uncoffined, wrapped in the débris of pauper bed-clothes, whence their uncovered faces looked forth, wise at last with the certain knowledge that is sought for uncertainly by all mankind—and which all mankind earns at last by the easy task of death! The shallow pit of their sepulture, the perfunctory business of pitching them in and covering them up—he saw it all, while the little Professor shuffled through the files of papers.

He had walked apart and stood in the bay of the big window, looking forth. The sun was strong on the patterned garden, with its flower-beds, conventionally

star-shaped or circular, jewelling the disciplined turf of it with the hue and blaze of many flowers. The day was at its glorious best. Upon the broad gravel path below the great window, walking into its vista like actors into a scene, suddenly and significantly possessing an empty stage, there came a group of five men, coatless, labour-stained and with the nonchalance of gait and demeanour of men who have completed their task and earned their dinner. Two had shovels carried at the slope upon their shoulders. One of these turned, pausing in his walk, and spoke to the others, laughing as he spoke. They, too, paused to hear him. What he had to say was obviously an anecdote or a comment ; the Herr Direktor, watching them unobserved in the bright bay of the great window, could hear no word of what was said ; it was a dumb-show drama. He saw their blond, strong and simple faces crack into laughter as the speaker finished. Perhaps it was something about himself ; and like all weak men, he valued the mere show of outward respect. He stepped forward and tapped upon a pane loudly with his knuckles. They looked upward with a start. They saw him, tall above them, and froze. His arm swung in a peremptory gesture that sent them marching towards their quarters.

" Eh ? " The Professor, lifting an abstracted monkey-face from the tabulated papers, enquired :

" What was that ? "

The tall man shrugged. " Nothing ! " he answered. He didn't wish to answer at all ; but those merry world-mocking eyes of the small elderly man at the desk remained upon him, and they beat him down.

" It was the burial squad returning," he said. He swallowed. " That was all ! "

He stood staring at the smaller man.

"Oh, that!" said the Herr Professor. "I should have liked a little examination; but I did not give instructions. No! No! Still——"

He was putting the bound files back into the order in which they had been offered to him. As he packed them back he spoke.

"Still," he continued, "there will be plenty of others. And now"—he rose—"I have, as I told you, an engagement. So let us lose no time. We will not trouble, after all, about the One month cases; we will just have a look at Number Three. They are always interesting. I am"—his twinkle quickened—"I am proud of my Number Threes!"

He started to lead the way to the door, but paused to look for a moment at the Direktor. For a moment his mouth widened in the semblance of an involuntary smile. And for him it was assuredly enough to smile at; those darting, probing eyes of his had seen desperation in the countenance of a man incapable of rebellion and the virtue of a man without force. Then he turned and went his way; he knew his way!

The room to which they presently came was on the spacious scale of the whole establishment; it was a ward, extending from one of the forth-jutting wings of the main building to the back, the windows at each end having aspects of colourful gardens and of trees—and each window, a "loop of Hell whence a damned soul looks on Paradise," was barred like the cage of a wild beast. But the beasts, in general, at least, were not wild.

Save for one bed-couch, it was not a dormitory. There were benches, a few chairs, and two long tables. The floor was of bare planking; and everything had

that scoured and scrubbed sort of exigent cleanliness which suggests less the universal need for human decency than the enforcement of habits of cleanliness of a dog in a house. There were perhaps forty men in that place. There was one on the bed-couch. The others rose as the Herr Direktor and the Professor entered. The man on the bed-couch did not rise; he couldn't; he was strapped down upon it!

Two huge guards, six feet high and more, had followed the Professor and the Direktor into the great room. They carried their warrants of authority in their hands, plain and unmistakable—three-foot long rattan canes, twice as thick as a stout thumb, the proper thing to induce a pauper lunatic to remember where and what he was.

The Professor waited within the door as the guard clanged it behind him. And suddenly he seemed benevolent. These were the wares he dealt in; and his unrevealed customers were eager and lavish. Also, remember! He was first and last and all the time that thing which is not human, which challenges God's creation and breaks the Devil's heart with envy, a "man of science."

"Yes!" he breathed. "Ye-s!" The big Direktor, standing at his right side, but a little behind, started and suppressed a slight grimace. But the Herr Professor went on, blandly, with a kind of indifferent lavishness of indulgence.

"Well, my friends? How goes it?"

And from that hopeless assembly, that assembly of creatures to whom hope, love, aspiration, fellowship with mankind, and all the natural appetites of mind, soul and body were "*Verboten*"—these dregs of the race, which the race has neither the courage to kill

nor the skill to cure—stood upon their feet as the Professor and the Direktor entered. Perhaps it was to them, with their umistakable authority, that they rendered deference, but it was at the rattan canes that they looked. All of them looked at the canes. Save one, and he was the man strapped upon the bed-couch. He did not join at all in the general humble murmur of profoundly respectful greeting.

He laughed !

He laughed loudly, but not as men affect the gesture of laughter in scorn or defiance ; there was in it a certain reality of mirth, a sincerity of derision. A broad canvas belt held him down where he lay, and reeved into it were leather straps that clamped down his arms. He turned upon the Professor and the Direktor all that he could turn—his head, with its great brow and the sparse brindled hair above it, a face like a skin-clad skull, which would have been clean-shaven had anyone cared enough about him to shave him. There was a nobility of aspect, a quality of vivid and devilish potentiality about him ; anyone standing beside the Professor might have seen what he was—an over-balanced Bohemian, a mere clever monkey in the forests of a civilisation that affords " grand accommodation " to tailless apes.

The Professor walked across the room, the Direktor beside, but always a little behind him—as becomes, by certain codes, well-established in certain lands, the procedure of those who desire to show deference. The forty—or thereabouts—of miserable paupers, remembering the rattans, stood, in studious respect. Their poor piteous faces followed the two omnipotents as the Professor led the way towards the bed of the man who was strapped down.

They faced one another, the prostrate bound man and the erect free man. And somehow in some sense *macabre* and intimate there was a resemblance between them; neither was afraid, yet each was a servant. And there is nothing in life more terrifying than being a servant. One served with honour, consideration and great remuneration; the other with his strapped-down body, the pain of his soul, and the knowledge of his doom. But fellow-servants, all the same.

The Professor spoke.

"Well?" he said.

He used the German word "*Also?*" which can be an inquiry, an expletive or a reprimand. It's a wonderful language, the German; for pure poetry and for cursing, it is nearly the equal of English. The man who was strapped to the bed showed to him the mirth of his derisive and indomitable face, and grinned.

"Oh, splendidly!" he answered. "Quite splendidly! Just fancy—what could be better? This morning, one of my valets—one of those gentlemen who carry the canes with such distinction—brought me my breakfast. It was in a shallow tin-pan, such as I used to offer to my dogs—when you and I were students together. But my dogs—you surely remember my dogs?—would have turned from that garbage with loathing. However, I—I can only turn my head a little. So my chief butler—that's that black-avised brute who is carrying your bag in his right hand and his cane in his left because he is left-handed, and he must have his fun with us—brought it to me with the appropriate ceremonies. He had an iron spoon with him."

He broke off for some instants and lay staring at the ceiling, while the Professor watched him.

"Yes!" he said. "He brought an iron spoon with him. Do you remember the dinners I used to give at Dressler's every month? You were there now and again, and it seemed to me that you enjoyed yourself. Well, your way of returning my hospitality of our student days strikes me as—crude. Almost gross, in fact! The contents of the feeding pan had a stench which gave me the impression of a bright-blue miasma; the look of them reminded me very vividly of the nastier processes in a *Kadaverervaltstungsanstalt.* In short, I had no appetite. But our henchmen had his iron spoon. It's a long handled thing which gives him all the leverage he needs against the resistance of a bound and helpless man. So, not gently, but quite firmly, he pried open my mouth and shovelled the offal down. I was"—he grinned, the horrible grin of one to whom life is a remembrance and death a hope.

The Professor had watched him through all his talk with that unchanging clay-face which he had, and no movement save the growing and dwindling twinkle of the lively and inhuman little eyes. He spoke now.

"I remember those dinners at Dressler's," he said. "They were the only dinners I had in those days." His fluttering eyes steadied themselves in a look of purpose upon the man who was strapped down to the mean and narrow bed. "I was grateful for all that good food. Shall I now stand you a lunch?"

The bound man widened his eyes. They were eyes like a hare, enormous in the emaciation of his face. And suddenly they were bold and arrogant. And they were merry.

"What's the menu?" he asked.

The Professor still stood, regarding him. "I remember," he said, "those dinners at Dressler's very clearly. I was very poor; I had to earn my living while I studied. You didn't know—you couldn't know!—that for a little time I was a waiter at Dressler's. But—here I am, standing over you now; and there you are, strapped down. Now look!"

He travestied the attitudes of a very servile waiter, offering wine or offering a dish. The man on the bed, the bound man, the doomed man, the man who had toyed with life and who now was to be the toy of death, grinned again.

"Yes?" he said. "What's the menu?"

"I'll tell you," said the Professor. "Look at yourself—strapped down to a bed in a pauper asylum because you can't be trusted to obey. I can obey. You, the rich fellow, who gave the wonderful dinners at Dressler's—you thought you belonged to those who must be obeyed. Then you gambled till you had nothing left but yourself. And you found out that yourself was not an asset. And then, you couldn't obey! The world, society, civilisation, gave you orders; they gave you orders even here; you couldn't obey; and thus you lie, strapped down upon a bed, so that you may do nothing of your own accord."

For the moment, the little black-clad man, with the fringe of his trousers trodden under his heels, his silly coat hanging to his knees, his hat—he had not thought to remove his hat—sagging upon the shaggy back of his head, was august. He might have been a small impotent god; but the skull-like mask that watched him was like the face of an indefatigible satyr.

The man on the bed cracked his dreadful face in a

dreadful grin. They used to laugh upon the rack, you know; they made immortal jokes at the stake; and the greatest and most terrible epigram ever uttered was spoken from a Cross. The man on the bed spoke.

"Yes?" he enquired. There was a goat-like character in his long-lean face—something of the faun, something Pan-like—which was accentuated by a patch of beard on his unshaven chin. "What's the menu?"

The little Professor considered him. The tall, blond Herr Direktor considered both, and the pauper lunatics, standing beside their bleak benches, looked on, gaping. The great south window blazed with sunlight, and the iron bars across it left straight, strong shadow-streaks upon the wide floor.

"First," said the Herr Professor, "let me see your mouth. Put out your tongue!" The man on the bed complied, and managed to do so with a docility that was in some manner sarcastic and derisive. "Now your eyes!" said the little Professor.

He moved the lower eyelid with a finger as gentle as a mother's, and peered. No muscle moved in his face of clay; a smile in it would have been like a break in a crust; but his eyes rejoiced. For within the mouth, upon the tongue, and on the inner lining of the eyelid, there showed, as plain as paint, the hue of saffron, the yellow for which he looked.

"According to plan!" he remarked, in a murmur, addressed more to himself than to the other.

The man who was strapped down upon the bed, frowned for a couple of instants in thought, and it was as though his vision pierced for the moment the mist that befogged his lively brain. His freakish

face was grave; he clearly deliberated. For a while there was no speech. The tall Herr Direktor watched them with a kind of fascination, as they confronted one another, the small, unsmiling mask of the one looking down at the plastic and indomitable countenance of the other. They had been students together, it appeared; and one had been trapped into a pauper lunatic asylum, and the other into the service of mankind. For mankind, being what it is, sets its traps also.

The man on the bed spoke again. The frown on his face had relaxed; once again its ironic and defiant quality had returned.

"Death?" he asked.

That scrutiny of the two opposed faces continued for some seconds.

"Yes!" answered the Professor. There was a pause.

"You see," went on the Professor, presently, "you know a good deal which it is well should not be known. Also, you have twice been detected at attempts to escape. For all my purposes, you are best as you are. Still——"

He halted, and did not continue.

The man on the bed heard him intently.

"Still——?" he repeated, prompting him to go on.

The Professor stood in thought for some seconds.

"Now!" he said: "listen! It is you that have spoken the word Death—not I! I am not sentimental; sentiment will never work upon me; but I will admit that we were students together. That I will admit—and now we are serving together. For you *are* serving!"

The bound man grunted and tried to shrug. "Yes," he said, "as munitions."

The Professor shook his head. "No!" he answered. "As front-line—as storm-troops. It means nothing to you—eh? It means little to me, for that matter—but there you are! However—if you want your discharge—since we were students together——"

He could shrug, and he did. The motion completed his question and the man on the bed understood it perfectly. They stared at one another again in silence for a space of seconds.

"It's death, anyhow, isn't it?" asked the man on the bed. "In a month or—two?"

The Professor shook his head. He had exactly the manner of a lecturer who rebukes an irrelevant questioner. He dealt so with the doomed man who was strapped down upon his bed. He seemed to consider and then to decide.

"Three months!" His face did not move from the set of its waxen composure. "Three months—as far as I can judge. Yes—three months! But—since we were students together—understand, I am not sentimental!—you can, if you like, have your discharge!"

It seemed to the Herr Direktor that there passed between them, the goat-like, so-called idiot lashed to his bed, with his face of bitter mirth and indomitable contempt, and the Herr Professor, expressionless and deadly as an adder, some look of understanding, some token of a common code.

"Three seconds!" It was the Professor speaking in nearly a whisper. "Or; if you have things to think about, three hours! I have both of them here."

And still that intercourse of looks continued. And again there was that space of silence.

"No!"

The bound man answered sharply. There was again a pause.

"No! I will take my chance with your hellish experiments. I know I am just a—a beast on whom you have inflicted some devilish thing which you have discovered or invented, and these poor brutes"—he turned his head; it was all that he could turn; towards the miserable, cotton-clad inmates of the ward, standing by their benches, in the conventional attitudes of discipline inspired by the presence of the heavy rattan-canes in the hands of the two guards who stood ready behind the handsome Herr Direktor—"these poor brutes, of whom you have made me the comrade, share my fate with me. Yes—you can pry my jaws open and jam your poison down my gullet! You can do anything—but one thing!"

His face upon the palliasse—he had, of course, no pillow—challenged that of the Professor. It was suddenly not merely whimsical and ironic; it was contemptuous; there was in it a trace of the triumphant.

"You!" he jeered, bound as he was. "You, and your drugs—and everything else you've got! You think you can vanquish us? You walk about with your poison-bottles; you strap me down; you set your big bullies with their canes to lash us to submission. And you think that is victory! Man! I shall die upon the cross, shameful like a slave and glorious like a martyr, and you—you will die upon your bed, and the people around you will not even hate you. You will die like a dog!"

He ceased. But still that strange intercourse of regard continued, that mutuality of understanding across the great gulf of purpose and destiny. And to

the Herr Direktor, still staring, absorbed and deferentially silent and apart, it seemed as though there passed between them, without speech or gesture, a converse of those bitter and opposite minds.

"Listen to me!" answered the Professor, suddenly. "You shall have two hours—two hours a day—in which you shall be loosed from your straps to walk about. This I will do for you! You will be watched, of course; and in addition you will give me your word of honour to make no further attempt at escape. Well?"

The man on the bed frowned as though in a worry of incredulity.

"Watched—of course!" he repeated. "But—word of honour? Are you playing another of your tricks upon me? For, by my life, I didn't know, after these straps and those canes, that I had any honour left!"

He grinned; his grin had the fashion of a jeer; of a man, broken beyond repair, but spiritually unconquerable—there are people who forget that you can beat men but that you cannot conquer them. These are the great heroes; these are fanatics; these are idiots! And the terrible danger of the last class of these is that it may comprise the other two.

The Professor did not meet that grin, that jeer, that bitter aggressive mirth with any responsiveness; only those lively eyes of his flickered, but did not waver.

"I will take your word of honour," he said. "To a point—I will take it! For you will be watched, as well!"

The bound man, who could move no part of himself but his head and his feet, drooped his chin towards

his chest in the travesty of a bow. His dreadful face—where humour had survived humiliation, and courage had outlived torment, broke once more into its death-defying, Professor-defying, Hell-defying smile. Such a smile as one can imagine in the old Roman arena, when the lion had his man down—no hope, no help! Smile, damn you! Smile! And they smiled!

"Good!" he said. "I understand! You have my word of honour! And I realise that, all the same, I shall be watched. *Also!*" he added, which in that case was as much as to say—"and that's that!"

"Good!" said the Professor. He reciprocated only the word, but none of the horrid mirth that faced him with every intention of affront across the prison-bed of the alleged lunatic who was strapped to it—because, on two occasions, he had kicked a rattan-armed guard where it would do most harm and been captured by the sentries of the *Wehr-Polizei*, when he scaled the beautiful red-brick outer wall, which, in the sacred name of Charity, folded the pauper lunatics—those poor and miserable dregs which are dripped out from life as sweat is dropped from an overdriven beast.

"I have no time," said the Professor. "I will give orders about your two hours. Two hours a day you may walk in the gardens. But—I have your word of honour?"

"You have it already!"

The professor's lively eyes ceased to glitter gaily. He bent a serious face above the bound and helpless man.

"There is a kind of man," he said, "to whom formulæ like that have a meaning! Even 'word of honour' has a meaning—a meaning above plain fact, above service, above even passion—which is always

a nuisance. But I think you are that kind of man! Two hours—and your word of honour!"

The bound man grinned again. There was no wiping that grin off his ruined face. He was broken; he was smashed flat; all that was left of him was his slave's carcase and the mighty mutinous spirit which straps could not confine nor rattan canes subdue. He grinned!

"All right!" he said. And after a moment he added: "It seems to be true that a man must believe in something outside of himself. But just fancy *you* believing in honour!"

"I don't!" answered the Professor. "That is why I am having you specially watched. I will give orders about you, as I said. *Auf Wiedersehen, Andreas!*"

The man on the bed cackled with brief laughter. "*Auf Wiedersehen,* Jakol!" he replied.

The Professor turned away. The tall Herr Direktor was awaiting his instructions. The big guards came to a posture of discipline as though a sergeant-major had called them to attention. The little, lean, shabby man who was their master gave them some moments of what seemed to be a regard of disdainful amusement. The man who was strapped to his bed laughed aloud.

The pauper lunatics cowered.

II

There is a point which is as nearly the pivot of Europe as any other which you can mention. It is at the intersection of the *Friedrichstrasse* with *Unter den Linden,* where stands the great café which never closes by day or by night. Throughout the changing

years, its broad windows are alive, shedding their mild allure upon the handsomest street in the world. Yes, we Allies beat Germany; we out fought her and out manœuvred her; we capsized her Emperor off his throne and fetched her representatives to mock us at Versailles; but none of us have found the time to beautify our great cities with a road like *Unter den Linden*—two parallel avenues of traffic, with between them an average road's width of grass and flower-beds and trees. We were too busy for that.

It was under the awning of this café that the Professor sat, after his busy morning at the asylum, awaiting the niece who was to lunch with him. The day had a mild benignity of sun and air; the incessant traffic streamed in the roadway with the effect of life poured through a pipe. With his little glass of *Kirschwasser* upon the iron-topped table beside him, the small Professor watched that spate of activity. His small black bag was on the ground at his feet; he sipped his drink and his eyes twinkled from under the brim of his black hat upon the motor-cars, the hurrying men, the splendours of the women, as they flowed past him. Wealth, power, purpose, went by; defeated Germany promenaded in the sunshine as glorious and as challenging as a peacock; there was nothing else in sight so trivial and meagre of effect as the Professor himself. Yet, if any had cared to watch him, and analyse the quality of his regard as he contemplated the flow of the street, some having vision, might have detected in it a character if mildly benevolent possession, a touch of the kindly autocracy of the father of a large family. As if, in short, he suffered them to run about and play at being free human beings till it should suit him to teach them

otherwise. And so sitting and looking forth, he beheld the arrival of his niece.

She was easily recongisable across the nearer roadway as she stood at the further edge of it, awaiting a chance to ford the current of its traffic. She was a girl of that make and manner which the Germans—with good warrant, too—have idealised. She was of the middle stature, neither thin nor stout, and blonde, of course—that gold-tinted blondness which reminds one of harvest-ripe corn. And from hat to heels she was clad in black, the stern and bitter black which is the ensign of mourning and bereavement. For somewhere upon the Somme—shattered or shot, bundled into an unmarked grave, like a pauper lunatic—lay the twin brother who had halved her life with her.

She saw her chance to cross the roadway, stepped from the kerb and started over. She caught sight of the Professor under the awning as she came and raised one hand in a gesture of greeting; it was thus that she failed to see the great car that came booming down upon her, slewing across the road as the driver, roaring blasphemies, jammed on his brakes. She knew only that some one suddenly caught her from behind and threw her forward, so that she fell on her knees in the roadway. Then turmoil piled up about her; there were passionate howls of protestation from the driver of the car, a jabber of comment from the throng which automatically collected, the staccato official bellow of the inevitable *Wehrmann*, the street policeman and one answering voice, precise, prompt but unhurried in German that was fluent and correct, which yet, in a certain exotic delicacy of accent, was not German.

No, there had been no accident ; there was nothing to report. A lady had become involved in the traffic and had been pushed clear of an imminent car.

"*Nichts ist geschehen ; alles ist wohl ! Es braucht hier kiene Untersuchung !*"

It was a clear voice with that marvellous and inimitable character of modulation which enables a Frenchman to express in mere enunciation the difference between "*cent*" and "*sous.*" Upon the kerb the young woman with mud upon her skirt at the level of her knees, turned to look at what was happening. The little Professor looked also. He had not moved from his chair. His set face of clay did not break into expression ; but the eyes had their twinkle.

"*Ach !*" She had not yet greeted the Professor. She had turned upon the refuge of the side-walk to look upon the scene in the roadway. The throng was dissolving under the urgency of the policeman : the essential motor-car, its driver still muttering curses, was moving on ; and forth from the disorder of it all there limped towards her, with one long brisk leg and one which dragged and failed; a tallish young man. He, too, had been down in the road, and his clothes, of convential blue serge, bore the signs of it. His hat had disappeared somewhere under the feet of the crowd, but his black hair, plastered upon his head like a coat of paint, discounted that loss. For the rest, he showed a high, indifferent and comely face ; he was, perhaps, thirty years of age, or thereabouts ; there was a small smear of moustache under his nose ; and despite his dragging leg, his limp, there was that in the general set of him, in the mere poise of the head, in the fashion in which he made his

way through the scattering throng, something which betrayed him for what he was.

He was an " officer."

He joined her on the kerb where she stood watching. He raised a hand in salutation towards the hat which he had lost, remembered and dropped it again. He smiled, as if at his own inadvertency. He had a queer smile ; there was in it a casual mirth, a pleasant and not cynical worldiness ; and with them both there was twisted in a strand, like the red strand in the ripping-cord of a balloon, of bitterness.

" Gnadiges Fraulein ! " he bowed to her. " I trust you are not hurt ! I had to act quickly. I hope I need not say I had no intention of throwing you down."

She smiled faintly. She was as tall for a woman as he was for a man, large in the frame, in the German manner, yet without bulkiness. Her face was a wide oval, with very pale blue eyes set deep under gold-tinged brows ; and upon it there was a character of gravity as though an experience had brushed it in passing and left its stain of knowledge and sorrow.

" I am not hurt," she said. " But you——"

She stopped. The little Professor had risen from his chair and was now beside them.

" My dear," he said. He had a voice with no more tones in it than his face had smiles, a voice that ran upon a rigid level like a train upon rails. " My dear, if you will ask this gentleman to sit down with us for some moments, we can thank him comfortably."

The girl—she was perhaps twenty-three years of age—made a little obedient gesture of invitation towards the triple rank of small tables which bordered the sidewalk.

" *Ich stelle mich vor*—I introduce myself," supple-

mented the Professor. He drew his feet together and bent in an absurd bow. And in doing so, he had the effect of burlesquing the German formality of polite observances, as a dog on his hind legs burlesques the gait of a man. "Sigismund Conradi," he announced himself. He moved a jerky hand towards the girl.

"My niece," he said "Fraulein Lohr!"

The young man bowed in his turn. Of course—you can do nothing in Germany without either bows of blows—and spoke his name.

"I am Charles Benest," he said.

The glitter in the little Professor's eyes quickened for an instant. "Ah yes," he said. "French of course? I had already guessed it. But all that business of French and German, of friend and foe—that is an old story now. We can sit down and drink a bitters together—not?"

His flitting glance did not miss the swift look at the girl's mild serious face, its inquiry and the acquiescence of her answering regard.

"I shall be delighted, Herr Conradi," said the younger man.

There is no privacy so complete and agreeable as that which one can obtain in the midst of a throng. Three people, seated at a small table upon the *terrasse* of a café, with indifferent fellow customers concerned only with their own affairs, the easy current of the sidewalk drifting past, the spate of the roadway boiling by, are folk in an oasis. Deserts burn about him; let them burn!

The Herr Professor—let him have the title! Who cares?—had the place of honour, facing the street. The girl was at his right hand and the young man at his left, opposite to her. She spoke.

"I saw you were limping a little. Your leg—I hope it has not been hurt ?"

The young man smiled that queer rueful smile of his.

"Thank you," he said. "I, too, hope it has not been injured. It cost a lot !"

"Cost——" She did not understand. The Herr Professor twinkled.

"Ach !" he exclaimed. "Of course ! Is it by any chance a *Leichtglied ?*" The young man made a motion of acquiescence. "Because," said the Professor, before he could answer in words, "if anything is wrong with it. I can put it right for you. You see——"

His lips did not soften as they widened. They only for a moment or so, changed shape.

"You see," he said, "the *Leichtglied*, with the aluminium bearings at the knee joint and the special articulation at the ankle, and so forth—well, I can put it right for you if it is damaged. Because——"

He hung on his effect like a trained actor, tantalising his audience. He picked up his glass, drained it, and bent on his two companions a face that was meant to be patronising and —so to speak—paternal. His littleness was rat-like ; in every aspect he was mean and small ; yet he achieved for the one moment his attitude of triumph. It was a pity that he had drained his glass already, for he lifted it as he spoke, to emphasise his words with a debonair gesture.

"Because," he went on, with a grimace of momentary discomfiture at his empty glass—"because I invented it !"

"Allow me !" begged his guest. "If the *gnädiges Fraulein*—the gracious young lady—permits." He lifted a finger to a hovering waiter. "I think I should

tell you, to avoid misunderstandings, that I am a French officer on the Disarmament Commission. So, perhaps——"

He moved in his seat as though he volunteered to depart, to relieve them of his company. His eyes were on the girl; they were very steady eyes, which yet were eloquent in the trained composure of his face. She met them with her own still earnest regard.

"But——" she was eager and uncertain—"we——"

Her uncle, the little Professor, supplied the needed words.

"*Aber wasz!* What is all this? Disarmament Commission! It is my hope that you will break or burst every gun in Germany. Guns, and rifles, and shells, and bombs—what are they?"

The hovering waiter had refilled his glass. The gesture was effective this time. He lifted the thimble-sized glass and drank, flamboyantly. Perhaps the previous draught had touched him. For he laughed; he actually laughed! His death-mask of a face collapsed into a humanity of mirth.

"Toys!" he chuckled. "Toys in the hands of big children! Give a child a knife, and it will cut something—itself as likely as not! Give a man a gun and he will kill somebody, or be killed by another man who also has been given a gun! Imagine—trusting the ordinary man, the common man, the man in the street, with the means of compulsion, with the means of power, with the means of death! Imagine—appointing a silly old General, who has been kidnapped into a cadet-school at the age of fourteen and taught nothing but *Dreck*—muck—about drill and trash like guns—and giving him a thousand

guns or so, and expecting him to regulate the affairs of a seething continent! *Ach, wasz!*"

The younger man was watching him as he spoke His look moved at moments to the quietude of the girl's face, but came back always and at once to the Professor's.

"I am not a gunner," he said. "But I have been taught to break up guns. I belong to the *génie*—I am in the engineers! My leg—I lost it, when a mine, which I had laid myself, went off prematurely. So, you see, I am not entitled to heroic poses. I am merely an expert with gun-cotton and dynamite and such stuff."

The girl spoke. When his eyes had travelled from the Professor's face to her's, she had met them each time with that steady gravity of regard which was in the manner of her. He was comely, in a sober, masculine way; when he spoke of his abandonment of "heroic poses," her eyes kindled a little in sympathy and approval; but what should have been chiefly evident to a front-row observer, one in the position of the Professor, was that "contact" had been made; two spirits had touched and each had left its mark upon the other. There are such perceptions, happily for mankind; the soul knows its home.

"Then you did not fight upon the Somme?" she asked. "In 1916?" she amplified.

Her face and her gaze intensified as she put the question. The little professor turned mirthful eyes upon him and spoke ere he could answer.

"It is this!" he said. "My niece, here, had a twin brother. He was a lieutenant of *Kaiserjäger*, and in the battle of the Somme, he vanished! Some fool at the breach of a gun—possibly a brute, possibly a saint, but a fool, nevertheless, for he knew not what

he was doing when he did it—pulled a cord. A shell forthwith travelled a mile or two and burst, and my niece's brother—my sister's son—disappeared. There was nothing left of him. And that is what disgusts me. If he had been clever, and, therefore, dangerous, and had been picked out for slaughter for that reason, there would have been a leaven of sense in it. But he wasn't clever; he wasn't dangerous; he was just a weak, obedient fool."

The girl stirred. His pale, malicious and merry eye switched round upon her and quelled her.

The young man, too, moved momentarily in his seat.

He answered her question. "I have never fought, gracious young lady," he answered. "I never shared that privilege with your brother. He was more fortunate than I. I only blundered!"

The girl warmed to a glow, that shone in her look. The little Professor made a noise like the bastard of a chuckle.

"He only moved a wagon-train on an unscreened road in broad daylight, with aeroplanes watching him," he said. "Fool! He went to meet that shell as though he had an appointment with it."

He held up his fingers again to the waiter. The young man shook his head as the menial—in a café, an uplifted finger can make a cringing slave of six foot of flesh-and-blood in one second—came behind his shoulder.

"Perhaps he had," he said. "When I was serving at the front, I used to think: 'There is a bullet somewhere with my name written upon it. I shall travel from sector to sector, from one command to another, from town to town and from road to road; but that

bullet will not be too early nor too late; and I shall not fail it. I must keep faith with Death!' "

He smiled his narrow smile at the girl as he concluded. She had heard him intently. She nodded now.

" Yes!" she said only.

" But, come!" The Herr Professor struck in with his dry briskness. " I have a committee meeting this afternoon; and, my dear, it was for lunch we met here. If our young friend——" he waved a hospitable hand. " After all"—he practised again that trick he had of widening his mouth to the shape of a smile which was not a smile; it was, as medical witnesses say at inquests, a *rictus*—" we must keep faith with appetite!" His unfailing twinkle was in his eyes as he looked up at the young man. " You will join us?"

The other rose. " Forgive me!" he said. " The *gnädiges Fraulein* will easily believe that I excuse myself with extreme regret. But it is true that I have already an appointment for lunch." He looked down into her face. " With some colleagues," he added. And then, unnecessarily, " I am staying at the Adlon."

And then the formalities of farewell achieved themselves. In Germany, this can be as involved as a rite in some lodge or temple of a secret society; to meet a German is painful enough for most Christians, but to part from him civilly involves calisthenics. They shook hands, they clicked their heels, they bowed.

The young man had his cigarette-case to hand.

" My card!" he said, laying it on the little table.

The Professor swung an instant's glance on the girl. She had not moved nor craned forward to look; she

was yet still in her chair, her hands clasped in her lap, her tiny glass untouched before her. But she was perring at the card.

"Thank you!" The Professor groped in his waistcoat pocket and extracted a pasteboard the large kind of thing which ladies use in civilised countries, which men also employ in Germany.

"And *my* card!" he said, blandly.

The young man picked it up and read it. He had a good "poker face," for his expression did not change. His eyes passed to those of the girl for a moment. He did not say in words: "I have met you; I cannot rest till I meet you again." He spoke no word at all to her; yet her pale blue eyes widened; she got it.

Upon the card he had deposited was his name—"Le Capitaine Charles Benest"—with the address of his hotel and of the French headquarters of the Disarmament Commission. But upon the Professor's card was no address. There were two words only:

"Sigismund Conradi."

III

Major Burke—the Honourable Phelim Burke—of the Guards and of the British section of the Disarmament Commission—sat at lunch in a corner of the great restaurant of the Hotel Adlon. Opposite to him was Stanley Post, the American special correspondent, with the face and the physique of a monkey, the manners—when required—of an ambassador, and the brain and the experience of a statesman. Major Burke was bottle-nosed; he grunted; he did not pretend to pretty manners. He was the last of a

long and noble line of hard-working soldiers; he wore the Victoria Cross; and he knew his job.

There was a third seat at their table, preserved to privacy by the chair tilted forward upon it. It was to this seat that Captain Charles Benest advanced.

"Good-morning!" he said, as he sat down. His English was as good as his German, with the same delicate spice of accent.

"Morning!" answered Major Burke. He was eating goulasch; and goulasch does not go with conversation. Stanley Post responded with his ear-to-ear grin.

"Welcome to our city," he said. "Glad to see you! The Major has got all four hoofs in the trough and as a light and chatty companion, he'd make a mighty good dog-butcher."

The Major looked up, formidably. And he could look formidable, too. The grizzled muzzle of a face, with its set of a lifelong habit of authority, its self-sufficiency and sheer disdain of the graces—that mark of the invincible caste which was the doom of Bolshevism before Bolshevism was born, which his two invalid children had seen and over which they had rejoiced him with their baby jeers at its grimness, which the enemies of his country had seen and not jeered at all, when he carried it over their parapet at the head of his men—it softened to the ape-like grin of Stanley Post. For that was the virtue and the genius of Stanley Post; he wasn't like a man at all; he was like some funny and likeable thing out of a Zoo; and all the time he *was* a man, a real one, and no mistake about it!

Captain Benest dropped into the reserved chair and picked up the menu.

"Try this goulasch!" urged the Major. "Not filthier than usual! Made of diseased cab-horses, o' course, but you've got to allow for that!"

"Don't you try it at all," put in Stanley Post. "For the love of Mike, eat something that'll let you talk while you're mangling it. Dammit, I've helped you a hundred times. Haven't you got anything to tell me? I've not cabled a dispatch for four days."

"I will have an *omelette aux fines herbes*," said Captain Benest, to the waiter. "Send me the cellarer and I will order some white wine."

Then he turned to Stanley Post. One knows that delightful little manner with which a Frenchman accedes to a demand for attention, that quick smiling surrender to the request, that gentleness and alacrity of courtesy.

"A hundred times, at least," he said. "Not less! Let us make it a hundred-and-one!" He was fishing in his wasitcoat-pocket while he spoke. He found the visiting-card for which he searched, drew it forth and handed it across to the newspaper man.

"Who is that?" he asked.

Stanley Post was famous—he was even notorious—for knowing everybody, who was anybody, in Europe. He carried his monkey-face into Courts and into clubs, into Stock Exchanges and other hells. He knew what Queens said about rouge and lip-stick, and he knew what their maids said about it, too! He picked up the card.

"Sigismund Conradi," he read aloud. He looked at Charles Benest. Then he read the card again.

"No," he said. "I don't know him. I want to know him, though. I want to the worst way! That lad could tell me a lot. Tell me——" he paused and

considered. "Telling me isn't everything," he said. "There's something doing—an' he's in it.

"Look here! I only set eyes on him once. He was goin' upstairs in this very hotel. Scrubby little skunk, he looked, all in black, with a face as white as a piece of paper and as stiff as the sole of a boot. That your man?"

Captain Benest nodded. "That sounds exactly like the man," he answered.

"Well, that's all I ever saw of him," said Stanley Post. "Of course, I wanted to know who he was an' where he was going. The headporter here doesn't lose anything by answering my questions. He pays a thousand marks a week for this job and I help him to pay it. He couldn't tell me anything which he thought would interest me. But it did interest me, all the same. That little black-clad walking corpse was going up to the suite of old Baron von Steinlach." He grinned; when he grinned, he showed his dog-teeth; he wasn't beautiful at any time; he was only good and clever. "That mean anything to you?"

The Major had abandoned his knife and fork and resorted frankly to a spoon. Goulasch calls aloud for a spoon, but it needs courage in a crowded and super-fashionable restaurant. He uttered one word: "Yes!"

Stanley Post nodded and turned again to the Frenchman. "You haven't heard of von Steinlach—and his gun-dog Captain von Wetten—the emergency diplomats that were played across Europe during the war wherever the work was too dirty or too dangerous for the regular ambassadors! Von Steinlach, man? Come, be yourself!"

Captain Benest took his fork and a forkful of his

omelette, golden-brown, with tiny specks of *fines herbes* showing upon its complexion like sun-freckles upon the face of a healthy girl.

"I have drunk with him," he answered calmly.

Stanley Post sat back and looked at him with genuine indignation.

"And you never told me a word," he said. "Secret diplomacy again—that's what it is! Me—giving you the goods every time I get them, the solid stuff, the real dirt, an' you two—why, I'll bet my wad the Major there has dined with him!"

The Major was using his napkin. He spoke through it. "You win!" he said. It is characteristic of wearers of the Victoria Cross that they are not loquacious.

"I've a dam' good mind to quit you two tight-mouths," said Stanley Post. And then he grinned. "An' I would, too, if there were any other white men in the city. Though a man who would scoop up that Brunswick stew with a ladle——"

He nodded a significant head towards the Major's disarrangement of plates.

"Goulasch," retorted the Major, tranquilly. "Not Brunswick! Spoon—not ladle! Go to Hell!"

"Oh, shut up!" answered Stanley Post. "In spite of all I know about you—and that's plenty!—I'm trying to put something before you which might be worth thinking about, always supposing you've got something to think with. Listen to me, will you?"

"Oh, carry on!" said the Major and groped for his cigar-case. Captain Benest said nothing; but his plainly apparent expectancy was enough for the little grotesque man before him, the man who not only

knew but could tell it. He told it to several million people each week; and he told it discreetly and well.

"Well friends, Romans, and undesirable aliens, lend me your ears," he invited. "Apart from the bilge which you usually lap, as a stray Tom-cat laps skim-milk, when I'm good enough to put out a pan of it for you——"

The Major rose. "Got an appointment!" he said. "So long!"

"Confound you! Sit down!" said Stanley Post. "Can't you stand a bit of guying? And you've got to hear anyhow! It's your job—an', worse still, it's mine."

The Major resumed his chair. He was a bulky man; there were people in the world who had mistaken his bulk for mere fat, and had been undeceived.

"Give you five minutes," he said, and was forthwith large and bland and passive.

"Thanks most frightfully," answered the special correspondent, bitterly. "That's English, isn't it? But you've got to hear this. Of course, there may be nothing in it."

He paused. The Major had his cigar well alight. He repeated, in a dreamy voice, the voice of one full-fed and at peace with his digestion and his palate: "There may be nothing in it!"

Stanley Post's india-rubber eyebrows contracted. "I want to tell you something," he said. "There may be nothing in it, but it'll bear thinking about. Are you two goin' to listen, or are you just goin' to sit there and—and shut your atrophied brains?"

"I," said Captain Benest, "am going to listen."

The Major moved his large cigar from his large lips.

"Oh, carry on!" he said, and restored his cigar to the place in that case made and appointed.

Stanley Post surveyed them both with every outward sign of strong dislike.

"I wouldn't tell you at all," he said. "But *I've* got some sense of my duty. Now hark! You know about this Conradi man? You know what he's done? Do you?"

"He invented an artificial leg," said Benest, calmly. "I'm wearing one now. It's a good leg, but expensive."

"Did he?" Stanley Post stared at him. "An artificial leg— and you're wearing one now? If the armistice hadn't come when it did, you might have been wearing artificial eyes, too! You heard of his gas—the stuff which no known mask can stop, which goes through textiles and rubber and leather as if it weren't there at all? And one touch of it on the eyes is blindness, incurable blindness, everlasting blindness! And any dye-factory can be arranged to make it by the ton! You heard of that?"

"I heard of that," answered Captain Benest. "I know that gas; every nation makes it now—in readiness! And I know about the anthrax shells, and the poison-battalions. And I know about the explosives in the coal which will be offered us for import, and about the many millions of counterfeit French and English banknotes which will be snowed all over the world to ruin our credit."

He smiled. His little smile involved a jutting-forth of the under-lip, a movement of contempt that was yet kindly and tolerant.

"And I know, too," he went on, "our preparations

to answer most of it." He ceased smiling and frowned. "Beastly!" he added.

The bottle-nosed Major grunted. "Ours, too!" he said. "Bloody awful!"

And Stanley Post, who knew much, whose trade it was to know it all, was suddenly aware that here he was in the company of two men who were the authentic confidants of the future. There was Benest, dark, grave, comely, with his real modesty and his no less real achievement—for the mine which had exploded prematurely had been laid under direct rifle and machine-gun fire; he did not wear the ribbon of the Legion of Honour for nothing—and there was the Major, insufficient of speech, gross-bodied, with the manners of a coachman—coachmen have commonly very good manners—with his hard-earned honours, and his future peerage. And there was himself, with his razor-edged intelligence, his great gift for expression, and the vast knowledge which he was not privileged to keep to himself! He knew that Europe was re-organising its means of creating Hell, that throughout the continent nation after nation was perfecting and polishing the means of terror and slaughter, that the late war was a mere experiment, that the seeming peace was a breathing space, and that Armageddon was yet to come.

And these two quiet men knew it too—and went on being quiet!

"You're mighty encouraging, the pair of you," said Stanley Post; "when a man's tryin' his darndest to make you worth your pay. I told you I saw that little reptile goin' up to Steinlach's rooms, didn't I? You didn't let me get as far as telling you that I paged through the hotel register to find who else was

here—and that I rang them up from the desk-telephone, and found they were all in Steinlach's rooms, too! You had to chew the rag all the while, but I'll tell you now though you're not worth it."

He paused. A journalist knows how to break his speech into paragraphs. One must present oneself effectively; it is one's only compensation for being oneself.

"The first," he went on. "was an Englishman!" He waited; the Major continued to smoke; Captain Benest uttered no word and moved no feature.

"Lord Sleigh!" said Stanley Post. They did not speak. "Ever heard of him?" he demanded.

The Major moved his cigar to answer, but ere he spoke, he yawned.

"Cousin of mine," he said, very indifferently. Then, reflectively: "all my cousins are blackguards. Told 'em so, often!"

He replaced his cigar and relapsed to his previous attitude of torpid comfort.

Stanley Post sat up. "Is Van Haagh a cousin of yours, too?" he demanded. "The Dutch munitioneer? Sure he didn't absent-mindedly marry your aunt? That's fine, for he was there, too. And Verville, the Frenchman! Say, Benest, isn't he a cousin of yours?"

"No!" said Captain Benest, as calmly as ever. "He is not; but his wife is!"

Stanley Post gaped at him. The Major continued to smoke, placid as a cud-chewing cow; Captain Benest did nothing in particular; only the vivid, ugly, brilliant little American boiled over.

"Hell!" he said. "I'm glad I'm not a European! It isn't only a family party—with your blasted aunts

and cousins scattered round so's you can't heave a rock without beaning a near-and-dear !—it's a dam' conspiracy ! What relation to which of you was our man, the American, Wantage ? He's got money enough to be anybody's providential brother-in-law ! No claimants ? " For they did not answer. " Well, that's the gang your friend Conradi went up to sit in with. And I'd give quite a few shin-plasters, belongin' to my paper, to know what he's got to say to them or what they've got to say to him."

The Major moved his cigar again. He had a large arm, a thing stout and slow as an elephant's trunk, with brown fingers as thick as sausages.

" Don't be so dam' American ! " he said, and resumed his cigar.

" Oh ! " said Stanley Post. " And don't you be so dam' English with me ! If there was less aristocracy and more grey matter in that dome of yours, you'd see I was giving you something to work on. There's a committee of them, man—millionaires, munitioneers, profiteers—from Germany, France, England, the States, with that terrible driving brain of Von Steinlach among them—and then this little beast of a devil-begotten Edison, who can contrive means of more villainous death where the other devises methods of more spacious life—he is sent for ! He is one of them ! Why ? What's the answer to that ? "

He slammed it at them. He had learned much in his time, and taught much ; but he had not acquired the dire indefatigable calm of those who had looked Death in the face and stared him down.

" A lemon, I s'pose," said the Major, indifferently. " Was that what you wanted ? " He rose again. " Told you I'd got an appointment ! "

Stanley Post said several indecorous words, but he and Captain Benest rose likewise. The Major moved ahead of them like an ice-breaker before a flotilla. The aisles between the tables were seething with brilliantly-dressed people seeking tables; pauper Germany yet demanded spendthrift provender, from the aeroplane-carried Volga caviare to the Riviera peaches. They came into the vast hall, whence the great staircase branched grandly up to the costly privacies of gaudy harlots, of crooks who could have taught statesmen their trade, of statesmen who had nothing to learn from crooks.

And think! Think hard! They are all over the world, these fattening-pens for those who make wars, who live on them, and never die in them. The long thick-carpeted corridor; the lobby and the roccoco ante-room, where inventors and reporters and little diplomats and such trash are planted to wait; then the reception room, with the immaculate tired secretary at his desk in a corner; and in the middle of it the great shining table of the potentate! No papers on it, of course; only silver desk-furniture; some of them actually go as far as gold! Beyond that is the salon; all these rooms open in a string from one into the other; and further on—you never get further on—are the splendours of the drawing-rooms, the lavishness of the bedrooms, the dazzling white-and-silver of the bathrooms!

And all this will be frame and background, the vehicle—as wine might have been the vehicle of a Borgian poison—of some damned bald-headed gnome, groping his way from tariff-wars to battleship-building, and thence to shell-making and on to food-control and population-control. All over the world! Men

don't die in wars for right and freedom and humanity any more; they die to furnish the caviare and the peaches!

"Well," said the Major, "I'm goin' to the Embassy. Got an appointment."

"I'll go with you," said Stanley Post, "in case you're not lying, as usual, and your appointment's about something interesting. You, Benest?"

And then he followed Benest's fixed eyes. He was staring. Within the revolving doors from the street there stood a man and a girl. They were both in black, the girl in that profound completeness of black which has only one meaning. They were taking leave of one another. The man turned; he was little, and flimsy and shabby—you recognise him, of course!—and went towards the broad staircase. He had his crack-seamed doctor's bag in his hand.

"Gosh!" said Stanley Post. "Old man C.O. Incidence is right on the job and cracking records, at that! It's that feller we were talking about—Conradi! See him?"

"I have an appointment," said Captain Benest.

The revolving doors had just closed behind the girl. The Professor was half-way up the first ascent of the wide and shallow stairs.

"Good-bye," said Captain Benest and strode at once to the doors.

The Major and Stanley Post looked after him and then looked at each other. Stanley grinned, but that was only because his face was made that way. The Major merely smoked.

"Of course!" said Stanley Post, at length.

"Umph!" said the Major. "Of course!" he

conceded finally. "Share a taxi—what?" he enquired.

"Of course!" answered Stanley Post.

IV

"Democracy has failed," spoke the Baron von Steinlach from his seat at the table. "It has always failed; it must always fail. I will not inflict a speech or a lecture upon you; but since it is the first time we have all met together, it is well that our principle should be clear to all of us. For principles are like shackles; and a man in shackles always knows his range of action."

It was a vast room in which he spoke—one of the many splendid stables of Death's white horse to which allusion has been made. Panelled with oak, carpeted with rugs whereon saints had kneeled with their faces towards Mecca, and with a long and narrow table at which an Abbot had once presided over the refectory of his monks. Baron von Steinlach sat in the seat that once had been the Abbot's. At the further end of the table were certain bottles and glasses. In the wide English hearth there glowed a quiet fire of wood built of those old English battleships that are cut up and sold for fuel; it showed little spurts of blue and green and crimson flame. It had probably fought alongside of Nelson's flagship at Trafalgar.

The Baron was a large man, yet not tall—a solid and deliberate man, great in the frame, without the fact or the suggestion of the pot-belly which is almost *regelmäszig* in an elderly German who has always had the means of doing himself well. He had a small white moustache and his white hair was cropped close; he showed to those who sat about the great room

a pink elderly face whereon the footsteps of his seventy years had left only tracks of humour about the eyes. There were no visible scars upon him of those battles, dire and blood-lavish, which he had fought here and there, from Bucarest to Washington—till the close season for Washington started—when Ludendorf was his washpot and over Hindenburg he had cast out his shoe.

There was a club-fender, leather-seated, before the wood fire. Lord Sleigh sat there, very accurately tailored—even a little too much so for his fifty odd years and the strongly-wrinkled ivory of his clean-shaven face. He was a man of vast and various possessions ; he had nearly infinite means of doing evil, and the evil he did was limited only by the narrow bounds of his imagination. He counted among his contemporaries as a dirty story counts among fairy tales ; men might know him but they didn't care to admit it.

" Oh, principles ! " he said now. " Principles be blowed ! We were goin' to hear about ways and means ; that's what we came here for ! Who cares about principles ? "

There was a chintz-covered armchair at the other elbow of the hearth. In it sat Fergus Wantage, the American. Behind him, in the embrasure of the tall window, sat Mynheer van Haagh, dark and little, as Dutchmen commonly are not, with unwavering shoe-button eyes and traces of a habitual small smile —something humorous, nothing genial, but merely a seeming behind which the cruel and unresting mind lay in ambush. Remember, there were Spaniards once in Holland, and they had their own way with the Dutch—for a time !

These were rulers ; half the world was theirs already. Van Haagh was shipping, with mighty supports of Javanese sugar, with prospects of East Indian cotton, that Golconda of the near future, of oil from Borneo, rubber from Sumatra, and pearls, opium, spices and rare timber from all three. A little empire was his—and not so little, at that—branching and tentacling through the Dutch East Indies and British Malaya, reaching out towards Siam, with Burma in view. And, beyond that, for a goal, as Heaven is the goal of the Christian, incalculable, unsurpassable, the terrible and overwhelming possibilities of China.

Wantage—he was anything you can think of which makes civilised life possible. He was coal and steel and railroads ; he was oil and banking—he had to be that—and insurance and real estate. He was also as kindly a man, as lavish towards well-advertised charities, as cheery and complaisant in manner and counsel, as ever sucked the blood of a great community.

Captain von Wetten, whom Stanley Post had described as the Baron's "bird-dog," late of the Prussian Guards, with marks of them stamped all over him, in the high superciliousness of his countenance, as though he suffered mankind, other than Guardsmen and Prussian aristocrats, patiently but not gladly, in the rigid correctness of his garb, and even in the stringless and rimless monocle that inhabited the socket of his right eye, sat at the table, silent and very upright, in the attitude, easy and showy, with which a cavalryman sits a horse on parade.

Verville, the Frenchman, who had once been Pamphoulos, the Greek—it's funny how these Levantines affix themselves on the great Western nations like mistletoe on oak-trees—was at the end

of the table opposite to the Baron. Gambling hells, fashionable summer resorts and winter resorts, killing-pens for the tired rich, the idle rich and the silly rich —that was his game! And, of course, munitions; you can never get away from munitions. With unblemished, olive-tinted complexion, delicate pencillings of eyebrows and moustache and wide dreamy eyes—God save and preserve us from those dreams! —he was as beautiful as a snake and as horrible as a snake, and a million times more poisonous.

And then, in the embrasure of the other tall window, defiling the *mise en scène* with his paltriness, the misery of his clothes, his general effect of being a creature of no account, knowing it, and not caring a hoot in hell about it, with his little bag and the trodden heels of his trousers, and the inflexible merriness of his eyes, which looked over the head of all human judgments, was the Professor! An obscene object in that little gathering of aristocrats and millionaires; like a rat in a throne-room; but like a rat in a throne-room where the King and his courtiers were afraid of rats.

"Me," said Wantage, "I'd like to hear this 'principle' business. Principles or policy—you can call it which you like! We're meeting all together for the first time, an' we want an understanding, with all of us in it, about how we stand an' where we're heading!"

"And I," said the little dark Dutchman. Verville, the Frenchman who had been a Greek, merely smiled his acquiescence. Lord Sleigh shrugged in surrender to the majority.

"All right!" he said ungraciously and produced his cigarette case. Gold, of course; there are certain

obligations of vulgarity and ostentation which millionaires, unless they are of much character, cannot escape.

"Well!" The Baron von Steinlach had bided their time. "I was going to point out to you—to express for us all—the total of the position. I said that democracy had failed, as it must always fail. A hundred million of mixed human beings can no more govern themselves than one man, as an autocrat, can govern a hundred million people. Neither of those things has ever been done. Tsars, Kaisers, Parliaments and Presidents have always been, and always will be, the instruments and the servants of self-appointed minorities. Of a governing class, as in England, where half-a-dozen families pull the strings which make the Empire jump; of great business interests, as in America and Germany; of a clique, almost a secret society, of bankers and financiers, as in France! Of, in short, oligarchies!"

He paused and looked about him. Lord Sleigh was trifling with his cigarette; Wantage was frowning in heavy attention, silently judging every word; Verville and Van Haagh were expressionless. He knit his strong white brows.

"All this has been said already amongst us, though it is the first time we meet together all at one time; and that is why it is well to state it. What, after all, is an oligarchy?" He paused again. "There are moments when I believe in Fate," he went on; "when it seems to me that something besides ability, knowledge and inward power have appointed certain men to rule and the rest of mankind to be ruled. It may be what some men call God; what others call the Devil."

Wantage spoke suddenly. "Leave God out of it," he said. "Talk business, and don't go preaching. I've got preachers of my own. You told us you were going to show us a trick. You told me the Reds were finished in world-politics and strike-breaking from now on would only be a matter of uncorking a bottle. I'm on to all this oligarchy stuff, and that's all right with me! The world's too small, anyhow, for all this mess of kings and presidents and popes and the rest of the picture-cards. But what are you goin' to do about it? If it's a war, you can call it a day. I can make my own war any time I want it and shatter my own honest steel with my own explosives while I'm killing my own customers. So, if it all comes down to restoring conquered Germany at my expense—another war with France and a loan of a hundred millions for it an' that kind of bunk—well, you won't need to talk to me, because I'll be stricken with deafness. See?"

In his way, his very effective way, he was as forcible and expressive as the old Baron. If he lacked the manner and the culture of the trained and practised old European diplomat, whose unwavering blue-grey eyes had in their time outfaced resistant kings, baffled ambassadors and humbled spur-clinking generals, he had other qualities. This super-millionaire had begun life with a shovel at the foot of a slag-heap; he had ground himself smooth on one side and rough on the other in contacts of which the Baron had never dreamed. And the rough side was really rough.

"Not sayin' a word against you, Baron! Little time ago—now!—oligarchies was the bunk. There was mighty things that could be done. A world oligarchy—that was the idea. "Am I right?"

"You are perfectly right," answered the old Baron. "It could not have been better put! A world-oligarchy, precisely—with the power of compulsion. Don't leave that out; it is essential. The power of compulsion! Think what that means! If every man, out of the millions with which you deal, had to have your leave to live, and without it certainly and inevitably to die—if you had the power to give him the means of life in a glass tube no bigger than your little finger, or condemn him to certain death by withholding it—if you could do this, not only with individuals but with communities, with states, with nations, with practically the whole population of the globe—do you see no advantage in that?"

Lord Sleigh spoke while Wantage, genuinely startled, pondered under the Baron's hard blue eyes.

"I can see one thing," he said, flourishing his cigarette. "And that's a greatly increased death-rate in my country. Set of swine, there! Might be an accident or two in the House of Lords, too; and one, anyhow, in the Royal Family. Blighter cut me in public!" he added, pathetically.

Verville and Van Haagh continued to say nothing. Von Wetten had not spoken; he merely continued to express, in attitude and expression, that he was in the presence of *canaille*, and, therefore, had nothing to say.

"So now, then, shall I show you what you have called my tricks?" said the Baron. "My magician is here, and he has with him his Pandora's box—or, rather, her black bag." He turned to the recess of the tall window nearest to him, where the Professor waited like a particularly dilapidated saint in a misfit niche. "Herr Conradi, if you would now

be good enough to make to us a statement of your work and its results ! "

The Professor, bag in hand, came forth from the alcove into the immediate presence of those sleek millionaires. His frock-coat was too long in the sleeves and the skirts ; his trousers rested upon his shoes—and his shoes bulged and were abominable—in concertina folds. Von Wetten, exquisite as a he-mannequin, looked him up and down and looked pointedly away again ; there must be limits to the things upon which a Prussian officer may be called to soil his eyes ; genius in hand-me-downs, power in baggy pants, death, damnation and doom with a cracked patent-leather handbag and a string tie, are not among those things. But the others were not Prussian Guardsmen who can be contaminated by a breath and destroyed by a blow. They employed men, they were judges of men, and they lived upon men. Each of them saw the paste-white face, where the wrinkles were set as though grooved in by the thumb of a sculptor, and the lively eyes that shone forth from it, with their devilish trivial merriment and their deadly contemptuous assurance. They cleared their bright aggressive brains for action.

The Baron introduced him, naming him and each of the others in turn. " Pleased to meet you," said Wantage, and the others uttered civil little murmurs. To each of them he gave a funny little Charlie Chaplin bow. He was laughable and pitiful ; so mean and squalid against the splendours of the great chamber, so little and poor in the presence of those plutocrats ; yet none smiled and none pitied. It is possible that they recognised, with a sudden aroused delicacy of perception, that the man before them was present

only in the body, that the real he abode alsewhere, in a wonderland of pure knowledge, upon "the other side of good and evil," whither they could never follow him.

The Professor advanced to the table and set down his disgraceful black bag upon its shining surface. He opened it, standing beside Von Wetten, inserted a hand and spoke.

"The Herr Baron has directed me to speak to you in language which is not technical; but to show you things and to relate their effects in the common speech. That which is merely scientific, upon which, later and in due season, your own chemists, pathologists and bacteriologists will report to you, is not for to-day. This, now, will interest you!"

He drew forth from the bag a fat-bellied phial, elaborately sealed.

"This now!" he said. "It is new, though it is eight years ago that I chanced upon it; and then it was useless. It was meant first for employment in war against our enemies; but it was useless. It was worse than useless, for it could not be controlled. The man to whom one administered it—his mucous membrane, within his lips and in the linings of his eyelids from which the red corpuscles were being surely eliminated, died without fail in a period which one could calculate almost to the hour. But there was this. The condition induced in him was not one of mere poisoning; cyanide of potassium or any one of a dozen deadly drugs would have done that in a second or two. It was a disease, and it was both contagious and infectious. Half a dozen prisoners-of-war, duly treated, could have been released, and in a hundred days France would have been dying and in three

hundred days all Europe would have died. And in six hundred days, the world would have been free to develop through its ages a race of beings to take the place of Man. This is it ; it has as yet no name ! "

He held up the fat phial. The liquid within it was as clear as water ; it was only a tint in the glass of the phial that seemed to give it a greenish tinge. And it was Death : not the trivial ten million or so of deaths which blundering amateurs of slaughter can achieve in a European war, with weapons slowly and painfully developed from the stone hatchet and the bow-and-arrow into complicated monkey-gear like guns and battleships and General Staffs and military discipline and propaganda, inspired patriotisms and hatreds. This, held up before them in a puny fist, was Death !

He said so ; and such was the manner of him that they believed.

" But——" it was Wantage.

The Professor set back the phial in the bag.

" I have been allotted subjects for needful experiment," he went on. " They were persons of such condition that it was possible to isolate and seclude them. Pauper lunatics, in fact—unnecessary persons at the best—many of them irresponsible criminals ! Only two were treated ; contagion and infection were left to continue the work. They did not fail. There have been no failures."

" You mean," asked Wantage, rather hoarsely, " you mean there were men shut in with—with these plague-carriers ? "

The Professor nodded. " There were indeed ! I have been seeing the returns this morning. All according to plan ! And one case I have inspected myself.

Again according to plan! And in the staff, the doctors, the nurses, the guards and so forth, there is no case at all. As I have said, according to plan!"

They waited, and at last Verville spoke.

"You interest me more and more," he said. "I hope you will go on to tell us how these—er—these functionaries of yours contrive to avoid infection and contagion. Speaking for myself, I am unwilling to spend my life in a gas-mask."

The Professor smiled; he actually smiled. He proved that that waxen mask which he wore in front of his brain could stretch and crinkle.

"Gas-masks!" he said. "Why not plate-armour? Why not ox-hide shields? They all belong to the same date of mentality. Here, now—in just a little bottle."

His hand drew forth and exhibited another fat phial; but this time its contents were red, red as blood or wine. They all stared. The deplorable little man had his gift of self-presentation; he *knew*, and he could convince his audience that he knew. Only the old Baron sat back a little and smothered a smile, for he had not misjudged his man nor his men.

"This, too," said the Professor, "has as yet no name. Your chemists, and the others whom you will employ, will put a label on it in due course. It is the control of the preparation which I showed you first. Here is immunity for at least four hundred days, and then, with a fresh administration, for four hundred more, and so on. It seems to me," he added, and strained himself to smile once more, "that I have only to release a couple of pauper lunatics to make this preparation the most valuable and most marketable thing in the world."

None smiled with him. "There have been deaths, then?" enquired Van Haagh from his window-seat.

"Oh, yes," answered the Professor. "And there will be more. There are no failures."

He returned the second phial to its place and snapped the shabby bag to. He had almost a benignity, a patronising kindliness, as he looked from face to face of those ruthless and narrowly limited men, those human islands in seas of gold, whom he was prepared to endow with utter dominion over the human race. What they did with it, to what ends of profit or evil they steered it—giving to mankind the alternatives of shocking death or servile life—all that did not concern him. He was a man of science.

"Sounds pretty devilish," said Lord Sleigh. The cigarette between his fingers was extinct. "Nasty stuff to handle! There are plenty of men who'd be better dead, of course; but I'm not keen on doing the killing myself."

Baron von Steinlach smiled slightly under his clipped white moustache. Lord Sleigh was the kind of Englishman he wanted—rich, wicked, presentable and a fool. He turned his eyes upon Verville, and his look was as though he prompted the French-Greek to answer. Verville responded.

"A means of compulsion," he said. "As our dear Von Steinlach has remarked, a means of compulsion! As to the morality of it—well, morality is only a glaze of colour upon facts. But there never was a weapon left lying about the world which some one did not pick up and use; and as to this one, I do not desire it shall be used upon me. So, for my part, I shall pick it up myself."

Wantage grunted. "There'll be a price for all this," he said. "We'll have to do some more talking, of course. I don't think any of us have got the size of this proposition yet. I haven't, anyhow. And how you're going to serve out this poison and this immunity dope to several thousand million of people—well——" He paused. Van Haagh struck in.

"Matter of a great organisation, simply," he said. "A vast one in many countries—in every country. During the last war, most of the world was rationed; it was clumsily done, and corruptly; but it worked. And with this antidote, we shall be able to collect the one universal tax which is conceivable. Not an impost on property or revenue, which every man does not possess: but a tax on life!"

The Baron Von Steinlach nodded slowly. "It is so," he said. "But our friend Wantage is right, of course. There must be more talking and consideration and preparation. Some of us have been a little carried away, I think, by what we have heard. We cannot accept or refuse a gigantic power like this during an after-lunch chat. Great business is not done like that!"

The little Professor had continued standing by the table with his shabby bag before him. None of them had imagination to look at that bag with horror and reverence, the mean and cheap container of the race's destiny, or they might have been reminded of the mean and cheap earthly habitations of the souls of terrible conquerors, of great and terrible saints, of devastating geniuses. But the Baron only looked up at the shabby little black-clad merchant of hell and tyranny and death with the manner of a kindly and courteous man addressing a flunkey.

"I don't think we need keep you any longer," he said.

And forth went the Professor, obediently, pausing in the doorway, with the black bag in one hand and his hat in the other, to make his funny bow. Then he edged out and was gone, to amble homeward through bright thronged streets where none dreamed that their master was walking among them.

"Now," began the Baron von Steinlach. "We can begin to talk. First——"

And in that great ornate room, four millionaires put their heads together to concert their terms for letting the world go on.

V

Captain Benest, moving briskly despite the leg which dragged, the *Leichtgbied,* marked her down at forty yards distance, passing at an even and measured pace through the throng of the street. He overtook her easily, came alonsgide and raised his hat.

"Pardon!" he said. "I am so glad to see that you are not hurt!"

She turned towards him the golden shine of her gentle face, with its strange shadow of old grief and of something which gave Captain Benest to think. The droop, the tensity, the resolution and the withheld appeal! He had seen soldiers, grizzled old ruffians of weathered war experience, who wore that general effect of expression; men, generally, who proved to have shops and little farms behind them, and good wives and cherished children; who looked at the barrage as it crept towards them, and then went on with their work. Unknown Warriors, all of them; but the Arc de Triomphe shelters no tomb of the Unknown

Woman who slaved and suffered and died in squalor that her man might die in a glory of flames and thunders. Nothing is popularly less regarded than a dead woman, unless it be a live one. But the girl ?

" If you are walking, may I walk a little way and let you see, as best I can, that it is not a hobby of mine to knock ladies down in the street ? Or must I, at your command "—they have these gracious phrases in some languages—" must I suffer you to go on alone ? "

They were in *Unter den Linden* again, where it broadened to the *Pariser Platz*, with the arches of the *Brandenburger Thor* beyond it, through which there shone benignly the tender green of grass and the varied hues of trees.

" I am going home," she said. " But my uncle will be some little time yet. So I shall sit in the *Tiergarten* for a while. It is pleasant there on afternoons like this."

He nodded in warm agreement. " I, at any rate, should find it very pleasant indeed if you would accept the circumstances of our first meeting as a sufficient introduction and let me come and sit with you."

She turned her head. The sobriety and kindliness of her regard dwelt on him for some instants : it was plain she was estimating this enemy of her country ; it was plain, too, that men had proposed before to sit with her alone in sequestered places. He met her look with no variation of his customary sophisticated calm. The honesty and modesty of him stood as plain upon him as the nose on his face. There was no mistaking it—he was strong and sad and good !

" We could talk," she acquiesced.

" We could, indeed," he answered. " It is people

like us who can bridge that huge misunderstanding of our rulers. They could only send ultimatums; they did not know each other; but we can talk!"

"Yes," she said slowly. "You see"—she hesitated and then decided—"I don't know many people to talk to. Since my brother's—you heard to-day about my brother—since his death——"

She stopped. He waited before he spoke.

Then "I sympathise, of course," he said. "That would be a banality if I had not a title in my own losses to sympathise. I would tell you, if you permitted."

By this time they were passing through one of the side-arches of the *Thor*: the park lay open before them.

"Tell!" she said, simply.

"Since you wish it!" he agreed, obediently. "There was my father!" he said. "He was a soldier *de carrière*, a general. He had been a *cuirassier;* I remember him with my earliest memories, the splendour of him in his uniform: I know I thought the Lord God must be dressed like that; and the gaiety and the understanding and the wit with which he would play with my baby sister and my brother and myself, and drag our mother into the game! I had a good childhood; and I am rich in the memories of it. Which is fortunate; for my father met a salvo of long range gas-shells. And so all that goodness and intellect, that gentleness and mirth, died strangling in a ditch. In his life he was—er—*elégant;* he died disgustfully. He, of all men, was not afraid of death; but he was afraid of dirt. And he died disgustfully."

He paused; she said nothing. She walked on.

"My brother," he continued. "You would have liked him. He was a law student; the army sucked

him in. And he paid his footing on the Chemin des Dames. I bear your people no grudge for him; the law might have given him a living: the Chemin des Dames gave him immortality! They remember him, and they quote him, as he was at the last, upon the parapet. All his officers and his sergeants were dead: "'Rosalie,' his bayonet, was red and dripping. The—er—the Germans were coming, great, grey-clad men. He called to the wounded and the broken men in the trench: 'Do you want to live for ever? Follow me!' And they followed him. His grave is somewhere; we have not found it. This distresses you, gracious young lady? I shall not tell you the rest—no?"

There was a sincere solicitude in his manner and his tone as he put the question. Her gentle face, a little fearful, shy, yet daring, came round to him again.

"Tell!" she said once more. "I, too—I want to hear.

He moved his head, between a bow of civil deference and a nod of agreement. They were nearing the *Sieges Allee,* where every dreadful sculpture of "Prussia's Rulers" has a penitential seat of marble upon each of which the Prussian Ruler turns his back.

"Since you wish it," he said. "But only since you wish it!" He paused. "Do you wish it?"

They walked some ten of fifteen paces before she responded. The tall young officer, in his worn clothes —not shabby at all, but decently worn—walked beside her. She spoke again.

"Tell!" she said.

Again he moved his head, in that motion which was just not a bow.

"Since you permit," he said. "My mother was

killed in one of the air-raids on Paris. She had been good to everyone: she had her own hospital, which she supported herself, and in which she worked, day and night. How many German officer-prisoners found comfort under her very gentle hands, I cannot say! I only know that her hands were always gentle. And then came the bomb! A thing of aluminium shaped like a pear, which drops blunt end first, with little spinning vans on its tail to keep it end-on to its target. And there is, it seems, no target so good as a broad Red Cross, painted on the roof of a hospital. The first bomb was a bull's eye."

He used the German slang-word—"*Blendlaterne.*" She did not know it.

"And?" she said.

"Oh!" he exclaimed. "I was careless in my speech. I meant that an aeroplane bomb dropped on my mother's hospital and that the hospital then ceased to exist. So did many wounded German officers and some French officers who were relations of mine. So did my mother!"

She did not answer for the moment. Then she asked a question.

"And your sister? You spoke of a sister."

"Yes," he said. "I have a sister. I knew her best before I went to Switzerland in my studies as a civil engineer. My father, you see, was a soldier; and so he did not make soldiers of any of us. I was to make roads and railways, and my leg was blown off; my brother was to aid in the administration of human right; he was stabbed and shot and kicked to death in the great moment of his life. Of my father and my mother, I told you. My little sister escaped death! God was as cruel as all that! The

last time I saw her, there was a Sister holding her back by the thickness of the arm; for she wanted to kill me. A gibbering and dangerous idiot," he said, and that which was bitter in his face trickled into his voice.

"I remember how she used to sing in our orchards in Brittany," he said. "How she would dance between the apple-trees and sing, while our nurses pretended to search for her. She had a little song, a little French baby song—you know French, Fraülein?"

"I know French," was her answer.

"It was——

"*Promenons nous*
Dans les bois
Tant que le loup
N'y est pas!"

So you see, gracious young lady, I am not patriotic or heroic in the sense that I want to fight. Those little songs! I would fight your country to silence "*Die Wacht am Rhein*"; but never to stop "*Stille Nacht, Heilige Nacht.*" I would even fight my own country to blot out "*La Marseillaise*"; but I would die for it to preserve the baby song of my little sister. I am talking too freely, of course; but, *gnädiges Fraülein*, I have the feeling that you understand! Am I wrong?"

The grace of the trees, the quietude of the grass, was about them. Ahead of them, at right angles to their path, was the *Sieges Allee.* This is a most horrid road, disfigured by some thirty or so statues of Prussian potentates, livid in marble or marble-like

composition. As if any Prussian ever really ruled! They shied at it.

"Over there, don't you think?" suggested the girl.

It was a "rustic" seat under those trees—I don't know the name of them—which the Germans and the Swiss trim so that their branches are spread to make the roof of an arbour, a green and gently rustling canopy, which conserves the cool of the morning through the nerve-tearing heat of the afternoon.

"You have been there before," he said. It was not a question.

"Yes," she replied, simply. "I often go there, unless some one has found it before me. It is very quiet.

So presently they were sitting under the dense green roof, which moved and murmured above them.

"What you have told me," began the girl, and halted. "To think——" she halted again. Then with an inconsequence which was not strange to Captain Benest, for his mind was taking short cuts to meet hers in its course: "My brother," she said. She paused once more.

He was silent. "We were twins," she said. "We had nobody else except my uncle, whom then we scarcely knew. My brother—he was delicate. I do not mean in physique; so far as that goes he was strong and very quick—nervously quick. He wanted to paint—to be a painter of pictures. I loved his work; I have it all still. Strange work; I have not understood it all yet, though I am—I mean, I was his twin. One has to see it—I mean, one has to *see* it, when it glimmers through, the thing he saw as he saw it. Then—it is wonderful! For me, at all

events, it is wonderful. I look at it always; and for me it is as though I saw again that flitting, changing fashion of him, the queerness of temper, and all that was so good in him, so truly good, and all that was childish and—and naughty. And I loved it all. I still love it! Can you understand that?"

It was really a question and not just a piece of narrative rhetoric. He nodded slowly.

"I love my little sister," he said. "She is a screaming maniac. She fears me and hates me and wants to kill me. But I love my little sister. Can you doubt if I understand?"

She was silent, staring at the ground between her feet, leaning forward in the rough seat with her hands clasped before her.

"The war took him," she said. "It took everything—except me! They wouldn't let me work or nurse or anything. They wouldn't let me scrub floors in hospitals, even; they just told me to go on keeping house for my uncle. But they took my brother; they took him and they kept him." She tossed her blonde head very slightly. "They kept him for ever. My brother, my gay, brilliant brother—they gave him wagons to move in the daytime—my uncle told you in the café—upon an unscreened road. And then the English aeroplanes, with their bombs, dashed down upon them. And so——"

She sat up, sighing.

He answered. "Yes, I know. I, too, sometimes feel that it is difficult to go on living. Our lords and masters taxed us too heavily. Still, there is this! We have had enough of it! Our lords and masters may snarl like house-dogs at the end of their chains; but we—we who do the killing and are killed—we

have had enough of war! War!" he said. He had the Frenchman's irresistible impulse towards epigram. "It sucks up the best of each of us and leaves the worst to lament it! And yet we are preparing—every country in the world is preparing—for another war."

The girl did not move, but she spoke. "I know," she said. "The next war—it will be awful!" She paused; he did not interrupt her silence. Then, presently: "I am glad my brother will have no part in it!"

"It will be, as you say——"

He broke off and stared. Following his sudden silence and the direction of his regard, the girl looked too, and remained looking. For the thing which burst upon them, at not more than ten yards of distance, was merely outrageous; an apparition like a fever dream; in the daylight decency and decorum of the *Tiergarten* it was not a credible being at all. It came dancing through the little trees—dancing, with lavish and extravagant brandishings of feet and arms; and making noises as if it supposed itself to be singing. It had the shape of a tall man, lean as a ladder, clad only in a coarse grey shirt, open at the neck, with sleeves rolled back to the elbows from pipe-stem forearms, and trashy grey-blue trousers. And over all was a head, with thin, long hair tousled upon it, and a face on which the sparse beard stood like mildew on a skull. It turned that face upon them, where they sat, as it cavorted past; there was an instant when it consulted with them and confided in them, as a man might speak with his eyes to an understanding friend. And both saw it, though neither could name it—the ribaldry, the glee, of that ruined countenance, the terrible mirth of such as

can dance to their open graves, singing! There are such.

The creature did not pause. The dire derision of the goat-like face rested upon them but an instant, upon the sudden official severity of the captain and upon the shrinking of the gentle golden girl, their seclusion and their privacy. And then it danced on, till the next belt of little trees took it and hid it. They stared after it.

"*Tiens!*" said Captain Benest, inadequately.

The girl turned to him. The creature had showed to her a quality which was really hellish and daunting.

"What was it?"

Captain Benest was not slow in the uptake.

"Nothing to be afraid of," he answered. "Since I am here, there is nothing for you to be afraid of. I do not customarily exhibit weapons in the presence of ladies; but I am a soldier—of sorts; and, if it will reassure you—well, I have this!"

He showed the flat black automatic for just a moment and restored it to his pocket.

But she persisted. He found something childlike in the little puzzled frown that puckered her brows; and Captain Benest was very much a lover of children.

"But——" she said, "it wasn't a man! Did you see its face? It *wasn't* a man! What was it?"

Captain Benest shrugged. His grave and earnest eyes did not leave her face.

"I can only make guesses," he said. "You could make them as well as I. Think of all that has been let loose upon the world in the last few years! Some poor fellow maddened by starvation; some shell-shocked wreck crowded out of a hospital; some wretched creature poisoned by the awful drugs and

drink which are offered to them! Any miserable thing of that kind! But nothing which you need fear."

He was watching her, but she did not turn her eyes upon him. She continued to lean forward, her hands clasped in their ugly black gloves, looking at the ground before her.

"It is not that I'm afraid of—of anything," she answered at last. "I am only afraid of things—of things which I can't understand. Such as——"

And then she halted. A word, and she would have gone on. The fear that filled her days, the horror that infested her nights, the clue to the menace which lay in wait for the world, the hand that groped for the throat of mankind, would have been open to Captain Benest.

He only said: "I, too, am afraid of many things, gracious young lady. I am not a hero!"

And so he lost the story of that late evening, many months before, when her uncle, the Professor, walked into her room while she was yet undressing for bed. He had not knocked; she turned, startled, from before her mirror, in what she still had on. And there, in the door, was the black-clad, gnome-like Professor, with his long frock-coat, which suggested some robe of a damnable ritual, of the Black Mass or something like that, with his great and splendid brow, the defiled shrine of a noble brain, and under it the lively and wicked little face. In his hand he bore a tumbler.

He stood and surveyed her an instant or so.

"Uncle!" she cried, and groped for a wrap or a robe.

"*Kummer dich nicht!*" he said. "Don't trouble yourself." He stood, unmoved, as she covered her insufficient clothing. He had not stirred, but she

cowered back against the wall that was opposite to the place where he stood.

" Uncle ! " she stammered again.

There were electric lights in the room—a great one overhead, a sort of frill of them around the main mirror of the dressing-table, and a reading lamp by the bedside. They shone on chintz and bright linen and silver toilet furniture. It was into a stage-setting like this that the Professor advanced, the full glass in his hand, walking with a care so that none of it should spill.

He came to her where she leaned back against the wall.

" *Narrin !* " he said. " She-fool ! Why ! " He paused. " I have dissected prettier women than you ! Drink this ! "

He thrust the tumbler which he carried at her.

There was power in him. She feared him ; and to fear is to hate. But, upon his insistency, she took the glass.

" What is it ? " she managed to ask.

" Life ! " he answered.

And when, under the compulsion of his look and his presence, she had taken the draught—she could have spoken of the taste of it, the strange first sickly sweetness which yet left an acid sting in the mouth—he took back the glass from her hand. If only he had been Mephistophelian, more devilish or a little dangerous, more comprehensible, in short, or even less contemptuous and less indifferent, there would have been less horror in him. As it was, he reached out his hand for the glass which she had drained. She surrendered it.

His twinkling gaze travelled over her again where

she leaned against the wall beside her great dressing-table of polished wood, of shining glass and silver equipment, like an altar. And then he spoke. He spoke two words. In his brain was the death of the human race; in his hand was the means of salvation. He was the go-between of Life and Death; he was in the logical lineage of that fool who will some day find the means to disintegrate an atom; who will assuredly do it; and in some mean little laboratory will touch a key, or press a knob, or make a contact, which may blow the solar system to blazes and leave Creation to be done all over again.

"Sweet dreams!" he said. And then he turned and left her.

Captain Benest lost that story.

It was not till half an hour later that he was saying: "But your uncle will not mind, *gnädiges Fraülein*, if you permit me to accompany you as far as your door."

She took a second to consider.

"No," she answered. "He could not mind that." She hesitated. "Could he?" she finished.

"Impossible," answered the captain. But as he rose to his feet, there was a wonder in his mind.

Could he?

VI

The Professor had housed himself—or they had housed him—in one of those huge blocks of flats, massive in appearance as an Egyptian pyramid, built by sweated labour of half-baked brick masked with a paste of moulded stucco, ingenious in its contrivance as a bee-hive and as bleak as a prison, which Berlin has accepted without protest from its architects. But it

showed a good front to its street—a great arched doorway opening to a spacious tessellated hall, with brass-and-mahogany pens for the porter and the elevator and so forth; and upon the face of it there rose tier after tier of neatly curtained windows, screens and masks of lives. Behind them, women were being loved and men betrayed; children were being born and corpses "laid out" for burial. It might have been the Fatherland itself, with so bland and featureless a countenance did it shelter its content of pain and hope, of vain virtue and the common currency of villainy.

There were two shallow wide marble steps before the big arch of the entry. The girl turned at the foot of them. It so happened to Captain Benest that he saw her then with the sunlight on her face and hair, and the great arch embracing her nobly, as a fit frame embraces a picture. She *was* little, after all; little, at least, as compared with his stature and his sinewy strength of frame—for all his dragging leg. And he was right in what he had said. Two human beings can bridge those gulfs which our lords and masters have digged for us. That tender shine of a gentle face—that sudden softening and illumination in a hard blue-jowled dial! Well, who cares, after that, who wins the next war? Those two have got to get together!

"I would ask you to come up," she was saying. "But I don't think my uncle is back yet. So you will excuse if——"

She was interrupted, where she stood at the foot of the easy steps. From the arch of the door, there paddled forth to her—scuttled, waddled, pattered—any undignified word will serve—there came a tall

man. He had hair and a beard like wheaten straw, golden and stiff, the kind of man who would stop to comb his hair before escaping from a burning house. He was dressed with extreme elegance. He wore a bowler hat, a long-tailed morning coat of pewter-grey, black trousers, and shoes of a virulent and very dangerous yellow. Captain Benest, who understood clothes, looked at him with indignation.

"Another!" was his only remark.

But the long-tailed, bowler-hatted man was not—was not yet, at all events—of the tribe of him who pavisanded through the Park.

There was no mistake about the urgency of him. He meant every word that he said, and he meant business.

"Gracious young lady! Forgive! I have come to see your high-born uncle. It is a matter of great urgency. We have met before, but in case you should have forgotten, I am Fallwitz—the Doktor Fallwitz! I present myself! But my business with your learned uncle——"

He had to pause and swallow and get hold of himself. As a fashionable physician in a fashionable field of practice, he would have been sure of much success. For, incidentally, he knew his trade. Perhaps it was not entirely his fault that he was weak and silly and venal.

"Please!" he said, while the girl stared at him. "If you could tell me where he is, so that I could go there—so that I could even telephone—for it is—it really is, a matter of life and death."

All this at the foot of the two handsome steps, with the mild traffic of the pleasant street flowing by. The girl looked at Captain Benest. She looked at him

with deliberation and intention. Then she answered the doctor.

" I do not know where he is," she lied.

" Oh ! " the Herr Direktor exclaimed distressfully.

Captain Benest spoke suddenly. But his eyes were on the girl. They captured hers and beat them down, even as a lover must always conquer his love ; a man who is not a master is a slave. He spoke :

" I know where he is," he said. " But I do not see why I shall tell you. You have mentioned a ' matter of life and death ! ' That sounds like rot to me ! If you are a professional man, as you have said you are, you had better make yourself clearer. Much clearer ! "

The tall blond doctor gaped at him. The lean French officer was the man in the case. Cold as the cordial French can be cold, vicious as the kindly French can be vicious, forthright as the easy French can be forthright—the kindliest and the most generous nation in Europe, and the last to play the fool with !

" Well ? "

The tall doctor went to pieces. " *Mein Herr,*" he began. Then again : " *Mein Herr !* "

The captain laughed. He caught the girl's eyes and even they, for that fantastic moment, had an answering spark of mirth. For, by a casual sidelong glance, he had seen and identified him who arrived. Black bag in hand, wide-hatted, paper-white of face, there came the Professor himself.

" Here's your man," said Captain Benest, cheerfully. " Now for the fireworks ! "

" *Ach !* " The tall doctor gasped.

The Professor came abreast of them. You must imagine that stupendous street, decorous and clean

as a corridor in a hotel, flanked by the prim vastness of its buildings, which only wanted a carpet along it to remind one of the main aisle in a cathedral, and the sun flooding it in a great tranquillity of afternoon light. All that solemn, seriously-contrived bigness for a background to the little figure that was like nothing so much as a clothed and dangerous ape! He saw the doctor; he saw his niece and Captain Benest. He saw all that there was to see.

"Fallwitz!"

The tall doctor held out both open hands before him. The Professor blazed at him; "blazed" is the word to describe that shine of fury, that authentic light of hell-fire which showed in the unmoving crust of his face.

"Yes?"

"I *had* to come—to come at once. Herr Professor—there has been a disaster! I could not find you on the telephone. Without your orders I dared not call on the police. Herr Professor—Herr Professor——"

His voice was shrilling, and it was travelling. The buttons of a uniformed porter shone in the shadows of the great hall; there was a sense as of "presences plain in the place", of lift-attendants and messenger-boys and the like.

"*Schweig!*" said the Professor. It means "shut up"; but it is the word one would employ to a noisy dog. "Don't bellow here! Come up; I must hear this!" His vivid eye swept over them. "Come up, all of you!"

Captain Benest smiled. "You put it so nicely Herr Conradi," he said, "that I could not possibly refuse your invitation. I will come up."

The Professor had his snake's eyes on him for an

instant. This is the defect of a snake : it can eat the food which honest beasts transform into vigour and beauty and make of it only venom; but it doesn't know the simple and straightforward thing which a man can do to it with just a stick.

" Yes ! " said the Professor. " We will go up ! "

" *Allons !* " said Captain Benest, cheerfully. In English : " Let's ! "

The elevator shot them up to the third—fourth—fifth floor. Captain Benest did not keep count. A face can do that, a very gentle face just dusted, as it were, with old sorrow and present concern. That is the kind of face which will launch a thousand ships. And God help the topless towers of Ilium !

It was a big handsome flat, very sumptuous indeed in the German manner. There was much carved oak—a great desk, and all that—tortured by the chisel into paroxysms of decoration. The windows of the great front room had leaded panes, splendid and meaningless.

The Professor slammed down his black bag upon the desk and spun round upon them.

" Now ! " he said. " You were talking. What is it all about ? Fallwitz ! Speak up ! "

Captain Benest smiled on him blandly and infuriatingly. It is an old trick, that ! Get your man angry ; get his goat : and he is your meat. He spoke to the girl.

" A chair, *gnädiges Fraülein ?* "

He moved forward. From under the pale bronze of her brows, her eyes answered him with understanding and submission. She sat in the seat he put in place for her.

But the Professor uttered something like a howl.

" What is it ? " he shrilled. " What in the Hell is it. Fallwitz, you fool——"

The tall blond doctor made again that despairing and supplicating gesture, with his shoulders a little bowed and his hands outspread. Captain Benest, standing beside the chair in which the girl sat, looked on. And now he was looking with something more than his mere eyes. He was a gentleman : he wasn't a fool ; and also he was an officer of the Disarmament Commission. Those gentlemen are seldom fools.

And there was something wrong, something bizarre and out of the decent course of events, about the whole thing. The little mean puny sham Professor, standing there, spouting would-be blasphemy like an amateur volcano, while the large, fair man cringed and crouched before him—these things don't happen ! They were happening all the same.

" Now ! " It was the Professor barking. " One of you ! Speak ! "

It was then that it was clear to Captain Benest that he and the girl were supposed to know—*what ?* That they were supposed to have been in talk with the big doctor when the Professor surprised them ; that there *was* something to know.

It was the doctor who blubbered it out. He exploded like a damp squib.

" Escaped ! " was his first word. The Professor made a movement. It was pitiful to see the great face of the doctor, with its tail of yellow beard, and all kind and mild and idiotic, convulsed in an abasement to the little thing before him. He ought obviously to have been feeling the pulse in a slender white wrist and asking ; " Well, and how are we to-day ? "

Instead, he went on :

"It was organised! He had it all organised! Can I help it—can I help it if the guards are out of the room for two minutes? They unstrapped him: the others unstrapped him; the idiots unstrapped him. It was you, Herr Professor, who caused him to be strapped down in the first place. And when the door was opened to admit the guards, he led them out in a rush. There were two men killed, Herr Professor. I must—I am compelled by the law—to do something about it!"

The Herr Professor ceased looking at him. He turned to the nearest leaded casement and stared through it for a little while. They watched him, each through the clouded medium of his or her separate interest. Only one of them, and that the feeblest of them all, was aware that he was looking upon the apparatus and accoutrement of the world of which he was master, which should live or die as he should desire.

He turned back. "Led *them?*" he said abruptly. "How many have you lost?"

At the direct question, the doctor was instantly as supple as a worm.

"Herr Professor, we got them all. All except one! They were hiding in the garden and the farm, stealing our fruit and vegetables. The dead guard, who had been stabbed—somebody must have left a pair of surgical scissors in the ward—or his pocket was picked——"

The Professor spoke one word only.

"Somebody!"

The tall doctor was all but tearful. He tried to explain.

"Herr Professor! There is nothing missing; we have taken an inventory of the instruments! Ours

are all there. Only, Herr Professor, a week ago you did the dressings on an attempted suicide, and possibly, Herr Professor——"

The Herr Professor shook him off with one jerk of his narrow shoulders and one motion of his head.

"*Zo!*" he said slowly. In English it means: "Well, it's like that, is it?"

Captain Benest was listening carefully and in silence; and he had perceived that the Professor had assumed that he and the girl and the poor trivial doctor had been in talk together. Therefore he held his tongue and let loose his ears.

"Herr Professor! They came streaming down the stairs, and they were out into the garden before anyone knew. The second guard was killed in the doorway; they must have trodden him to death! And there they were, when I got the men together"—and his voice rose to a real indignation—"there they were, crouched down in all kinds of places, eating *my* potatoes as if they were peaches! munching them, Herr Professor, as you and I eat fruits!"

There was a picture possible, to lively and humane minds, of pauper lunatics, crouching from pursuit by the big men with the rattan canes, and gnawing the sacred potatoes of the Herr Direktor, having dug them with their hands from the raw earth—that earth which their uncoffined bodies may fertilise, but upon which they may not live.

Captain Benest was aware that the girl stirred slightly in her chair. But she spoke no word. Yet he was aware that she saw what, for a single flashing instant, he saw himself—the miserable broken men, maddened and famished, for whom Christ died in vain, gibbering through the greenery of the garden,

grinning in terror, gobbling in desperate haste, as the avengers with the canes came down upon them.

(" Now, you dog ! " A slash and a scream ! " Got you now, have I ? " A slash and another scream.) Let's leave it ; it's beastly ! But you ought to know that it happens. It happens every day !

The Herr Professor did not indulge in visions.

He spoke.

" It was Andreas Meyer whom you could not catch," he inquired. " *He* escaped."

The tall blond doctor answered pitifully.

" He must have scaled the wall, Herr Professor ! They killed the guard at the room and the other guard at the door ; but the two guards at the gate saw nothing of them."

Benest was very intent.

" *So,*" said the Professor. A little man can be very big when his subject is big enough. The doctor cringed as he turned back from the window. There was in him a manner of judgment formed and fixed, unchallengable and inescapable, the fashion of a small and malicious god.

" It was Andreas Meyer ! " he said. " It would be he, of course ! The man you didn't watch ! Yes ! *I* had him strapped down in the first place ; and *you* suffered him to enlist the idiots to free him and follow him forth ! And now he is walking the world with death widening round him in circles, like water-rings from a stone dropped into a pond. The weapon, the one weapon that leaves the world defenceless in our hands " —unconsciously, in a gesture of illustration, he laid his hand upon his black bag ; Captain Benest saw and marked the movement ; and his faculties, already alert, bristled anew at that word " weapon "—" is

being brandished abroad in the hands of a vengeful idiot."

He was speaking as much to himself as to them.

"Did he steal anything?" he demanded suddenly.

"Er——" the doctor hesitated. "The guard who was killed in the doorway—he had just been paid a month's wages—but his clothes had been rifled." The Professor glared.

"*Vollkommen!*" he said. "Perfect! He has money!"

"But, Herr Professor, if we employ the police, it will be easy to lay hands on him. Think how he was dressed! Just the grey shirt and the blue trousers! He has not even shoes or a hat. And it is easy to describe his appearance! Tall, very thin——"

Captain Benest touched the girl's shoulder in time to restrain her from an exclamation. For the man the doctor went on to describe, stammering his details nervously in face of the other's still stare, was, of course, the creature who had danced past them in the *Tiergarten.*

"No one else in Germany is dressed like that," concluded the doctor, hopefully.

The Professor shook his head slowly. "He will get himself clothes! You don't know him! Somewhere this afternoon there will be found the stripped body of a murdered man; or a house will have been plundered. But he has money—and by God!" A quick excitement lit in him. "I know where he will be this evening! I know! Seven o'clock was always his hour, and he will return there like a bee to its hive! You heard how he spoke of it this morning?"

The doctor looked as vacant and helpless as he was.

"Dressler's, fool!" cried the Professor. "I have

eaten with him there a hundred times! It was his habit, ground into the groove along which his failing mind travelled to its disaster. You fed him on carrion and sewage, rammed into him as they stuff a Strasburg goose. And he remembered Dressler's. Now, I will call up—no, I will go myself! You will come, too. I need powers for this! Where is that damned hat? Ah!"

He found it where he had thrown it. There was a distraction in all his manner; there are ways of pushing a man of stone off his balance and his pedestal. Not once did he look with conscious consideration upon Benest and the girl, wordless and watchful where they were. Power had gone out of his hands; long and steady purpose had been frustrated; an idea, vast as the Creation it was conceived to dominate, had been spilled abroad. His idea! No one else's! and he was a "man of science!"

"Come!" he cried, and charged at the door, carrying the black hat in his hand. And the big straw-coloured doctor, who had not relinquished his bowler, trotted obediently at his heels.

Captain Benest and the girl looked after them. She had risen, had made one step forward, and then he had caught her arm and instantly she had stood still in a quietude of submission. He did not release her when the two men had plunged through the door; the clatter of their feet upon the stairs—they had not waited for the lift—died away. And still she stood, unresisting in his hold.

But Captain Benest's brain was working. He was a Frenchman; he could love and think at the same time. They had been forgotten—and by the Professor, who appeared to him the kind of man who did not habitually forget. During his training, he had met

men of that type, if not of that virulence; men for whom nothing was complete if a factor were missing, who counted all the factors. That meant, pretty plainly, that something more than merely urgent, something desperate, something fateful, was in the doing. And further, the black bag, that which the Professor had automatically reached forth to touch when the word "weapon" was mentioned, had also been left behind.

He let the girl go, crossed the floor behind her and closed the door. He came back; she had not stirred.

"Fraülein," he said. He was very grave. "I do not know what you think of the strange chance of our meeting. Me, I do not believe in chance. The war had to happen in order that we might meet; my family and your brother had to die before we could meet. It all happened and we met. We shall meet again, of course. We will meet of ourselves; we cannot invoke again all that tremendous machinery to bring us together. But now, I have a question which I *must* ask you. You permit?"

He took her silence for consent. "It is this," he said. "We heard that conversation together, between your uncle and the doctor. And we have seen that poor terrible creature in the park. I did not understand the full significance of all that was said; it was only suggested to me that something was in preparation—perhaps some such eruption of hell as took your brother away from you, and all my family from me. Can you tell me anything which can help to stop all that?"

He waited; she stood where he had left her when he went to close the door. But she did not yet speak. He waited; then:

"I do not ask you to betray your country. I am sure you are not a traitress; but it seemed to me that this was not just a question of France and Germany. It seemed so to me—something dire and universal, something aimed not at France or England or America, but at mankind! At all the brothers, and all the fathers and mothers and little sisters in the world! I am wrong, perhaps; if that is so, will you not at least tell me that I am wrong?"

It was a quiet place; in that great *salon* the noise of the traffic in the street far below was no more than a hum. He waited. He knew more than to speak further; and beyond that, he did not wish to speak further.

Very suddenly she looked up. There was a pallor on the good sun-tan upon her face. She moved a slow hand, as though with great effort, to point at the black bag where it sat, in its squalor and disrepair, like a pauper lunatic in a great and sumptuous asylum, upon the polished surface of the great desk.

"Take that!" she said. Her voice was no more than a gasp. "It's all there." She paused to recover herself. "I only know what I have chanced to overhear. There is poison in it—I do not know the right word; but it is poison for all the world! And the remedy is there too! Take that!"

The Captain nodded very slowly. "Yes!" he said. "I knew it was there—whatever it is! I knew it when I saw his face as he stroked it. We'll have a look at it!"

The bag was locked, but cracked patent leather tears easily and Captain Benest had strong fingers. Fat-bodied phials, with labels upon them, lettered in minute handwriting with chemical or pharmaceutical formulæ, each wadded into a loop sewn into the lining of the case! Four of them!

The girl moved beside him to look also.

"This, then——?"

"Yes," she said. "Some are death—certain, widespread death! You heard what they said. I do not know which is which, but one is life. And they will deal them out as they please."

He stood frowning. "Who are 'they'?" he asked.

"I do not know," she answered. "Only—if there is any way to stop it—to stop what will happen——"

"There's a way to stop it," he interrupted briskly. "There are a dozen—twenty—a hundred ways to stop it. There is publicity; and there is *expert* analysis—the most expert in the world—in a Paris laboratory. I'll take all this to Paris to-night."

"You——" she spoke very slowly—"you will go to Paris to-night?"

"To-night," he answered.

She nodded. "A diplomatic passport; it will be easy."

She knew the manner in which he was looking at her, though she did not raise her eyes to his. They had known each other for about six queer hours.

"And we shall not meet again," he said.

She did not answer that. "Because," he went on, "we shall not part."

She glanced up for an instant.

"One leg, not a hero, not very rich and a Frenchman! Knocked you down in the street and robbed your uncle! Leaving for Paris to-night and not coming back! There you have it all. Will you go with me?"

There was a silence of some seconds; and then she raised her eyes to his, eyes of a very pale blue, where now there burned a soft fire.

"I will go anywhere with you," she answered.

THE DARK RIDE

WHERE the lily-ponds lay in a chain of little willow-bordered lakes at the far edge of the great park, the Countess of Marydean and her two daughters were reaching the end of an honest afternoon's work . Of the latter, Lady Joyce had been trying to make a cradle of bulrushes that would float ; a limp and water-sodden doll was witness of her ill-success ; and Lady Joan, having given up hopes of a sailing boat, which lay becalmed twenty feet out, had been building houses with mud, fished from under the grass bank. The Countess had been assistant and general labourer to them both ; she kneeled on the grass now, dabbling mud-stained fingers in the water ; and all three were happy and dirty and damp.

It was nearing the close of a soft and sunny day of earliest spring ; the boughs of the willows were studded with fluffy green buds, but most of the trees that stood about the park and lined the long avenue showed only a lacework of bare branches. A thicket of evergreens, laurel and fir and holly, lay black across the middle distance, and over it, a mile from where the three laboured in play beside the lily-ponds, the roofs and towers of the great house, whose two hundred and forty windows looked upon no land but its own, stood against the colourless sky like the outline of a city. There was evening in the air.

Joan, flat on her stomach on the grass, excavated two more dripping handfuls of building material ; she arose with a further supply smeared on the said

stomach. She was a plump, deliberate child of five, much accustomed to profit by her position as the youngest member of the family. The Countess laughed at her reprovingly.

"Oh, Joan!" she cried. "You little pig! Look at you!"

Joan desisted from her splashy and sticky architecture to survey her mother with eyes of critical reprisal.

"Oh mummy!" she retorted. "An' look at you!"

The Countess glanced down in mock dismay at her own wet and muddy skirt. That was the moment when Joyce, rescuing the infant Moses for about the eleventh time, stepped into the water and was submerged to the knee.

"An' look at her!" commented Joan ere she fell to work again.

The Countess jumped to her feet.

"But what about catching colds and things?" she cried. "It's hot baths and hot milk for all of us as soon as we can get to them. Besides, babies—listen!"

She held up a finger; they all raised their heads to listen; and out of the distance came to them two mellow notes from the clock above the stables.

"*Now* we'll catch it!" said the Countess. "It's half-past five, and nurse will be simply furious. No, Joyce, let poor Moses have a rest, and one of the men will get Joan's boat. We must simply scurry home as fast as we can, and we'll go the short way through the thicket."

Both children looked at her, interested at once in this new project. Joyce's eyes, dark with dreams, were wide and eager.

"The Dark Ride, mummy?" she queried. "Oh, let's!"

"Well, hurry up, then," urged the Countess. "And I'll carry all these things."

She stooped to gather up their litter of apparatus, the garments of Moses, the reel of string that should have safeguarded Joan's boat and the like. She was deft and swift in all her movements as a girl of eighteen, small and slender of body, with fair hair, now disordered about a pretty and mirthful face. She had as little the look of the mother of Joan and seven-year-old Joyce as she had of the lady of those many magnificent acres, the heiress to the traditions of a line of august gentlewomen famous in history. She had come hither, upon her marriage, from a childhood spent in as splendid a frame elsewhere; and there was still not a peeress in Europe who could play so convincingly with children on the edge of a muddy pool.

"And now, wash-ward ho!" she commanded, her right arm full of the gear she had gathered up, and reaching down her left for Joan to drag by. Joyce held to a fold of her skirt, carrying Moses by a leg. "Come on with you," she said, and they set off across the sward where the daffodils were going to sleep in golden galaxies.

The swift spring evening darkened over them as they went, and the mass of the thicket hid the line of the great house's lighted windows. The "Dark Ride" showed as a blacker streak upon the black bulk of it; it was no more than a neglected path, overarched with branches and dating from the time when the thicket had been a wood. The wonder of it consisted for the children in the fact that it was

roofed with green from end to end, a tunnel or a cave as the make-believe of the moment required.

Joan let go her hold upon the helping hand suddenly and sat down forthwith.

" Tired ! " she announced with calm.

" Oh, you bad baby ! " smiled the Countess. " Get up, Joan, and come home. We'll soon be there now, and mummy will tow you along."

" Tired ! " replied Joan, with a note of insistence.

" You little lazybones ! " protested the Countess. " D'you mean to say I've got to carry you ? Get up at once, Joan ! Oh, all right then ! "

She stooped. Adjusting her bundles of other burdens—she did not transfer any of these to Joyce—she gathered the soft body of Joan expertly to her bosom, but high up so that her shoulder took its share of the weight, and rose.

" Who'd sell a farm and buy a baby ? " she demanded cheerily. " Joan, I think they feed you on shot, like the Jumping Frog. Come on, Joy ! "

They entered the Dark Ride ; as they passed from the deepening twilight without to the dense shadows of the thicket, where the trunks of trees were invisible and ahead, where the path turned, there was only blackness, Joyce put out a hand and again laid hold of a fold of the stout tweed skirt. The Countess felt the touch.

" Nervy, Joy ? " she asked, and her tones carried her unseen and comforting smile to the child. " There's nothing here worse than this lazy Joan, you know."

" Aren't lazy," came in a murmur from the hollow of neck where Joan's face was reposing.

" No," said Joyce ; " I was just thinking. S'posing, mummy, that instead of coming out the other side by

the lawns, with the terrace in front of us, we was to come out somewhere else—somewhere we'd never seen before, and couldn't get back!"

"It would be beastly!" said the Countess. "You dreamer, Joy! Oh, do keep still, Joan; it's like carrying a ton of monkeys in a sack!"

For all her littleness and slenderness, she had the strength and clean muscles accustomed to out-door sports; but Joan was an awkward load. At the bend of the way, where the path was blackest, she kicked a tree-root that grew across the way and hurt her foot; and soon she was breathing hard and fighting to get on to the open where she could put Joan down, and if need be, send Joyce to summon one of the regiment of servants to complete the portage.

"Two minutes more!" she told herself doggedly; already she could see through the tunnel-mouth of the path the lights of the long house-front. She could, of course, have put the child down where she was and rested; it was only the fanatic sportsmanship which is the creed of her kind and class that held her true to her goal of getting out first. She had a moment's giddiness; the lights blurred and swam before her; then the ground under her feet hardened and there was free and open air about her. She bent to put Joan down.

"You're too heavy, baby," she said, panting. "Mummy must rest."

She was bending over the child, Joyce at her side still holding to her skirt, when someone, passing hastily, brushed roughly against her, thrust her to one side, and passed on. She heard the snarl of an impatient oath as she staggered from the impact, and turned in amazement to see who had passed. Joyce crowded

closer and clung to her as if in alarm: Joan began to cry feebly.

The man who had bumped against her was receding —no more than a black and hurrying shape. But now it was not at him she looked. Her recent giddiness of fatigue and the dazzle of her senses were clearing from her; she saw with unfogged eyes. But it was not upon the majestic and many-windowed front of Marydean Court that she gazed, with the ancient velvet of its lawns about it and its sweep of stone-flagged terrace before it; upon her other hand was no longer the tangle of the thicket through which she had hurried, carrying Joan.

It seemed, instead, that she stood upon the corner of a street that stretched away to either hand in a raggedly-lit vista of dull street-lamps and mean shop-fronts, a street of that feeble squalid commerce which is native to the poor quarters of a great city. A great public-house was spangled with bright lights a hundred yards away, and about its doors, men and women were wrangling and shouting.

She stared, aghast and uncomprehending; and then suddenly, like the pain with which a surgical patient comes back to consciousness from unconsciousness, and with a very sickness of horror, she realised that she knew the place, had long known it familiarly. The little shop at her elbow was where she was wont to buy such vegetables as she required; where Marydean Court had fronted its park, there was a row of other shops.

"Want to go home!" whimpered Joan, and Joyce seconded with a tired pull at her skirt.

She looked down at them wildly, by the light of the corner-lamp under which they stood.

"Babies," she began distractedly. "I'm——" She ceased. They were looking up to her with little wind-reddened, weary faces, Joyce, the slender, upright child, upon whom delicate clothes sat as aptly as the rose in her cheeks or the blue in her eyes, sniffed dejectedly in a shabby black frock and shivered in the wind that cut along the street; Joan, the debonair, the dominant, the handsomely solid and rotund, was squat and shaky at her feet, blubbering weakly, and also horrid in black. She herself was black-clad, in things rusty and ill-made; they were a shabby and mournful group in keeping with the sadness and unloveliness of the street that made their background.

And she knew them—there was the sick horror again; she knew them like that.

"Want to go home!" cried Joan, in a hoarse wail.

She was frightened, uncertain, bewildered; but at that cry she stooped again and lifted the heavy baby. And when she had done so she began to walk, and was conscious that she knew her way and whither she was going.

"I'm dreaming," she did not cease to tell herself. "I fainted and I'm dreaming." Yet, ere she turned out of the street to the dreary road that joined it at right angles, she had ceased to say it. Whatever manner of base miracle it was, was closing in on her.

The road along which she went was to decent and sane architecture what the louse and the liver-fluke are to the animal creation. Two rows of houses, built of soot-hued brick and each attached to its neighbours on either hand, fronted each other across it; each had an unsavoury basement area railed off from the footpath, and three pinched storeys above. And all, in their depression and dilapidation, in a general

quality of slattern poverty, had the air of having fallen from an original low estate to a yet lower one. It was upon the two dirty front steps of one of these—she had known it !—that she set Joan down.

She was not struggling ; something was shepherding her along, giving her knowledge that was not hers and she let it guide her till she should find somewhere where she could be at rest to think and fight for her life—the life that was properly hers. There was a key in the worn bag she carried in her hand ; with it she opened the door and led the children in.

There was a narrow hall, fœtid with the smell of greasy cooking that rose like a miasma from the basement ; narrow stairs ascended at the end of it, carpetless and dirty ; Joyce, dragging her feet miserably, went towards them at once and began to ascend. Above there was talking and a sudden hoarse laugh as coarse as an obscenity. Helping Joan, she commenced to climb too, acknowledging each new disgust she came to as one recognises a thing one has for a while forgotten.

She had to go to the top floor ; she knew that. Upon the landing of the second, a room-door was open, and at the sound of their foot-falls a man in his shirt sleeves came and leaned against the door-post. At sight of him she was aware of a sensation that at first seemed new, but was very soon familiar—the shrinking and weakness of actual fear. He was a youngish man with a face at once fat and predatory, like a beast of prey that has been overfed. Under his strongly-hooked nose there was a moustache like a broad black smear ; under that again, his mouth and his intolerable smile were wide and moist and red.

"Evenin'," he said. "Want a 'and to carry that kid up?"

She replied with a vague murmur of refusal and tried to hurry past to the next flight of stairs. He strode out and intercepted her; she stepped back against the flimsy hand-rail. Above them, Joyce turned and stood looking down on them.

He was grinning at her; this was his daily sport; but his eyes did not cease to be avid.

"Kid's too 'eavy for you," he said. "Lemme stick it upstairs an' then I'll come back an' 'ave a little chat with you. I got some'ing to tell you—honest, I 'ave."

"Please let me pass," she begged nervously. "I'm late and—and you're frightening the baby."

Fortunately Joan did begin to cry again. The man swore and made as though to kick at the child. She snatched it up and darted past him.

"Wait till I ketch you by yerself!" he called after her mockingly.

She came, trembling, panting and soothing Joan, into the two rooms that she knew were "home." The one into which she entered first was a bedroom converted to the uses of a kitchen by the installation of a gas-stove; the inner room had a single large bed. Here she laid Joan on the bed, covering her with a worn travelling rug which served as a counterpane, watched for a moment while the cold, tired baby-face drooped to a doze, then gathered up the bundle she had carried and went back to the front room.

Little Joyce, with the uninterested manner of old habit, had lit the gas-stove and put a kettle to boil. In that other life, Joyce had never struck a match; she had been guarded from them like a holy relic

from sacrilege. There was an old, creaky rocking-chair in the room and the weary, scared woman sat down and watched the shabby, clumsy child set forth cups and plates.

"There's half a loaf of bread, mummy," said Joyce. "But we'll want some more tea for the morning."

"Shall we, dear? I'll—I'll get some."

Joyce looked round at her. The children of poverty are not beautiful, and Joyce had neither complexion, expression, nor grace. But to her mother, staring at her, it seemed as though in the child's face there gleamed at that moment, as it were, a reflection from the elfin beauty of the lost Joyce.

"It isn't like this at Marydean Court, is it, mummy?" she said quite clearly.

Her mother uttered a cry and sprang up. She caught the child towards her, a hand on either thin shoulder.

"Marydean Court! Joyce, what do you mean? You don't—you can't——"

But even as she spoke she knew what was coming and calmed herself lest she should frighten Joyce.

"Marydean Court, Mummy—the lovely stories you made up about us. You remember, mummy, the night we couldn't get any lodgings, and we sat all night on a bench in the Square! All about the park, and the big nurseries, and Mullins the butler, and the lovely things to eat! And, instead of Mrs. Dean, you were Lady Marydean, and I was Lady Joyce. Don't you remember?"

"I remember now." The answer was a low one. She sat down again.

So that was it—a tale that she had invented, drugging childish minds with the pulp of dreams

against their bodily hunger and distress, till it had become real to them, and, at last, overwhelmingly real to her.

She recalled the night of which Joyce had spoken, when, able to drag and carry them no farther, she had wrapped them in her coat and tried to make the adventure seem gay to them. And since at first they could not sleep, and were scared and uneasy, she had built against the background of the unfriendly night that structure of magnificent security, of splendour and plenty and beauty, while they listened and demanded details—" And what do I wear, mummy ? " —and forgot their trouble.

Since then, they had demanded the tale again and again ; it was to them what the nurseries, the comfort, and pleasantness of Marydean Court had been to that other Joyce and Joan.

But if it had seemed real to them for an hour or two, how real had it seemed to her—how real was it now in her memory ! She could trace the way in her mind, step by step, through the outer hall where the visitors' book lay, to the great inner hall, with its vast hearth and silver fire-dogs, and the Gainsborough portrait of a dead-and-gone countess smiling from over the mantel ; thence up the great staircase, wide as a coach-road, and by the right-hand branch, where it forked to the gallery, above where the stands of armour stood for ever at attention ; and so, by the south gallery, to the great quiet space of her bedroom, where an open door beyond gave a white-and-silver glimpse of her bathroom. And scores of other rooms ; she could have made an inventory of their contents and their fittings, from the billiard-room, with its prints, to the private chapel.

But as she glanced about her she knew she had but to think and she could make an inventory of these rooms, too.

"Oh!" It was a cry, strong and despairing, for all she made no sound. "These babies—I mustn't go mad! I mustn't go mad!"

She rose, pressed her hands to her temples a moment, and crossed the room.

"Joyce," she said, "will you just pass a sponge over baby's hands and face, and I'll make the tea. And if there's any jam left, we'll have that, too."

Joyce went to obey. Her mother laid the filled teapot aside and crossed the room to its one picture. It was a cheap, enlarged photograph of a young man in the uniform of a second lieutenant, a pleasant, ordinary, open-faced youth, composed to an unreal nonchalance before the camera. She gazed at it earnestly. This had been Dick, her husband, slaughtered in France; it was upon her pension as his widow that she and the children lived.

"Dick!" she said to it softly. "I'm carrying on, Dick!"

A thought struck in her mind. While she gave the children their food she spoke of it.

"I wonder if there's a letter for me downstairs," she said. "I must run down afterwards and see."

Joyce looked up intelligently.

"Is it the pension, mummy?" she asked.

"Yes; the papers ought to have come yesterday; but they didn't. But they're probably all right."

They had need to be. Her stock of money was reduced to a very few small coins, and there must be no hitch about the rent. Though she paid monthly in advance, she counted as a bad tenant compared to

a street-walker who would pay four times as much, or a man who could be plundered with small charges for "extras."

When the pitiful meal was over, she put the cups and the plates into the pail in which she would presently wash them up, arranged Joan upon the bed again, with Joyce in charge, and went down to inquire about the letter.

She tip-toed carefully past the door on the landing below, but it was half-shut and the man she dreaded did not appear. No letter lay on the mat in the hall below, and she made her way down to the heat and reek of the basement kitchen where her landlady had her habitation. Timidly she knocked upon its door and opened it upon a cry from within.

The stench of the room hit her in the face. Some culinary alchemy had recently been taking place, and wreaths of smoke wandered in the dead air below the whining gas-jet. At the table, in the middle of the room, with a mess of food before her and a bottle at her elbow, sat Mrs. Cramp, the landlady.

"Oh, it's you!" was her greeting. "An' what might *you* want 'ere? Letter? 'Ow should I know?"

She was not a tall woman, but she was vast, with redundant chin and overflowing bosom, a huge and gross carcase swaddled in greasy and unbuttoned clothes. Her hair was dragged back into a tight little knot that crowned her like a mouldering pompom; and in the red and furious face, aglow like a malevolent moon, the eyes were those of a rabid pig.

The other shrank back, daunted, but Mrs. Cramp recalled her.

"But 'ere! Since you *are* 'ere where you got no

business, what abaht that there rent ? Doo yesterday it was. What abaht it, eh ? "

" That's why I was looking for a letter," the younger woman explained. " It's—it's my pension papers. Perhaps they'll come by the last post, and then——"

The creature at the table interrupted with a noise like a hoarse yell.

" To blazes with your pension ! " she screeched. " What I want's my money, an' I ain't goin' to wait, neither ! Pension ! Livin' orf a dead man's flesh—that's what I call it ! " Her little eyes lit suddenly with another light than anger. Now, perhaps, she might get rid of her tenant. Lodgings never stood empty an hour in those days.

" I ain't goin' to wait, d'ye hear ? " she said. " I'm comin' up now an' I'm goin' to 'ave my lawful money. Out o' this, you——"

The younger woman fell back from the door. It was not the epithet ; she had been called that before. This was another terror. She turned and ran up the stairs. Behind her she heard Mrs. Cramp laugh direfully and drink noisily from her bottle.

She was going, now, blindly, with no precaution to be unheard, and possibly the man on the second floor took this for encouragement. At any rate, there he was, with his damp scarlet smile, waiting for her on the landing. She was making small moaning sounds as she climbed, the wordless voice of fear and helplessness.

" My, whatever's the matter ? " he asked in his oily and mocking voice, confronting her so that again she could not pass.

She could not answer, and unwisely, she tried to thrust him aside and get away. As her arm came

against him, he misunderstood—perhaps! For the sake of his rotting soul, let us hope that he did.

Her movement of defence culminated in arms that surrounded her, pinning down her own. His face, bland as a sweet-tasting poison, was close to her own. She could struggle only feebly.

"Now, girlie!"—he was oozing horrid endearments. "I got you now! Only kid you want carried is yourself, eh? Right! . . . I'll carry yer!"

He was trying to lift her, panting heavily. She fought at him with all that was left of her powers. Her voice, that she aimed at a scream, came only in squeaky whispers. "Let me go! How—dare you?"

Why shouldn't he dare? He was in no danger. Anyone can affront and oppress a poor widow with young children. It is the safest of indoor sports.

"Goin' to 'ave a kiss, any'ow!" he said, breathing hard. "Stand-off, touch-me-not li'l devil, you are; but now I'm goin' to 'ave—a kiss!"

His face, like a monstrous, gay-hued fungus, bent towards hers. She laid her head back, willing to die ere he should have his wish. But the wet, blood-red lips came nearer; she could fight no further from them; and the wetness of the kiss descended on the corner of her mouth like poison deposited there. She had no voice to call to God; but: "Dick!" she breathed. "Dick!"

He heard and his arms slackened.

"Now, there's a little darling!" he said unctuously. "All right between us now, ain't it, girlie? *But 'ow did you know my name was Dick?*"

Wave upon wave, tide upon tide, of despair, hatred, anger and impotence crashed over her. How could

she speak and blast him? His arms were yet about her; his kiss was a cancer on her lips. From behind her, on the stairs, came aid in the dress of disaster.

"Break aw'y—break aw'y!" It was the harsh and ribald voice of Mrs. Cramp. She was there, leaking through her clothes like some horrid oil through the seams of a bilge cask.

"'Ere's goin's on, I *don't* think! Don't pay no rent; oh, no! Waitin' for her pension, she is; an' w'ile she's waitin', she starts gallivantin' with my lodgers! This 'ere's a respectable 'ouse, an' don't you forget it, my gal. Now, you goin' to pay me my rightful rent, or you goin' to pack out o' 'ere, 'fore I fetches a p'leeceman?"

She did not see the frightful wink to the man that accompanied the speech nor his wink in answer. He had let her go, and she had fallen back against the wall of the landing, her arm across her soiled face. She could neither speak nor see.

"Well, which is it?"

She strove with herself; she had to answer.

"To-morrow——" she began to murmur feebly.

"Termorrer!" Mrs. Cramp's derisive bellow echoed in the well of the staircase. "You'll go *now*, this instant minute, mark you!" The younger woman did not move, could not move. "'Ere, I'll soon 'eave the kids out o' that!"

She made a step towards the upper flight of stairs. It needed only that to galvanise her hapless tenant into life. She was on the stairs before Mrs. Cramp and fled up them while the man and woman lumbered at her heels.

Within her rooms, she was breathlessly swift. Joyce was sitting beside the bed on which Joan dozed.

"Quick, Joy!" she cried. "Hat and cape, darling! Oh, be ever so quick! They're coming to turn us out!"

She snatched up the heavy baby, waking her as she did so, and commenced to cram it into such outdoor clothes as she possessed. Joyce gave her one look pitifully, tragically shrewd, and started to dress herself. The door of the outer room slammed open, and through it like a tank rolling into action, advanced Mrs. Cramp. Behind her, alight with interest and pleasure, came that creature of God's making, the man from the second floor.

"Yus, get yer kids an' hustle 'em out o' this!" vociferated Mrs. Cramp. "But you don't take nothin' else—not a particle o' nothin' else you don't take!" The mother was endeavouring to wrap Joan in the old rug. "Lea' go o' that!" screeched Mrs. Cramp, and she dropped it. "An that!" Mrs. Cramp, with a grab, snatched the worn handbag from her and exulted at the weak jingle from within. "Money!" she triumphed. "I'll keep that on account! An' now, out yer go!"

The young woman, holding the heavy baby in her arms, paused. She had no resources; but in the last moment her eyes yet turned to that photograph on the wall. A second they dwelt on it and her lips moved. There was no sound, but—"I'm carrying on, Dick!" they shaped.

Mrs. Cramp's outcries pursued them down the stairs.

Upon the bottom flight Joyce stumbled and fell a couple of steps.

"Don't cry, darling!" said her mother. "I'd carry you, too, if I could. Help mummy and just come along!"

" But—where to, mummy ? "

Her voice was plaintive with tears. There was need for a magic to hearten her. Mrs. Cramp above was mouthing loud violence behind her.

" Marydean Court, of course ! " answered the mother cheerily. " Where else, Joy ? "

And it seemed that at that name of charm, even Mrs. Cramp was silenced. Her outcries dwindled ; they passed in comparative peace to the darkness of the street and turned towards the main road.

Within, Mrs. Cramp had a word with her gentleman friend.

" 'Ear that ? " she asked. " Some'ing abaht ' Marydean ', she said. Didn't you 'ear it ? "

" Go on ! " The man from the second floor laughed. " That's 'er name, that is—Mary Dean ! "

" Oh ! " Mrs. Cramp was enlightened but only half relieved. " Any'ow, it's a Marydean—Earl o' Marydean—that owns all this property ; an' I can't afford no mistakes o' that kind. Give me a reg'lar turn to 'ear 'er, it did ! "

At the corner of the street, where the nameplate, the cleanest thing in all its length, showed its white lettering, " Darkride Street," to the shine of the street lamp, there was an august and inscrutable policeman, very large and massive in his helmet and long blue great-coat. Him the tired woman accosted.

" If you please," she began timidly. The pillar of the State turned towards her. " Can you tell me where I can go to-night ? I've nowhere to sleep, and I've got these two children, and——"

" Got any money ? " he enquired briefly.

"N—no ! " she answered.

" Down the street, then," he answered, pointing.

" Second turning to the right ; then 'alf a mile on an' you'll come to the Union."

She was unwilling to understand him.

" The—Union ? " she queried.

" Yes, Workhouse—the poorhouse ! " he explained. " That's your best chance ; 'fact, it's the only chance you got, 'cept walkin' about all night."

She thanked him and moved away numbly. She had not gone three paces when he stopped her.

" 'Ere ! " he said, holding out his hand. " Take it—coffee-stall on the corner. G'night t'ye ! "

It was a shilling he thrust into her free hand ere he stalked away, superb, aloof from the weaknesses and misfortunes of mankind.

The coffee-stall on the corner gave two cups of hot milk and one of watery tea for ninepence ; there was likewise a slice of sandy cake for Joyce and another for Joan, and still a penny left over. A snivelling old beggar tried to cadge from the stall-keeper and was ordered off with an oath ; she bestowed upon him that last penny. And at last they were facing the final stage on the way to the workhouse.

It was the ultimate fall : this time they would touch the social bottom. Perhaps *they* would even take the babies away from her.

" Dick ! " she was praying to the darkness, voicelessly, " be with us now if you can, or else we're all alone. I must do it, Dick, or they'd sleep to-night as cold as you, my Dick. I must do it ! "

The interminable street went slowly under their feet ; and at last it was at hand—the great temple of charity that burns and disgraces like a brand. The upper storeys of it were dark, save for a window here and there, behind which some paid dispenser of

alms took his leisure; but below there were many lights.

"Is it here, mummy?" asked Joyce.

She did not answer. There was a wide entrance, a formal threshold across which she must commit herself. Tears half blinded her; she could make out only the glass door and the shapes that guarded it. With a heart that beat hurtfully, she turned in. The child in her arms was suddenly an intolerable burden, the child at her skirt dragged like a fetter. She put a hesitating hand to the door. Someone within swung it open before she could push it. She heard Joyce sigh deeply. . . .

"His lordship was enquiring for you, my lady," said the familiar voice of Mullins, the butler.

Then arms were about her and Joan was lifted away; she looked through the fog that was on her. There was the double door to the inner hall; there was the visitor's book on the antique lectern; and bending over her was the face of all faces most beloved.

"You've been carrying that lazy, fat rascal," he was saying. "Darling, you're not a—not an elephant, y'know."

"Dick!" she breathed.

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