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Madeline of The Desert

By Authur Weigall

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TO
"THE LITTLE DOCTOR"

E. D. M.

IN GRATEFUL REMEMBRANCE OF HIS
SKILL, HIS KINDLINESS, AND
HIS FRIENDSHIP

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Madeline of
The Desert

PART I

CHAPTER I

THE SANCTUARY IN THE DESERT

THE blazing orb of the Egyptian sun had passed down behind the rugged hills of the Western Desert when Father Gregory, tall and gaunt, dismounted from his donkey at the gate of the little whitewashed building which stood amongst the palms and tamarisks at the foot of the cliffs. Looking eastwards, his eye followed the thin line of the path along which he had ridden, as it trailed down from the desert, now deep in the shadow of the Theban hills, into the vivid fields of the Nile Valley, where the sun still flooded the scene with a golden splendour; and thence through a straggling native village down to the banks of the river. Beyond the silent expanse of the water he could see, in the far distance, the houses of the little town of Luxor bathed in sunlight ; and his gaze dwelt for a moment on the columns of the ancient temple which seemed to stand in disdainful majesty above the ramshackle cluster of the modern buildings. Behind the town and its palm groves stretched the desert again, with its range of peaked hills, pink and saffron and violet in the haze of the late afternoon.

Father Gregory was a man of over sixty years of age ; and the ride down to the Luxor ferry and back, as well as an hour's shopping in the sun scorched bazaars, had fatigued him considerably. With a sigh of relief, he handed the reins to his

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diminutive Egyptian sais, who appeared, as by magic, from behind the bend of the whitewashed wall; and, detaching his parcels from the hump of the red-leather saddle, pushed open the heavy wooden door and passed into the seclusion of the court beyond.

The little domain consisted of a range of rooms opening on to this square courtyard, in the middle of which there was an old Byzantine wellhead sheltering under a tamarisk. The rooms were protected from the sun by a series of small whitewashed domes supported upon rough pillars, these forming a kind of cloister along the four sides of the square ; and opposite the main entrance an open archway led into a small garden surrounded by a high whitewashed wall, wherein grew palms, hibiscus, roses, and many a luxuriant flower. At the far side of this well-kept plantation stood a little chapel, also whitewashed, up the walls of which climbed a vivid mass of purple bougainvillea; and behind its domed roof the towering cliffs formed a rugged and tremendous background to the placid scene.

In this quiet retreat, from which the racket and bustle of the restless world was shut out, and news of high events penetrated only with the weekly newspapers, themselves ten days old, Father Gregory lived every year from October to March. As he crossed the Mediterranean on his journey from England each autumn, flights of migratory birds could be seen hastening in the same direction away from the approaching winter; and when, in the late spring, he returned to his native land there passed above him these same adventurous companies seeking the temperate summer of the North.

Throughout his life, from the days when, as an unknown young member of a famous preaching order of the Anglican Church, he had spread the Gospel of his Master in the slums of London, to the

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time when the fame of his eloquence and the sweetness of his character had brought him to an almost unequalled position of influence and power in the religious life of the metropolis, he had worked humbly but strenuously in the interests of the poor ; and when at last the high temporal reward of his labours was offered to him, the astonishment of his colleagues was unbounded at the announcement that he had declined the dignity and was retiring from active work.

Soon after his retirement he had visited Egypt, and, while staying at Luxor, had acquired the plot of ground upon which he presently built his little settlement; and now he was residing here, for the third winter in succession, at the foot of the immemorial hills of Thebes, aloof from the affairs of man, his mind immersed in a calm and serene contemplation, and his inward eyes looking with quiet gaze towards that horizon of hope whence should come the salvation of the world.

Four or five men usually lived with him in this retreat : some of them archaeologists whose work lay amongst the adjacent ruins of the ancient necropolis, and others painters or men engaged upon some piece of literary or scientific work which necessitated quiet study. And upon the minds of this company of thoughtful men the ascetic figure of Father Gregory exercised an unconscious and yet commanding influence, bringing an atmosphere of contentment and calm into their daily affairs, and at the same time stimulating them in their work by the magnetism of his personality.

Crossing the courtyard, he now entered his simple bedroom and sat himself down in the wicker armchair to rest. The walls of the room were whitewashed and unadorned by pictures; the floor was covered by rough grass matting; the furniture was of the simplest ; but upon the table and the

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sill of the window great bunches of roses were placed, which gave colour and fragrance to the room. Through the open doorway he could hear the murmur of conversation in the common room on the opposite side of the courtyard ; but he did not feel in the mood to join the young men. He wished first to sit still in the solitude of his room, and to allow the soothing influence of his desert home to draw its gentle veil over the unrest of his brain; for his occasional visits to Luxor always disturbed the quiet landscape of his mind, and discovered to him many pathways of thought which he had believed to be obliterated. Today, as he was standing in the hall of the huge Nile Palace, he had caught an annoying glimpse of the outside world. It was December, and there were a number of visitors in the hotel; and he had distinctly overheard the whisper which passed from group to group as he was recognized.

After all, the position which he had abandoned had had its advantages ; and, to a man of his energetic temperament, it was no little matter that he had swung aside from the forceful current of affairs, and had passed into the silent backwater where now he rested from his public labours. The strength and energy which he had for so long employed in the vast work of the Church had been deliberately tamed and diverted, for the greater part of each year, to the cultivation of his little garden and to the fatherly supervision of his small settlement. The mental effort which had been expended upon the addresses delivered to crowded congregations was now concentrated no longer upon teaching but upon learning, no longer upon explanation but upon research. Here in this recess of the desert - a place the selection of which he believed to be due to a higher guidance - he was bringing himself into relation with the eternal equity ; and it was

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distressing to him to find that a brief return to the world, such as he had this day experienced, should still be able to cast a cloud across the serenity of his ascetic life.

He arose from his chair, and having shut the door of his room, knelt down by his bedside, and buried his face in his thin hands. For some moments no thoughts formed themselves in his brain ; but at length the oft-repeated prayer of the sainted Thomas a Kempis entered the domain of his memory, and with passionate fervour he repeated the beautiful words

" Grant me, O most loving Lord, to rest in Thee above all creatures, above all health and beauty, above all glory and honour, above all power and dignity, above all knowledge and subtilty, above all riches and art, above all fame and praise, above all sweetness and comfort, above all hope and promise, above all gifts and favours, above all jubilee that the mind of man can receive and feel, above all that Thou art not, O my God. For surely my heart cannot truly rest, nor be entirely contented, unless it rest in Thee."

There was silence in the room, save for the twittering of the sparrows in the palms outside the window and the distant song of a goatherd driving his flock home for the night. At length he arose from his knees, and, with a more quiet mind, turned his attention to the unwrapping of the parcels which he had brought back from Luxor.

There was a knock at the door, and his native servant entered the room. " Sir," he said, " there is a leddy, she wish to see you. She wait on her donkey outside. She say, 'Go, tell your master I must see him.' She wanty varry much to speak to you."

An expression of tired resignation crossed Father Gregory's face. Again, then, he was to be disturbed

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from the quietness which his mind so strove to impose upon the restless mob of his thoughts; again he was to be called back from his seclusion to the affairs of the busy world.

" Very well," he said, without animation, " I will come out to her."

CHAPTER II

OUT OF THE DEPTHS

HE slowly crossed the shadowed courtyard and went out through the wooden entrance door. Immediately he found himself under the eyes of a young woman, who was seated silently upon a well-groomed white donkey, which stood amongst the palms, a few yards away from him. With his first glance he observed that she was beautiful altogether beyond the ordinary conception of beauty, and that she gave an impression of refinement and delicacy at once commanding attention.

He was almost sure that he had seen her face before, but where he could not recall. Its perfection of moulding and the strange admixture of gaiety and tragedy in the expression of the eyes and lips were unforgettable.

She wore a wide-brimmed grey felt hat, beneath which her short brown hair stood out from her pale face like mysterious dark curtains drawn back from a picture ; and from between her red lips protruded a cigarette held in a long amber holder, which she slowly removed from her mouth as he approached. Her grey eyes, shaded by long black lashes that gave a curious effect of deep violet shadow to them, were fixed upon his face, and so remained while his own rapid glance passed over her in unconscious scrutiny. She wore a shirt of soft cream coloured silk, open at the neck; a very well made grey divided riding skirt ; and tall grey boots, somehow suggestive of a Russian hussar. She was sitting astride, and there was something about her that was almost boy-like in appearance, though her small and slightly built figure, with its slender waist, was essentially feminine. She carried a pair of serviceable gloves and a cane ; and he noticed that her hands were white and slender, like those he had seen in the Florentine paintings of the Madonna, though there was something resolute in her grip upon the reins.

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Her donkey was standing very still in the deep shadow of the palms which clustered around the front of the house ; and the rider's grey hat and skirt seemed to merge into the dusty haze of the fading light, so that there was about her something very elusive, almost of the quality of dream.

" Are you Father Gregory ? " she asked, after the first slight bow had been exchanged.

" I am," he answered.

" Well, won't you ask me into your house ? I have ridden over especially to see you."

Father Gregory hesitated. " I am sorry," he said. " It is our rule here that women are not allowed to enter."

" How extraordinary! " she answered, a suggestion of a smile playing about her mouth. " Are we so dangerous ? "

" No, not in the least, my child. We defend ourselves only from waste of time."

" Are you very busy just now ? " she asked.

" I am at your service," he answered gravely. " If you will dismount, we can stroll over to that mound, where we can sit down, and you can tell me to what I owe the honour of your visit."

" Thank you," she said, and at once dismounted. Her donkey-boy, who had been standing under the palms at a respectful distance, emerged from their shadow and took charge of her donkey. As they walked away from the house, she pointed with her cane to the distant Nile. "Can you see that

dahabiyeh moored on this side of the river near the village ? " she asked. " That is my present residence. We arrived here last night, on our way downstream from Assouan."

" A very comfortable way of seeing the Nile," he remarked. " My boatman told me this afternoon that the dahabiyeh belonged to an Italian prince, from the Italian Consulate-General in Cairo."

" Yes," she answered, " Prince Paolo Gueracci. He and I have been up the Nile together."

Father Gregory looked at her with an inscrutable expression. A little smile hovered around the girl's lips, and she nodded her head. " Yes," she said, " I'm afraid I'm rather unconventional."

" My child," he said, and there was sorrow in his voice, " let us sit down here on this rock. Look, the last light of the sun is passing from the tops of the columns of the temple over yonder. If you leave here in a few minutes you will be back at your boat before it is dark."

" You are very eager to be rid of me," she said, with a light laugh, as they seated themselves upon the mound.

" I expect there is very little that I can do for you," he answered. "Why have you come to see me ? "

" Some years ago I heard you preach in London," she replied. " I thought you had the most beautiful voice I had ever listened to ; and your face, as you looked down at me from your pulpit, was like the face of a saint. You made me cry bitter tears ; and on my way home I bought myself a rosary, and I fingered it half the night, until the clasp broke, and then I spent the other half of the night in trying to mend it with a pair of champagne-nippers. Soon after that I read in the papers of your retirement from public life, and I thought it a terrible mistake. You were giving up so much, such power, such

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glory; and people said you openly admitted that you did so to show your contempt for the world and its vanities. I couldn't make it out. Then I was told in Cairo of your monastic life amongst these ancient tombs in the desert; and when we moored here last night I inquired where you lived, and determined to come to see you." She paused, and then added lightly: " I enjoy a ride in the late afternoon. It gives me an appetite for dinner."

" If that is all," said Father Gregory, rising, " you certainly are wasting my time."

" It is not quite all," she continued, " but the real object of my visit is so undefined that I don't think I can explain it."

Father Gregory resumed his seat. " You may try, if you wish," he said.

" I think it is that, fortunate as I am, I am not entirely happy," she said, and the sorrows of all the world seemed to express themselves in her quiet voice. " I want something that my world has not yet given me."

How old are you ? " he asked.

" Twenty-three."

" How long have you been living this sort of life ? "

" I was born and brought up in a back street in Port Said," she replied, and her voice now became passionless and dull, as though she were telling of events which had nothing in them to mark them from the commonplace. " My mother was an English dancer who had some success at the once famous Cafe du Nil, where she made enough money to set up the little hell in which I spent my childhood. My father, they say, was an Irish revolutionary, who stayed for a short time at Port Said on his way to stir up the dust in India: a wild, clever man, I believe, and something of a poet. I was given a year or two of lessons by some philanthropic French people who ran a school at Ismailieh : they

didn't know anything about my mother, and she said she would kill me if I told them. And then when I was sixteen or seventeen I ran away and went to live with a man who had been kind to me. It was the first kindness I'd ever known. He was the prosperous proprietor of a wine shop in Alexandria, and he loved me with all the passion of his dear French heart. He was a good man and always treated me well, so that, in spite of the restlessness of my nature, I lived with him for nearly three years."

" Were you married ? " asked Father Gregory.

" Oh no: we didn't think it necessary, as we had no children. I should have liked to have borne him a son, but fortune decreed otherwise. Then he died of cholera one summer in Alexandria, and I found that he had left me his business and all his money. I sold the business, heaved a great sigh of relief, and sailed for England, with altogether some twenty-five thousand pounds to my credit."

She paused, and Father Gregory noticed that her eyes were full of a strange radiance, as though the last rays of the sun, still thrown on to the eastern sky, had been reflected in them.

" What did you do then ? " he asked.

" Why, that was my chance, my opportunity!" she exclaimed. " I had risen from the gutter, and now I was the captain of my own destiny. I went to London, became chums with the more or less respectable young widow of an army doctor, took a flat with her, and soon collected a circle of friends. I have a quick sort of brain, and very soon I had educated myself into an imitation, at any rate, of what you in England call a lady. Amongst my friends was Saloman, the great pageant-master; and one day, he invited me to play a small part in a pageant he had organized. I made a success in it ; and then he produced 'The Galileans.' Did you ever see it ? "

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"Yes," replied Father Gregory. "It was a wonderful piece of work."

" I played the part of the Magdalene," she said.

"Now I know where I have seen you," he exclaimed, with interest. " I knew your face was familiar to me. Let me see, your name was . . ." " Madeline Rorke."

" Yes, Madeline Rorke, of course." " You see, my mother's professional name was Rorke, and it seemed as good as any other. I am still known by that name."

" You became quite famous in London," he said.

"Yes," she replied, " for a time I, was pretty well known. Then Saloman took me over to New York to play the same part there ; and at the end of our long run, I went to the South of France to rest and spend my accumulated salary. Saloman asked me to take up my work again, but somehow I couldn't tolerate the idea. All my life I had wanted to travel, and now that I had the means, and had had a taste of real freedom, I could not bring myself to return to any sort of routine. I wanted to drift about, where the wind and the weather and my heart sent me. So I went down the coast into Italy, motoring along those white dusty roads, under the warm sun, with the little red-roofed villages climbing up the hills on the one side, and the blue Mediterranean on the other. Then to Venice, where I spent a long-summer. . . ." She broke off, and sat for a few moments in silence, as though lost in thought.

" What are you thinking about ? " asked Father Gregory.

She uttered a sigh. " I was just thinking of the sound of the wash of the canals against the stonework and the swirl of the water at the prows of the gondolas. And the little lights on the water at night, and the music in the darkness. And the

bathing over there at the Lido-ah ! Summer is the real season for Venice. Then, in the autumn, when the tourists began to arrive, and I was tired of the group of friends that had collected round me, I went on down the Adriatic coast, where the tourists do not go, till I came to the blood-red rocks of the South. Brindisi is a miserable little place, you will say ; but I was wonderfully content there. Another girl I was very fond of was with me, and I think I have never been so peaceful in my life; till one morning I awoke to find she had slipped away, taking most of my jewellery with her.

" Then I went across to Sicily and stayed in a hotel amongst the olive groves. I used to lie in a deck-chair there and look up through the grey-green leaves, to the deep blue of the sky, and I remember I could see the white banks of cloud around the crater of Etna, or turn on my side and look down to the purple sea, where the little red-sailed craft plied to and fro. But having wandered so far, I could not now rest. I boarded a trading-ship bound for the East-just myself and my maid; but we only got as far as Crete, and there I went off into the mountains, where the ground is carpeted with asphodel and the wild tulips cluster round your feet so that you're almost afraid to tread for fear of crushing them. I bought a pair of white sheepskin boots there, like the peasants wear ; and I used to drink their wine and smoke their horrid cigarettes.

" Soon I got tired of the rough life, and managed to get a ship for Egypt. It was summertime again, and we sailed southwards over dead-calm seas, with the porpoises playing about in our wake, or diving under the keel and coming up in a shower of spray. And at nights I used to lean over the rail watching the phosphorus on the water, looking like the thousand lanterns of the little men of the sea. Then when we arrived at Port Said, and I disappeared into

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the town, I was told afterwards that the astonishment of my shipboard friends was wonderful to behold. I simply vanished down a back street ! Well, I found that my mother had recently died, and fortunately nobody remembered me. Somebody else was running the brothel; it was still a notorious place. I looked into the salon, where the same tawdry plush furniture stood stiffly round the walls, and three or four wretched girls were wandering about waiting for the horrors of the evening. I gave them a fifty-pound note between them, as a thank offering to Providence for my own escape unharmed from that sort of existence, which would have been mine, too, if I hadn't run away as I did; and I went straight down to the docks and took ship back to Europe, so as to forget their faces.

" I left the ship at Marseilles, and went into Spain with some English friends. We made our way inland to Granada, where we used to have wonderful picnics on the mosaic floors of deserted Moorish palaces. And we used to pick oranges in the light of the tremendous moon, and the little bats used to dart to and fro in the darkness. Then I crossed the mountains to Biarritz, where I wore my best clothes again, and lived like a queen. And so back to Paris and the grey skies and the rain. I stayed there for a year, dancing and dining and spending my money, enjoying myself sometimes and sometimes asking only for the end of it all. But I never really liked living in a city: I was always oppressed by the presence of the poor and the destitute ; and, indeed, I found myself giving more than I could afford to ease their sufferings. It was the same in London. Wherever I looked I saw misery and want and squalor; until I became haunted with the weary sighs of the unfortunate, and their dumb, appealing eyes seemed to look at me, like the eyes of ghosts, from every dark corner of the streets.

So I went off again to the sunshine of Southern France, where there is less to bring a chill to one's heart ; and so back to Italy, to Capri, and there Paolo, whom I'd known before in Venice, came into my life again, and off we went together."

She made a little gesture with her hands to indicate the casual flippancy of Fate, and turned with a half smile to Father Gregory. " I suppose you think I am quite beyond the pale," she said.

Father Gregory roused himself as from a deep reverie, for her quiet tones had seemed to blend with the sounds of the evening into the voice of a dream. " Humanly speaking, yes," he replied, looking straight at her with his grave eyes. " And what do you intend to do next ? "

" Oh well," she answered, " that depends. I suppose I shall presently grow tired of Paolo or he of me, and we shall separate ; and then I shall drift about, merrily enough, wandering over the world, like the tramp that I am, turning my back to the wind and my face to the sun, until the long night comes and the lights go out."

" And then ? "

"Then, with my last breath I shall thank what powers there be for having raised me from a villainous cafe in a back street of Port Said to a life of some elegance, some luxury, and some adventure."

" And then ? " he repeated, with earnestness.

" Oh, just oblivion," she replied, with a shrug of her beautiful shoulders.

There was silence for awhile. The light of the day was fading fast, and a certain sharpness had come into the air. The smoke of the evening fires rose from the scattered habitations of the peasants ; and here and there silent figures could be seen returning from the fields. Father Gregory rose and faced the girl, who sat with her hands folded in her lap, looking at him with unreadable eyes.

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" Did you ride over here," he asked, " simply to tell the story of your life to a stranger ? "

" You must regard it, I suppose, as a sort of confession," she said.

" No, my child," he answered; " it was more like a piece of frank boasting."

" I did not mean it like that," she responded quickly. " It was simply a sort of introduction, a preface."

" To what ?,"

" I don't know."

Father Gregory laid his hand gently upon her shoulder. " My daughter," he said very tenderly, " tell me."

Suddenly she looked up at him, and a flush of colour came into her pale cheeks. " Yes," she cried. "That's it! That's what I came to you for ! I wanted to see you look at me like that, with all that blessedness in your face. Oh, man, don't you see I'm miserable, miserable ? Don't you see there's something I want, something my life lacks. . . ? " She broke off, checking the flow of her words with an effort.

" Don't I see ? " he said, with a gesture almost of despair. ", Why, to me your life lacks everything, because it lacks one thing; it is vain and empty because it is not filled with the only essential thing! "

Oh yes, I know what you mean," she interrupted, and her voice was dull with disappointment. " You are going to say that what I lack is religion."

Father Gregory raised his hand. " You are wrong," he replied. " Religion is not the essential thing for you."

" What is, then ? " she asked.

" Christ," he said.

She looked at him in silence for some moments, and the strange violet haze of her eyes seemed to deepen, as she turned his words over in the hidden places of her mind.

" It is the same thing," she said at length.

" Not quite," he answered, in even tones.

" You mean," she said, " that what I require is the particular form of religion called Christianity."

" No," he replied. " You do not need religion, you do not need Christianity. You need simply - Christ."

She rose, and pointed with her cane towards her donkey, which stood under the palms at the foot of the mound where they had been sitting. " It is time for me to go," she said. " I am afraid we do not speak the same language."

"Yet the same voice speaks to us both," he whispered.

She turned to him with a gesture of appeal. " I can't hear the voice," she sighed. " What does it say to me ? "

" It says," he answered, " 'What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?'"

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Very slowly they walked back to the palm grove through the gathering dusk. There was silence between them, not of estrangement but of understanding. In the soft Egyptian twilight an essence of dream enshrouded them, and made it difficult for Father Gregory to accept the reality of their meeting or take the significance of her story. As he looked down at her in the half light, she seemed to him to be so very small, so very fragile ; and the pallor of her face accentuated the delicacy of her finely cut features. Yet as she mounted her high spirited donkey, and firmly grasped the reins, he was conscious of a kind of purposefulness in her attitude, and there was a determination, which was almost haughty, in the graceful lines of her figure.

" I am afraid I have wasted your time after all," she said, as she placed her hand in his; " but I shall not bother you again. We move on downstream tomorrow. Thank you for being kind to me."

" Good-bye, my child," he answered. " If you happen ever to want a friend, you may write to me." A faint smile played round her lips, but her eyes were grave, as, without another word, she turned her donkey away.

Father Gregory watched her as she galloped off into the gathering darkness, the donkey-boy, fleet of foot, running like an apparition behind her. Then he passed his hands across his eyes with a sigh and entered the house. He felt almost as though he had been dreaming.

CHAPTER III

EASTWARD BOUND

IN the second half of the month of December, a few days after the events just recorded, Captain Robin Beechcroft, the young but already well-known explorer, turned his back on England and embarked on the special mission in Egypt which had been entrusted to him. He passed through Paris in a scurry of sleet and snow: he awoke next morning in Southern France, with the hot sun streaming into the stuffy little wagon-lit compartment. The sensation was amazing to him. It was like going out into the garden after a long illness. The country through which he was passing presented itself to his famished eye as a chiaroscuro of rich contrasts in colour, like a dish of fruit or a piece of Persian embroidery. The red roofs of the houses, their white walls, the green trees, the blue distance, the rich brown rocks, fell into place in an ever-changing kaleidoscope of colours and shapes.

He sprang out of his berth and sat for half an hour with his head out of the window, enjoying life as an Englishman so well can when he leaves his dear northern island behind him and turns his face to the South. His heart was full of the quality of adventure, and his mind was actively receptive and alert. He was stimulated by the eager enthusiasm of the natural traveller setting out upon his travels, of the wayfarer taking once more to the road and getting into his stride ; and this fair morning he

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was more than ever conscious that Providence has vouchsafed to the men of his race two recurrent thrills transcending all others of their kind-the joy of returning to England after a prolonged absence and the joy of going abroad again.

Before leaving home he had written a long letter to his uncle Francis, his mother's only surviving brother, known to fame as, Father Gregory, setting out his plans for his season's work, which was partly scientific and partly in connection with Egyptian and Arabic affairs, and expressing the hope that he would have the opportunity to come to stay with him for a short time in his retreat in the Theban desert. He had posted the letter some days ago ; and now he was following it in person as fast as the Riviera express and the liner which he was to board at Marseilles could carry him.

As the train steamed into the terminus he was whistling a lively tune; he whistled as he drove down the hills of Marseilles from the station to the hotel; he whistled as he splashed in his belated morning bath; and he whistled as he walked out into the boulevard, and made his way along the crowded sunny streets and under the awning of the shops. People here turned sharply to look at him, as he stalked along, a picture of youth, confidence and vitality. His fair, almost golden hair, close cut moustache, and easy, athletic bearing stamped him as an Englishman. He was very tall and very powerfully built, and it was evident that his constitution was of the strongest. There was something quietly self-reliant in the poise of his handsome head and the set of his jaw; and, though his blue eyes were kindly and sympathetic, there was some indication in his face that his opinions, once formed, whether right or wrong, would be hard to eradicate.

At the hotel he ordered his meals and paid his

bill with precision, and in the evening he directed the placing of his baggage in the carriage which was to take him to the docks with a business-like despatch which earned for him a particularly respectful bow from the hall-porter.

The Gulf of Lions lived up to its evil reputation; and the roll of the vessel during the first day of the voyage effectually prevented the development of those brief and intense friendships which flourish so luxuriantly in the idle atmosphere of shipboard. Robin was a pretty good sailor; but he was constrained to join the long row of pallid, damp people who lay wrapped in their rugs in the deck chairs mercifully provided on the sheltered deck by a benevolent company. The grey-green seas slapped the sides of the great liner as she ploughed her way through the Gulf in the teeth of the wind ; and Robin's valiant praise of life on the boundless main fell from his lips in a somewhat half-hearted manner.

After they had passed through the Straits of Messina, however, they left their troubles temporarily behind them, and entered upon a fair, smiling stretch of water, whereon they moved with a steady keel, which brought the passengers up from their cabins and out of their chairs with jovial faces. Now acquaintanceships were made with celerity, and youth turned to youth with outstretched hands; while in every sheltered recess of the deck a man and a maid sat absorbed in the tremendous possibilities of life.

A remarkable individual occupied the other berth in Robin's cabin. His name was Augustus Blake, and in theosophical circles it appeared that he had a great reputation as a mystic. In a certain degree he seemed to be an ordinary charlatan; but there was something about him that was likeable, or perhaps it would be more correct to say that he made some sort of undefined appeal to persons of

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wide sympathy, although at the same time few who came into contact with him escaped an occasional sense of repulsion. He was middle-aged, was almost absurdly tall, and had a bald head which rose like the huge egg of some extinct monster of the air from a tangle of sandy-red hair. His black eyes resembled two round marbles set prominently above his high cheekbones. He was clean shaven, and had a weak, sensitive mouth, though by contrast a fairly pertinacious pointed chin.

Robin had first seen him on deck in the moonlight, on the evening on which they sailed. Mr. Blake was walking towards him bare-headed, his body sheathed in a tight-fitting, dark overcoat, which was closely buttoned from the neck to the ankles; and being very thin, he suggested to the imagination an animated cylinder, a piece of piping, surmounted by a large ostrich-egg. When he came closer, staring in front of him with hypnotic goggle-eyes, the simile had to be varied, and Robin found himself thinking of the illuminated turnip or pumpkin set upon a pole with which he used to terrify his friends in the days of his childhood. When the apparition had passed he found himself laughing inwardly in an hysterical sort of way; and, somehow, he felt inclined to shiver.

Later, when they met in the cabin, he observed that the face was by no means so awful as he had supposed in the semi-darkness on deck. The man had at times a whimsical and almost wistful smile lurking about the corners of his mouth; and, as he stood at the washing-basin, clad only in his underclothes, he gave the appearance of being an athlete, though one, perhaps, somewhat out of training. Robin soon discovered that he was extremely anxious that men should not think him a crank, and equally anxious that women should not think him a normal man. In other words, he seemed to like, and indeed to require, the sympathy and awe

of women, but he did not find it good policy to offend the susceptibilities of their men kind.

Robin's own interests being wide, he led Mr Blake to discuss occult phenomena in the privacy of their cabin, and much that he said was of considerable significance; but ever there seemed to be a baffling variety of emotions in the man as he conversed. At one moment he spoke as though he were appealing earnestly to Robin not to harden his heart against him and his sincere beliefs; at another moment he appeared to be anxious to convince himself by convincing his listener; and at yet another moment Robin could have sworn that there was laughter behind his words, as though he were saying " What bosh I am talking! - but, as one scoundrel to another, you will understand that this is my stock-in-trade." In consequence, it was very hard to say whether he were a mountebank or an honest man ; and, indeed, it might well be that he did not quite know himself which he was.

There was a woman on board to whom Augustus Blake paid devoted attention. She was a rich young woman, presumably a widow, of the name of Jones, who was going out to Egypt with her aged father, Colonel Winterbottom ; and it appeared that for some time she had sat at the feet of the mystic and had freely imbibed his mysteries. Mrs. Jones had the appropriate Christian name of Daisy; for indeed it was apparent that she regarded herself as a simple little flower of the fields. She was rather pretty, with charming yellow hair, innocent blue eyes, and nice little white teeth ; she was small and plump, and was daintily dressed, though in an unfashionable style; and her manners were dewy, blithe, and gay.

Robin rapidly formed the opinion that she regarded herself as a ray of sunshine in a grey world; and he was sure that she was sure that she loved a good romp with the children.

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He was introduced to her by Blake on the second day of the voyage, when the calmer sea permitted some social intercourse.

"Daisy," he said, " I want to introduce my stable-mate, Captain Robin Beechcroft. I am sure you will find much in common to talk about."

Mrs. Jones looked at the newcomer with wide, innocent eyes. " Are you any relation to the great explorer ? " she asked, unaware that he knew she knew perfectly well who he was.

Augustus Blake slapped his new friend on the shoulder. " But, Daisy dear," he laughed, " he is the great explorer."

" Oh, how perfectly delightful! " exclaimed Mrs. Jones, clapping her plump little hands. " But you are not a bit like what I expected. I thought explorers were sturdy little men with cold, stern eyes."

" Yes," Robin replied. " I am generally mistaken for a coal-heaver or a chucker-out.",

" Oh, I'm sure you wouldn't hurt a fly," she murmured. " But, oh dear, how small and breakable you two enormous things make me feel ! Yes, both of you. Here's dear old Plato-that's my nickname for Mr. Blake, you know-looking as though he could pierce the heart of a dragon with one thrust of his rapier; and you, who I am sure could knock its head off with one blow of your fist. And here am I, just a silly little female with arms as soft as putty. Feel them." She held out her arms to Robin, and he was obliged to remark on their softness.

Presently she insisted on going to find her father, in order that she might introduce him; and away she flitted along the deck, a veil of soft white ninon floating in the breeze behind her.

" A wonderful little woman," said Blake, when

they were alone; " I think you will find her quite out of the common. She lives on a plane of high innocence and lightness of heart that cannot fail to influence those around her. That sounds silly, doesn't it ? " he added quickly. " But . . . well, you'll see what I mean when you get to know her better."

Soon Mrs. Jones returned with Colonel Winterbottom, a handsome old man, rather typical of his class. One sees his like in all the military clubs of London.

" This is my daddy," she said, by way of introduction; " my dear old good-for-nothing daddy-kins." Colonel Winterbottom patted her hand rather perfunctorily, and was soon explaining the object of his visit to Egypt.

This business of introduction took place in the mid-morning; and it was arranged that Robin should join the three of them at meals at a small table which Mrs. Jones presently managed to secure by a direct appeal to the heart and the pocket of the head steward.

" The table where we've been sitting," she said, " was perfectly horrid. There was a fat man opposite me, who ate his food like a cat eating a mouse. I think he was afraid that it wasn't quite dead and might snap back at him. And next to him was a fashionable lady-doctor, who terrified me. I am such an ignorant little country bumpkin that I can't stand the cold eye of worldly wisdom. I'm sure she doesn't believe in fairies. . . ."

" But what have fairies got to do with it ? " Robin asked. " Why drag them in ? "

" Oh, it's just my silliness," she laughed. " I always divide people into two classes: those who believe in them, and those who don't."

" There is a third class," said he. " Those who pretend they believe in them."

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She looked up at him sharply, and then laughed gaily. She had a very infectious laugh, and a quaint trick of showing the tip of her little pink tongue between her pretty white teeth.

" I think you are rather fascinating," said Robin.

" Oh, do you ? " she asked, at once interested.. " I thought you thought I was a silly-billy."

CHAPTER IV

THE TRIO

THE two following days were passed pleasantly enough, for the weather was sunny and the sea calm. Robin Beechcroft, being something of a celebrity, was not permitted to hold himself aloof from the good fellowship of the company; and, indeed; his spirits were such that he felt no desire to confine himself to the reading of the half-dozen books which he had brought with him. Nor was he able to be monopolized by Mrs. Jones and Augustus Blake, though, somewhat against his own judgment, he found himself drawn into a fairly close friendship with them. It was evident that Daisy Jones had conceived a very considerable liking for the stalwart young man, and it was not in her nature to gainsay her own inclinations.

On the last day of the voyage, however, the sea was again rough, and their intercourse, therefore, suffered a temporary interruption. Once more Robin spent the greater part of the day amongst the row of recumbent figures who ventured to leave their cabins.

He did not mind a steady roll nor a regular rise and dip; but this time the vessel treated him to both together, and added a sporadic plunge and shudder at unexpected moments, which led him to feel that a journey across the Mediterranean was a much overrated form of pleasure.

As darkness fell, he was filled with a sort of gloomy horror at the thought of sharing his cabin that night

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with Augustus Blake, who had retired thither early in the day ; and he could not help wishing that, in a moment of occult abstraction, the great mystic might go and sleep in some other cabin. However, when he turned in, after a painful dinner, which he wolfed in an hysterical mockery of hunger, he found his friend lying in his berth, clad in an expensive suit of new silk pyjamas, and with the cabin door opened wide and an electric fan buzzing away merrily.

" Buck up! " laughed Robin, as the good ship recovered from what seemed to be a trick-dive from a springboard. "We shall be in Egypt tomorrow morning after breakfast."

" Breakfast ! " Augustus Blake groaned. " Good God!" And they were both laughing at their mutual afflictions as Robin switched off the light.

They awoke at sunrise next morning to find the sea as calm as a lake ; but, looking out of the port-hole, they could not yet discern any sign of the low-lying Egyptian coast. At about seven o'clock the steward brought their tea, and thereafter they both sat up in their berths like giants refreshed, and recalled with glee the miseries of the previous day.

" I do hope Mrs. Jones is none the worse for it," said Robin. " Women are awfully easily knocked out."

" Oh, Daisy will be as fit as a fiddle today, you see," replied his companion; " she is a wonderful woman. She has the greatest command over her stomach."

" I beg your pardon ? " queried Robin, awed.

" I mean," he explained, " she has made a thorough study of the subjection of matter to mind. She is quite a little Yogi-you know, the people who mortify the flesh."

" Don't you believe it! " the younger man

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answered, with conviction. " Of course, you know her very well, and I have only just met her ; but surely one can see with half an eye that-well, that she isn't by any means dead to this wicked world."

Ah, there's where you make a mistake," said Blake, with earnestness. " She belongs to the good fairies."

" And you believe in fairies," Robin added. Blake took the remark perfectly seriously. "Well," he said, " I won't say in fairies exactly; but I believe that we are surrounded by unseen forces of good and evil, some helpful and strengthening, some capricious and elfin, and some wicked and deadly."

" The trouble is," said Robin, " that when a person begins to probe into these mysteries he never knows which class of influences he may come into contact with."

" Yes," Blake answered, " that's so. But you can be quite sure that Daisy, in her occult studies, has got into touch only with the powers of good, or at any rate with nothing worse than the elfin ones."

" And what about yourself ? "

An extraordinary change came over his face. He stared long and silently at Robin with his round, black eyes; and, as he looked, the whole, atmosphere and condition of the conversation altered. The young explorer had been feeling a sort of good humoured, rather friendly tolerance for this strange creature and his outlook. Now, however, there crept over him an overwhelming horror of the man. It was a sensation such as he had once felt on coming across a leper in a native village : horror mingled with pity, horror without hatred, horror intensified by sympathy.

" What about myself ? " Blake repeated, his voice rising; and then, in tones which conveyed the strangest admixture of anguish and laughter, he said I don't know. That's the trouble. I don't know!"

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The combination of agonized despair and silent, diabolical laughter was in some peculiar way revolting. Robin lay back in the berth and literally shuddered.

It was not till after breakfast that their destination came into view. The Egyptian coast is so low lying that the first sight of land was the cluster of the houses of Port Said, which seemed to be rising straight from the placid, blue Mediterranean, backed by nothing but the sky. At a distance the place looked like an island of dream, floating by magic upon an enchanted ocean.

Soon they had taken the pilot aboard and were steaming slowly towards their mooring-place, the long breakwater close on their right, with its great statue of the engineer De Lesseps towering up against the intense blue sky.

A few minutes later they had dropped anchor a hundred yards from the shore, and were watching the host of rowing-boats and launches that were hastening towards them. The first thing the traveller notices on arriving in Egypt is the noise. The native boatmen shout at one another, the native passengers shout at the boatmen, the native policemen shout at the passengers, the native officials shout at the policemen ; and over above the din the commissionaires of the hotels and the agents of Messrs. Thomas Cook & Son shout as it were to unheeding heaven the names of their employers.

Goodness me, what a noise! " exclaimed Mrs. Jones, who was standing by Robin's side on the deck as they stared down on the throng. "They all look furiously angry with each other."

" So this is Egypt," said Augustus Blake, " the Land of Mystery ! Such is the scene on which the dark eyes of Cleopatra gazed ! " And, with a kind of dramatic gloom, he whispered to himself : " The Siren of the East, the Serpent of old Nile !
"

" Oh no," said Robin, in his most practical manner. "This is only the modern cosmopolitan town of Port Said, commonly known as 'Hell.' In Cleopatra's time there was only clean desert hereabouts."

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" Is it a very wicked place ? " asked Mrs. Jones, with undisguised interest.

" It's not so very terrible nowadays," Robin replied. " But a few years ago . . ." He ended the sentence with a significant expression.

Dear, dear! " said Blake.

"Do tell me: what did they do?" asked Mrs. Jones, looking up at her new friend with innocent eyes.

" The inhabitants did the travellers," said Robin.

" How ? " she questioned.

" Generally by the exploitation of the wiles of your sex," he answered.

" Oh, but I'm sure they didn't mean any harm," she murmured.

" Of course not," he laughed. " It was just their playfulness."

Blake winked at him. " She's just a little fairy, isn't she ? " he whispered.

Mrs. Jones drew nearer to Robin. " Used they to have terrible orgies in the middle of the night ? " she asked.

" Yes," he replied. " For five bob they'd show you in five minutes more than you'd learn in fifty years of respectable life. And for ten bob . . . "

" Let's leave it at five bob," said Blake, eyeing his new friend with mistrust. Mrs. Jones pressed Robin's arm. " What about seven-and-sixpence ? " she asked, with a sweet smile.

The conversation was interrupted by the arrival of one of Cook's agents, to whom Mrs. Jones decided to entrust their baggage. Colonel Winterbottom had insisted on proceeding to Cairo by the train at noon ;

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but Robin intended to stay at Port Said for forty-eight hours, as he wished to make an expedition to one of the islands of Lake Menzaleh on the following day. He therefore now bade good-bye to the three of them, and promised to come out on his first free afternoon to see them at Heliopolis, which is just outside Cairo.

" Good-bye," said Mrs. Jones, squeezing his hand more intimately, perhaps, than the proprieties would sanction ; " I am sure we are going to be friends."

" Good-bye, old chap," said Blake. " You know, I feel somehow that we three are linked together in some mysterious way."

" Delighted, I'm sure," remarked Robin, busy with their baggage ; and it was not till later that he realized what indifference on his part the words must have seemed to indicate.

He watched them as they were rowed ashore, seated amidst a pile of baggage. Colonel Winterbottom, white-haired and red-faced, was wearing a very new sun-helmet, which seemed somewhat out of place in mid-winter, when the Egyptian seacoast is enjoying weather not unlike the best days of an English April. Mrs. Jones wore a large picture-hat, from which flowed yards of pale-blue veiling. She was dressed in a summery sort of costume and carried a parasol, which she waved merrily to Robin, until, having inadvertently smitten the burly, red-jerseyed oarsman across his brown face, she was persuaded to make her salutations with her white-gloved hand instead. Beside her sat Augustus Blake, a stiff, upright figure in grey flannels, with a green Homburg hat, several sizes too small for him, placed gaily upon the dome of his bald head. Behind them stood Cook's agent in his smart blue uniform, one hand on the tiller and the other wildly gesticulating to the surrounding craft ; while on top of the pile of baggage sat another

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red-jerseyed porter or boatman, a cigarette in his mouth. Robin watched them until they were lost in the crowd of swaying, bumping boats; and then he too descended the steps and was rowed ashore.

CHAPTER V

AN EVENING IN THE DESERT

FATHER GREGORY put out the candles which were burning on the altar in the little chapel, where he and some of his friends had just read together the evening office; and coming out into the white-walled garden, he stood for awhile in the semi-darkness, fingering the roses and breathing in their fragrance.

He was very proud of this little plantation; for the ground hereabouts, though capable of nourishing the group of hardy date palms, was scarcely to be distinguished from the barren desert around, where no shrub or blade of grass could exist. When he had first built his settlement he had marked out the prospective flower beds in orderly squares; and had dug away the gravel and lifeless soil from each to a depth of some two or three feet. He had then filled up these excavations with rich earth brought up from the Nile bank by a string of camels ; and into each bed a little brick gutter had been directed, leading from the well in the, outer courtyard.

An hour's work each evening sufficed to irrigate the whole garden; and it was a rule of the establishment that all should lend a hand in turn at the rope and bucket. Now, as he stood musing in the peaceful quiet of early night, he could hear the water gurgling along the ducts, and could see beyond the archway the dim form of the man who happened to be taking his turn at the well—a black-bearded,

gypsy-like young painter, Henry Morland by name, who found in the Egyptian desert the inspiration of his dreams.

The door of the common room was closed, and those who were inside seemed to be absorbed in the newspapers and letters which the post-boy had lately brought over from Luxor. The full moon was rising behind the palms, and already the dome of the chapel had caught the soft light, and was changed thereby into a thing of enchantment. The rugged cliffs of the Theban hills behind reared up into the moonlight, and were transformed into the towered and buttressed walls of some city of dreams. Overhead the stars faded as the glory of the lady of the night increased ; and the feathered leaves of the palms beyond the walls grew momentarily more black and more distinct against the growing splendour which they screened.

Under the influence of the quiet warmth of the evening, Father Gregory was lost in thought as he entered his bedroom, and his candles had been lit for some moments before he noticed his letters awaiting him on the table. He picked them up and glanced at them one by one with mild interest. Then he carried them out, together with a candle, into the cloister fronting his room, and, seating himself in a basket chair, began to open them and read their contents.

One of the first letters in the packet was that written to him by his nephew, Robin Beechcroft, just before he left England, in which he had outlined his plans for the season's work; and Father Gregory calculated that the young man would at that time be due to arrive, or perhaps (as was the fact) had already arrived that day at Port Said. It was a pleasure to him to know that they would shortly meet, for he had a great affection and a great admiration for his nephew. Robin, it is true, was

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a practical man of affairs, and his uncle was to a large extent a visionary and dreamer; but both were gifted with imagination and sympathy, and both displayed wide interests in many and divergent subjects. Robin was more typically English than his uncle, and had the faults and the virtues of the national character more clearly defined in his nature ; but his sobriety and high sense of honour, his bravery and tough endurance, had a sympathetic counterpart in his uncle's purity of mind and the courage of his convictions. There was thus a close attachment between them, which made the reception of this letter a matter of warm and pleasurable interest.

Amongst the letters there was one which bore an Egyptian stamp and the postmark of Cairo; and this he had placed at the bottom of the packet as being, on the face of it, the least interesting. But his close attention was at once secured when, on opening it, he saw the signature of Madeline Rorke. He drew the candle nearer to him, bent down over the sheets, and did not rise his head again until he had twice read through them.

"You will perhaps not be surprised to hear from me," the letter ran, "for I think you will have expected some better explanation of my intrusion upon you last week than I was able to give you at the time. As I told you, I had wished to ride over, partly because I wanted to make the near acquaintance of one who had interested me so much from afar, but that wish changed into a resolve because I was feeling very unhappy and I thought that I should burst unless I talked to somebody. Perhaps I should have explained to you that Paolo and I were already out of sympathy with one another, and that our once happy relationship was drifting rapidly to its inevitable conclusion; but an absurd sort of pride kept me silent on that all-important

point. When you have closed a book that you have been reading, do you know what a bore it is to begin a new story ? Well, I felt that the book of the romance of Madeline and Paolo had come to a tedious end, and life was a blank to me. I could not think what to do next. For some reason my mind did not leap forward to a new adventure as it used to do. I was lonely, a little out of conceit with myself, and very down on my luck ; I felt that I needed something, and I thought it might be that I wanted a father on whose shoulder I could go and cry. But I hadn't got a father, and so I thought of you. Then, of course, you went and spoilt it all by telling me that it was not you I wanted but Christ. For a person like me, it was like offering a hungry beggar a lemon souffle instead of a good bowl of Irish stew. So our interview was brief, and I came back to the boat in time to refuse my dinner and go early to bed.

" Paolo had spent his time, meanwhile, in obtaining the services of a steam-tug to pull us downstream and so shorten the boredom of our Nile trip, and the result is that we are already in Cairo, and he has decided to sail for Italy at once. Out of politeness (for he is always a perfect little gentleman) he has asked me to come as far as Rome with him, after, which, he regrets, pressing affairs will take him away for some months. But I shall go no further than Port Said, and shall there contrive to give him the slip as the boat sails. You may ask what I then intend to do. Candidly, I don't know. I find it so difficult to arouse in myself any interest in plans for future wanderings over the face of the globe. I am oppressed by the feeling that the world is a place of badly concealed misery, and that one has but to probe below the surface to find the rottenness and corruption of it all. This has become quite an obsession with me ; and I so fear to meet with this

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lurking undercurrent of horror, no matter where I may travel to, that (if I have the courage) it is possible I shall start on the greatest adventure of all. I opened my career in Port Said, and it would be quite appropriate to make that place the scene of its close. If I have the courage ! . . . At any rate, thank you for offering me your friendship, and in case I don't ever see you again, please pray for me that somewhere I may find both the happiness around me and the outlet to myself that the world has failed to give me."

Father Gregory folded the sheets deliberately and put them into his pocket. Then he arose and carried the other letters back to his room. His mind was working rapidly, and he could not keep still. He crossed the courtyard, and as he passed the tamarisk in the middle of the open space, he saw that Henry Morland was still standing at the side of the well in the shadows of the foliage, working at the rope and bucket.

" Hullo! " said Father Gregory mechanically. " Still at it ? "

" Yes," replied the young painter. " I've been giving the dom palm an extra drink. She's very sickly. I wonder what's the best way of saving her. D'you think if we . . ."

" Oh, man alive!" exclaimed Father Gregory, interrupting him, " I've got something more important to think of than that palm. I've got a soul to save. Please go and get me the time-table."

Morland uttered a short laugh, and hurried towards the common room without waiting for an explanation. Father Gregory, meanwhile, paced up and down in the moonlight which now flooded one side of the courtyard. Of course the girl meant to say that if she had the courage she would kill herself ; but was she serious, or was the thought only the momentary reflection of a phase of annoyance and

tedium? She would probably have gone down to Port Said that day, for it chanced that he knew an Italian mail-boat was to sail on the Thursday morning, and today was Wednesday. Tomorrow, therefore, she would be left alone ; and then anything might happen.

Perhaps she would not have the courage; and yet he had noticed a sort of determination, a masked strength, about her which now troubled him greatly. He asked himself why he should allow the fate of a woman so essentially belonging to the world to disturb the even tenor of his life and arouse him to action. What had he in common with this exotic little piece of humanity, disgorged from a back street of Port Said and left to drift about the world, without morals, without a knowledge of right and wrong, without God ? True, she was an interesting character ; and her sudden arrival out of the Egyptian dusk and her departure again into the darkness had left on his mind an impression full of significance. Moreover, he did not disguise from himself the fact that her beauty and grace were altogether exceptional ; and this gave her, like a work of art, a certain value, a certain ability to command attention.

He recalled her ineffable charm and dignity in the role of Mary Magdalene in London, he saw again her small figure demurely facing the storm of applause from the vast audience; and he remembered how deeply he had been stirred by her portrayal of the sorrows of this woman of sorrow. Yet, even so, he could not account altogether for his anxiety to save her from herself; and he was forced at last to attribute it simply to the attraction of her remarkable personality, and to the natural interest in a lost sheep which a follower of the Good Shepherd must feel.

When Morland returned with the railway guide,

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Father Gregory hurried back to the light of his room and anxiously turned the pages over. To his great distress he found that it was already too late for him to catch the night train to Cairo, and that if he took the day express the following morning he would arrive in the capital too late to proceed to Port Said the same evening. He was therefore obliged to content himself with the determination to go down to Cairo by the *train de luxe* the following evening, although it would be Christmas Eve, and to travel on to Port Said by the morning express.

" That means," he muttered, " I can't get there until the day after tomorrow - Christmas Day. It may be too late - it may be too late ! "

She had written her letter from a well-known hotel in Cairo. He would have time between the trains to call there and make inquiries, and at Port Said she would no doubt stay at one of the larger hotels. He realized that his chances of missing her were great, but not greater than those of finding her, if she had not already taken the fatal step. It was a long journey for him to take with so uncertain an object ; but the spirit of activity was upon him, and for the time being the serenity of his life in the Theban desert was disjointed beyond immediate repair.

His plans being fixed, he went across to the common room, where presently the evening meal was served; but when he bent his head to ask a silent blessing upon it, the astonishment of the men assembled around the long table would have been great could they have known that there went up from his anxious mind no thanksgiving for his daily bread, but only a prayer for the safety of the soul of a daughter of sin in Port Said.

CHAPTER VI

THE FRIENDSHIP

WHEN Robin Beechcroft stepped from the boat on to the quay at Port Said he felt a great desire to bend down and give a friendly pat with his hand to the ground of Egypt ; for his joy at being once more in the Orient seemed to encourage some such demonstration. Knowing the country well and speaking the language fluently, he did not take long to pass his baggage through the custom house, and presently it was heaped upon a hand-cart in the charge of the porter of the Orient Hotel, and was being trundled through the narrow streets of the town, while Robin followed a few moments later, leisurely strolling towards the hotel, looking around him as he went with keen eyes and alert senses.

Here in Egypt he felt a kind of mental expansion; his mind seemed to be putting out tentacles towards passing events, grasping at and absorbing those surrounding incidents which in his own land he would have left to go their peaceful ways. He stared at the tawdry little shops, listened with interest to fragments of the conversation of passers by, and noted the varying expressions of their tanned faces and the explicit gestures of their hands.

At the hotel he obtained a room on the fourth floor, the long windows of which opened, as did those of the other rooms, on to the wide verandah that passed around the four sides of the building

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like the covered deck of the liner he had just left. While waiting for his baggage to be brought up he stepped out on to this verandah, and, leaning on the railing, looked over the town and away to the desert behind it. The wind was chilly, but the sun shone down from a clear blue sky ; and for several minutes he stood happily breathing in the familiar smell of Egypt and listening to the hubbub in the streets below.

As he turned to enter his room again he noticed that the next room was occupied by a girl who was sitting writing at a table drawn close to the window. As he passed she glanced up at him, and he was able to observe the beauty of her face. The room was dark behind her; and, sitting there at the window, she looked like a delicate cameo set in black velvet. The vision of her shadowed eyes, raised from her writing to meet his, remained with him as he entered his own room and set his heart beating. There was something so tragic and yet so defiant in their expression that his interest was at once aroused. His sensibilities, he thought to himself in his practical way, were probably peculiarly alert just now, in the excitement of the beginning of a new season's work; but, whatever might be the explanation, he determined there and then to do his best to make her acquaintance.

At luncheon, an hour later, he saw her again. She was seated at a table near by, talking to a pale faced young man of obvious Italian nationality a dark-haired, sallow-faced youth, immaculately dressed and wearing an eyeglass. For a moment Robin thought that they were married, and the idea rather annoyed him ; but soon he observed that the girl did not wear a wedding-ring, and the man's careful politeness was not quite that of a husband.

He stopped the English head waiter as he was

passing. " Who are that lady and gentleman over there ? " he asked him.

" I don't know, sir, who the gentleman is," he replied, " but the lady is Madeline Rorke, the English actress, I believe, sir." " Never heard of her," Robin murmured.

" I think she played in 'The Galileans,' sir," the waiter added. " Oh yes, of course," said Robin; " I remember now. She made, quite a hit : but that was three years ago."

He watched her, fascinated, throughout the meal, and immediately afterwards went to the manager's office to make further inquiries, with the excuse that he recognized her as an acquaintance of long ago. There he discovered that the lady had arrived from Cairo that day, and was sailing on the morrow for Italy, and that the man was Prince Paolo Gueracci, of the diplomatic service, a friend of hers, who was also leaving next day by the same vessel.

During the afternoon he went out for a stroll along the main streets of the little town and made a few small purchases in the shops. In one of these Fortune favoured him with the introduction which he had so desired to bring about. It was at a tobacconist's, and he was standing at the counter waiting for his change when she entered alone.

" Do you sell," she said in French, " a drug that smells something like attar of rose, with which one touches the paper of one's cigarettes before smoking them-do you know what I mean? "

The Greek salesman evidently did not understand French ; and she therefore repeated her question in English. The man replied with a few halting words in the same language ; but it was clear that he had not taken her meaning. She explained that one dabbed a little of the drug on the cigarette paper and allowed it to dry, thus giving a soothing

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quality to the tobacco. The man shook his head uncomprehendingly. She tried him in Italian, and that having failed, asked him whether he spoke Arabic, to which he replied volubly in that tongue. At this she looked up at Robin and laughed.

" I'm afraid my Arabic is rather rusty," she said. " Unless I get a sudden galvanic inspiration of memory, I shall never make him understand."

That was Robin's opportunity. " May I try mine on him for you ? " he asked; and quickly he conveyed her meaning to the salesman in his native tongue. The man did not, however, keep the drug, and they therefore left the shop together.

" You can get it in Cairo, if you are going there," said Robin, anxious to find out for certain whether she were leaving the country or not.

" But I specially want it today " she replied. " It is so soothing to the nerves, and mine are all to pieces."

"It's very bad for you," he told her. " I wouldn't smoke the stuff if I were you." Then, realizing that it was not his affair, he raised his hat and was about to leave her. In fact, he had already turned away when she stopped him by a further remark.

" I don't think it is powerful enough to hurt," she said; " and anyway I am quite used to hurting myself."

" Personally," he answered, with a laugh, " the hurts inflicted by Fate are quite enough for me. There's no sense in adding to them."

" Fate ! " she exclaimed, and a look of haughtiness came into her shadowy eyes. " I keep nay Fate with my foot upon it. It is my servant, not my master."

The words were uttered with intensity, and for a moment he glanced at her with the feeling that she had spoken them because they sounded dramatic;

but in this it seemed that he was mistaken, for there was something very real, very spontaneous about her. It was evident that her nerves, as she had said, were strung up; and she conveyed to him, by a kind of telepathy, a sense of menacing calamity. It was as though she were one of life's rebels ; and, like all rebels, she seemed to endow the common things of every day with a new momentousness. He seemed to find a passionate honesty underlying her words and her expression ; and it aroused in him an unusual feeling of interest.

" The poet Henley," he said, perhaps a little facetiously, " has written 'I am the master of my fate, I am the captain of my soul.' "

" Yes, I know those verses," she answered, with some impatience. " And, as far as I can remember, about a dozen French, German, and Italian poets have said the same thing." She suddenly stopped still in the middle of the road and laughed. " But, you know, this isn't the way to begin a friendship. We ought to be discussing the weather."

" Are we beginning a friendship ? " he asked." Of course we are," she replied. "Perhaps it will be a very brief one.; but it will certainly be a friendship. I felt it at the moment you walked past my window on the verandah."

" Oh, you noticed me, then ? "

" Of course. I said to myself, ' There goes a friend.' Wasn't it sad at lunch? There you were wanting to know me, and there was I, wanting to know you . . ."

" Yes, and there was your Italian friend . . ."

" Oh, poor Paolo ! He is in love with me."

" No, he isn't," said Robin calmly.

She looked up at him quickly. " Why do you say that ? " she asked.

"I don't know," he laughed. " I just think he isn't."

"Well," she said, "you're quite right: he isn't. He was."

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" Has he got tired of you ? " asked Robin.

" You're a very brutal friend, aren't you ? " she remarked.

"Very," he answered. "One has to be brutal with a woman, in self-defence, when she is the most beautiful and the most bewitching thing in the world."

" Am I that ? " she asked. " I do hope you really think so-truly, from the heart, you know."

" Yes, I do. And I also think you are the most tragic person I have ever met."

" Oh no! " she cried. " I am not tragic. I hate tragedy. Life is a vaudeville entertainment ; nothing more."

" What nonsense ! " he said. " Life is a very serious business."

She shrugged her shoulders as though to indicate that the matter was not worth discussion, and they walked down the road, conversing in a quite inconsequent manner. Presently they left the little street of shops in which they had met, and turned into the main boulevard which runs in a straight line through the middle of the town to the sea front, and here they walked in the shade of an avenue of fine acacia-trees, whose rich foliage spread above them, rustling in the cool breeze. Between the leaves and branches the intense blue sky could be seen, and the sunshine was splashed over them like sprinkled flames as they walked.

"What are we doing?" she asked at length, smiling at Robin as an old friend might have smiled who was happy to be with him again.

"Well," he said, "we've passed the hotel, so I suppose we're going for a walk."

" I suppose we are," she answered, and therewith they relapsed into a temporary silence.

Soon they reached the shore, and found themselves walking out to sea along the great mole on which the Lesseps statue stands. Here and there a native fisherman crouched with his line cast into the translucent water; one or two Egyptian youths, dressed like young Parisian dandies, sauntered to and fro taking the air ; and in the distance stood a black-faced *coast guard* in his smart khaki uniform, his red *tarboush*, or fez, worn at a lively angle and his rifle tucked under his arm.

The girl waved her hand in a gesture which comprised these different types. "There you have modern Egypt," she said. " The negro soldier trained to look like his British master whom he adores; the young Egyptian gentleman aping the manners of his French friend whom he admires; and the peasant fisherman not caring a fig for anybody."

" You know Egypt pretty well, I gather," remarked Robin.

" Parts of it," she replied.

" Are you English ? " he asked her.

" I don't really know," she answered, with startling candour. " English, or Irish, or something like that, I suppose. But I never think of myself as having any definite fatherland; I am just a daughter of mankind, a sort of international product. I speak a lot of languages ; have travelled in all manner of countries ; and I have mixed with men of many nationalities."

She glanced at Robin as she made this rather enigmatical statement, and evidently she saw by his expression that he was a little exercised in his mind by it.

" I tell you that," she explained, "because I like you, and I don't wish those I like to misunderstand me. I am just a homeless wanderer, a sort of cosmopolitan adventuress."

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" 'Adventuress ' is not a pretty word," he said.

" I prefer it to 'village maiden,' " she replied, with finality.

The sun was setting behind the houses of the town as they turned their steps towards the hotel, and the chill of evening had come into the air. The girl wound a scarf about her neck and drove her hands deep into her pockets. Robin looked across his shoulder at her trim, graceful figure; and his eyes rested with delight upon the beautiful lines of her profile. The glory of the sunset was in her face, and her skin looked like white coral; while her eyes seemed to reflect the deep purple of the sea beside them and to respond with mystery to its mysteries.

He could not help remarking the elusive sadness of her expression; but when he asked her to explain the meaning of it, she answered only with a little laugh and a gesture so deprecating that he could not follow the subject further. They hardly said a word to one another of any significance as they walked. They laughed a good deal, it is true; but yet there seemed to be a deeper sympathy between them which was building up the edifice of their friendship with a rapidity that was almost disconcerting. Long before they reached the hotel he had the feeling that she was an old friend, one with whom he was entirely at his ease ; and yet they knew nothing of one another. He gathered from such conversation as they had had that she was unmarried, and that she had lived an entirely independent life for the last few years, travelling hither and thither as her mood dictated.

" And has this wandering existence brought you happiness ? " he asked.

" I have been happy," she replied, with a shrug of her shoulders. " But I have also been unhappy.

There are times when I find my days so dull that I go about only seeking sleep."

In the hall of the hotel they said good-bye. Robin had to dine that night with the Commandant, an old school-friend of his, and it was therefore not likely that he would see his new friend until the next morning.

" Tell me," he asked her, " are you really leaving tomorrow ? You know you haven't yet said so definitely, and I've asked you several times."

Let tomorrow answer for itself," she replied.

" Good-night, then," said Robin. " I am so glad we are going to be friends."

She held his hand in hers a moment and looked quietly at him with her wonderful eyes. " I am so glad that we have *been* friends," she replied. " I have been happy with you this afternoon."

She turned away and entered the lift, and as the attendant closed the gate upon her she looked at him once more, with a smile now upon her lips, but with misery in her eyes.

CHAPTER VII

DREAMS

ALL that evening Robin was haunted by the memory of her. He had the feeling that she needed a friend, that something was amiss with her life; and yet her nature seemed to resent pity and to shun any sort of commiseration. In spite of her history there was something strangely childlike about her, and he would have liked to have taken her in his arms and to have held her quietly there, surrounded by his protective strength, while she fought out the war that he felt was being waged in her heart.

He fully realized that very possibly she was socially and morally an outcast ; but that knowledge produced no aversion in him. On the contrary, it added materially to his interest in her. He was stirred by her beauty, charmed by her personality, and fascinated by the mystery that brooded over her; yet he could truthfully say that he desired his friendship to be in her life a thing of honesty and purity, different from all those she had known before. It pleased him to think he could say to her, " I have no ulterior motive; I want nothing from you; I want only to help and to protect you."

He felt a sudden pleasure in the fact that he was a healthy, hard-working, self-controlled Englishman, and not one of the dissipated, immoral foreigners whom he supposed she, had known. Though not particularly insular, he found himself indulging in a pleasurable pride that he was not a sallow-faced

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Italian. He did not know what her relationship to Prince Paolo Gueracci might be; but he felt that, whatever it was, it was not the kind of friendship that she required. A hundred times he declared to himself that though her past, so far as he could gather, was not above reproach, he knew instinctively that she had been more sinned against than sinning. He detested a vulgar adventuress who turned her wits to commercial ends and lived by them ; but he was, perhaps, rather attracted to a woman who had set aside the conventions of society and had lived her life according to the dictates of her own conscience, and his sympathy was increased by his realization that her sorrows must be real sorrows and her sins as scarlet.

He was a dull guest at dinner that evening; and the Commandant, his host, thought that he had undoubtedly lost much of his youthful spirits since last they had met. Returning to the hotel soon after eleven o'clock, he went straight up to his room, and, going out on to the verandah, he observed that the windows next door were in darkness. The girl was evidently in bed and asleep ; and he therefore also turned in, determined to see her early next morning, in case she had really decided to leave by the Italian liner.

He awoke next morning-it was Christmas Eve with the sun streaming into his room, and, looking at his watch, was dismayed to find that it was nearly nine o'clock. He slipped on a dressing-gown and stepped out on to the verandah, where the cool sea breeze played around him with invigorating touch. He glanced quickly towards the room next door, and was surprised to see that it was already vacated and that a native servant was employed in sweeping the floor.

" Has the lady already gone out ? " he asked the man, speaking in Arabic.

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" She has left by the steamer, effendi," the Egyptian replied. " Listen! you can hear the siren blowing now."

Robin dashed back into his room, his heart full of disappointment. He had not thought that the steamer would sail so early, nor had he supposed that she really intended to leave by it. Perhaps, if he ran down to the quay, he could wave a farewell to her as the ship passed down the roadstead towards the open sea. He flung himself into his clothes, and a few minutes later was hurrying along the street. He arrived at the water's edge in time to see the liner in motion, and already some distance from the group of rowing boats and launches which had been attendant upon it.

A few friends of the passengers were standing on the quay waving their handkerchiefs to those on board, while others in the boats were being rowed back to the shore. He could not distinguish the figures that clustered on the deck; but mechanically he lifted his hat and waved it. Presently he thought that he could make out the form of Madeline Rorke standing beside a man whom he supposed to be her Italian friend; and when the latter waved a handkerchief, he suddenly replaced his hat on his head and turned away with a heart of lead.

His thoughts were of dreary stuff as he walked back to the hotel. The expedition across the Menzaleh Lake which he had planned for today now seemed a tedious and useless business ; and he had to force his mind to it with a comfortless effort.

" Oh well," he thought to himself, with a sigh, " perhaps it's a good riddance of bad rubbish. I should have become awfully interested in her, and, no doubt, she isn't worth it ; and, anyway, that sort of thing is bad for my work."

He tried hard to brush the memory of her from his mind, but in this he was by no means successful.

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"Perhaps we shall meet again," he thought, "or perhaps she will write." He wondered if she would recollect that he had told her he would be an honorary member of the Turf Club at Cairo during the winter. She had given him no address: would she remember this address of his ?

After breakfast he hired a carriage and drove over to the lake, where he bargained with a boatman to take him across to the deserted island of Tonnys, which he had desired to visit ; but his heart was not in his work, and he sat for many hours in the prow of the boat, staring with unseeing eyes across the expanse of the water, while the boatman tacked to and fro in the light breeze, seeming to make no progress whatsoever.

At length, at mid-afternoon, he arrived at the little island where once had stood an early Christian monastery ; but here he was disappointed to find that nothing but a few mounds of broken bricks and pottery remained of the holy place. He sat down at the edge of the water, and ate his sandwiches and smoked his pipe without being able to arouse himself from his gloom. On all sides the waste of water stretched before him ; and in the far distance the houses of Port Said could just be seen rising out of a haze of heat.

He felt very much alone in the silence of the afternoon, and he wondered how the early anchorites could have endured the tedium of their existence on this barren, unfriendly spot. How he would have enjoyed the picnic had she been with him! She would have sat here smoking her cigarette and gazing over the lake, with a far-away expression in her wonderful eyes and a wistful smile upon her lips; and suddenly the deserted island would have blossomed like the rose, and the shimmer of the sun upon the still water would have become the vision of a dream. . . .

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At length he arose and entered the boat once more for the return journey; but now the breeze had died away, and their progress was again slow. The sun went down as a ball of flame below the low horizon before they had traversed half the distance, and soon the moon had risen. The boatman, who had taken to the oars, now broke into song, and his voice rippled out across the water like the wail of a lost soul. Robin sat, as before, in the prow, looking with weary eyes at the distant lights of the town which twinkled in the calm water; and presently a condition bordering on sleep came over him, so that his eyelids drooped and his nerves relaxed.

A sense of great happiness stole over him: it was as though the weight of his depression had been lifted from his heart. He stretched out his hand, and it was with no feeling of surprise that he became aware of her presence. She was sitting by his side, and his hand was on her arm. The boat moved quietly over the moonlit lake, and the water seemed to murmur to them as it fell aside from the prow. Very gently he drew her towards him. She did not resist: she nestled down into his arms with a little sigh of happiness. Her enchanted eyes looked up into his, and there was such tenderness in them that his heart seemed to stand still. Her pale skin looked like alabaster in the light of the moon, so smooth, so translucent, that he thought there could be nothing in the whole world so beautiful.

" Robin," she whispered, " I have found you at last : I have been looking for you in vain so long. Hold me close in your arms ; save me, save me from myself."

He bent down, and his mouth came so close to hers that he could feel the touch of her breath ; but even as their lips met the vision faded, and he

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awoke to find the boatman standing over him, arousing him with a rough hand. They had reached their destination ; and looking at his watch, he saw that it was already half-past seven. He soon found a carriage to take him back to the hotel, and as he was jolted through the streets he passed his hand over his eyes and drew the breath in between his teeth like one in pain.

" Oh God," he groaned, " oh God, I want her; and she has gone from me!"

As he entered the hotel he observed that dinner was already in progress, and, therefore, after hastily tidying himself, he went immediately into the dining room. And there, sitting alone at the table next to his, was Madeline Rorke, calm, self-possessed and inscrutable. Robin stared at her in blank astonishment, and for a moment he thought that he was again dreaming.

" Won't you sit at my table ? " she said, looking up at him with a friendly smile.

" Then you didn't sail, after all ? " he exclaimed.

" No," she replied. " I went on board; but while Paolo was arranging his things in his cabin, I suddenly changed my mind and came ashore again. I don't suppose he missed me until they were well out at sea."

" Why did you change your mind ? " he asked eagerly, as he sat down.

" Oh, I don't know," she replied. " I had other plans in my head, I suppose."

" I've been thinking about you all day," he said, " and I can't tell you how unhappy I was that we might never meet again. Did you remember my address ? "

"Address?" she laughed. "No: did you give me one ? "

" There! I might have known you wouldn't write," he said, with bitterness.

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" But," she explained, " I didn't expect to continue our friendship. It was to be just the little happiness of an afternoon. When I turned back from the steamer I had planned to go away at once in quite another direction, but somehow . . . Well, anyway, I'm still here."

During dinner he talked with animation, and she, too, seemed to have thrown all cares to the wind. There was something very magnetic, very exciting about her; and Robin, still somewhat under the influence of his dream on the lake, felt himself fast losing his head. Across the little table her eyes seemed to burn into his; and their spell was still upon him when they rose and went out into the moonlight.

There was a sheltered alcove in the garden of the hotel, where two basket chairs stood in the darkness beneath the palms; and here they seated themselves, the shadow of the foliage behind and around them, and the white moonlight spreading out before their eyes. The wind had wholly dropped and the night was warm and silent : it was as though the place had fallen under an enchantment and only they two were vibrant with the fires of life. Their voices were low as they talked, and their words seemed to blend with the murmur of the little fountain which rose in the light of the moon outside their bower. Robin told her something of his adventurous life, and spoke with renewed enthusiasm of his future plans ; but of her own life Madeline said little. She seemed to be detached from her past, uninterested in her future, and living wholly in the present ; and thus the moments slipped by and the moon rose to its zenith.

At length he put his hand upon hers as it rested on her knee. " I am going to be in Cairo for some weeks," he said. " Won't you come there too, so that I can see something of you ? It will be quite, respectable. You can stay in one hotel and I in

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another, and we can just dine sometimes together or go for little excursions."

Madeline looked at him curiously. " So that is what being respectable means, is it ? " she asked, and her voice mocked him. " I had often wondered. It sounds very tedious."

For answer he suddenly closed his hand upon hers and pulled her almost roughly towards him. His arms went out and enfolded her, and his impassioned lips impressed themselves upon her throat and her bare white shoulders, from which her cloak had fallen. " Madeline ! " he cried.. " Come with me; I want you. We will go away together, into the desert, or far up the Nile."

" Ah no!" she murmured, and there were tears in her voice. " You have come too late. There was a time when I should gladly have gone with you ; but now . . . Ah, don't let us speak of the future. Just hold me quietly in your arms: let me be at rest for a little while, my dear. I am so tired, so weary of all things. I think I have lived too hard, too fully, and suddenly the play is finished and the lights are going out."

" Come with me," he entreated. " I will make life a high festival for you again. I'll take you away from the shams and the insincerities of the existence you have known. You'll come with me into lands where no living man has trod, and where the air is pure of all taint ; we'll ride side by side over untouched ground in the splendid light of the sun, and we'll sleep together under the stars."

She put her hand lightly upon his mouth. " No," she said; " don't tempt me: don't try to appeal to the wanderer in me. You have so much to lose I have so little to give you . . ."

" You are all that I have hoped for," he whispered, " all that I have longed for."

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" Ah, you don't know me!" she sighed. "How can you know me in these few hours ? I don't think I want you to know me. I should bring you nothing but sorrow. I would rather we said good-bye now, while the sweetness of it lasts."

" No; at any rate tomorrow we must travel as far as Cairo together," he insisted.

" Dear, forget tomorrow," she said. " Tonight has still a little while to run."

She turned her face to his breast, and would listen to him no more. For a time she lay thus silently in his arms, and soon, like the whisper of the breeze when the tempest is spent, he could hear the contented sigh of her breath close to his face as he gazed down at her in the half light. Presently she opened her eyes and looked up at him.

"It is very good to rest quietly like this," she whispered. " It makes the world seem almost worth while."

" The world has always seemed worth while to me," said Robin, " but this is the first time in my life that I have known how close it is to heaven."

There was silence again between them; and so quiet was the night, that they were able to hear the sounding of " eight bells " on some steamer lying far off in the roadstead.

" There's midnight," he whispered. " A happy Christmas, my dear ! Now for us comes the new day."

She raised her hand as though in protest, and a little murmur of distress passed from her lips. Then she closed her eyes again and nestled into his arms like a child. At last she took his hands in hers, and moving them from about her, stood up. '

" Come," she said, and her manner was resolute. " It's finished. I must go to my rest now, and you must go to your room."

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" Oh, we needn't, go in yet," he declared. " Christmas comes but once a year."

" It's useless to stay here," she answered passionately. " What is the good of drowning the unfriendly facts of existence in a moonlight pretence of happiness ? Sympathy is not substantial enough to fill the hollowness of life. It's all just dreams ! " She put her arm through his, and they walked back to the hotel. In the passage outside their rooms they paused.

" Good-night," said Robin. " I shall live for the moment when I shall see you in the morning."

" When you wake up," she answered gravely, " I shall probably have already gone."

Robin stared at her in dismay. " What do you mean ? " he asked anxiously. "Where are you going to ? "

" Somebody may come for me during the night," she said. " I may be going on a long journey at once."

His attitude stiffened. The thought flashed through his mind that perhaps her Italian friend had also decided not to sail that day and was coming to take her away from him. Or, may be, there was some other man.

" Adventuress ! " he exclaimed, with a hard laugh.

" Yes," she repeated quietly, " adventuress. And this may be one of the best adventures of all."

" I don't understand," he said coldly, " and I don't think it's much use trying to. Good-night ! " He entered his room with a quick movement, and he did not observe the despairing gesture that Madeline made towards him, nor the manner in which she turned away, slowly and deliberately, as he slammed his door.

CHAPTER VIII

AT THE DEAD OF NIGHT

ROBIN was angry and perplexed, and for some time he sat on the side of his bed, staring in front of him. A variety of wild suppositions passed through his mind. Perhaps this beautiful and mysterious woman was a thief who was about to bring off some coup in the hotel and disappear ; and yet in her every action honesty was manifest. Perhaps she was the agent of some dark sect of revolutionaries which suddenly required her services in another part of the world, or worse still, which now menaced her life ; or, maybe, she had dealings with the Secret Service, and was about to set out, at dead of night, on some perilous mission. Of such things he had read, and since she was so clearly an adventuress, anything might be believed of her.

There was a mystery about her which baffled him ; but he was most troubled by the thought that perhaps she had only been playing with him, and was actually at the command of some other man. He could not bear to think of her in the next room waiting silently for some event of which he had no cognizance. He knew she was not happy there was tragedy in her eyes and behind her words. He could not forget how in his dream she had begged him to save her from herself ; and in an agony of mind, he recalled how in the alcove she had hidden herself in his arms like a weary fugitive seeking refuge, or like a child asking to be comforted.

So he sat for more than an hour, turning these speculations over in his mind, while his anger dwindled to naught and the tenderness that she had aroused in him increased until it seemed almost to choke him.

"She needs me," he kept saying to himself; " she needs my protection. She requires the love of a man who asks nothing from her in return."

But here his thoughts paused with a question did he want nothing ? He cursed himself for his uncontrolled passion as he had taken her in his embrace; and he recalled with a feeling of shame how she had asked him only to hold her quietly in his arms, so that for a little while she might be at rest. She had not responded with passion to his passion, nor with words of love to his protestations she had only seemed to ask for the protection that his manhood could give her.

Gradually the certainty grew in his mind that she was in some manner passing through perilous hours, that the crisis of her life had been reached, and that she required his friendship, his help. This conviction became so strong that all other thoughts were set aside by it ; and presently he found himself absorbed, enthralled, by the consciousness that he must protect her - he knew not from what.

He rose and paced up and down the room. The shutters were half closed across the long French windows, which themselves stood open; and through the apertures the moonlight streamed on to the patterned carpet. If he were to go out on to the verandah he might be able to glance into her room and to satisfy himself that all was well with her ; but he feared to do so, lest she might be awake and might misunderstand his action. Yet ever the conviction grew more overwhelming that he must act now, immediately.

Very quietly he pushed the shutters open and

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stepped out into the moonlight ; and as he did so his heart stood still within him. There at the end of the verandah, in the full light of the moon, stood Madeline ; and his blood turned back in his veins as, in a flash, the truth burst upon him. She had climbed over the railing and was standing on the outer edge, one hand holding on to the iron bars, the other pressed across her eyes. She was, that instant, about to let go and pitch headlong to her death.

With a cry he flung himself towards her in a passionate effort to save her. As he reached her her hand let go, and she swayed limply outwards into the void, uttering a choking sob. Robin's arms shot forward over the railing as she fell, and one hand grabbed at her flimsy nightdress, while the other seized her above the elbow in a grip of iron. For a moment the strain was too great for him, the impetus of his rush having left him at a perilous angle ; and he felt that he must either let her fall or himself pitch forward and drop with her from the dizzy height on to the concrete courtyard far below.

" Catch hold of the railing! " he gasped; and involuntarily her desperate hand clutched at the bars, missed, and clutched again. The momentary easing of the strain gave him the chance to shift his hold, and a second later he had grasped her around the waist and with a mighty effort had lifted her back into safety. Then, carrying her trembling and almost nude little figure in his arms, he ran back to his room, and, still holding her close, sank into a chair. She uttered no sound, but her teeth were chattering, and he could feel that her cold limbs were shaking terribly, while her breath came in short, painful gasps.

" Oh, Madeline," he whispered, " why did you do it? Oh, my dear, my dear! "
But to every

word only her convulsive trembling responded, and her fingers clenched and unclenched themselves spasmodically.

Presently he carried her across to the bed, and as he laid her upon it she turned towards the wall, burying her face in her bare arms. He spread his rug over her, and then, pouring out a little brandy from his flask, brought the glass to her.

" Drink this," he said; and, putting his arm under her head, he obliged her at last to do so. The stimulant had the desired effect, and slowly her trembling ceased, until only an occasional shudder shook her small frame.

For a time she lay silent, while he chafed her hands and her bare feet which protruded from beneath the rug ; and as he watched her he became aware that she had begun to cry. Her long-drawn sobs wrung his heart, yet he was glad that nature had thus found a vent for her emotions. He could not see her face, but the tangled mass of her dark hair clustered upon the pillow, and nothing in the whole course of his experience had ever seemed to him to be so entirely pathetic. In a passion of tenderness he bent over her and put his arms about her; and with joy he felt that her uncovered breast was warm beneath his touch. The regular current of her life was returning to her, and under his hand he could feel the beating of her heart quieting down to its normal action.

He knew not what words he whispered to her, as he implored her to take hold again upon existence and to put out of her mind the nightmare through which she had just passed. He felt as though his heart were breaking for her, and the agony of his love and his desire to comfort her clutched at his throat, so that his voice sounded hoarse and out of his control.

At last her hands thrust him from her, and

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suddenly she sat up, a wild, dismayed little figure, her hair falling over her tear-stained eyes, her nightdress slipping unheeded from her white shoulder.

" Why, oh why did you stop me ? " she cried. " I wanted to die; I wanted to find the rest I've looked for everywhere here in vain. I had arranged it all: they would have thought I had fallen over while walking in my sleep."

" God sent me to you just in time," he answered brokenly.

" God ? " she said. " You talk to me of God ? What is God? "

" The peace of mind you are seeking," he replied. " That is priests' talk," she exclaimed impatiently, running her hand over her face. " It has no meaning. There isn't a God at all. It's all just words, empty words. There is no peace, no contentment in this world: it's always just out of reach. The thing one is bursting to express is locked up in here " - she beat her breast - " and there is no key - none."

She began again to cry out, asking him why he had prevented her from making an end of herself ; and as she sat there on the side of the bed, one leg drawn up under the tumbled folds of the rug, the other hanging down, white and bare, while her toes tapped the floor, Robin saw in her the very picture of desolation. In figure she seemed such a child, and yet all the grief of all the world dwelt in her eyes. In her attitude of abandon he could find no immodesty : she did not seem to be any more conscious of her half nude condition than a savage of the forests would have been ; and somehow he could not connect her with what is called sin.

" Tell me," he begged her at length, when he had managed to calm her somewhat, " what is it that has brought you to this state of mind ? Why is it that you, at the very outset of life, want to put an end to all things ? - you of all people, with your

beauty, your power to command anybody's attention, your many gifts."

" There's nothing to tell," she replied. " I am just tired of everything, and I dislike myself so heartily. There is so much misery in the world, such wailing, such piteous pleading for help. I hear it on all sides; and I am so useless. My mind always seems to be grasping at something beyond my reach, something that will help me and help all those terrible others. My eyes are always looking ahead along the road, trying to see what is hidden behind the next hill. I wander about, and never, never get to the place of my dreams. There's something so horribly lacking. It's all so baffling."

Robin put his hand upon her shoulder and looked into her eyes. " Madeline," he said, with deep earnestness, " will you let me help you to find what you are seeking? Will you promise me to do nothing rash for at any rate a few weeks, while I try to set you on the right road ? "

" What's the use ? " she answered. " We belong to different worlds, you and I. I have always taken the easiest path, drifting about with the wind you have always set yourself to accomplishing some task or other. All my life I have absolutely failed to understand what I know are the rules of society, and right and wrong haven't the same meaning to me that they have to you. Why, you would be horrified at the things I have done : you would call them dirty things."

" The dirty things you have done," he said with conviction, " I believe you have done cleanly." She stared at him a moment, as though taking in his meaning. Then she pressed her hands to her eyes and threw her head back in an attitude almost of supplication. "Oh, please think that! " she cried. " Please, please always think that! "

" I don't think: I know," he answered. " It

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isn't your fault if you break the rules. I've seen enough of you to know that you've been brought up differently from most girls. The way one looks at things is simply a question of training."

She uttered a little laugh. "Training! " she exclaimed. " Shall I tell you what my training was ? " And without waiting for his reply, she began to relate to him her history, not in brief outline as she had told it to Father Gregory, but fully, unreservedly, with many details and many word pictures. He saw in his imagination the house of ill fame in one of the very streets which the hotel overlooked, and he realized that even as a child she must have watched how trifling a matter sex morality was considered to be. How should she have known that this thing was sin, when such multitudes of handsome, clean young officers, officials and visitors came to spend their evenings at the house ? If these men were wholesome members of society, what fault was there to be found with the feather-brained, inconsequent, chattering girls who took them, laughing, upstairs ?

While she talked she pulled the rug around her; and, sitting on the bed, with her knees drawn up to her chin and her hands clasped about her shins, she looked down at him as he lay back in the armchair, slowly smoking his pipe. At times her voice was callous, at times it burnt with intensity; but as each section of the narrative came to an end the same note of despair was to be heard, the same cry of desolation touched his heart.

And as the story unfolded itself in all its nakedness, Robin listened undismayed, unable to be shocked, so it seemed to him, by aught that she said. It was a paradox, but nevertheless a fact, that she remained a woman-nay, a child-of delicate and refined feelings, even when the narrative presented her in the most sordid surroundings; and always

he discerned how her heart had risen above her environment, and how her soul had survived even down to this fateful hour. Yet all that she said could be reduced to the one bitter cry of the wise King Solomon: " I have seen all that is done under the sun; and, behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit ; therefore I hated life." And when, thus, she found life not to her taste, so simple and definite was her character that she at once attempted to cast it from her and to sample the nature of death.

"And so you see," she said in conclusion, " I can't find much reason to go on living. The discontent is always greater than the happiness ; and I can no longer face that sense of loneliness which tortures me even when I am least alone, and that feeling of helplessness when there are so many requiring help. It is as though I could neither understand myself nor make myself understood by my friends. There is something in me aching for expression, something craving for utterance ; and I don't know what it is, and nobody understands what I mean - nobody."

I think I understand," said Robin.

" I wonder," she : sighed. " Somehow, in the garden, I was very happy, very soothed in your arms. I felt like a wandering tramp who has been given a seat by the fire at the inn. And yet . .."

" Oh, my dearest," he said, going over to her and putting his arm around her, " I want to make you so happy. Will you let me try ? Will you promise to live, just for the sake of the experiment ? "

" My dear," she replied, and a wan smile touched the corners of her mouth, " you need have no fears for my life for some time to come. I doubt if I shall ever be able to gather up my courage again." She shuddered, and for a moment buried her face in her hands. " Oh, it was terrible, terrible!"

" Is it a bargain ? " he asked.

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"Yes," she said, and held out her hand.

" Very well, then. We'll stay here quietly tomorrow and have a bottle of champagne with our Christmas dinner; and we'll take the evening train to Cairo. There we can make further plans when the time comes. We are just going to be friends, you know."

" Well, my friend," she said pathetically, " will you please carry me to my bed ? My knees feel as though they would not hold me, and all of a sudden I am so tired."

Robin picked her up in his arms and carried her into her own room. Here he noticed that the bed appeared to have been already slept in, and Madeline, seeing the question in his eyes, explained with a shudder how she had disarranged the bedclothes in order to give colour to the theory that she had walked to her death in her sleep. At this the tears welled up in Robin's eyes, so that the moonlight, which alone lit the room, glistened in them.

" You poor little child! " he said; " you must banish all that utterly from your mind. The past is over and done with : this hour you begin a new life."

From a little French convent across the street the sound of singing floated up to them ; and, with strange emotion, Robin recognized the Latin words of the chant: " Gloria in excelsis Deo ! " He went to the window and stood for a moment gazing over the moonlit housetops. Far away in the east a faint suggestion of light told that the dawn of Christmas Day was nigh.

" Gloria in excelsis Deo ! " sang the nuns. " Glory to God in the Highest, and on earth peace and goodwill towards men ! " The tears came again into his eyes as he returned to the bedside.

Madeline sighed contentedly as he arranged the

pillows and drew the bedclothes over her. Then he bent down and touched her pale forehead with his lips ; and in the half light he could see that her eyes were already closed.

" Sleep soundly, dear heart ! " he whispered.

" My friend," she murmured, her voice scarcely audible, " I think I'm rather glad I'm not dead. "

CHAPTER IX

THE SHEPHERD OF SOULS

THE moon which cast the mystery of its light into the room where Madeline lay in the deep sleep of exhaustion, and which shone through the shutters of the next room on to the bed where Robin endeavoured in vain to put the events of the day out of his active mind, also poured the flood of its white beauty in through the windows of the wagon-lit compartment where Father Gregory turned from side to side of the narrow berth with unclosed eyes and restless limbs. The train bearing him northwards to Cairo was comparatively empty: for no traveller chose of his free will to make the long journey on the night of Christmas Eve. He was thus alone in the two-berthed compartment, a comfort for which, in view of his sleeplessness, he was profoundly glad.

Through the window he looked out upon the varying panorama of the fields, the palm groves, and the huddled little villages, all silent and dreaming in the moonlight ; while from time to time he caught a glimpse of the gleaming Nile, on whose broad expanse an occasional vessel was to be seen slowly drifting down the stream with sails furled. And ever in the distance ran the long low line of the barren hills, rising and falling interminably, a boundary wall between the desert and the sown.

Sometimes, when the train came to a standstill at some lonely signal-box, he could hear a jackal

wailing across the fields, with a cry like that of a lost soul; and once he saw a great white owl flutter like a ghost from one tree to the next, hooting as it went. In the villages near which they passed the dogs barked furiously, and sometimes the lonely figure of the night watchman could be seen, crouching over his fire or slowly pacing, gun in hand, along a deserted pathway.

In the dimly lit stations where they stopped, shadowy figures crept to and fro in the flickering light of the oil lamps, and dark-skinned railway officials went yawning along the platforms, picking their way between the huddled groups of native Egyptians who squatted or slept outstretched upon the ground, waiting for the third-class passenger train which followed the train de luxe.

There was something dreamily monotonous in the recurrent features of the landscape and the regular halts at stations all built upon one plan; yet Father Gregory could not sleep. When he closed his eyes he saw before him the appealing figure of Madeline Rorke, her unfathomable gaze fixed upon him; and all through the long night he prayed that he might be in time to save her from death, or, if her proposal to do away with herself had been but an exaggeration, that he might save her soul alive.

" My Christ, Thou wilt not forsake one of Thy children! " he murmured; and with hope beaming in his rugged old face he said over to himself a hundred times: " Though her sins be as scarlet, yet shall they be as white as snow."

He had long since given up all speculation as to why he should be concerning himself so deeply in the welfare of a girl who was almost a stranger to him : he had accepted the call as coming from the Master, and he was setting out at His bidding to find one of His lambs that had strayed from the flock. Madeline was an outcast from society, and

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might be regarded as a menace to it ; yet he believed that even in that moral degradation Christ walked by her side. It was almost unthinkable that the Deity could follow a woman of her grade down into the darkness of her untutored life; yet he believed that the saving hand of the Good Shepherd could stretch down even to depths far below the limits of his own comprehension. He recalled, and now said over to himself, the words of the poet Rabindranath Tagore which he had read in a publication of the India Society and had memorized on account of their beauty

There rest Thy feet where live the poorest, the lowliest, and the lost.
When I try to bow to Thee, my obeisance cannot reach down to the depth
Where Thy feet rest among the poorest, the lowliest, and the lost.
My heart can never find its way to where
Thou keepest company with the companionless
Among the poorest, the lowliest, and the lost.

If she could but know how near to her was the King in His beauty ! It was for him to find her and to open her eyes, that suddenly she might feel the sweetness of the presence of the Master and might place all her cares upon Him.

At last in the small hours of the morning he fell into a troubled sleep, from which he was awakened by the attendant, who notified him that they would reach Cairo in an hour's time. The sun, not yet far risen, was streaming into the compartment with its gift of vigour and energy and the air was cool and fresh.

Through the windows, as he dressed, and later as he sat at breakfast, he could see the busy peasants streaming out from the villages into the fields, driving their flocks and their cattle to pasture. Along the high embanked roads long lines of people and animals passed by, moving forward to

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their daily tasks, and the dust of their footsteps was blown in clouds on the morning breeze. At the edge of a canal half-naked young men of splendid physique were to be seen working at the shadoofs, or water-hoists, singing as they flung the sparkling water into the ducts ; and here and there groups of blue-clad, shrill-voiced women were filling their pitchers and carrying them on their heads back to their houses.

In all directions the teeming life of the fat lands of Egypt was manifest, aglow with the warmth of the sun and vigorous with the keen touch of the morning air; and Father Gregory found himself unconsciously repeating the words of the Psalmist

" O Lord, how manifold are Thy works ! ... the earth is full of Thy riches ! "

At length the train rolled into the station at Cairo, and soon he was driving through the busy streets to the hotel from which Madeline Rorke had written. Here he learnt that when she had left for Port Said it had been her intention to stay at the Orient Hotel ; and with this information to guide him he returned to the station, and presently set out northwards on the morning express. His mind was, so intent on his mission that the time passed rapidly, and the summons to the restaurant car for luncheon came much sooner than he expected. When the meal, with its attempt at Christmas decoration, was finished, they were already running alongside the Suez Canal, where a great liner was passing on its journey to India or Australia.

Port Said was reached in the early afternoon, but it was not until he was driving towards the Orient Hotel that he began to formulate in his mind the manner in which he would approach Madeline, were he to find her here. Up till now he had followed the Lord's instructions to His disciples when He

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said: "Take no thought beforehand what ye shall speak, neither do ye premeditate; but whatsoever shall be given you in that hour, that speak ye." Yet now that the time had come, as he fervently hoped, for him to meet her, he suddenly became conscious of the difficulty of his task, and his courage so far forsook him that he almost wished himself back in the undisturbed calm of his little white-walled garden in the shadow of the Theban hills.

How was he to influence her headstrong nature or turn her from her wantonness ? Supposing he found her about to blow her brains out, what inducement could he offer her to live ? The love of God ? What was that to her, who knew Him not ? Or if she intended to live, how could he persuade her to refrain from the society of men until the dormant virtues of womanhood had been aroused in her ?

He felt very old, very feeble, very stupid as the carriage pulled up at the door of the hotel, and an unspoken prayer was uttered in his mind that he might be given words by which he could reach her heart. " O God," he whispered, " remember that though she comes from the very dregs she is no fool. Give me a clever and persuasive tongue, O God." The words trembled on his lips as he inquired at the office whether she were staying there ; and the answer in the affirmative left him for a moment dumb.

" Is she expecting you, sir ? " asked the tactful manager. " I mean, will you go to her room, or shall I send the page up with your card ? "

" Thank you," answered Father Gregory, " I will go straight up."

He was therefore shown into the lift, and a few moments later was standing outside the door of Madeline's room. For a second or two he hesitated, and again he murmured, a prayer for words of power then he knocked.

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" Come in," Madeline's voice replied.

He opened the door, and suddenly stood turned as it were to stone on the threshold. Clad in a brilliant kimono, Madeline was lying on the bed, her head and shoulders raised upon many pillows. In one hand she held a cigarette, in the other she had grasped three of the toes of her bare foot, her leg being tucked beneath her. By her side, seated in an arm-chair, with one hand laid upon Madeline's white arm, was his nephew Robin, engaged in reading a book of nonsense rhymes to her.

Upon the table were two empty coffee-cups, two liqueur glasses, and some cigarette stumps. Upon a chair near by a few delicate articles of female underwear were immodestly thrown; and over the rail at the foot of the bed hung a pair of silk stockings. A half-packed trunk stood open in the middle of the room, and a dressing-case, in similar condition, was lying upon the chest of drawers.

" Uncle Francis! " cried Robin, springing to his feet and holding out his hand. " What on earth are you doing here ? "

" Is he your uncle ? " exclaimed Madeline, scrambling down from the bed, an expression of real amazement on her face.

Father Gregory stood perfectly still, looking from one to the other. He did not seem to notice his nephew's proffered hand.

" I came," he said sternly, " to answer this lady's letter in person ; but I see I might have saved myself the long journey."

Robin looked at Madeline. " You know Father Gregory ? " he asked, and she nodded in reply.

" Oh, my poor dear man! " she cried, looking up at the gaunt figure in the doorway, whose tired face seemed to express only grave reproach. " You

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don't mean to say that you've come all these hundreds of miles because of that thoughtless letter of mine ? "

I supposed you were in earnest," said Father Gregory quietly. " I came to try to save you; but I find that you have by no means lost the faculty to extract amusement out of life."

" Uncle Francis," said Robin, interposing, " let me explain. . . ."

" No explanation is necessary, Robin," he replied, raising his thin hand. " I didn't expect to find you in the toils : the rest I might have known. I think, with your leave, I will go."

He stepped back, and shutting the door in their astonished faces, walked away with dragging steps, all the life gone out of his limbs and tears gathering fast in his eyes.

Robin looked at Madeline and she at him.

" Go after him," she cried, suddenly. " Tell him everything. Oh, the poor dear! I wouldn't hurt him for the whole world."

She opened the door and pushed Robin through it.

CHAPTER X

A PROPOSAL OF MARRIAGE

ROBIN overtook his uncle near the foot of the first flight of stairs, at a point where, in a screened and unfrequented recess of the landing, some easy chairs stood vacant under a palm that rose from a large brass bowl.

" Let's sit down here a moment," he said, taking the elder man's arm.

" Yes," said Father Gregory, in a voice hardly above a whisper.

" I am very tired, Robin."

" What did she write to you about ? How do you come to know her ? " his nephew asked him.

Father Gregory sank wearily into a chair. " First tell me," he said, " how it is that you are a friend of hers."

Thereupon Robin related the events of the last two days, describing how he had become acquainted with Madeline, and how by accident he had gone out on to the verandah just in time to save her.

" Yes," said his uncle. "That is what she threatened in her letter. She said that she intended to destroy herself because of the emptiness of her life." And therewith he described his meeting with her in the Theban Desert, and told of his resolution to come down to Port Said to search for her.

" I've been trying to amuse her today," Robin went on, "to keep her from brooding. And this evening she has consented to come with me to Cairo."

At this his uncle looked very grave. " But, my dear boy," he said, " surely that is a very dangerous undertaking. She is a notorious woman, and nobody would give you credit for entertaining merely a brotherly interest in her."

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"They need not do so," Robin replied quietly. "If she will consent to it, I intend to marry her." Father Gregory drew in his breath sharply, and his hands, grasped the arms of his chair.

"You can't mean it!" he exclaimed. "You are jesting."

"I have never felt less like jesting in my life," Robin answered.

"It would be a calamity!" said his uncle.

"You should be the last to think so," Robin declared, "you, who have travelled all night and day to find her. You must have felt, like I do, that there are hidden treasures in the heart of that girl, unused forces waiting to be employed, unformulated thoughts bursting for expression."

"That is true," his uncle answered. "But first she must work out her own penance."

"Penance?" exclaimed Robin. "Penance for what? For being born in a brothel? for having lived her life in accordance with, or, indeed, far above, the codes in which she was trained?"

Father Gregory stopped him with a gesture. "Yes, I am wrong," he said. "The Good Shepherd would not belabour the lamb that He has found. But, Robin, has she abandoned the old existence, think you?"

"The past ended for her," Robin answered, with conviction, "as she hung over that awful gulf last night. Her method of life had brought her nothing but misery and loneliness and exasperation, and the death from which I snatched her was its conclusion."

There was silence between them for a while, and Father Gregory's eyes were fixed upon the

ground. At length he raised his head and laid his hand upon his nephew's knee. "You will have to face a lot of criticism," he said. "Your mother will be shocked."

"I am prepared for it," Robin answered.

"And, maybe, you will be sadly disillusioned." "Neither you nor I think that probable." "You will make errors in handling her: she isn't like any woman you have known before."

"She is totally different," Robin agreed.

At that moment a step was heard on the stairs, and the two men rose as Madeline came towards them. Now, dressed for the coming journey, she looked cool and chic, and, as Robin thought, altogether beautiful.

"Oh, Father Gregory," she said, standing before him in obvious embarrassment, "I feel so very ashamed. I don't know what to do."

"My child," he said gently, "I have heard all that has happened from Robin. It seems that old age was too late, but youth was in time. Let us not speak of what is past. The busy servants of time have already tossed the sorrows of yesterday into the world's dustbin, and the house is swept and garnished. You must think of me just as an old man, an old friend, who has come to wish you a very happy Christmas and to give you his blessing."

"Yes, that is what I want," she answered, with emotion. "Give me your blessing, my father." Simply, and with entire naturalness, she knelt down before him, bending her head, and a ray of sunshine from a window near by fell upon her hair, so that Robin, who stood silently watching her, seemed to see her lit by a glory not of this world. Father Gregory raised his thin hand and made the sign of the Cross upon her forehead. "The Lord bless you and keep you, my daughter," he whispered, and his voice trembled; "the Lord lift up the light of His countenance upon you, and give you peace, now, henceforth, and for ever!"

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The tears were running down his face as he raised her to her feet, but he brushed them aside with his hand and smiled at her very tenderly.

" Thank you," she said. " I shall always remember that you thought I was worth while." Together they walked downstairs, a new light of happiness in their faces, and so passed out into the sunshine of the garden. In the shade of a group of palms Madeline persuaded Father Gregory to lie back and rest in a garden chair, while Robin was sent into the hotel to order some tea, and she herself returned to her room to complete her packing as hastily as possible. And so, as the sun was setting, they drove over to the station, and a few hours later were comfortably installed at the Ritz Hotel in Cairo.

" Well, Robin," said Madeline, as she bade him good-night, " what are our plans for tomorrow ? "

" First of all," he replied, " we must go to the Consulate and register ourselves as British subjects resident in Cairo."

." What on earth for ? " she asked in surprise.

" So that in three weeks' time we can be legally married," he said.

She received the news in grave silence, and her eyes looked away from him at the floor. "It's an awful thought," she murmured, at length. " I guessed, somehow: that that would be my fate. But it's rather quick, isn't it ? "

"Quick!" he exclaimed. "Good Lord! I seem to have known you for years and years."

"I'm not the sort of person," she said, "who can be controlled and brought into line, you know. I am very independent."

" That's why I love you," he declared.

" I hope you will never think of me, or treat me, as though I were merely your wife : you must promise me always to do your best at any rate to *pretend* I'm just living with you and may suddenly leave you."

Her sincerity was undoubted, and he did not smile as he gave her his promise.

Next day the visitors staying in the hotel evinced considerable interest in the remarkable trio : the tall old man with the saintly face, who was speedily recognized as the celebrated Father Gregory ; the stalwart young man whose name was already familiar as that of a daring and tenacious explorer; and the beautiful girl whom some recognized, others knew only by name, and all in unison admired. They were the object of much scrutiny and much whispering as they sat together at breakfast and luncheon; and tea on the crowded terrace was an ordeal from which Father Gregory shrank.

" I am glad I am going back to Luxor tonight," he said. " The world of fashion upsets me."

" Oh, but, Uncle Francis," Robin protested, " you must stay one more day. You are surely too tired to travel tonight."

" No," he replied. " My little excursion into the world has occupied enough time and thought. I want to get back to my studies in the quietness of the desert. You, Robin, are a riddle which I am too old to solve ; and you, my dear Madeline, are a problem to which God alone knows the answer. I leave you to work out your own destinies-not with my heart heavy, mark you ; with a little misgiving, may be; but with a deal of hope."

Later, as they drove away from the hotel, Father Gregory offered his nephew some worldly advice. He pointed out that it would be better for Robin not to put up at the Ritz Hotel, where Madeline had elected to stay : a concession to propriety which his nephew promised to make, not, however, without a protest from the bride to be, who totally failed to understand these rules of polite society.

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It was also arranged that the engagement should be kept secret, for it was sure to arouse public interest and private comment, which, to say the least, is always undesirable.

At the station, before the train started, Madeline took Father Gregory aside while Robin was securing a place for him for dinner in the restaurant car.

" I understand," she said, " that after the civil marriage at the Consulate Robin wants us also to have the religious ceremony in church."

" It is usual," he replied.

" Well, I want to ask you," she went on, " whether you would marry us in your own little chapel in the desert."

" Why, certainly I will," he answered.

" That's a relief ! You see, I know very little about churches or religion or the Bible, or what God likes and what He doesn't like," she explained. " I was rather afraid that you might find some technical point about me that you would think He might boggle at."

" My child," said Father Gregory, " in God's eyes there are no technicalities." And then, suddenly, he added: " You must have a talk to Henry Morland."

" Who is he ? " Madeline asked.

" A painter who is staying with me at Luxor, a man who is very down on the Church. He is a fanatic, but he's worth listening to."

Their conversation was interrupted by Robin's return ; and a few moments later Father Gregory was waving farewell from the window of his compartment as the train steamed out of the station. That night he slept soundly. The reason was beyond his comprehension why he was not troubled

by the coming marriage of his favourite nephew to a woman born and bred in the gutter.

He knew that the alliance was to be regarded almost as a catastrophe; yet somehow his mind was at rest in regard to it. A rapid analysis of his feelings showed him that this might be due to the fact that he was more interested, temporarily, in Madeline's welfare than in his nephew's career; and that since a sober marriage was the happiest solution of the dilemma of her life, it was only natural that he should find some momentary satisfaction in the arrangement. But this explanation did not cover the ground. There was some greater, more profound cause for his peace of mind. Was it, he wondered, that he knew instinctively how great a treasure Robin had won ?

Could it be, he asked himself, that in the depths of his heart, by some occult process of divination, he had observed in her a spirit richer even than that of his well-beloved nephew ? Could it be . . . ?

CHAPTER XI

SENSE AND NONSENSE

IN fulfilment of his promise to his uncle, Robin drove out to Heliopolis next morning to engage a room for himself, for the coming three weeks, at the Royal Egypt Hotel, the palatial establishment which stands on the edge of the desert a few miles to the east of Cairo. He had elected to make this his headquarters mainly because it was a convenient starting-point for certain visits he proposed to make to the encampments of a Bedouin tribe which were scattered at the foot of the hills that formed the eastern horizon, while at the same time it was within fifteen or twenty minutes drive by car from the Ritz Hotel, in the centre of Cairo, where Madeline would continue to stay.

It was true that he would have to make himself polite to the somewhat amorous Mrs. Jones and her extraordinary cavalier, Augustus Blake, who were also staying at Heliopolis ; but this did not trouble him, and it occurred to him that Madeline would find much amusement in making their acquaintance. He would introduce her to them as an old friend of his ; and, following Father Gregory's advice, he would not mention the fact that she was about to become his wife. That would remain a glorious secret between Madeline and himself ; and he looked forward with happy anticipation to the silent understanding that would link them together as they watched the idiosyncrasies of their remarkable friends.

He arrived at the hotel at mid-morning, and was ascending the great flight of white marble steps which led up in a blaze of sunshine to the cool shadows of the portico, when he caught sight of Daisy Jones seated under an awning on the balcony, reading a newspaper. He saw her put down the paper and lean forward excitedly : then she rose to her feet and waved her hand to him with a circular movement, as though she were leading a chorus of cheers for the King. She wore a white muslin dress and a large hat, whereon were artificial poppies and cornflowers; and, as she tripped down the steps to meet him, Robin was somehow reminded of a coloured plate he had once groaned at in the summer number of an illustrated journal of the days of the South African War, entitled " The Young Earl's Homecoming."

" Welcome, dear mortal! " she exclaimed, wringing his hand. " Welcome to our fairy palace ! " She led him on to the balcony and drew up a chair for him beside her own, patting and arranging the cushion on it so as to add to his comfort. Robin sat himself down murmuring his thanks, got up again, removed the cushion, and resumed his seat. At a slight nod from her a waiter glided forward and stood bowing before him. It was easy to see that she and her father were rich.

" You will of course have something to drink," she said. " A jewelled bowl of red wine with fruit floating in it, or a golden goblet filled with a nectar of the East and sprinkled with rose leaves. . . "

Robin looked anxiously at her, and was relieved to see that her eyes were dancing with merriment. " Thank you," he replied; " a gin-and-tonic will be most acceptable."

The waiter hurried away, and Mrs. Jones beckoned to a small native page-boy who was standing at the entrance of the hotel holding a feather duster, as is the custom of the country, and who now sped over to them.

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"Dust the gentleman's boots," she commanded; and the boy instantly whisked his duster vigorously around Robin's feet, as though his life's entire welfare depended upon it.

"Send the hall-porter to me," she said to him when he had finished; and a moment or two later a corpulent Frenchman, in pale-blue and silver livery, stood before them.

"Oh, Georges," she cooed, "you who are so wise and clever, and so gifted in regard to all material matters, dear Georges, faithful Georges, will you please have the entire hotel and grounds searched until you find Mr. Blake, and send him to me here?"

Georges bowed, and hastened away as the waiter with the gin-and-tonic returned. "And now, let me see," said Mrs. Jones, "you would like a cigar, wouldn't you?"

"No, really, thanks," Robin replied. "I don't want anything else; and please don't give any more orders: I'd much rather talk to you in peace."

Mrs. Jones turned to the waiter. "Go!" she said sternly. "His Excellency would like to talk." The waiter having thereupon withdrawn, Robin told Mrs. Jones of his intention to come out next day to stay at Heliopolis.

"I must go to the office presently," he said, "and find out if they have any rooms vacant."

Mrs. Jones clapped her hands with pleasure. "How perfectly delightful!" she cried. "I will see that you get a really nice room: just leave it all to me. Dear old Plato will be awfully pleased. You know, he took such a fancy to you on board ship: he has talked such a lot about you."

"That's very nice of him," said Robin.

"But we quite disagree about you. He thinks you are the reincarnation of an ancient Egyptian

High Priest who was sometimes very cruel but always very just, and used to sacrifice human beings to the Cat of Bubastis. He says he is almost quite sure that he was one of your victims. That's why he feels so drawn to you, you know."

" Yes," Robin mused, looking straight in front of him, "little memories like that would form a sort of friendly tie."

" Oh, he says you were perfectly justified in sacrificing him," Mrs. Jones added quickly, " because, you see, he was a foreign vassal king, and he had offended me, and I was the Queen of Egypt and the representative on earth of the cat-goddess."

" Oh, I see," said Robin.

" Yes, isn't it wonderful! " she exclaimed. " He saw it all in a vision, in the train, the very first hour he was in Egypt. He went to sleep in the corner of the carriage, and I knew he must be having a vision or something because he snored so terribly. He says all clairvoyants snore."

" But why do you disagree about me ? " Robin asked.

" Well, you see," said Mrs. Jones, " I don't ever think of you as an Egyptian High Priest. I think you were a king, a Greek king, you know, living in a marble palace built on the edge of the Mediterranean; and you had thousands of warriors whom you used to lead into battle, wearing those lovely plumed helmets and shining breastplates."

" And what were you ? " Robin inquired.

Mrs. Jones looked at the ground. " You must think me an awful silly-billy," she said, " but, of course, it is quite acknowledged by really clever people-doctors and professors and things-that you can remember your former existence if you go without your dinner, you know, and subdue the passions of the flesh, and put yourself into a state of *bishnu* . . ."

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" Good heavens! " said Robin, " what on earth is that ? "

" I don't know," she answered, entirely unconcerned, " but Plato says I must be very advanced to be able to do it. Well, anyway, I think I was a Queen of the Nile who came to visit you in your kingdom by the sea; and we made a great alliance, and had a banquet and a procession and some Olympic games . . ."

" And where was Augustus Blake ? " Robin asked. " Oh, he was being sacrificed in Bubastis while you and I feasted," she said, with a laugh.

" Well," Robin remarked, " either way, he must be perfectly crazy about me."

At that moment the great mystic appeared on the balcony, directed by the hall-porter, and walked in a straight line towards them. His round eyes were so intent on his goal, and, by reason of his great height, were so far removed above the ground, that he was apparently oblivious to the fact that several pieces of basket furniture stood in his way. At least two chairs and one table fell before his onslaught, while others, thus flung aside, tottered at surprising angles before finally righting themselves.

Ah, my dear old fellow! " exclaimed Blake, as he shook hands with Robin; " we three meet again! "

" Plato," said Mrs. Jones reprovingly, " you really must be more careful of the furniture. You've upset several things."

Blake looked serious. " I keep forgetting," he said, " that one can't walk *through* things on this plane like one does in the astral."

He looked quickly at Robin, and his eyes seemed to conceal laughter, though his face was serious enough ; and he must have appeared to Mrs. Jones to be truly concerned at his forgetfulness of terrestrial laws.

" Guess the news," she exclaimed, slipping her hand through Blake's arm. . " Captain Beechcroft is coming to stay in this hotel for two or three weeks. Isn't it lovely ! "

Blake glanced at Robin, and there was a momentary gleam of apprehension in his owl-like eyes. Then, " I'm delighted to hear it," he said, a pleasant smile illuminating his face. " We three will have wonderful times together."

" Well, of course I have a great deal to do," Robin explained. " I shall be out all day in the desert over there."

" What do you hope to find? " asked Mrs. Jones, in an awed voice. " Gold and jewels and precious stones belonging to fabulous kings and queens ? "

" Oh no," said Robin; " I'm just going to make friends with some Bedouin."

" Oh well, we shall always be able to dine together," Blake remarked, " and have a little chat before turning in."

" I'm booked up most evenings," said Robin quickly, " with friends in Cairo."

"That's too bad," murmured Blake; but Mrs. Jones only laughed and said that they could not expect to monopolize so great a lion.

Robin returned to Cairo a short time before luncheon and went straight up to Madeline's room. He found her seated in an armchair at the window overlooking the well-kept garden, where the native gardeners were flooding the sun-scorched lawns with water from their hoses, while a number of black Egyptian crows hopped around them in search of food. She was smoking a cigarette, and an open novel lay on her knees. Robin went across to her, and, seating himself on the arm of the chair, took her white hand in his and raised it to his lips.

" What are you reading ? " he asked her, when he had related the events of the morning.

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" Oh, just trash," she replied, tossing the book impatiently from her. " Robin," she exclaimed suddenly, putting her hand on his shoulder, " I want you to get me some real books to read. For some reason, since I have known you, I have felt awfully ignorant. Of course, during my travels I have met plenty of clever people, and I've picked their brains when I had the chance ; and I've done a certain amount of general reading. But still I am awfully uneducated, you know, and I am getting very tired of pretending to understand things that I don't know anything about, just for the sake of good-fellowship. Last night, just during dinner, I counted three separate subjects that you mentioned which I didn't really know the meaning of at all."

" What were they ? " he asked, with a smile. She marked them on her fingers. " Trades Unions, Pre-Raphaelite's, and the law of survival."

" Good heavens! " he laughed. " Did I talk about all that ? The wine must have gone to my head."

" No," she answered, " you didn't hold forth about them. They just cropped up casually and disappeared again."

Robin was delighted to find this confirmation of the belief which was being formed in his mind that Madeline was, in spite of circumstances, a thoughtful woman, capable of intellectual development. Her ignorance of most subjects of topical interest was in itself refreshing; for when he brought them to her notice, she turned the clear gaze of an unbiased mind upon them, and exhibited no prejudice due to that one-sided influence under which most people have been brought up.

It was extremely exhilarating to be in the society of a woman who, although a brilliant linguist and an interesting conversationalist, was neither Con-

servative nor Radical, neither aristocrat nor plebeian, neither religious nor irreligious, neither Roman nor Anglican, neither moral nor immoral, neither modest nor immodest.

Her character, he felt, was essentially honest, truthful, childlike, and frank ; and her mind was open to conviction on all subjects. He began to see that she had a keen desire for knowledge, and it was hourly becoming more evident to him that she had not previously known any man who had stimulated her to any sort of mental activity.

" You know," she now said, as she rose from the chair, " I'm beginning to find that there are a tremendous lot of things to think about in life. There's something about you, Robin, that galvanizes my brain into action. It's not so much what you say or think : it's just that you are so virile."

She stood before the mirror and combed back her hair so that it revealed the beautiful line of her forehead. Robin looked at her with admiration so illuminating his face that Madeline laughed in sheer happiness.

" Shall I be a presentable wife ? " she asked, addressing herself to his reflection in the mirror.

Robin took her in his strong arms and gazed at the intoxicating beauty of her face. " No man will ever have had a wife so utterly adorable," he said, " or so much to be respected."

The intensity with which he spoke sent the colour into Madeline's pale face for a moment, and such tenderness came into her eyes that Robin seemed to feel the impress of it upon his heart. It was as though some celestial being had spread its gentle wings about his soul.

" My dear," she said, with a little smile, " you mustn't say such things to me. It's fatal! You almost make me feel that there is something after all in being worthy of respect. If you aren't care-

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ful I shall become a high-principled British matron, whatever that may be."

That afternoon they strolled down the street to the largest bookshop in the city, and there they selected a great number of learned works. Several books had recently been published on the subject of Imperialism, and there were also two or three works on Socialism and the Labour Movement which the enterprising salesman had stocked. Madeline realized that these subjects represented opposite points of view, and for this reason she selected two of each. She also bought a number of volumes dealing with history, philosophy, art, and so forth.

" You'll never read all these," Robin laughed, as they looked at the pile of handsome books which they had selected.

" Perhaps not," Madeline replied, " but if I find them too dull I shall have to get some of Father Gregory's young men to read them for me and give me an intelligent abstract."

" Uncle Francis has a wonderful library in his retreat, I believe," Robin remarked.

" But he doesn't allow women on the premises," said Madeline.

Robin pointed to a heavy work on the position of women which she had selected. "Perhaps if you read this little trite to him," he said, " he will relent and let you in."

CHAPTER XII

AT HELIOPOLIS

THE next morning; precisely at eleven o'clock, a message was brought to Robin that a car from the Royal Egypt Hotel was at the door, and a few minutes later he was gliding through the noisy streets on his way out to Heliopolis. Arrived at his destination, he was greeted by the hall-porter, who, with the utmost deference, led him into the hotel and told him the number of his room.

At the lift a page-boy took over the unctuous duties, and at the door of the room retired, thus leaving Robin alone to examine his quarters. To his dismay he found himself in an expensive apartment, from which a private bathroom led off; and he realized at once that his bill would be enormous. The room was literally a bower of flowers, large vases and bowls of roses standing upon every available table or shelf. On the writing-desk he observed with increasing wonder that every conceivable article required by the most fastidious scribe had been newly purchased for him, and even an engagement book, open at the then day of the month, lay beside the blotter. Upon a round table a number of books, straight from the shop, were laid out; and an ivory paper-cutter was placed beside them ready for the reader's use.

Robin stared around him in bewilderment, and it was some moments before it dawned upon him that the lavish hand of Daisy Jones had been busy

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in the room; but when this startling fact had become clear to him, he turned with a feeling of anger to make further inspection. On the flower laden dressing-table he found a bottle of eau de Cologne, a box of powder, a shining tray of assorted pins, and a manicure set. On the washing stand he observed a large cake of very fragrant soap, an unopened pot of shaving cream, and a new bottle of a celebrated mouthwash. Beside his bed lay a little anthology of English verse and an expensively bound and beautifully illustrated edition of Hans Andersen's fairy tales. Near by was a miniature medicine chest, containing such tactfully selected remedies as aspirin, quinine, vaseline, iodine, permanganate of potash, castor oil, cascara, sal volatile and chlorodyne.

In the green-tiled bathroom next door he found a variety of wonderful soaps arranged around a bowl of red roses, an enormous unused sponge, a glass jar of bath salts, and a large new nail-brush.

Returning to the sitting-room, Robin stood scratching his head and gazing around him. " She has evidently taken a fancy to me," he muttered to himself, and therewith burst into nervous laughter. " What the blazes am I to do ? "

There was a knock at the door, and a plump and elderly maid entered the room. She had small, furtive dark eyes, which gave to her swarthy Latin face a look of shiftiness not altogether in keeping with her jovial expression and ; broad, good-natured smile. She held out a letter to him.

" Pardon, monsieur," she said.

" Madame tell me to give you this letter when you come, and she hop' you are please' with all everything."

Robin took the letter and opened it. It was written upon a dainty sheet of lilac note paper, in the corner of which the name " Daisy " was printed within a delicately engraved wreath.

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"Dear Mortal," it read, " My father wishes you to be our guest while you are here, if you will do us that honour. I don't know much about the ways of man, but I hope my shopping has not been altogether off the mark. Giving presents is a mania of mine, so please accept all you see with a good grace, and thus show your indulgence and condescension. - DAISY."

Robin turned his eyes nervously from the letter to its bearer. " Please thank your mistress," he said abruptly.

" May I do anything ? " she asked, beaming on him.

" Yes, anything," said Robin, looking again at the letter, and especially at the informal signature.

" I mean, do you want anything ? " she explained. "

Oh no, nothing," he answered. " Good Lord, no!"

" Madame say you must have everything at all what you require - everything," she said,

" Thank you very much," he murmured, embarrassed.

"Now then I go away," she announced. " A votre service, monsieur."

She backed out of the room, all her white teeth gleaming in the culminating expansion of her smile; and when the door was shut Robin again read the note over, uttering an ejaculatory whistle as he did so. " The innocent little fairy ! " he muttered contemptuously; and then, with a change of expression, " Oh well, perhaps it is a sort of ingenuousness. Good Lord! it'll be most awkward getting out of this. But obviously it's no place for me ! "

At the hour of luncheon he met Mrs. Jones in the hall downstairs. " I really don't know how to thank you," he said, as he shook her plump little hand. " I might be a king."

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" You might," she answered, and the tip of her tongue was visible between her pretty teeth as she laughed gaily. Then she put her arm through his and led him towards a doorway on which the inviting words " American Bar " were inscribed. " We shall find father and old Plato here, I'm sure," she said.

Her supposition was correct: Augustus Blake and the florid Colonel Winterbottom were standing at the counter sampling two original cocktails just invented by the barman. An expression of pain passed over Blake's face as he saw Mrs. Jones's arm linked in Robin's, but this quickly gave place to a smile and gesture of *camaraderie* as he shook his apparent rival warmly by the hand. It was not till later that Robin, at an instant when he was supposed to be looking elsewhere, caught sight, momentarily, of a glance of excruciating agony which Blake was directing towards Daisy Jones ; but as he turned, the mystic's tense face relaxed into an absurd, mischievous smile.

Luncheon proved to be amazingly dull, and it soon became apparent that Colonel Winterbottom exercised a somewhat depressing influence upon his daughter, while even Augustus Blake, who was usually so communicative, relapsed into mystic silence in his presence. Mrs. Jones did her best to enliven the party by a stream of inconsequent prattle ; but relief appeared to be general when the meal was over. Colonel Winterbottom thereupon went immediately to his room for his afternoon siesta, while Robin accompanied Mrs. Jones and her friend on to the terrace. Here Augustus Blake livened up considerably, and at moments was witty and amusing. He had a curious whimsicality, a sort of extravagant drollery, that was at times most entertaining ; but between these little gusts of humour there were long pauses in which his wit seemed to lapse and his face assumed a

disconcerting likeness to a wax mask. During these silences he had a peculiar habit of uttering, for no known reason, a low ironical titter, his eyes fixed in front of him and no vestige of a smile apparent on his lips; and this habit today chanced to bring to an end with dramatic suddenness their lazy hour of inaction under the awnings of the terrace. For, commenting on one of Blake's little chuckles, Mrs. Jones turned to Robin and laughingly remarked: " That's the evil spirit that possesses him."

Without a word the mystic rose from his chair and walked rapidly away into the hotel.

"There now ! " exclaimed she; "I've offended him. Do forgive me a moment if I just run after him."

Robin waited till she was out of sight and then slipped up to his room by a circuitous route ; and there, in a comfortable armchair, he sat for nearly an hour, thinking out the best means of making his escape from her patronage.

Soon after sundown, when dusk was gathering over the desert in a dreamlike haze, Robin encountered Daisy Jones standing on the terrace gazing into the distance. She started as he addressed her, and then smiled up at him very sweetly.

" You came to me right out of my dream," she murmured. " I was looking at those little clouds above the sunset and was shaping them into an ancient kingdom by the sea. . . ." She gave a pathetic sigh, and fluttered her eyelids as though reluctantly recovering consciousness. "Let us go for a stroll," she said presently, "out there in the enchanted desert."

Robin looked at his watch. He was to dine with Madeline in Cairo; but the December sun sets early in Egypt, and there was still plenty of time before he need go to his room to dress. Rather ill

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at ease, he therefore followed Mrs. Jones down the steps of the hotel, across the grounds, and out by a side gate on to the sandy plain which stretched in front of them as far as the eye could see, the flatness broken only by sand drifts and little knolls rising here and there beside the shallow channels cut by forgotten rivulets of rain water.

On one of these mounds they presently sat down, a few hundred yards from the hotel. The fast diminishing splendour of the sunset was behind them, and the sky before them was faintly tinged with the delicate rose of its reflection. The line of the horizon was so merged into the dusk that the boundary between desert and sky was lost, and only the nebulous veil of the evening limited the vision. There was no sound except the drifting notes of the song of a native boy at a *sakieh*, or waterwheel, in some garden at the edge of the wilderness, and the plaintive creaking of the wheel and the faint splash of the water. Robin had made a study of Egyptian folk-songs, and the words that came to him on the gentle breeze were very familiar.

" Listen," said he; " do you hear that song ? It is one of the oldest songs in Egypt."

He translated the words to her

The wild wind knocked at the door of my chamber,
And whispered, " Thy little sweetheart has come to thee."
Therefore art thou a rogue, O wild wind,
Who laughs at my love-sick heart.

Heard in Arabic, there was an indescribable pathos in the words, and the singer had that curious suggestion of tears in his voice which the Egyptian peasant regards as so essential to song. Robin listened entranced, and in his thoughts, bewitched by the plaintive melody as by an incantation, the picture of Madeline formed itself before him, steeped in that strange atmosphere of sadness which he

always associated with her. He saw the silent gaze of her great eyes as it were reading his soul, and he totally forgot the presence of the warm, plump little Daisy Jones, who sat with her thigh so close to his and her hand so near to his own.

At length she laid her fingers on his arm. "What is the matter?" she asked. "You are so silent."

"I was just thinking," Robin replied. "That song and the dusk and the desert are enough to make one think."

"Where were your thoughts?" she whispered. "Here in Egypt," said he. "It is so strange how one's destiny reveals itself like a picture being slowly unfolded. We look at the half-unrolled canvas of our life and wonder what all the colours and forms represent, and then suddenly another fold is turned back, and in a moment the meaning of it becomes clear."

She laid her hand upon his. "I think I felt it almost the moment I saw you," she said; and Robin, dragged down from his dreams, glanced apprehensively at her. "I felt so uplifted, so carried off my feet. There's something so exhilarating about you. I wanted to dance and sing. I had a feeling that I wanted to tell everybody . . ."

"Tell them what?" asked Robin, perversely obtuse.

"Oh, you know what I mean," she laughed. "I wanted to say to all my friends 'Come and look at him: isn't he wonderful?'; and I loved to see you walking about like a king, totally unconscious of the efforts people were making to know you."

"Oh, rot!" muttered Robin.

"There's such gaiety, such laughter, such lightness about you," she said.

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" It's the first I've ever heard of it," he remarked. " I thought I was a gloomy sort of fellow."

Daisy ignored the denial. "I've told all my friends," she confessed blithely.

" Told them what ? " he repeated.

" Oh, just the extraordinary effect you have on me. Plato says it's awfully interesting. He thinks it's a kind of Egyptian magic, you know-white magic, of course. I explained to him how I see you shining with gold, and he says he's going to read it up in one of the ancient books and cast our horoscopes; and see what planets were in conjunction that day we met on board ship."

" Don't have any illusions about me," Robin exclaimed. " Do you know, one of the most fatal things is to create an ideal in regard to anybody, or to build up an illusion about a man ; because, when that illusion is shattered by his ordinary habits and actions, you think it is he who has failed, whereas in reality it is merely your dream that has ended. Build your friendship on facts, not on fancies."

She shuffled her feet and moved closer to him. Had it been a month or two later, Robin, being something of a zoologist, would have attributed her actions to the spring. He felt curiously annoyed at the picture she had drawn of the manner in which her little heart had been set fluttering by him; and he could not quite make up his mind as to whether she were artful or artless. He looked at his watch, believing this to be his safest course, and told her it was time for him to return to the hotel. She rose with a sigh, but suddenly, as she did so, clutched at his arm and uttered a little cry.

" Look! " she gasped. " What is that black thing over there ? "

Robin's eyes followed the direction of her trembling finger; but in the haze of the gathering darkness he could at first distinguish nothing to cause her alarm.

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" It moved," she said, clinging to him. " I saw it move." He looked again, and presently he discerned a long black object, like a log of wood, stretched upon the sand at the side of a little mound, some thirty or forty yards away. He stood quite still, his eyes fixed upon it ; but there was not sufficient light for him to see what it was. A curious sensation of nervousness swept over him, an unaccountable feeling almost of horror; but when, suddenly, he detected a spasmodic, lurching movement in the uncanny thing, the cold chill of real fear touched his heart.

" What in God's name is it ? " he whispered, and pushing Daisy Jones behind him, he crept forward. " Don't, don't ! " she cried. " Don't go near it ! It's something devilish . . ." and her voice trailed off into a whimper.

Again it moved, and now Robin could see that, whatever it might be, it was slowly floundering to the other side of the mound, as though to take cover. Had he been in the Sudan, instead of on the outskirts of Cairo, he would have guessed it to be a crocodile disturbed in its sleep, and still but half aroused. As it was, however, he could make nothing of it : nothing, except that it was uncanny, unwholesome, beastly.

" Stay where you are and keep quiet," he said to his companion sharply. " I'm going to see what it is."

He crept forward, and as he did so the thing slithered out of sight behind the bend of the knoll. Therefore Robin ran forward through the semi-darkness, his heart beating and a sense of nauseating repulsion nearly mastering his curiosity. Reaching the mound, he tiptoed around it, prepared to strike with his fist, though he dreaded to think what substance his knuckles would encounter; but as his head peered round the bend, so he saw the black

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object slide out of sight behind the next angle. At that moment a cry from Mrs. Jones arrested him, and thinking that the nameless horror had perhaps floundered in her direction, he ran back to her.

" N-no," she stammered, in answer to his rapid question, " I didn't see it again, but I'm so frightened. Please don't leave me."

She was nearly crying with terror, and Robin put his arm about her soothingly, propelling her hurriedly towards the hotel gardens, which loomed up before them. She looked behind her anxiously every moment or two; and suddenly she again uttered a cry.

" It's following us ! " she gasped. " It's getting on to its hind legs."

Robin swung round and halted abruptly. " Why, it's, a man! " he exclaimed, and then, after a pause, " he must have been crawling on his stomach."

" Oh, let's hurry in! " she cried. " He wants to murder us. I feel it : I can feel what he's thinking." She darted towards the garden gate, and only paused when she stood in the light of one of the lamps in the drive. Robin followed more slowly, allowing himself to be overtaken; for his horror had left him, and he was only anxious to solve the mystery. When he reached the gate he turned sharply to await the approaching menace, but a moment later it had resolved itself into the familiar tall figure of Augustus Blake.

"It's only your friend Plato," he called out dryly to Daisy Jones, who thereupon ran to his side.

" Hullo ! " said Blake casually. "Been for a stroll ? "

Mrs. Jones took hold of the mystic's coat and tried to shake him. " Oh, you nasty pig," she said, "frightening my life out like that! What were you doing ? "

Blake stared at her; and in the light of the lamp

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his eyes looked round and glassy, and his smile, by reason of the strong shadows, seemed horribly grotesque. "What was I doing?" he repeated, with a short laugh. "I was just pretending to be a thing that goes flop-flop through the darkness." He giggled, and slowly shut his eyes and opened them again.

"You acted the part wonderfully," Robin said, without emotion. "If I had had my revolver in my pocket instead of upstairs in my valise I should have shot you."

"My dear fellow," said Blake, with concern, "I do hope I didn't startle you."

"You startled me very much indeed," Robin replied, "and I'm not easily startled. In the half light you looked quite horrible."

"And you were so brave;" said Daisy Jones to Robin, pressing his arm. "You went after the monster single-handed, though for all you knew it might have eaten you up at a gulp, or turned you by magic into a struggling pillar of salt or something. There are such creatures in the desert, you know, really. A famous Egyptologist told me about a man who had once seen one. It was cold and clammy and soft, and it whistled all over its victims till they died." When they entered the hotel Blake went straight up to his room, leaving Robin and Mrs. Jones together at the foot of the stairs.

"There's something extraordinarily creepy about your friend," said Robin. "I can't make him out."

"Yes, sometimes he's appalling," she answered; "it's as though he were something right out of hell. It is then that I feel he needs a woman's care most, and I pity him from the depths of my heart. At other times he is so sweet, so nice-minded, that one can't help loving him." She paused a moment in thought.

"I wonder," she went on,

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" whether he was creeping after us to see what we were doing. He used to be in the secret police once, you know, and he has told me how he has had to creep about all over the place, tracking down anarchists and kings and things. Perhaps he's just a teeny-weeny bit jealous, you know."

" Why? " asked Robin.

" Well, because I'm so . . ." She paused.

" So what ? " said Robin, vaguely impatient.

" I must whisper it," she laughed; and standing on the second step of the stairs she put her hands on his shoulders and brought her mouth close to his ear. " Perhaps he's jealous," she whispered, " because I'm so . . . in love with you."

With that she rushed up the stairs in playful flight ; and Robin caught a glimpse of a pair of rather fat ankles encased in white boots, the buttons of which seemed near to bursting. At the top of the stairs she turned breathlessly, and snatching a red rose from her belt, threw it down to him. Then she disappeared round the corner; and Robin, much sobered, slowly walked up to his room.

The red rose lay unheeded upon the floor, until, half an hour later, the hall-porter noticed it, and, being a man of tidy habits, threw it into the wastepaper basket.

CHAPTER XIII

GALLOPING AWAY

" **MADLINE**, what are you going to do all day tomorrow ? " Robin asked, as they sat that evening drinking their coffee in the lounge of the Ritz Hotel.

'The girl shrugged her shoulders and smiled at him with a sort of indulgence. " Nothing in particular," she replied. " In the morning I shall go on with my reading, and in the afternoon I shall lie on my back and smoke half a dozen cigarettes. Then after tea I'll probably go up to the bazaars and wander about till it's dark."

He looked at her as she sat back on the comfortable divan, a small, entrancing figure, charmingly dressed, her dark hair tossed back from her smooth forehead, a cigarette poised in her delicate fingers, and a single jewel suspended from a fine aluminium chain around her beautiful throat. A softly shaded lamp above the divan threw a warm and alluring light about her, and the music of the orchestra, still playing in the restaurant near by, added a further quality to the richness of the moment. Robin was deeply in love; but even had his heart remained entirely in control, he would not have failed to be intoxicated by the picture thus set before him.

"Somehow," he said, " I can't think of you reading stodgy books. It seems utterly incongruous."

" Not at all," she replied, with seriousness. "Haven't you yet realized that I am a born

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explorer ? Ever since I became independent I have wandered through many lands, searching for I don't know what, sampling all manner of new emotions, experimenting with all sorts of new sensations, and always failing to find whatever it is that I am looking for. And now you have come to me and have sent me galloping off in a new direction. The other day, when you told me I had a brain, I didn't believe you, and when you said I was simply hungering mentally, I thought you were altogether off the mark. But now . . . Do you know that buying those books yesterday was the finest thrill I've had for ages ? And just opening them, peeping into them, tasting them, so to speak, is a revelation. It's like discovering a new world. I don't suppose the fun will last ; but just for the moment I find the fascination of saying to one's author 'There I agree with you,' or 'There I think you must be wrong,' altogether delightful."

" Well, do you think you could find time to ride with me tomorrow ? " Robin asked. " At the moment there is for me a serious slump in the market of my intellect. I don't feel a bit inclined to go off to interview Bedouin men: I'd much rather stay by the side of civilized woman. Supposing I brought a horse round here for you in the morning, would you come ? "

Madeline was delighted with the suggestion. " I'll be ready for you at ten o'clock," she said; and therewith their conversation passed into other channels. It was always a source of pleasure to Robin to hear her talk, for she expressed herself well and lucidly; and even when her ignorance seemed to him to be deplorable, he always felt that there was something very simple, very logical, in the manner in which her mind attacked a subject that was new to her. More than once he had the feeling that her untutored view was clearer, less

complicated, than his own; and he found that while he was, so to speak, clothing his thoughts in words, by words she was laying bare hers. Every now and then he was slightly nonplussed when she questioned some opinion which he had not thought open to question ; and it was then that he had a vague consciousness that a mind without traditional prejudices might, in certain circumstances, have a wider vision than one trained along conventional and accepted lines.

Madeline's views were expressed so frankly, so simply, with such childlike innocence, that they were hard to refute. Yet it seemed clear to him that they were often wrong-headed, or that, at any rate, they did not conform to the necessary practicality of the present day.

Early next morning he telephoned to some livery stables in Cairo to secure two horses, and at ten o'clock he called for Madeline at her hotel. She was waiting for him on the terrace, dressed in a well-fitting white riding habit, set off by brown top-boots, brown felt hat, and rough brown gloves, which seemed to have been selected to match her hair. Her red lips, and a red rose stuck in her buttonhole, gave two notes of colour to the admirable scheme.

" Words fail me," said Robin, laughing with happiness. " You look absolutely wonderful."

" Then we shall make a very presentable couple," she answered, with a smile ; for he, too, made a very handsome figure, booted and spurred, his fair hair gleaming in the sun as he greeted her.

Two spirited Arab horses awaited them at the gates of the hotel, and no sooner were they in the saddle than Robin realized that his companion was an excellent horsewoman; for in the keen morning air her mount was restless, and before her feet were in the stirrups, gave an exhibition of

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rearing, waltzing and side-stepping which would have disconcerted any but an expert rider. "Isn't he a beauty! " she exclaimed gaily, as she patted the horse's neck when her mastery of him was complete. "Let's go somewhere where we can give him a good gallop."

Robin suggested that they should cross the Nile by the Kasr-el-Nil bridge and ride out through the village of Gizeh, southwards along the embanked road, whereon the earth is soft to the hoofs and the traffic is slight. He had ridden there many a time in past years, and the way was familiar to him. This, therefore, they did ; and soon they had crossed the river and were trotting along under the *lebek-trees* towards the open fields.

" This is better than the philosophers, isn't it ? " Robin exclaimed, his face radiant.

" Yes," said Madeline. " Shall we have much of it in the life you've condemned me to ? "

" As much as you like," Robin replied. " I had no idea you were so good a horsewoman. If you'll come, I'll take you on some of my expeditions."

" Well, of course," she laughed. " I'm much tougher than you think, Robin, and I can stand any amount of fatigue. In Crete I've ridden forty or fifty miles in a day."

" When we get back to England," he said, " I'll give you a horse of your own."

" Oh, that reminds me," she put in. " Are you rich or poor? I quite forgot to ask you before. Can you afford to keep me ? "

Robin laughed. " I'm quite comfortably off," he responded, " but I suppose you are pretty expensive."

"No," she answered. " I can adapt myself to any conditions. And I have a certain amount of money of my own, you know, that's not tied up, though Paolo cost me a good deal."

"What do you mean? " said Robin sharply, turning to her in astonishment.

" Well, you see, he wasn't very well off, so I paid most of our expenses."

" Good Lord! " he exclaimed. " I thought the man always paid in those sort of affairs."

" Oh, Robin dear," she said reproachfully, " you don't yet understand me. Don't you realize that all my life I have always done the thing that happened to please me, without any thought of what I should get out of it ? Paolo was rather witty, and he amused me, so I went off with him. That's all."

Robin brought his horse close to hers and put his hand upon her arm. " I'm only beginning to understand you, my dear," he said, "and oh, Madeline, you make me feel very unworthy of you."

Madeline did not reply, but there was a little convulsive movement in her throat as though she were swallowing back an inclination to cry. Then she pressed her knees to her horse's flanks and set him off at a gallop.

They drew rein as they rode through the village of Gizeh, for the narrow roadway was almost blocked with traffic. Strings of heavily laden camels meandered lazily along; here and there a well dressed native landowner, riding a spirited donkey that was almost hidden under his voluminous robes, picked his way through the crowd of sauntering pedestrians; a small boy drove three unwieldy water-buffaloes towards the canal, wherein they would presently wallow; a group of young women, two of them big with child, carried heavy water pots upon their heads as they returned from the well;

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the village dogs sat scratching themselves perilously near the rickety wheels of the passing carts, or ran along the flat roofs of the houses, barking to one another; a blind beggar called loudly for alms in the name of Allah ; a seller of sherbet clanged two brass dishes together continuously as he walked along, to attract the attention of the thirsty ; emaciated hens ran in and out between the legs of the passers-by seeking for anything that might be edible ; and a water carrier sprinkled water upon the momentarily vacant spots of dusty roadway from the neck of the bulging skin which he carried upon his back.

A group of ragged children followed them out of the village as they passed once more into the open; and the cheeky shouts for *bakshish* assailed them on all sides as they went off at a canter along the embanked road towards the southwest. Away in the distance on their right stood the great pyramids upon their rocky plateau, and in front of them, beyond the dense palm groves at the edge of the desert, the smaller pyramids of Sakkara and Dashour were visible on the horizon. The road here was almost free of traffic, and stretched before them in a more or less straight line for three or four miles, passing across the wide fields, where the rich crops covered the fertile earth like vast green carpets spread out in the sunlight.

Madeline's horse was still chafing for a gallop, and now, at a nod from Robin, she gave him his head. He was off in an instant, like an arrow from a bow ; and Robin had to use his spurs so that he should not be left behind. For some minutes they raced along, throwing up the dust behind them in dense clouds; and at length Robin shouted out to her to use her rein a little, in order that he might come up alongside.

" I've tried to," she called back, turning a merry face to him as she crouched like a jockey in the saddle, " but I can't hold him. He's got a mouth like iron." They galloped on, therefore, for some distance;

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but when their headlong course had sent a passing camel careering in fright into the fields, Robin again called to her to pull up. He now saw, however, that she was tugging at the reins with all her strength, but that no impression was being made upon the excited animal.

" It's no good," Madeline shouted. " I must let him run till he's blown."

CHAPTER XIV

A VILLAGE BRAWL

THE galloping horses were now fast approaching a small village which lay at the side of the road in the shade of the palms, and it so happened that outside the doorway of one of the hovels of this village a wild-eyed old sheikh was to be seen, who wore the green turban of sanctity and whose beard was stained with henna. He was crouching upon his haunches, and the thin brown fingers of his right hand were tracing cabalistic patterns in the dust of the roadway as he talked with a kind of hissing intensity to a group of awed villagers. In his lap, amongst the folds of his robe, lay a weather beaten copy of the Koran ; and in his left hand there was a string of praying beads.

" The Christians," he was saying, " have placed their feet upon the neck of this land, and holy Islam is trodden into the dust. *Ya Nebi ! O Prophet !*

"Pull out the wool of beatitude from thy ears, that thou mayst hear the voice of my complaint. Listen to the woes of Egypt ! Is it not enough that the followers of the holy Sheikh Jesus, the sage of Nazareth, whom we call *Ruh' Allah*, the 'Spirit of God,' have besmirched his excellent name, and have blasphemed the honour of Allah by worshipping their leader as a god, and have perverted the hearts of the Greeks and the Franks and the English, so that half the sons of Adam are sunk in error? Is not the basket of

the Evil One full enough ? Must these swine come also to Alexandria and Cairo and the cities of the Faithful to corrupt the purity of our people ?

Behold their manners! Contemplate their customs! They walk about their houses bareheaded, like the lowest fishermen; they do not remove their shoes from off their feet ; they drink wine and eat the forbidden flesh of pigs ; their soldiers wear skirts like women; their women expose their faces like men, and in the evenings ye may see them stripped to the breasts, so that the eyes of the Faithful must be cast down in confusion. O Muslimin, how long will ye endure the tyranny of these accursed malefactors, these besotted children of Satan ? I attest the Unity of God and the Mission of Mohammed His Prophet! I believe the word of Allah, in the holy Koran, which decrees that the unbelievers shall be put to the sword. In the time of my father's father these same Christians were not allowed even to step upon the sidewalks of the streets of our towns; but were obliged to make their way along the gutters or amongst the legs of the beasts of burden ; but now the whole roadway is theirs, and they jostle the true Believers in their arrogance !

"

Even as he spoke there was a cry from along the street, and Madeline and Robin went thundering past in a cloud of dust. Terrified chickens darted to right and left of them, dashing themselves against the sides of the houses in their efforts to escape the menace of the wild hoofs; and the startled dogs leapt up the low walls or sprang into open doorways with yelps of fear. A woman carrying a basket of onions flung herself headlong into the tumbling group of villagers assembled around the preacher, and that holy man fell backwards into the doorway of the house under a shower of earth and gravel.

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At the same moment Robin leant out of his saddle and caught at his companion's bridle, and before many more yards had been traversed the two horses, foaming and sweating, were pulled up short at a bend of the roadway. In an instant the old sheikh was on his feet, shouting to his friends, his eyes blazing with righteous fury.

" *Ya Muslimin !* " he cried, " O Faithful ! The Christians are upon you! Kill! Kill ! Kill! A clot of earth whizzed through the air and struck Madeline's shoulder, and simultaneously a powerfully built peasant sprang at her horse's head and seized the bridle menacingly.

" Leave go!" shouted Robin in Arabic. "Her horse is a *gini* : she could not hold him." Another native seized his own reins with one hand, and struck at him with the wooden staff the customary weapon of the Egyptian which he held in the other. Robin immediately vaulted out of the saddle, twisted the staff from the man's hand, and threw it to the ground. He then seized the other by the wrist with such violence that the man dropped Madeline's bridle and, uttering a howl of pain, sprang back into the gathering crowd.

" Ride at them and gallop away," Robin shouted to Madeline ; but a moment later her frightened horse reared and backed against the wall of a house, so that to save her leg from being crushed she was obliged to throw herself from the saddle. Thereupon the two horses went plunging away and were lost, to sight around the bend of the road. Robin caught Madeline by the arm, and dragging her into a recess at the junction of two walls, placed himself in front of her and faced his yelling enemies.

"Be careful!" he called out to them. " I am English. You don't want to go to prison, do you ? " A shower of earth and filth greeted his words; and an evil-faced ruffian, evidently the bad char-

acter of the village, ran at him, brandishing a laceless European boot which he had just pulled from his foot. This he flung full at Robin, who, being afraid to dodge it lest it should hit Madeline behind him, received it on his raised arm and the side of his head. In an instant his temper, was up, and with one blow of his fist he felled his opponent like an ox, so that the man rolled over at his feet and lay with the blood trickling from his nose and lips.

Two others ran forward, staves in hand, and lunged at Robin; but the weapon was quickly twisted from the grip of the foremost, and was instantly used to such advantage that the staff brandished by the other was knocked out of his hand and fell to the ground. Robin then stood breathing hard, and awaiting the next rush, while the din increased around him, and the shrill cries of the women who were collecting on the outskirts of the crowd were added to the excited shouts of the men. Stones are hard to find on an Egyptian roadway, and the volleys of earth and offal did no great injury to him; but suddenly a woman, jostled by the crowd, dropped her water-pot, which was broken into a hundred fragments, and immediately the sherds were snatched up and used as missiles. One of these sharp-edged pieces struck him on the head just above the temple and sent him staggering back against the wall, while the blood poured down his face, almost blinding him.

At the same moment Madeline stooped, and taking hold of the heavy staff which was lying on the ground, ran forward, striking furiously at the nearest figure just as he was aiming a blow at Robin's head. The man staggered and reeled back into the crowd; but an instant later another of the attackers, who had crept up close to the wall, struck at Robin with his staff, the full weight of which fell upon his heart and ribs, knocking the

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wind out of him, so that he fell to the ground gasping for breath.

With a cry of anguish Madeline planted her feet across his body, and swinging her staff to right and left, for a few moments kept their assailants at bay. Her hat had fallen off, and her hair was tumbled about her flushed face as she stood with clenched teeth and glittering eyes, defending her fallen lover. Then the staff was knocked from her hands and she was hurled back against the wall.

At that moment the cry was raised: " *El Omdeh !* " ; and the portly headman of the village arrived panting upon the scene, accompanied by half a dozen armed guards. The crowd swayed back as he shouted frenziedly at them.

" O fools and sons of dogs! " he bellowed. " Would you have me deprived of my office and dishonoured? Would you bring disgrace upon me by murdering the Englishman and his lady ? What devils have possessed you ? You shall go to prison, every one of you, by Allah ! "

At this most of the men fled to their houses, while others, sullenly tending their bruised heads, stood muttering at a safe distance; and the women hovered at the bend of the road, beating their breasts and uttering their curious jackal-like cries of distress. Madeline, who had not lost her presence of mind, immediately sent somebody for water, and soon she was bathing Robin's head and trying to stanch the flow of blood.

" Oh Allah! " cried the headman, as he saw the ominous red pool; " oh that this should have come upon me in my prosperity! "

" Be silent! " Madeline exclaimed in Arabic.

" Send one of your men to catch our horses. And is there any kind of cart or carriage in the village ? "

" Yes, yes, lady," he answered. " A carriage is here which was to drive me to Gizeh this morning.

It is at your disposal. O Allah, O Nebi ! "- and he broke forth into lamentations once more, mopping the perspiration from his face with the hem of his robes.

Suddenly Robin opened his eyes, and after a vague glance around, sat up, leaning against the wall. A moment later he found himself looking straight into Madeline's anxious face. " You do look delightful, all untidy and flushed," were the first words that he uttered. Then suddenly he groaned, " O Lord, my head!" and the spasm of pain recalled their situation to him, whereat he tried to struggle to his feet.

" Keep still, Robin," Madeline commanded. "The row's over. We're quite safe."

He did not need, however, to be told to remain quiet. The gash in his head was deep and ugly, and he had lost so much blood that he was dizzy and faint. His ribs, too, felt as though they had been stove in, and every breath hurt him. For some time, therefore, he sat leaning against the wall, while Madeline bandaged his wound with a handkerchief torn into strips. The headman, meanwhile, had caused the arrest of four or five men ; and, as is usual in any kind of brawl in Egypt, the prisoners taken were not necessarily those who had participated in the fighting, but were simply the most undesirable persons in the village. The blank astonishment upon the pock-marked face of one bad character who had just been arrested while sleeping soundly in his own house brought a smile even to Robin's pale lips.

At last a rickety old carriage, drawn by two small and emaciated horses, drove on to the scene; and at the same time a mounted policeman, summoned from his patrol on a neighbouring road, arrived at a gallant gallop. Robin was then lifted into the carriage, where he leant feebly against Madeline's

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shoulder; and a large umbrella, provided by the headman, was held over him by her to protect him from the hot sun. The runaway horses having been found, the cavalcade set off along the road back to Cairo. The headman had seated himself on the box next to the driver, and at almost regular intervals he turned to Madeline protesting his innocence of all fault, and swearing before Allah that the whole affair was the work of an evil gini in league with his enemies to encompass his personal ruin. In the village of Gizeh they secured some brandy at a little Greek store, and, thus revived, Robin bore the remainder of the journey with sensations somewhat less similar to those of a disembodied spirit falling into the Pit.

Madeline had decided to obtain accommodation for him at her hotel, for he could not support the additional fatigue of the drive out to Heliopolis, and he kept repeating that anyway nothing would induce him to return there. A well-known Scotch doctor was sent for when they arrived, and soon the wound had been stitched and bandaged and the patient was quietly resting on the cool bed, with Madeline in attendance at his side. In the afternoon, when he was somewhat recovered, he dictated a message to Daisy Jones, in which he told her of his accident and expressed his great regret at not being able to avail himself of the hospitality she had provided for him at the Royal Egypt Hotel.

Towards sunset an English official from the Ministry of the Interior called to make inquiries and to express regrets. He was a fresh-complexioned, blue-eyed boy, evidently not long down from the Varsity; and he bore a surname which had been honoured in England since the Crusades.

" I should like it to be understood," said Madeline, who interviewed the young man in the hall down

stairs, "that the whole thing was my own fault. My horse ran away with me and went through the village like a streak of lightning, scattering the natives to right and left. It must have been most aggravating for them."

" It is very generous of you to look at it in that light," he replied. "But the affair has a more serious aspect. There is a good deal of unrest in the country, and the feeling between Mohammedans and Christians is rather strong just now; and of course our business here in Egypt is to keep religion in its proper place. It's these confounded Greeks and Levantine tradespeople - of the lowest class who cause all the mischief, swaggering about and hurting the susceptibilities of the Faithful. I had to stop a row the other day between a Mohammedan and a Christian in a native cafe. As neither could speak the other's language, they were quarrelling in broken English, and it sounded awfully queer. The Mohammedan was most conciliatory, and kept saying to him: 'Jesus Christ he varry nice gentleman, yes' ; but the Christian only answered

' You wait till my God Him catch your dirty Mohammed: Him punch his head, oh yes, damn ! " Madeline laughed, and went on to ask him not to be too hard on the headman. " He was courtesy itself," she said, " and he is evidently much respected, for a few words from him instantly dispersed the whole crowd."

" I left him sweating blood at the police-station," the official replied. "He's not a bad old chap a bit of a sport, in fact : keeps a bull terrier, and sings in his bath like a white man, they say. Well, I suppose I shall have to ride over there in the morning and talk to them all like a father. The silly babies ! " he muttered, as he rose to go ; " I've a, jolly good mind to take a stick with me."

As he shook hands he looked down at her with

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boyish admiration. "They tell me you fought like a young lion, Miss Rorke," he said, and his grip tightened on her fingers. "It was splendid of you to keep the old flag flying like that : by Jove, it makes one proud to be English! "

Madeline watched him as he walked briskly out of the hotel - a slim, boyish figure, totally unconscious of the fact that in his weaponless hands, and in those of his colleagues, rested the responsibility of the keeping of law and peace in the land.

" Yes," she said to herself, " perhaps there is something about English blood. . .
." She smiled and dismissed the thought from her mind.

CHAPTER XV

THE SICK-BED

THAT evening Madeline had her dinner brought up to her in the patient's room, and she sat by his side until the arrival of the night-nurse, for whom the doctor had sent. The next day Robin seemed better, the wound being less painful; and in the afternoon he was able to see Mrs. Jones, who had driven in with Augustus Blake to make inquiries. When their cards were sent up Madeline suggested that she should leave him, but this he refused to allow.

" I so want you to meet them," he said to her. " I can't make out if she is an innocent little fool or a designing woman. You'll be able to judge her much better than I. And it's the same with Blake I really can't tell if he's a fraud or not. You see what you think of him."

Madeline was standing by the bedside as their visitors entered, and in the subdued light of the darkened room Daisy Jones did not at first give any attention to her.

"My poor dear mortal! " she exclaimed, as she seized Robin's hand in both hers. " What a calamity! - and just when you and I and Plato were going to have such jolly times together! "

" Well, old fellow," said Blake, coming forward and dropping an armful of parcels and flowers on to the bed, " our dear fairy has brought you some gifts." Robin hastened to introduce the two of them to

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Madeline. " It was Miss Rorke, you know, who was with me when we were attacked," he explained.

Mrs. Jones turned to her with effusion. " Then you are the brave Amazon everybody is talking about," she cried; " and you're so beautiful, too ! "

" I am really proud to shake hands with you," said Blake, fixing her with his disconcerting eyes. " But I can see by your aura that you have high courage and great presence of mind."

" Good gracious! " Madeline laughed. " What is an aura ? "

Daisy Jones hastened to explain. " It's a thing that sticks out of you all round," she said, "like a hoop. And it's all sorts of colours. When you're angry it goes quite red, for instance. Occult people like Mr. Blake see them round everybody. When he first saw mine it was upside down and a perfectly horrible colour; but now it is much better. You know, fairies don't have them; and that's the way you can tell if a person's a mortal or a werewolf or goblin."

Blake smiled at Madeline. " Of course, you now understand perfectly, don't you ? " he said merrily.

"Do tell me," Mrs. Jones asked her, " how many natives did you really kill in the fight ? My maid says that the postman told her you killed seven stone dead and wounded fifteen." Madeline laughed. " I think I stunned one and slightly hurt another," she answered. " That's all, I'm glad to say."

" Oh, what a disappointment! " Mrs. Jones exclaimed. " I had pictured heaps of dead and dying around you ; and lots of blood that lay in pools after the fight was over, so that when the place was deserted at dusk, the elementals and trolls came creeping out to snuff at it."

" Oh, Daisy," laughed Blake, " what an imagination you have got ! "

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"Well, I dropped about a pail full," said Robin, " on my own account. That's why I'm so weak."

"Oh, that doesn't matter," Daisy Jones replied. " I guessed you'd be weak, so I brought you some tabloids that I saw advertised in a chemist's shop. They are especially for men who have lost their strength. There they are." She held a little package up. "And here is some of the best chocolate in the world; and here are three little bags of dried herbs, very fragrant and precious, all picked on midsummer's eve; and this parcel is some novels, a lovely new one by Eleanor Glyn, and a frightfully clever one by dear Algernon Blackwood, all about reincarnation and souls in torture and things."

And so she chattered on, while Madeline watched her silently and weighed her up. Meanwhile the great mystic sat at the foot of the bed, his round eyes wandering continuously from Robin to Madeline and back again, as though he were trying to understand their relationship.

I am really disappointed," he said at length, "that we shan't see you at Heliopolis for some days; and as for Daisy, she is simply desolate." He turned to her, smiling in his whimsical way. " However, you must come as soon as you are fit to move; and you must bring Miss Rorke out too."

" Yes, we'll have a great feast," Mrs. Jones cried clapping her hands, " a real sort of Greek Bacchanal to celebrate your recovery. We'll all wear wreaths of vine leaves and be awfully voluptuous, and lie on couches, and drink champagne out of each other's goblets. . ."

" That will be nice," said Robin.

At this point the Sister entered the room, and the visit was sternly brought to an end.

" Good-bye," said Mrs. Jones to Madeline, as the latter followed her out of the room. " I am

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sure we are going to be friends. I love beauty, and you are so beautiful."

That night Robin slept soundly, and next day he seemed to be well on the road to recovery. But in the evening his temperature suddenly rose; and after a restless night his nurse was horrified to find that he was in a high fever. Hastily she telephoned for the doctor, who presently came round; but when he spoke to Madeline, after having examined his patient, his austere Scotch face looked very grave.

"The wound is in a septic condition," he said, "and I won't deny that I am anxious about it. He must have perfect quiet, of course, and I don't think you should go into the room at all."

" Oh, but I must, I must! " Madeline urged.

The Sister turned to the doctor. " Captain Beechcroft did nothing but call out for her all last night," she said. " I think her presence in the room seems to soothe him."

" You see," Madeline felt obliged to explain, " we are going to be married, and of course I am rather in his thoughts."

" I understand," said the doctor. " Well, perhaps if you, remain near at hand, and come to him if Sister thinks you ought to . . ."

And so it came about that during the crisis of his illness Madeline sat by his side in the darkened room through the greater part of the day; and through many of the silent hours of the night she remained there, drowsing in the dim light of the shaded lamp, but ever alert to respond to his drifting whispers. In his delirium he would from time to time mutter words of yearning love, and would beseech her to assure him that she, too, cared for him. In the fever of his mind, the conventional practicality of his character was lost, and all the imaginative qualities of his nature asserted them

selves, so that he uttered words that in normal conditions he would have been too shy to speak.

" I can't be sure that she cares," he said a hundred times. " I can't be sure of her. Why should she love me? There are no depths in me that her heart can be lost in, like my heart is lost in her."

Then he likened her to a new unexplored country, a place of stars, and the young moon, and dim valleys, and high hills rising out of the mist, touched with pale light. And somewhere amidst those hills was the city which he so desperately wanted to reach, hidden away amongst the rocks, its towers mounting up the precipices, up and up to the eagles' nests. He implored her to lead him to the city, so that he could see the lights, and hear the music of the fountains, and come to rest in the halls of the palace of her heart. "But I can't be sure," he sighed, " that you care enough to guide me there, and the dark valleys are full of my sighs."

At times he fancied himself wandering with her in the deserts that he loved ; and now it was not a fancied country of her soul through which he travelled, but the actual wilderness that lay behind the eastern hills. He saw in his mind, and described in whispered words, the echoing valleys, where the blue shadows lay across the tumbled boulders and the fierce light of the sun struck only upon the upper faces of the cliffs. Here they rode side by side along the shingly bed of a forgotten torrent, mounting ever upwards, until, suddenly topping a barren ridge, they saw the purple sea stretching out before their eyes, and cried, like Xenophon's weary soldiers, " Thalatta ! Thalatta ! " Or, now traveling across the flat expanse of a sandy plain, they pitched their tents, at red dusk, beside an unmapped well from which the startled gazelle had but lately fled; and there all night they lay under the stars, her head

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resting upon his arm, and the gentle murmur of her breath bringing utter contentment into his dreams.

It seemed to Madeline that in his delirium she was learning more of Robin's true nature than had been revealed to her before. In ordinary circumstances he was a man of somewhat restrained speech, a practical man of affairs, belonging to a type she had met in London amongst the young officers who had obtained introductions to her. He was as typically British as Paolo was Italian; but even on the first day of their acquaintance she had been conscious that the mind which had been standardized by the distinctive upbringing and education of the Englishman contained an individual charm and poetry that the rigid moulding of his training had not affected.

Even his devotion to her had not day by day been vividly lit by the fire she knew was burning in his heart. He had been ashamed of the first impulse of his love when, in the moonlight that night at Port Said, her white throat had been branded by his passionate kisses. But now in his illness the restraint of custom was removed. His adoration found expression in words, and she felt that she had obtained a view of the man himself; and all that she saw she loved.

His entreaties to her to give her heart to him as he had given his to her touched some chord within her, and awoke a melody so sweet, so tender, that her life seemed to stand still to listen. It was true enough that real love had not until this moment come to her. Their whole relationship was so young, indeed, that there had not been time for attraction to mature into a deeper thing ; but as she sat by his bedside through the long hours and listened to his words, the now unchecked flame of his love, as it were, lit a lantern in the depths

of her being which no wind of circumstance should put out.

Bravely during the ensuing days his fine constitution resisted the incipient progress of the disease, and his rich blood struggled to master the poison; but when the fever had abated, and the hopes of the watchers were high, a condition of collapse ensued which caused very great alarm to his doctor. Madeline was quick to detect this anxiety, and suddenly the fears which previously she had not allowed to take possession of her mind mastered her, so that her heart seemed to stand still. If he should die ? . . . The thought appalled her, horrified her; and in that moment she knew that she loved him.

The hour of agony came upon her early one morning, when the sun was pouring in through the windows and the cool breeze gently swayed the curtains, bringing the scent of roses to her from the brilliant garden, and the merry chirping of countless sparrows, and the scree of the hawks high in the blue heavens.

The doctor would not allow her to be in the sickroom at this crisis, and she stood as it seemed to her for an eternity outside the door which led from her apartment to his, leaning against the wall, her wide eyes staring at the opposite wall, her knuckles thrust into her mouth, her ears straining to catch any sound that would tell her how the battle fared. At last the door opened and the doctor stood before her.

" I am going to be frank with you, Miss Rorke," he said, and Madeline tightened her muscles to meet the blow that she foresaw. " He is at a very low ebb. I am going to try by artificial means to keep the breath in his body; but I can't give you very much hope."

Her mouth was dry as she gave some mechanical

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reply. "Will you tell me," the doctor went on, "what is his religion? I think we should send for a priest or clergyman."

Madeline sprang round at him, with a wild light in her eyes. "I don't know what his religion is," she cried. "I've never troubled to ask him. There is no God: there can't be; and as he's a man of sense I suppose he belongs to no twopenny-ha'penny religion. . . . Let me go to him."

The doctor held her back. "Blasphemy won't help you, my lass," he said very quietly. "Take the advice of one who has fought with death in many forms. Go down on your knees and ask God's help." He pointed to her bed. "Kneel down there. Christ has said, 'Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.' Call upon Him now."

Madeline clenched her fists, and the pallor of her face became even more marked and the shadows of her eyes deepened. "I have never asked His help in my life," she said defiantly: "I am not going to cringe to Him now."

"Do as I tell you," the doctor insisted; nor did he go back to his patient until he had seen her fling herself down, in the obedience of desperation, beside the bed on which she had lain through much of the night in tortured wakefulness.

"Oh God," she moaned, "listen to me, if You can hear me. Spare him, spare him! - give him back to me ! Oh Christ, if You are God, if there is a God at all, I humble myself to You. I love him; I want him, I want him, I want him ! . . . Look at me: do You see me? Do You see that I am on my knees to You ? I have never knelt to anything before, but I kneel to You, because the doctor says You can help. If You can read hearts, read mine, read it before it breaks. I would tell You that I'd give all I possess to the Church, I'd

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burn candies on Your altars, or whatever people do, if I could think You like that sort of thing. But I can't believe You want anything I can give. Spare him because You are good, spare him because You are merciful ; save him because he is all I have in the world, all I want, all I love. . . ."

The doctor came back into the room and looked at her gravely. She seemed so small, so pathetic, as she knelt beside the bed, her hair tossed about her head like that of a child who has been playing and is tired of its play.

" Go away! " she cried, turning her pale face to him. " I am talking to your Christ: I am telling Him. Leave me alone."

In silence he went from the room and resumed his vigil beside his patient. For more than three hours he stood there, absorbed in the fight with the great enemy, while the Sister silently carried out his instructions, renewing the hot water in the bottles which surrounded Robin's cold body, and administering the injections by which life was maintained. At length the fluttering pulse grew more regular under the doctor's fingers; and with a sigh of relief he nodded hopefully to his helper.

Robin opened his eyes and met the Scotchman's steady gaze. "I'm going, doctor," he whispered; " it's no good . . ."

" Going ? " the doctor said. " Why, man, we've won ! You're through the worst. Keep it up, and you're safe. You've got the lass to think of . . . "

" I'm not necessary to her," he sighed feebly. At that moment the door slowly opened, and Madeline stood there, staring at them with frightened eyes.

" I can't bear it!" she groaned. " You must tell me what is happening. I must know."

" You may speak to him," said the doctor.

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She crept to the bedside and laid her hand upon

Robin's. His eyes looked deep into hers, and what he saw there he had never seen before.

" Oh, Robin, Robin ! " she whispered. " My darling, my darling! Robin, don't leave me. I love you -I love you-oh, I love you, Robin! "

His lips moved, and she bent her head down to catch the words. " The doctor says I'm going to live," he murmured.

Madeline looked at the Scotchman with the agony of suspense in her face. He smiled at her reassuring, "He's over the crisis," he said; " you can go and get some sleep now."

CHAPTER XVI

CONVALESCENCE

WHEN Robin was completely out of danger, Madeline began again to take her meals downstairs in the restaurant. Seated alone at a small table in the corner of the room, she was the object of much interested scrutiny; for the story of her adventure had gone the round of the hotel, accumulating many new and startling details as it traveled. Moreover, there were other interesting facts that were known in regard to her. She was the once celebrated Madeline Rorke, whose tender interpretation of the part of the Magdalene had aroused London and New York to enthusiasm three years ago. Also, it was said, on the authority of the talkative hospital nurse, she was engaged to be married to Robin Beechcroft, the explorer, whose life - so the story went - she had saved, and who now lay recovering from his wounds upstairs. And, most interesting of all, rumour had it that she was as thoroughly wicked as she was beautiful, and but a few weeks ago. had been living in open sin with an Italian prince. This, however, did not receive full credence, for it was recalled that the celebrated Father Gregory had countenanced her, and it was not to be believed that a light of the Church would be so foolish as literally to follow Christ's example and talk in public to an immoral woman.

Madeline was often conscious, thus, that many pairs of eyes were fixed upon her ; but soon she

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became aware that an unusually penetrating gaze was directed upon her by a man of some forty years of age who sat at the next table. He was a person of very remarkable appearance. He was short, broad, and inclined to stoutness; and both his figure and his clean-shaven face were somewhat reminiscent of the great Bonaparte, though there was a suggestion also of a benign Punch in the hook of his nose, the kindly gleam of his keen eyes, and the stoop of his shoulders. He was rather uncouth in appearance, and he walked with a roll not unlike that of a performing bear; while at table, he shovelled his food into *his* mouth as though the quantity consumed and the rate of consumption, rather than the quality, were the end in view. He had an astonishing habit, too, of blowing his nose at frequent intervals with a violence which was most startling to his neighbours, and which usually brought a look of pain to the haggard face of the leader of the orchestra, accustomed though, he was to the clatter of the crowded restaurant. He ate his meals invariably with a book or learned journal before him ; and his hat was always placed upon a chair beside him, ready to be squashed on to his great head at the moment that his plate was scraped clean.

One day, at luncheon, Madeline's attention was arrested by a sudden loud " Ha ! " uttered by him; and, glancing at him, she saw that he was closely reading a copy of the Spectator. When at length he looked up, her eyes met his, and he nodded at her, pointing with his finger to the journal.

" It's 'about you," he said abruptly. "Listen! 'Plays dealing with religious subjects require very careful handling; and to tell the truth, the tender and artless simplicity of Miss Madeline Rorke's interpretation of Mary Magdalene in the never to be forgotten " Galileans," has rather spoilt us for the efforts of sophisticated actresses more palpably trained in the tricks of the stage.' "

" I'm glad they haven't forgotten me," Madeline replied. " How, did you know who I was ? "

" I asked," he answered, speaking with his mouth full. Then, producing a visiting-card from his pocketbook, he leant over and placed it on her table. " That's my name," he said.

Madeline glanced at the card, upon which was engraved: " Professor E. D. Hudson, M.A., D.C.L., LL.D., Ph.D., F.R.S., F.S.A., F.R.G.S."

" Good gracious ! " she exclaimed; " what do all those letters mean ? "

" Swank," he said, swallowing a glass of wine almost at a gulp.

Madeline laughed. " Are you the Egyptologist ? " she asked.

" Yes," he answered. " Awful, isn't it ? "

"I've got your 'History of Egypt' upstairs," she told him. "I'm just going to start to read it."

" Take my advice," he replied. " Don't."

" *Why ?* " she asked.

" Rotten," he said; and rising from the table with a napkin in his hand, he bowed to her abruptly. Then he wiped his mouth with some violence, threw the napkin into the middle of the empty dishes, put his hat on his head, and jolted out of the room.

On the following afternoon Robin was brought down in a carrying-chair into the garden, where he lay back on his cushions, while Madeline read the paper to, him. His head was still bandaged, and, being thus conspicuous, he was the object of many kindly inquiries made by persons whom, for the most part, he had never seen before. Presently along the path came Professor Hudson, his hands clasped behind his back and his gaze directed alternately to the blue sky above him and to the ground beneath his feet.

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He was evidently lost in thought, and he did not espy Madeline until he had almost collided with her chair.

" Ha! " he exclaimed, raising his crumpled hat and replacing it with a vicious tug. He stood silently in front of her for a moment, his head on one side, his left hand stroking his chin; and his eyes passed from her to Robin and back again. " A bad business! " he remarked at length, and turned to continue his walk. Madeline called him back and introduced him to the invalid.

"I'm glad to meet you," said Robin. "I've read your books with great interest and I've heard you lecture."

" I can return the same compliment," replied Professor Hudson.

He pulled a vacant chair towards them, and sat down ; and soon the three of them were deep in conversation. The subjects discussed or touched upon, however, were very far removed from those that might have been expected to interest an archaeologist. He spoke of the stage and of the characteristics of certain actors and actresses he compared the manners of society in Paris, London, and New York; he betrayed an intimate knowledge of the fashions of the day ; and his familiarity with the politics and questions of the hour was remarkable.

" You know," said Madeline, " you illustrate and personify a certain theory of mine."

" Good Lord! " replied the Professor, edging away from her. " Has it come to that ? "

" People always think of an antiquarian," she went on, ignoring him, " as an old fossil, a dry as dust sort of person ; but my theory is that he must be a man intensely alert to the joy of life :

otherwise he would let the dead lie forgotten in their tombs and would not always be working to bring them back to life. It seems to me that it isn't because antiquities are old that he loves them, but because they are the means of cheating death of its victims and making the past live again. It's always Life that he's after."

" Well, of course," said Professor Hudson. " The duty of an archaeologist is to appreciate life and its romance and to make it his study. He's so fond of living things that he can't bear to concede any victory to death and oblivion; he's always trying to bring to light the relics of the Past in order to make them tell their tale and add their quota to the sum of the living. He's in love with the Present. That's why he goes to the Past. He forces it to become part of the Present. See ? "

" Yes," she replied, " that's what I mean." Professor Hudson pulled out of his pocket a large coloured handkerchief, and blew his nose with such a sudden and violent trumpeting that both Madeline and Robin started in their chairs.

"The Present is so good," he went on, thereafter, " that it's not big enough for him. He must needs go to the tombs of the dead, clothe the bare bones with flesh and blood, and bring them again into the blessed light of the sun. All the laughter and the agreeable things of today are not enough for him, so he tries to add to them the gaiety of all the past ages."

" That's a new idea to me," said Robin.

" But not to her," remarked the Professor. " Trust a woman to understand anything that has to do with the essence of life. Ha! "

He rose abruptly from his seat. "When are you two going to be married ? " he asked with disconcerting suddenness; and his new friends were so startled by the question that they failed to ask him by what channel the fact of their engagement had come to his ears.

" Next week," replied Robin, glancing anxiously at Madeline.

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"Well," said Professor Hudson. "As I've told you, I am going up to Luxor to carry out some excavations. I have a spare tent in my camp there; and if you'd like to come and stay-as paying guests-I shall be delighted. Think it over." Before they had time to reply, he had bowed and left them.

" Oh, Robin ! " exclaimed Madeline. " That's just what I should enjoy. Let's do it."

" Rather! " he cried; and they were eagerly discussing the proposal when the nurse came to tell the invalid that it was time for him to be carried back to his room.

Within a day or two Robin was able to dispense with the carrying-chair; and one afternoon, while he was seated alone in the garden, Madeline having gone out to do some shopping, a native servant brought him the news that a lady was waiting in the hotel to see him. He was about to send a message to say that he was not well enough to receive visitors when he descried the figure of Daisy Jones flitting towards him, carrying an armful of flowers, which presently she deposited at his feet.

" I thought you might refuse to " see me," she said as she greeted him, " so I followed the servant."

" Why should I refuse ? " he asked.

" Well," she replied, " I hear that the beautiful Madeline Rorke is always with you nowadays. You must be careful or she'll ; catch you."

Robin looked at her curiously. Evidently she was not one of those who had heard of his engagement ; and a feeling of dismay came over him as he realized that he would have to tell her. He disliked the task immensely, for she could not fail to feel that she had made a fool of herself, and to make a woman look stupid is no pursuit for a man.

Mrs. Jones mistook his silence for that of annoyance, and she hastened to wash out her remark in

a flood of words. It appeared that during the last few days, on the advice of Augustus Blake, she had been reading a book on the subject of the galvanic power of mind over matter, called " The Electric Jesus," by Marmaduke Tomkins ; and so thrilled had she been by it that, for the moment, the other speculations of her effervescent little brain had been put into the background.

" You must read it," she said. " It's frightfully interesting; and you'll then have no reason to wear that bandage round your head at all. The wound will heal up by itself, and you'll be playing tennis next day."

" What's the idea of it ? " Robin asked.

"Well," she replied, " I'm not very good at it yet; and I can't quite explain. But, you see, we've all got a lot of electricity in us, and every time we think hard about anything we send out waves of electric force. Plato says that if you do your thinking in a dark room you can see the sparks flying out of your head."

" I've never noticed them," said Robin.

" Oh, but it's quite true," she answered. " I tried it last night. When I was in bed I put all the clothes over my head and thought hard of you, so hard that I could have almost believed you were there."

" Yes, that must have taken a bit of thinking," Robin commented.

" I was nearly suffocated," she said.

Well, did you see any sparks ? " he asked. "No," she answered, unabashed. " But then, you see, I'm not an adept yet. Of course, the greatest adept of all was Christ : He was full of electricity. That's how He performed all His miracles; and we must all try in our feeble, earthly way to be like Him. Anything can be done if you think hard enough and use a little water."

"Why water?" asked Robin.

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"Oh well, water is the medium of electricity. Christ always used it. For instance, when he spat on the eye of the poor blind man."

" Did you remember the water when you were under the bedclothes ? " he inquired.

" Oh, I am a silly-billy ! " she exclaimed. " I quite forgot it." She moved her chair nearer to him. "Let me put my hand on your head," she said, "and see if I can heal you."

" What about the water ? " asked Robin.

" Oh, bother the water! " she said. She bent over him, and placed her chubby hand gently upon the top of his head. Her face came very close to his. Her eyes were closed, and her brows were knit as though she were making a violent effort to concentrate her thoughts ; but presently Robin noticed that she was breathing hard, and the expression of her face was by no means that of one whose mind was risen above the things of this world. Her eyes opened, and she looked at him pleadingly, uttering a sigh as she did so.

" Be careful," said the invalid. " You are treading on your flowers."

Daisy Jones slowly stooped and picked them up. Several of them were stamped into shapelessness. " Oh dear! " she exclaimed. " Poor things! - and I'd promised them they should die by your bed-side."

" Perhaps if you thought very hard," said Robin, " they would resume their natural appearance, or at any rate something resembling it."

Now you're teasing me," she laughed; and then suddenly she added: " D'you tease Miss Rorke like that ? "

Robin glanced at her quickly. " No," he said, " some people don't lend themselves to it."

" I believe you're in love with her," she remarked, shaking a finger at him archly.

Robin braced himself. "Yes," he said, "we're engaged to be married."

Mrs. Jones stood perfectly still in front of him and the flowers fell from her hands. She uttered no word, but the colour mounted to her face. Then, suddenly, she turned from him and walked slowly away towards the hotel. Robin sat up and called out to her to come back. He wanted to say something to her-something sentimental-to mitigate the blow to her dignity. But at the sound of his voice she broke into a run, and so disappeared, headlong, into the building.

CHAPTER XVII

THE MARRIAGE

IT was towards the end of January that Father Gregory received the following letter from his nephew. " You will be pleased to hear," he wrote, " that I am now up and about again, and nothing remains to remind me of my accident except a fine big scar on my head, which, however, will soon be quite covered by my hair. The day after tomorrow Madeline and I are to be married at the Consulate ; and we shall come up to Luxor by the night express the same evening, namely Saturday; and on Sunday morning we shall ride over to you for our real wedding in your chapel. Madeline dreaded the thought of being married by the eminently sociable young curate at the church here, which she calls, in her incorrigible way, the strutting-place of English prosperity; but your remote little sanctuary in the desert makes a great appeal to her.

"Professor Hudson, the Egyptologist, is going to Luxor tonight. He has been staying here at this hotel, and we have struck up quite a friendship: He is going to conduct some excavations in the Theban necropolis, and his camp is already pitched somewhere near you: I expect you will have seen it. He has asked us to go over and stay with him there, a proposal we both jumped at ; and we shall go straight there after our wedding on Sunday."

Father Gregory smiled serenely as, seated in his airy whitewashed room, he read this letter. Then,

laying it aside, he produced from the drawer of his writing-table a bundle of letters written to him almost daily by Madeline during, Robin's illness, and probably sent without his knowledge. In these she had frankly spoken of her love, and she seemed to have been very conscious of its rapid growth.

"I don't know what is the matter with me," she wrote in one of the earlier letters ; " I can't remember ever feeling like this before, which is another way of saying that I can never have been really in love before. Do you know that even to sit by his side and read to him, or to turn his pillows and tidy his bedclothes, or to pour out his tea and butter his toast, is such happiness that I am utterly ashamed of it. I suppose a woman likes mothering the man she loves as much as a man likes looking after the woman; but if he really gets anything like the pleasure out of the one that I get out of the other, I shall know how to keep him happy. I have a great idea. I shall make him give me an allowance (a totally inadequate sum, of course) for housekeeping and for my clothes and for my pocket-money. Then he can always have the pleasure of feeling that he is paying for everything ; and he need never know that the expenses are really about three times as much as he is giving. You see, the fact is I have got plenty of money of my own-I mean on an average estimate, for fortunate investments have practically doubled the sum that was left me. So masterful Robin need never know that a chemise for which he pays two guineas really cost six, or that the grocer's bill is really thirty, and not ten pounds."

In a later letter she wrote : " It is very annoying ! I shall have to give up my idea of paying for things privately. I find that Robin knows the exact price of everything, though how he comes to know what a woman's wisp of a nightgown costs nowadays

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I don't venture to ask. He says he has been out shopping with his sister; but that is an absurd explanation, for it is notorious that in England all virgins' nightgowns are made of starched cardboard. I had forgotten, too, that as an explorer he would know the price of provisions; and, in fact, I had forgotten that he was a practical man of affairs at all."

Father Gregory handled the letters tenderly, glancing more than once at some of the pages, and giving, an appreciative nod from time to time. The words breathed sincerity : they were a record of the development of genuine love; and as he returned the packet to the drawer there was a feeling of confidence and contentment in his mind. He had never doubted Madeline ; but he had sometimes wondered whether she had consented to become Robin's wife because she had felt the aptness of this *denouement*. Now, however, he realized that love had come to them both.; and he believed that it would be lasting.

That night he announced the forthcoming marriage to the company assembled at the evening meal, and tactfully invited them all to absent themselves between eleven and four on the great day. " I am going to ask Henry Morland," he said, " to be in the chapel as witness; but otherwise, to put it really delicately, I want you all to clear out and leave us alone."

On the Sunday morning he went into his garden after breakfast and picked a bunch of white roses, some of which he placed upon the altar in the chapel, while others went to decorate the luncheon table. He felt very happy as he made the various arrangements, and, standing in the sunshine outside the kitchen door, discussed with his native servant the details of the " wedding-breakfast." To his eyes the wonderful vault of the heavens was today more unfathomable than ever, the walls that rose to meet it were of purer whiteness, the shadows more sharp in contrast.

As he crossed the courtyard and glanced towards the garden beyond, he was constrained to pause a moment, so vivid was the picture framed by the white plastered archway. The green rose bushes, with their brilliant red and white blooms, shining in the glory of the morning sun ; behind them the purple bougainvillea climbing up the wall of the chapel towards the radiance of the white dome ; and as a background the saffron cliffs, with their cobalt shadows, towering up to the intense blue of the sky : all this heliolatry of colour and brilliance dazzled him anew. And when across the picture there danced a pair of yellow butterflies, his worn old heart leapt within him, crying " *Laudate Dominum, confitemini Domino !* Praise the Lord, O my soul!"

At the corner of the covered cloister he came upon Henry Morland, sketch book in hand. " Well," said the artist, with a smile, "you have, persuaded me at last to attend a Church service ! You see, I have put on my best clothes."

" This is a very happy day for me," Father Gregory answered. " I am glad you are honouring it."

"Your nephew, I can see, has your thorough approval of his marriage," Morland remarked.

"Approval my son, it isn't that," exclaimed the old man, with a gesture of enthusiasm. " I am not thinking of him. I am happy because a lamb that was lost has been found, a little lamb that had strayed has come back to the world's green pastures."

" Eh ? " said Morland ; " and who is that ? "

Father Gregory smiled. " Nobody that you know," he said enigmatically; and therewith he passed on.

Soon after eleven o'clock the jangle of donkey

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trappings heralded the arrival of the bridal couple, and Father Gregory hastened out to greet them.; he shook hands with his nephew, and then, turning to Madeline, he held out both his hands to her.

" My dear," he said, " oh, my dear . . ." His voice broke, and unaccountable tears of happiness came into his eyes. A moment later she had put her arms about his neck and her warm young lips were pressed to his wrinkled cheek.

" Oh, Father," she whispered, " I am so happy ! " The old man brushed the back of his hand across his eyes with frank purpose; and then, taking his guests each by the arm, led them into the courtyard. Madeline at once uttered an exclamation of pleasure.

" What a beautiful little place! " she cried. " Oh, Robin, this is the sort of place I should like to live in for ever."

Father Gregory showed them over the establishment with pride, taking them at length into the sunlit garden. Here they encountered Henry Morland, who, in the white suit which he had donned for the occasion and a large grey sombrero, looked more like a black-bearded Spaniard than an Englishman.

" He is to be the witness," said Father Gregory, as he introduced him. " He knows as little about the inside of a church or chapel as you do, Madeline ; so you need not feel uncomfortable."

Morland fixed his dark eyes upon the girl, and a slight flush mounted into the tan of his cheeks. " It is extraordinary," he said, in a low voice, " that I should be helping at the marriage of Madeline Rorke. I had no idea. Why, do you know I have often tried to draw your face from memory-ever since I saw you as the Magdalene. Let me look at you a minute," he went on, with frank enthusiasm. " Yes, your eyes do tilt a little bit: I thought they did. I wonder what that shadowed effect is due to. I thought it was the make-up, but it isn't. By Jove, this is luck! "

Neither Robin nor Madeline could refrain from laughing at the young artist's enthusiasm.

" You must paint her portrait," said the proud bridegroom.

" Rather! " Morland replied. " And do you know what I shall paint her as ? Joan of Arc! Joan of Arc leading the French armies, with the inspiration of her earthly mission lighting her face and with the mystery of eternity in her eyes."

" No," said Madeline. " I would rather you painted me as one who has been very close to death and suddenly has been restored to perfect health and perfect happiness."

" Like Jairus's daughter," said Father Gregory

" Who was she ? " asked Madeline.

"She was a girl who had died," he answered gravely, " and whom, for His own inscrutable purposes, the Master brought back to life again."

" I was never dead," Madeline whispered close to his ear; " I was only sleeping."

"That is how our Lord described it, too," he replied.

Madeline bent her head down towards the roses, and for a while seemed to be oblivious to all else but their beauty and fragrance. The sun was hot, but the faithful breeze from the north, which blows almost continuously along the brilliant Valley of the Nile with cool refreshment, rustled through the palms and tamarisks and gave an invigorating quality to the air. In Egypt a consciousness of physical well being, a sense of life, is almost habitual ; and here in this garden in the desert a kind of elation both of body and spirit was felt. Along the path in front of them a little gray and

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white wagtail darted to and fro with eager curiosity; and high above them the crested larks of the Nile soared into the heavens, singing exultantly as they climbed. Above the towering cliffs the hawks hovered and swooped; and amidst the foliage of the trees the chattering sparrows made high holiday of the morning.

Madeline turned to Robin and linked her arm in his. " Oh, life, life, life!" she exclaimed, as though uttering her thoughts. " How could I ever have doubted you ? Robin, will you tell me what has happened to me, that I have come to glory in the very thing I was so ready to throw away ? Is it love that has made the change ? "

" Yes," he said quietly, pressing her hand, " it is love, Madeline. Love is a sort of interpreter of things, isn't it ? It makes one understand ; it makes one conscious of the thrilling life that is in all things."

" I didn't think I could be happier than I have been this last fortnight or so in Cairo," she went on. " But what with this glorious place and being married . . ."

" We are still only half married," he said, interrupting her.

She looked anxiously at him. "Why, so we are," she laughed. She hastened forward, and took hold of Father Gregory's arm. " Please may we be married at once ? " she asked him.

Father Gregory smiled at the ingenuousness of her request. " Of course," he said. " We will go to the chapel now."

He led them at once into the little building, and in its cool shadows they sat quietly a few minutes, while Father Gregory made his brief preparations for the service, and presently knelt in silence before the altar. Then, rising to his feet, he directed them to come to him ; and in a low voice he recited to them the time honoured words.

The ceremony was soon performed, and presently they were standing once more in the sunlight of the garden. Henry Morland now made his excuses, and, explaining that he had arranged to lunch in Luxor that day, left the three together.

The wedding-breakfast which followed was in all respects delightful. Father Gregory had forgotten nothing: he had procured champagne from the Nile Palace, and the excellent *chef* of the hotel had, with great pains, devised and produced a cake worthy of the occasion: So long did they linger around the table, talking, laughing, and discussing their plans for the future, and so quickly did the time pass as they sat afterwards in the shade of the cloister, that the tea served to them at four o'clock seemed to follow immediately upon the removal of the coffee-cups.

It was now time for them to walk over to Professor Hudson's camp, which lay a half mile to the north amongst the rocks near the mouth of one of the great valleys of the Theban range, and to which their baggage had already been sent direct. They therefore took their leave of Father Gregory, arranging to see him again on the following day.

Good-bye, Uncle Francis," said Robin, as they stood at the gate of the building. " I can't ever thank you enough for all you have done. You have been a brick."

" Robin," he replied, " I am proud to receive Madeline into our family. I hope we shall all be worthy of her." Then, turning to the girl, he put his hands upon her arms.

" If an old man's blessing is of account," he said, " you know that you have it, my child ; if his love is of value to you, remember that it is yours ; and if his prayers have any power proportional to their sincerity, do not forget that night and morning

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I am asking God to guide you into the way of happiness and peace."

He stood at the gate waving to them as they walked through the shade of the palms and away into the open desert ; and when they were lost to his sight behind a rocky hillock, he turned with a sigh of contentment, and directed his steps back to the chapel, where for long he knelt before the little altar, while the shadows of the afternoon lengthened around his frail figure and the sunlight passed from the roses outside the open door.

CHAPTER XVIII
AT THE SUMMIT

MADLINE and Robin soon reached their camp, where they were greeted with friendly warmth by Professor Hudson. A large rectangular tent had been allotted to them, the interior being decorated with the richly coloured ornamentation which the Arabs execute with such a fine flourish. Through the raised door-flap they could look out across the desert to the fields and the distant Nile, while some thirty yards to the right the main camp was clustered under the cliffs. Their tent had been wedged into a recess in the rocks, and thus a small enclosure was formed behind them, entirely screened from view. Here, as the Professor pointed out, they could take their morning tub in the open air in the full light of the sun, and he directed their attention to a pleasant-looking tin bath which leant against the rocks. Their two camp beds stood side by side in a corner of the tent; and some rough pieces of furniture, and an adapted packing-case or two, were placed around the sides, thus leaving a comfortable reed-matted space in the middle.

Here they spent a happy hour in unpacking and arranging the simple necessities of life; and Madeline very quickly contrived to produce an appearance of considerable comfort in their new dwelling place. Given a good climate, an airy tent is, after all, the happiest of habitations; and those who have lived for long under canvas, as Robin pointed

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out, can never again feel quite at ease in the confined atmosphere of four brick walls.

At half-past five the evening meal, a kind of high tea, was served in the mess tent ; and at this function they were introduced to the other members of the party : two young archaeologists who assisted in the excavations ; an architect and his wife, the former to be employed upon the planning of any buildings which might be unearthed ; and the photographer of the expedition, whose busy camera recorded all the phases of the work. The meal was unpretentious but excellent, and was partaken in the friendliest of company ; and both Madeline and Robin rose from it feeling that, for some time at any rate, the elegancies and comforts of the modern hotel could be given up without regret.

Robin now proposed that they should set out upon a rambling stroll; and soon they were climbing, hand in hand, up the white bridle-path which led in a wide curve to the summit of the cliffs at the back of the camp. It was good to be alone together once more ; for this day was sacred to them, a festival of individuality, and the company of their fellow creatures, however goodly, was not for long to be endured. But out here on the hillside they were utterly alone, and there was nothing to check in them the sweet selfishness of love.

On the heights of the cliff they seated themselves, and hand in hand, like a god and goddess enthroned upon their sacred hill, they looked down on the world with august detachment. The sun had long since set, and the short Egyptian twilight was fast fading into the starry haze of early night. Far away on the opposite bank of the Nile the many lights of the great hotels and of the shops and houses illuminated the modern river front of ancient Thebes, and cast confused reflections into the dark waters. On the near bank the fields and hamlets

lay silently awaiting the coming of night; and behind these stood the imposing hills of the desert, where the lovers now sat.

At the back of these hills they could also look down on the mysterious Valley of the Tombs of the Kings, which was shut in by the surrounding cliffs and rocky slopes of the territory once sacred to the royal dead. Here the mighty Pharaohs of the mightiest period of Egyptian history had been laid to rest in the bosom of Osiris ; and here also the early Christian monks of the Thebaid had dwelt in solitude amongst the deserted sepulchres. To this valley came no sounds from the crowded little town across the water, nor did the nearer noises of the village penetrate to its seclusion. The mighty rampart of the hills on which Madeline and Robin were seated divided it from the living world; and just now in its remote loneliness no human voice was heard therein, save that of a native custodian of the tombs, who crouched amongst the rocks upon the hill-side far away beneath them, chanting tales of old romance to his three or four comrades.

On all sides of this valley the cavernous sepulchres of the Pharaohs were cut into the rock ; and in the half light of the evening their dark entrances looked as though they were the mouths of passages leading up from the underworld, where clustered the ghosts of ancient days; come from the depths to look once more upon the stars. The white road which skirted the hills, making its long detour from the river to the royal valley, could be seen here and there winding amidst the great rocks and gaunt cliffs, like the misty pathway of a dream ; and in all directions the narrow jackal tracks passed, web-like, from slope to slope, worn white by the soft pads of hurrying little feet through untold ages. These, and the road, now lay deserted beneath them in the twilight, and naught moved thereon

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save the gentle wind of the evening as it passed into the wilderness laden with the scent of the fields. The great clusters of fallen rocks, the mighty heads of the cliffs, the dark ravines, were strangely suggestive of the monstrous thoughts of sleep ; and the whole vista had the nature of a landscape in the moon, or of some unearthly region of the dead.

With the fall of night a curious sense of expectancy had begun to permeate the valley and the rocky heights. The tumbled boulders hinted that something was hid behind them; the grandeur of the rugged cliffs was bared, as it were, to receive the echoes of words as yet unspoken; the stars, ever brightening as the sky deepened, appeared to be watching with bated breath for an imminent event to take place. It was as though the spirits of royal and ancient Egypt and the ghosts of the Christian anchorites, hidden day after day in this place of tombs, were now at the approach of night stirring from sleep, and were preparing to become manifest in the darkness. The whole place was waiting for something; and the dead rocks became animated with impending excitement. Each evening at dusk there is here to be felt this strange suspense; but tonight the valley seemed more than ever alert, and every cluster of rocks, every shadowed nook, every crevice in the cliffs. was full of eager curiosity.

Robin put his arms about the small figure of the girl who now was his wife ; and turning from the mystery around him, he gazed deep into the more wondrous mystery of her eyes. There was the smile of the glory of life upon her lips, and as he bent over her and placed his hand upon the whiteness of her throat, he could feel the pulse of her beating heart and could hear the murmur of her breath. Here on the heights of the Theban hills, under the dawning stars, the ecstasy of their love

was communicated from one to the other, and the earth beneath them dissolved into cloud as they passed forth into the untrammelled regions of their heaven.

In the arrogance of their passion it seemed that they two, their unity, were the fulfilment of all the world's hope, that they were the solution of the riddle of existence. This was the thing expected ; their unuttered words and the surge of their mingled breath were the messages for which the ears of the multitude of the dead were straining; the beauty of their all-conquering youth was the vision that earth and heaven, life and death, so breathlessly awaited. Yearning towards one another, absorbed into one another, they lay couched upon the extreme pinnacle of the world, raised into the very presence of the stars and assaulting the mighty gates of Paradise. Now the secrets of men and God were no longer hidden from them, and with tumultuous wonder they saw the mystery of the universe resolve itself into the simple fact of love, love omnipotent, love all-conquering, love eternal.

This hour was the fulfilment of all hours; for now were all joys, all desires, all passions transformed and refined into the purity of satisfaction. For Madeline the vain and foolish years, the motiveless loves, the empty attachments, were at this great moment purged from her life; and no whit remained of the adventuress of Port Said. Through those chance experiences, lightly met and as lightly abandoned, she had passed with unsullied soul. They had never been of account in her life ; and now the very memory of them was wiped away. And for Robin the colourless little intrigues, the passing amours of his earlier years, became as though they had never been. All the pages of the book of his life were washed clean by the tempest of love ; and all the hopes of his heart

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had no longer any form save that of the vibrant body encircled by his arms. In her were all things concentrated, in his possession of her were all his life's ambitions brought to fruition.

For long they lay thus under the canopy of heaven, while desire and passion and the unquenchable thirst of longing held them in the glory of mutual captivity; and softly the darkness of night fell upon them, hiding in its tender oblivion the idolatry of their love. The quiet night-wind stirred about them, mingling Madeline's dark locks with her lover's fair hair and touching their brows with its coolness. Her, hands which lay about his shoulders seemed unwilling to release him from their yearning hold ; her lips were ever loath to separate themselves from his. All the imperious need of her womanhood demanded of him the acceptance of her utter surrender: there was no thought of her brain, no fibre of her body, no atom of her life, that was not given wholly to him. And, in like manner, all the strength of his manhood, his very soul, so it seemed, was drawn forth from him and delivered into her keeping.

In the complete merging of their individualities all nature seemed to be united : the stars of the firmament above them ran together and rejoiced in their joy; the hills around them thrilled with the tremors of life at the call of their desire ; the blood of unnumbered generations of mankind rushed headlong through their veins, and in their ears throbbed the thunderous tread of unborn hosts. For the passion of love is lord of earth and heaven and the head of his arrow is the point of the meeting of all the universe ; the passion of love is King of past and future, and his moment is the instant assembly of all the ages that have been and all the aeons that are to come. And the sorcery of it is this, that in its vast primal simplicity there is no measure to the depth of its secret; in its over-

whelming plainness it demands understanding yet baffles all knowledge, the flood of its clear light, white like the moon, is poured upon humanity, but the heart of man finds in it the mystery of mysteries. It is ever near; it is seized by yearning hands and clasped in rapture to the aching breast, it intoxicates its captor with the glory of its essence, and slipping unseen from the exhausted grasp, it is gone again into the darkness, close at hand yet out of reach.

It was close on ten o'clock when at last they began to descend from their sacred hill, and slowly to make their way down the steep bridle-path. The night air, which at first had been warm in the curve of the rocks where they had rested, was now cold and sharp ; and, in spite of the brilliance of the stars, the darkness was intense. But neither cold nor warmth, neither darkness nor light, had retained any meaning for them in the exaltation of their love ; and though their feet stumbled and slipped on the rough and obscure track, their hearts strode sublimely through the buoyant ether.

When they reached the more level ground their footsteps were greeted by the frantic barking of the dogs in the scattered dwellings around them, and once they were challenged by a night-watchman, a ghostly, hooded figure who rose suddenly before them from behind a ruined wall. At length they reached the camp, where all was silent ; but there was a light in the Professor's tent, and his large shadow could be seen upon the translucent canvas. As they passed he suddenly put his great head out of the open door-flap and greeted them cheerily.

" Hi ! " he called abruptly, " I have something to show you."

Madeline and Robin entered hand in hand.

"You two young people," he said, "will be in the mood to appreciate this little poem I've just been translating. Look, it is written here."

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He held up for their inspection a small slab of limestone, upon which a few lines of the hieratic script of the ancient Egyptians were written in black ink; and from his note-book he read to them his rendering of the verses.

"If My Desire forsake me, whither shall I go? My Desire who is my wife, my little companion..

" If she leave me, what shall my right arm do? My right arm whereon my little companion hath rested her head in the midnight.

" If she pass from me, how shall I employ my strength ? My strength that is in mine arm whereon my little companion hath rested her head in the midnight.

" If she travel into distant lands will she ask my protection ? The protection of my strength that is in mine arm whereon my little companion hath rested her head in the midnight.

" Nay, but thou art with me always, O My Desire. The protection of my strength is given all to thee ; my right arm lies under thy head, my wife, my little companion."

Professor Hudson read it over twice to them, and then shut his note-book with a snap and threw it on to the table. There was an odd expression in his eyes. He got up and walked the length of the tent and back, and Madeline was reminded again of the gait of a performing bear. Then, suddenly, he made a half turn and thrust his hand into an open box in which the objects found in the day's excavations were deposited. When he faced them again he was holding out a mummy's withered arm, broken off at the shoulder.

"Look at that," he said, with a sort of anger in his voice. " It is a man's arm. I found it in the tomb from which those verses came. Good

heavens ! think of it! The arm that was so strong, the arm that used to be under the head of his little companion ! "

He tossed the gruesome object back into the box, and, turning to them, held out his own muscular arm.

"You see that," he said, striking it with his other hand. " Things have happened to that arm which ought to make it sacred for ever: yet who knows what old foggy will be chucking it about in a few thousand years, if the bones have not already rotted into dust. That is a little sermon for you for your wedding-day! Love while you may; make your life a riot of love while yet you are young, for soon you grow old and indifferent and stupid.

As Solomon said, and he was very wise, 'Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest all the days of the life of thy vanity, which He hath given thee under the sun, all the days of thy vanity ; for that is thy portion in this, life. Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might ; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave whither thou goest.'

Or as says Neferhotep, the harper at the court of one of the great Pharaohs, who lies buried not a stone's-throw from here: 'That which hath come into being must pass away again. The young man and maiden go to their resting-places; the sun riseth at dawn and setteth again in the hills of the west. Men beget and women conceive; and their children likewise go to the resting places which are appointed for them. Oh then, be happy! Come, scents and perfumes are set before thee, flowers and lilies for the arms and neck of thy beloved. Come, songs and music are before thee. Set behind thee all cares; think only upon gladness, until that day cometh whereon thou too shalt go down to the land which loveth silence.'"

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He put his hand on Robin's arm. "Be very happy," he said; "love each other always, get all you rightly can out of life; and thus, to quote another sage of ancient Egypt, 'when thy messenger comes to carry thee away, thou shalt be found by him ready.' "

Abruptly shaking them both by the hand he bid them good-night ; and even before they had left the tent he had turned from them and was again absorbed in his work.

Outside in the blackness of the night they found their way with difficulty to their tent. Once more they were alone ; two united entities walking in triumphant solitude under the blazing stars. In the far distance they could hear the cry of a jackal ; a long, wailing cry that rose and fell, and was echoed amongst the rocks. Madeline paused to listen, and her hand tightened on Robin's arm.

" It sounds like mocking laughter," she said.

Madeline of
The Desert

PART II

CHAPTER XIX

THE SIMPLE LIFE

THERE is probably some real fact behind the common legend that Egypt is preeminently the land of the lover. People say that there is something in the very atmosphere which conduces to romantic adventure, and certainly it is indisputable that the emotions are here always very close to the surface. Perhaps this statement should be qualified, for Europeans who have lived many years on the banks of the Nile become somewhat tranquil and prosaic, and the native peasants themselves are generally as little given to romance as the camels and cattle that serve them. Nevertheless, in the days of youth, life is certainly lived in Egypt in the full sense of the word, and the emotion of love is master of many an hour; but, like the consuming of fuel in the furnace, the progress of the adventure is, in the majority of cases, a rapid one, and soon there remains but dust and ashes.

Robin, however, was little disposed to study the influence of the climate upon his emotions, nor to doubt that his love would continue to flame so long as there was virility in his body. Madeline was the fulfilment of all the promises that life had made in its most sanguine moments; and he trembled to think of existence without her, so desolate would it be. He lived during these weeks of their Theban honeymoon in a condition of continuous emotional inebriation: he was, as it were, drunken with love.

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It was as though the alluring figure of Madeline lay waiting across the threshold of his brain, and no thought could issue from him, nor any observation enter, without pressing close against her, and carrying forward with it the intoxicating fragrance of her body.

He was very proud of the admiration that his wife aroused; and he felt well disposed, if somewhat patronizing, to the men whose eyes followed her. He was good-humouredly tolerant of Henry Morland's frank adoration of her; and he took much interest in the proposed portrait, for which the artist was now making some preliminary sketches. The time passed by, and found him each morning exulting in the gathering warmth of the sunlight of a new day, and each evening eager to fall under the sweet spell of the enchantment of the night.

And, to add to the content of his mind in these wonderful days of their first love, there was always at the back of his brain the consciousness that Madeline was by nature the right partner for him to have chosen. She fulfilled the conditions which, in view of his calling, he had so often formulated as being necessary in a wife. She had high courage and could face danger at his side; she was daring and adventurous; she was a born traveller-not merely an inconsequent wanderer, but one who could settle down to any conditions and quickly make herself comfortable in any place; she was a perfect horsewoman, and so she had told him, could sustain long hours in the saddle without fatigue.

Moreover and here he smiled to himself at his thought-she possessed one quality which is an enormous asset in the constitution of the perfect traveller: she was incapable of looking weather-beaten or bedraggled. By some natal gift of the gods, the simplest toilet secured to her that fair and alluring appearance which, in the case of most women, is only obtained

by the most elaborate mysteries of the mirror and dressing-table; and, similarly, no matter how carelessly she might jump into her clothes, an effect of smartness, a sort of natural chic, resulted. Though the wildest wind of heaven blew through her hair, it produced so charming an ordered disorder that it had the effect of a well-handled brush and comb. Though the day might be hot and the journey dusty and long, at its end she would, in appearance, seem to be at its beginning.

He felt, also, that she was so independent in character, so self-reliant, that when his expeditions should take him away from her she would not mope. She would not recall him from his purpose by her dreary tears, nor dull the enthusiasm of his heart by epistolary pictures of her loneliness. She would live her life fully; yet, somehow, in spite of her past, he was confident that she would always be true to him. He had no fears that in any of his absences her affections might wander; for promiscuity was part and parcel of the old life which had so miserably failed her, and she knew well enough that happiness did not lie in that direction.

And then, again, she had developed this surprising interest in reading up and mastering the social and ethical problems of the time ; and day by day he watched this habit developing in her. It seemed to him as though she were now analysing with care the experiences of life which with such unconcern she had gathered. A person who has tripped up turns naturally to see what was the stumbling block; and, similarly, Madeline had not banished from her memory the collapse of her earlier life, but had turned to inquire what was the cause of it. Her brain worked upon too simple a plane for her to attribute her past unhappiness to the mysterious machinations of fate : she called herself the master of her fate, and she wanted to know what had been

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amiss with her method of life. She had had none of the usual training; and right and wrong were not propensities whose recognized definitions had been explained to her in the nursery. She had to find out for herself ; and she was now doing so, not with conscious or narrow labour, but by a general and enthusiastic study of a wide range of- subjects.

" There is something entirely wrong with all of us," she kept saying to him; " and I want to find out what it is." Often she repeated what she had told him in Cairo, that he had, by his vitality, galvanized her brain into action, and had given her some magic key with which she had rapidly unlocked the disused chambers of her mind. Had he been of a less practical disposition he might have attributed this sudden development to sheer inspiration, as did his uncle.

" How can you not see," Father Gregory had said to him, " that, a mighty hand is upon her, inspiring her, stimulating her, impelling her? Why, with the first glance Henry Morland saw it-when he told you he would like to paint her as the inspired Joan of Arc. Have you not noticed that the haunting look of sorrow is gone from her eyes, and that the light of inspiration is growing in them ? - you can see it blazing under those great dark lashes of hers."

Robin had not replied with conviction, for what he saw in her eyes that was absent before was love. To him it was clear that love had opened the gates of her mind and had awakened the sleeping forces of speculation within.

A vast contentment was upon him ; and, If, he looked with serenity upon his coming absence from her. Very soon now he was going to set out on his expedition into the eastern desert, which was the main piece of work he had set himself to accomplish this year. He expected to be away about two months,

and for one all-sufficient reason it had been decided that Madeline should not accompany him, but should remain quietly at Professor Hudson's camp. It was only during the last few days that this decision had had to be taken; but her disappointment at having to abandon the trip was fully compensated for by the new joy that had been vouchsafed to her.

Madeline had always wanted to have a child, and the instinct of motherhood was very marked in her nature. Robin had observed this instinct in her while she was nursing him during his illness in Cairo; and on several occasions he had noticed how she had spoken to children in the streets of Cairo, or drawn his attention to their, to him, not very conspicuous charms.

During these happy days in the Theban desert Robin managed to get through a considerable amount of ethnological work. He had already collected from the natives a great deal of important folklore which shed a flood of light upon the origins of the race ; and he felt that his time had not been in any wise mishandled. For several hours each day he sat with the peasants in their houses, listening to their tales, and, by discreet questions, leading the conversation round to the subjects upon which he wished to collect information.

Meanwhile, Madeline spent a large part of the day seated at the doorway of her tent, reading the books she had bought in Cairo and those which she had asked Father Gregory to lend her from his own excellent library. Among these she had borrowed a Bible, and had amused herself by reading in it at random. Genesis and the early books had frankly bored her, but Isaiah had thrilled her with its exquisite language ; and, though the meaning was generally quite obscure, she read verse after verse over to herself for the sheer pleasure that the music of the words gave her. Ecclesiastes, of course, arrested her attention by its beauti-

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ful pessimism; and some of the psalms she found well worth reading.

Seated in the shade of the rocks, or in that cast by the tent, she could look up from her reading at the deep blue of the heavens above her, where the desert larks hovered in the sunlight ; or her gaze would wander over the rocky wilderness down to the vivid fields and palm groves where the peasants sang their songs as they worked. What finer reading room could there be than these sunlit rocks ?-what sweeter accompaniment to this glorious language than the carolling of the birds, and the distant bleating of the sheep and songs of the shepherds, carried up to her from the fields on the gentle breeze ?

In the late afternoons she and Robin used to go out for long rambles together over the windy hills of Thebes, or up the silent, awe-inspiring valleys which wound their way between the towering cliffs, where their voices echoed amongst the boulders and were cast back at them from the sheer faces of the precipice. Or they would wander arm in arm through the courts of the great temples, absorbing, so it seemed, into their very natures the serenity of these deathless monuments of the past.

Sometimes in their walks they would come upon Henry Morland busy with his painting, and would sit for a while by his side watching his work. He made a picturesque figure, with his wide-brimmed felt hat, his gipsy-like clothes, his fierce black beard, and his tanned arms from which the shirt sleeves were rolled back. Madeline always found much matter for thought in his comments upon life, and his brain seemed to her to be a library of curious and interesting facts. He was very rabid on the subject of religion, and professed himself to be a complete agnostic; but though his denunciations of the Church were of the severest nature, there was ever an idealism in his attitude which contrasted strongly with his

sharply expressed disdain for the parson and the priest. Robin more than once expressed surprise to him that he did not quarrel with Father Gregory; but he replied that a man could not quarrel with a saint, and there he would leave the matter.

On these walks Father Gregory would occasionally accompany them, though there were often several consecutive days on which they did not see him ; for, now that he felt Madeline to be in good hands, he had retired with a quiet mind once more to the peaceful seclusion of his desert habitation, and it was infrequently that he found cause to leave its enclosing walls.

" I think he is happiest," said Morland, in speaking of him one day, " when he is undisturbed by thoughts of the outside world, and can busy his mind with his little garden and the tending of his roses. He ought to have been the Abbot of a monastery, except that he has such a curious reluctance to assume command over his fellow-men."

"And yet," said Robin, "he was recognized in the Church as a great organizer."

" I suppose," remarked Madeline thoughtfully, " that when we are young we underestimate the tremendous happiness that peacefulness is to elderly people. It must quite take the place of youth's *joie de vivre*."

" 'Study to be quiet,' as Paul wrote," said Morland.

Madeline looked up at him quickly. " You know," she exclaimed, " I'm beginning to like that man Paul. When I first read, at random, his long-winded discussions, I thought him a very narrow-minded sort of person, extraordinarily devoid of a sense of humour. But I'm beginning to find that he generally knew what he was talking about."

" He certainly did," replied the painter, as he returned to his paints.

CHAPTER XX

AN INTERLUDE

A DAY or two later, Robin went across the Nile to Luxor in order to make a few purchases; and while walking along the river towards the hotel, he came face to face with Daisy Jones.

The meeting was somewhat disconcerting; for he had neither seen nor heard of her since she had fled from him with such precipitation after he had told her of his engagement. He wondered, for an instant, if she would pass him by without a word; but, rather to his relief, she fluttered up to him and greeted him with artless warmth.

" I didn't think it would be any use writing to tell you we were coming," she said, with a pathetic smile; " because, of course, you are too much in love to be interested. So I decided to leave our meeting to chance; and, you see, the very morning of our arrival brings you to me. I have only to step out of the hotel, and there you are ! "

" Did you come up by the night train ? " Robin asked, unmoved.

" Yes," she replied. " Just me and my old daddykins and Plato. You see, Plato's made a great discovery. Yes, it's awfully exciting. I don't know quite what it is, but the main thing is that he has found out the true mystical meaning of the *ankh*, the famous Egyptian symbol of life. It is really a hieroglyphical representation of the union of the male and female principles-of course very sketchily drawn. And now I've persuaded him to come up here, and he is going to study all the sculptures and paintings in the temples so as to find the proofs of what he says. Isn't it interesting ? "

" Yes," said Robin gravely. " It must be quite twenty years since the last time that that theory was put forward and squashed. At one time it was very fashionable."

" Oh, then, Plato isn't the first to have thought of it ? What a shame ! Poor fellow ! we must never tell him, must we ? There's enough suffering in the world as it is."

" How long are you staying up here ? " asked Robin, with a view to changing the subject.

" Oh, just a week," she answered. " We've just come dancing up here like children on a holiday, and presently, when we are tired of the game, we shall just dance away again. That's the right way to treat life, don't you think ? It's the way I regard my friendship with you, too. We met in a game of ring-o'-roses, we danced together a moment, then you went skipping off in one direction and I in the other."

She laughed, but her eyes looked tearfully up at him. Robin felt extremely uncomfortable : he always did when she talked in the language of children; for somehow, with all her artlessness, with all her prattle, she conveyed the impression of age. Her heart seemed ever to be hiding the burden of its experience under this motley cloak of innocuousness.

" You know," she went on, in more serious tones, " it was very wrong of you to let me make a fool of myself. It was very hard for me when you got married to that beautiful girl. Not that I blame you: oh dear, no! It would have been impossible to resist such loveliness under any circumstances; but when one remembers that you had had such an adventure together, and she had defended you against thousands of savages, and then had nursed you back to life ... well, of course you fell in love. And besides that, Plato says it was all foretold to him in a vision."

"Really?" said Robin. "How remarkable!"

" Oh, you needn't scoff ! " she exclaimed, for there was mockery in his voice. " He sometimes comes very near the truth. He says he saw your heart go out from you like a pure white bird, and it flew right into the sun, and the sun swallowed it and spat it out again, and it fell back into your body all chewed up and burnt. It seemed very real and dreadful when he told me about it."

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"Yes; it sounds awful," said Robin,

" But I dare say you'll be very happy," she went on. " I shall always try to will that the good things of life may come your way."

" Thank you," he replied gravely. " I think it is very nice of you to wish me well."

I want you always to feel," she told him, " that I am your friend; and if you are unhappy you must come to me, and I'll make a beautiful fairyland for you, where you can forget your sorrows."

" You know, you're quite depressing me," said Robin. " Do you think I'm going to be unhappy? "

" Oh, it may be all right," she replied, " but your wife has broken lots of hearts, so I hear."

" What d'you mean, 'you hear'? " he asked sharply.

" Oh nothing," she answered. " I expect you know what everybody knows."

" I do," he said.

" Personally," she went on, " I don't see any great harm in having had a past. I think it's awfully romantic. But let's talk about other things."

Robin concealed his annoyance as best he could, and together they, walked to the hotel. On the terrace, overlooking the Nile, they sat down for a while under an awning, and Mrs. Jones begged him to drink a whisky and soda. Calling to a waiter, she sent him to fetch this and a glass of port wine for herself, and she instructed him to bring a selection of the best cigars.

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Robin pointed to the hills of the desert which stood out boldly against the deep blue of the sky on the opposite side of the river. " That's where we are camping," he told her; " at the foot of those cliffs."

" How wonderful! " she whispered; and she sighed. " And yet somehow I don't feel that that is the place for you. You belong to the white palaces by the sea, with alabaster pillars and purple hangings and things, where there are feasts by night in the sound of the surf, and the mermaids swim up to the marble steps to listen to the music."

Robin laughed. " Too expensive for my small means," he said. " You forget I'm not rich, like you."

" You're not poor," she replied. " I hate poor people: they are so sordid."

" Nonsense," he protested. " You don't hate Blake; and you've told me he is as poor as a church mouse."

" Ah, well," she answered, " he disguises his poverty."

" Tell me," he asked, " what is your relationship to Blake ? Is he in love with you."

" Oh yes, of course," she replied. " He says his love for me alone keeps him sane and healthy. I truly believe that if I were to desert him he would collapse."

" And are you in love with him? " he asked.

" No," she answered, smiling as though at the absurdity of such a question. " I'm very fond of him, and I pity him. He can be so sweet and charming, and of course he is an awfully well-made and powerful man. But there are times when I think he's a devil incarnate, and I see the word 'Hell' written in flame upon his forehead. Oh, he's awful sometimes," and she shuddered as she spoke.

"Yes," said Robin, "I've felt that about him too:"

"All the same," she added quickly, " he's in many ways a darling."

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" Why don't you marry him ? " he asked ruthlessly.

" Ah, that is my secret," she answered. " I suppose I must tell you. You see, I am not a widow my husband is alive, so far as I know."

Robin looked at her sympathetically. " I'm sorry," he said. " You are the type of woman who ought to be happily married. Tell me about your husband."

" It is my tragedy," she sighed; " I was very young when I ran away and married him. It nearly broke my daddy's heart."

" Was he a bad lot ? " he asked."

Oh no," she replied, and paused. " Did he desert you ? "

" No. My daddy gave him a sum of money to go away."

" Why ? . "

" Well, you see, he wasn't English."

" 'Jones,' " said Robin; " was he Welsh, then ? "

"No," she replied. She braced herself, and forced a smile. " He was a negro," she said.

" Good Lord! " exclaimed Robin, looking at her with horror.

" Wasn't it awful of me ? " she whispered, trying to laugh.

" What on earth did you do it for ? " he asked.

"He was a magnificent creature," she replied, "and I was only a girl, a naughty girl."

At that moment Rosa, Daisy Jones's maid, came out to them from the hotel. She threw up, her hands with a gesture of delight when she saw Robin, and beamed upon him, showing her white teeth in a broad smile.

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" Ah, monsieur !" she cried. " Quelle chance ! " She turned to her mistress and patted her arm, as though she were offering her congratulations.

Mrs. Jones tried to explain the familiarity. " Rosa took such a fancy to you at Heliopolis," she said. " She often talks about you. I believe she thinks I'm in love with you."

" Monsieur is so beautiful," Rosa declared, "so kind, so fine English gentleman."

Robin looked at the swarthy face, and he was conscious of a hearty mistrust of her.

" Rosa, you wicked old thing! " laughed Mrs. Jones. " What d'you want, any way ? "

The woman whispered something in her ear, and Robin caught the words " Mr. Blake."

" Yes," replied her mistress, " put it in his room." She turned to her friend. " It's a cocktail for Plato," she explained. " He always likes one before his lunch." Rosa bustled away, giving Robin a full smile of approval as she left.

" She's not very fond of Plato," said Mrs. Jones. " He has offended her."

" Where is he? - is he in ? " asked Robin, ignoring her remark.

" No, he went into the bazaars," she answered, " but he'll be back presently. He will be surprised to see you: I expect he'll be furious."

" Why ? " inquired Robin, quite unperturbed.

" Oh, he's awfully jealous of you," she laughed. " Poor fellow !- he suffers tortures ; but he's very brave about it. And the strange thing is, he is so fond of you really."

" I think I'd better be going," said Robin. " I should hate to distress him." He rose from the chair, finishing the whisky-and-

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soda which had been brought to him; but as he did so he observed the tall figure of the mystic silently ascending the steps of the terrace, keeping close to the balustrade, as though he were stalking big game.

" Ah, there he is," he remarked; and a moment later Augustus Blake was standing before him, staring glassily from one to the other.

"Isn't it funny, Plato," said Mrs. Jones, "how Captain Beechcroft has turned up the moment we've arrived ? "

" Very," said Blake; and Robin caught a momentary look of ludicrous agony upon his face, as he glanced at Daisy Jones with his owl-like eyes. Then, suddenly, the man's appearance changed. Something seemed to blaze up inside him, and the glow of the sudden fire could be seen lighting his face and giving unaccustomed animation to its mask-like expression. The colour mounted into his cheeks, and his weak, sensitive mouth quivered.

" Oh, it's very funny," he said, his voice raised above its ordinary pitch. " I suppose it was carefully arranged. Look here, Beechcroft, I can see quite clearly that you and Daisy are in love. Why don't you say so clearly ? Then I shall know how I stand. Why don't you speak out like a man ? Good God !- I can bear it. It won't kill me."

" Plato ! " cried Daisy Jones. " What are you saying? Are you mad? "

" You two are driving me mad," he answered, his hands clenched on the back of a chair. " I shouldn't mind if you were frank about it: it's this deceit that's so horrible."

Robin gripped him by the arm and faced him directly.

" What the devil are you talking about?" he exclaimed. " Don't you know that I'm a married man, on my honeymoon ? D'you suppose I have eyes for anyone but my wife : Don't be a silly ass."

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Blake uttered a bitter laugh. "Men like you," he retorted, " have eyes for every pretty woman. It's clear enough. You're living with one woman and in love with another."

" Look here," said Robin savagely, " if you want your teeth knocked down your throat,. you've only got to say that sort of thing once again."

" I'm as strong as you," he answered, with a kind of childish defiance. " I'll fight you if you want."

" Oh, don't be a fool! " muttered Robin.

Mrs. Jones's eyes were gleaming: it would have been hard to say whether fear or pleasurable excitement were the dominating emotion of the moment. " Oh, don't fight about me ! " she cried, clasping her plump hands. " I'm only a weak little woman I couldn't bear to be the cause of bloodshed. Don't, don't fight about me ! "

" I'm not going to," said Robin coldly.

Suddenly Augustus Blake began to titter. The light had faded from his eyes, and once more they had become like two glass marbles; but the corners of his mouth twitched as though by reason of some inner convulsion of laughter.

Mrs. Jones gasped. " Oh Plato, you beast!" she cried. " You were acting."

The mystic held up one finger. " Hark! " he whispered. " I hear cocktails."

And therewith he crept away from them for a few paces, and then, like a cat, sprang forward and disappeared into the hotel.

" He's mad," said Robin, with decision; and presently he took his departure.

CHAPTER XXI

TOMBS AND TEMPLES

DURING the ensuing week Robin showed no inclination to waste any of his time on Daisy Jones, and with the exception of a single occasion, on which he introduced her and her cavalier to Henry Morland, who happened to be with him at the time, he did not again inflame the jealous passions-real or pretended -of the great mystic. Morland, however, saw her more than once on the following days, and he afterwards chaffed Robin, much to his annoyance, in regard to Mrs. Jones's very apparent admiration for him. Meanwhile, Robin went about his work day by day with increasing energy, for now his time in this part of Egypt was drawing to a close, and soon he had to be off, over the hills and far away, into the eastern desert.

One morning, however, while Madeline was wandering by herself amongst the ancient tombs, near the pathway which led from the camp towards the Ramesseum, she suddenly observed the peculiar couple riding towards her, preceded by a very stout and entirely objectionable native dragoman. Mrs. Jones sat her large white donkey somewhat clumsily, and her pink muslin dress, with its ill-arranged skirts, which revealed far too much of her fat little legs, appeared to be much soiled by contact with her sweating steed.

Augustus Blake was mounted on an animal so diminutive that the rider's two legs almost touched

the ground on either side, and he could make no attempt to put his large feet into the small stirrups. The wretched animal appeared to be so heart-broken by the disproportionate size of the burden it was carrying that it hung its head and flopped its ears in complete dejection, and seemed at any moment to be about to sit down and cry. A small donkey-boy ran behind them, alternately beating the two animals and uttering strings of frightful imprecations, which, had their nature been understood, might have brought a blush of shame to Mrs. Jones's already scarlet face.

" Ah, good morning, you beautiful thing! " cried she, as she held out her white-gloved hand to Madeline. " I'd begun to think you were a myth."

Madeline greeted them with amused interest, and, having ascertained that they were on their way to the Valley of the Kings, suggested that they should dismount and take a brief rest from their exertions.

The process of dismounting proved to be remarkable. Augustus Blake merely allowed one of his feet to touch the ground, and, hopping forward over the donkey's head, left that unfortunate bag of bones staggering in a bewildered manner over the pathway behind him. Mrs. Jones, on her part, nonchalantly leant over towards the left, whereupon the girth snapped, the saddle twisted round, and she was deposited upon the ground. The dragoman, being absorbed in his own mercenary thoughts, rode straight ahead, automatically calling the attention of the couple who, he supposed, were following him, to the various points of interest by the roadside ; and it was not till some hundreds of yards had been traversed that he turned his head and discovered the magical disappearance of his charges, at which he galloped madly back in a cloud of dust, looking from side to side in blank astonishment.

Madeline led her friends to the mouthway of a

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tomb cut in the face of a neighbouring cliff.

"Let's come inside here," she said. " It is cool and shady." She conducted them into the square chamber which was hewn out of the solid rock, where, as she had said, the air was cool, and a shaft of sunlight, penetrating through the doorway, lit the interior with a soft reflected light. Here they seated themselves on a fallen block of stone, which had once been a sacrificial altar, and turned their eyes to the surrounding walls, whereon some remains of the ancient paintings were still to be seen. An early Christian anchorite had evidently used the place as a dwelling, for on all sides large crosses had been splashed with red paint upon the walls, and there were indications that he had carefully erased the old paintings, which he had regarded as being works of the devil. A fragment of the representation of a Pharaonic feast remained at one corner of the chamber, and the outlines of figures. of naked dancing-girls could be discerned ; but here the hermit had laboriously scratched out all the essentially feminine characteristics of each figure, so that his meditations should not be disturbed by any visualization of the charms he had blotted from his thoughts.

" It's very dreadful," said Madeline, " that so many of the beautiful paintings in these tombs have been destroyed by these early Christian monks and hermits. I can never quite understand how it was that Christianity in early times came to be so inseparable from self-punishment and mortification of the flesh."

" Oh, but that's what Christ preached," said Augustus Blake.

" Oh, never, never! " Madeline replied vigorously. " Christ's injunctions about taking no thought for the morrow as to food and clothes were simply directed against gluttony and vanity and fussiness ; and when he reminded his disciples that Solomon

in all his glory was not so well dressed as an ordinary lily, he can only have meant that the body God gave us is more beautiful than any clothes, and that therefore there's no use in giving much thought to dressing up what is of itself beautiful."

Of course, the summers are hot in Palestine," said Mrs. Jones thoughtfully.

" The Son of Man came eating and drinking, you remember," Madeline went on; " and when he said he 'had nowhere to lay his head,' he meant that he was denied the ordinary comforts of life that ought to have been his. Throughout his whole ministry he never said one word to suggest that the vital forces in one's nature ought to be allowed to wither away. It's odd how people seem to think that his sufferings were a sort of practical illustration of the things he taught, whereas in reality he was only trying to teach people how to avoid suffering. One might just as well say that a doctor who himself gets cancer in trying to find a cure for it is advocating it! He always preached happiness; he gave his life in trying to teach people how to live happy, contented lives; and he was murdered by the stiff-necked Respectability of the day."

" Oh, but," said Blake, "Christianity teaches that his sacrifice had a mystic significance: it was made to appease God's wrath."

" Yes, isn't it utter bosh ! " Madeline exclaimed.

Mrs. Jones looked very shocked. " You are wicked! " she laughed. She pointed to the mutilated paintings." Do look how the poor hermit has scratched away all the women's lips," she said.

" Poor man, how he must have suffered ! I suppose men find our lips very upsetting."

" Not so upsetting as your tongues," mused Blake, with a smile on his usually expressionless face. Mrs. Jones went up to the fragmentary paintings and closely examined the erasures.

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Then she sighed deeply, and, turning away, hastily changed the conversation. She suggested that Madeline and Robin should come over to Luxor on the following day and dine with them at the Nile Palace Hotel, as it was the last night of their visit ; and, somewhat to her surprise, Madeline accepted the invitation.

" Yes, rather! " she replied. " I'll make Robin come: I think we'd both enjoy the change. We can spend the night at the hotel and come back here next morning."

" We might make a moonlight excursion to Karnak after dinner," said Blake, and the suggestion received general approval. Thus it was arranged, and presently Madeline was waving her hand to them as they rode off along the sunlit pathway. .

On the next evening, therefore, she and Robin found themselves seated at dinner with their friends. Colonel Winterbottom was suffering from a slight touch of the sun, and was confined to his room ; and the meal, relieved of his presence, was a very gay affair. Augustus Blake made up for his strange, and apparently jesting, outburst by being particularly jovial ; and he proved himself capable of being both normal and amusing.

Madeline appeared much to appreciate the brilliantly lighted room and the well-dressed company of visitors ; and even the little orchestra seemed to obtain her approval, for she sent a message to the conductor begging him to play some of the old Neapolitan songs which she always loved, and when he had done so she rewarded him with a smile so brilliant that for the remainder of the evening he appeared to be totally demented.

About nine o'clock, when the moon was fully risen, the four of them left the hotel and entered the carriage which was waiting to take them to Karnak. Their road led along the edge of the Nile, past the great

temple of Luxor ; and as they drove by they glanced in amongst the forest of columns, where the white moonlight struck across the black shadows. The place was deserted and still, and the sound of the horses' hoofs and the crack of the whip echoed through the roofless halls, disturbing the owls and the bats that dwelt amid the ruins. On their other hand a cluster of native boats lay silently upon the water, moored to the age-old quay where once, in the days of the Pharaohs, the merchants of Thebes of the Hundred Gates had piled their wares. On the deck of one of these vessels a group of native boatmen sat hunched like ancient wizards around a pan of glowing coals, the light of which was dimly reflected in their swarthy faces.

The road then passed amongst the houses of the town, where cloaked and silent figures crept along in the shadow, and here and there a lean dog barked savagely at them. From the open door of a low, white shed house the sounds of music issued, and the rhythmic beating of a native drum reverberated along the empty street. In the doorway, lit by the rays of an oil lamp, stood a dancing-girl, her tattooed face veiled, and her dark dress fallen open at the neck so that her heavy breasts were revealed. She smiled at them as they passed, showing her gleaming white teeth, and uttered some obscene word as she waved her henna-stained fingers towards them.

The houses were at length left behind and they passed out into open country, where the road was flanked by the moonlit fields and palm groves. Here all was still, and in the full expanse of the sky above them the moon reigned in her tremendous glory; and the spell of its enchantment was upon them as they alighted at length at the river-gate of the temple, passing with hushed footsteps between the huge pylons into the great courtyard, where a solitary black-robed watchman came to them like a ghost

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and glanced, without speaking, at their admission cards, disappearing thereafter into the shadows from which he had emerged. Crossing the open space, they walked on into the mystery of the vast and roofless halls; and here enormous columns towered around them in endless, overpowering array, their capitals illuminated by the moonlight, their bases lost in the deep darkness where once the white-robed priests had silently moved to and fro in the sombrous incense-laden air.

Down the great aisle they passed, four wandering shadows moving stealthily amidst the solid enormity of these mighty columns; and so out once more into the glare of the moonlight beyond. Then, drifting off to the left, they crossed the open space, threading their way amidst fallen architraves and tumbled walls and giant blocks of stone, until they came to the little temple of Ptah, the great Artificer, which nestled beneath the mighty ramparts near the northern gate. Here another ghostly watchman appeared, and unlocked for them the iron door of the dark sanctuary wherein the awe-inspiring statue of Sekhmet, the mighty goddess, consort of Ptah, stood revealed before them in a shaft of moonlight.

The figure, which is life size, is realistically sculptured in black stone: the head is that of a lioness, whose grim mouth seems shut in a perpetual and savage smile; the body is that of a beautiful woman whose delicately moulded breasts are so finely wrought that the hard stone becomes soft to the eye, and they appear in the imagination to move as with the breath of life. In her hand she holds a papyrus flower, and her fingers are marked with the impress of the kisses of millions of now forgotten women. The small chamber in which she stands is hardly touched by the hand of time: the walls and the roof are intact, and the light strikes down from a single square aperture, illuminating the unearthly figure as the priestly artist had devised in those remote ages.

The tall, thin form of Augustus Blake approached the goddess and halted facing her, his head bowed, his hands raised as though in supplication. Robin leant against the wall, near the door, watching him with curiosity; and Madeline slipped her arm into his as she stood beside him in the semi-darkness. Mrs. Jones, at his other side, declared in a whisper that she was too frightened to enter, and she hovered in the doorway, uttering querulous little noises, and every now and then touching Robin's arm with her fingers.

Blake had removed his hat, and as he bent forward his bald head projected into the single shaft of moonlight, but his body, sheathed in a black overcoat, remained in the darkness and was hardly visible. The head consequently seemed like some horrible pumpkin suspended in mid-air and swaying to and fro before the weird, smiling face of the leonine goddess.

Mrs. Jones peeped into the chamber. " Oh, Plato," she exclaimed, " you do look awful!"

His head turned to her, with glassy eyes. " Hush ! " he whispered. " I am going to utter words of power." There was silence for a moment, and then a low, sepulchral noise issued from his lips, as he uttered a series of words in which the sound oom predominated, drawn out till it drummed on the ears like the booming of distant guns.

Presently the sound passed into a kind of lickerish purring, like that of a huge cat ; now it suggested the far-off hum of an aeroplane ; and now, again, it opened out into the original booming, deep and hollow and ghoulish.

" It's rather uncanny, isn't it ? " said Robin in Madeline's ear.

" It's obscene," she muttered; for indeed, for some unaccountable reason, the sound had a peculiarly revolting, lecherous character.

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Presently Mrs. Jones crept into the chamber and clutched hold of Robin's arm, at which he turned his head from her and whispered in Madeline's ear " She's pinching my arm. What shall I do ? "

Madeline chuckled. " Ssh ! " she said, " I'm sure something's going to happen."

The horrid noise continued, and now the voice of the mystic rose and fell, almost in the manner of a chant. It had a hypnotic effect. Daisy Jones leant her weight against Robin's side, and the pressure of her hand upon his arm increased. He could feel that she was breathing hard. He turned to her, and his face came close to hers : her warm breath touched his cheek. Nervously he directed his attention once more to Madeline, on his other side.

How perfectly beastly ! " she whispered. Suddenly Mrs. Jones uttered an inarticulate gurgle, and, springing forward, flung herself on her knees in front of the statue, kissing the stone hand loudly and passionately. Augustus Blake stepped back into the shadow, but his voice still continued its devilish incantation.

" Oh, oh, I believe! " cried the worshipper, patting the legs of the image in ecstasy. " Oh, Sekhmet, goddess, hear me ! I believe, I believe! "

" Oh, don't be silly ! " exclaimed Robin sharply, as he grabbed her by the arm and dragged her to her feet. She staggered back to the wall and leant against it, panting like an animal.

" Shut up, Blake! " he said. " You're making Mrs. Jones hysterical."

Augustus Blake did not seem to hear. The sounds which he was uttering were resolving themselves into words that seemed to come up hoarsely from the depths of his body.

" Listen! " whispered Madeline.

The voice grew louder, but it no longer sounded like Blake's voice. It was a weird, unearthly snivelling, like the whine of a hungry dog.

" Blood, blood," he was muttering. " A sacrifice of blood ! You shall not conquer me : I stay where I am. Take your eyes from me : you are hurting me ! Torture the body, frizzle the flesh, but you can't touch me-no, you can't touch me! "

His head, now facing towards them, passed into the moonlight once more, and his eyes were seen to be rolled upwards so that only the whites appeared. His hands fluttered round him like those of a blind man hunting for something; and presently one arm stiffened out and a finger pointed directly at Madeline, who was holding tightly to Robin's arm.

" Get away from me! " he wailed. " What have I to do with you ? " He seemed to be choking, and his breath came in rasping sobs. " I can't breathe when you're here, I can't live. Oh! oh! Your light is blinding me."

Mrs. Jones gave a sudden cry. " It's the devil in him speaking," she gasped. " I've heard it before." And she fled in terror from the sanctuary.

Robin took hold of Blake roughly and shook him. " Oh ! oh ! " he spluttered. "Take her away! Don't let her come near me ! Why should she try to frighten me like that ? Can't she leave the poor damned alone ? Can't she ? All that blinding light hurting me ! . . ."

" What's the matter with you ? " asked Robin angrily, shaking him once more. The whining ceased, and for a moment there was silence. Then, without warning, he wrenched himself from Robin's grasp and leapt backwards, so that he fell up against the wall with a heavy thud. For a few seconds he seemed stunned, and in the dim light he could be seen to be standing motionless.

" Now you've gone and hurt yourself," said Robin, as though he were talking to a child.

" Lord, what a bump ! " muttered Blake, in his natural voice. " I shan't be able to sit down for a week."

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" You do like frightening women, don't you ? " said Robin scornfully.

" What ? " cried Blake. " Have I frightened anybody ? Where's Daisy gone to ? "

" She's in hysterics outside," Robin answered.

" And Mrs. Beechcroft? Ah, there you are. I didn't frighten you, did I ? "

" No, you disgusted me, that's all," said Madeline coldly. " I think we'd better be getting home."

" I say, I am sorry ! " Blake exclaimed, as he came across Mrs. Jones, who was standing trembling in the moonlight.

" You carry your jokes too far, Plato dear," she quavered.

" No," he answered, " they seem to carry me. It's awful when things get out of hand. . ."

He paused, and a smile that was almost wistful came into his face. " Please forgive me," he said. Late that night, when Robin and Madeline had returned to their room at the hotel, they discussed the strange behavior of the mystic.

" I can't make out," said Madeline, " whether he was humbugging or not. I think it was probably real-a sort of self-created trance or delirium or something, and the shock of bumping against the wall brought him round."

" Perhaps," said Robin doubtfully. "But the fellow's undoubtedly a bit of an actor, too. I'm glad they're going back to Cairo tomorrow. I shouldn't like to think he was anywhere about while I'm away. . . ."

" Oh, Robin, Robin! " Madeline broke in, " I can hardly believe you're going away. Two whole months without you ! - what shall I do with myself ? "

She looked very forlorn as she sat on the side of the bed, gazing up at him with sad, languid eyes.

Robin put his arms around her. " My darling," he said, " I married you because I know you are the sort of woman who is independent and able to get on alone. An explorer's wife has got to be that ; and this is only a short expedition."

" Yes, I know," she answered; " but our love came to us so quickly that I always dread that it may pass from us again just as quickly. When you have been away from me for two months perhaps you will begin to forget me."

" Oh, Madeline, my sweetheart," he cried passionately, " don't say such awful things! "

CHAPTER XXII

THE APPROACH

THE enchantment of twilight was spread like a veil over the desert when, one evening about a week later, Father Gregory sat himself down upon the mound, near his house, where he had had his first interview with Madeline. From this point of vantage he could overlook the pathway which led up to the wilderness from the river bank ; and in this direction he fixed his eyes, trying to penetrate the misty haze. He knew that presently he would see, slowly emerging from the gloom, a grey-clad little figure sitting very erect upon a white donkey, for Madeline would have to take this road on her way back to the camp ; and he wished to offer her a few words of sympathy before she returned to her lonely tent. At last the day of Robin's departure had come. That morning she had gone over with her husband to Luxor, where, in an open space behind the town, his camels and men were collected.

The arrangement of the baggage, the apportioning of the loads, the filling of the portable water-tanks, and the many details incidental to the outset of the expedition, were expected to occupy most of the day ; and the actual departure had been fixed for three or four o'clock in the afternoon. Robin had planned to ride some ten or fifteen miles into the eastern desert and then to camp the night, beginning next morning the routine hours of the long daily marches which were to carry him to the Red Sea coast, thence up

to the mountains of Um-Etgal and Dukhan, and so, two months hence, round to Cairo by way of the Mokattam hills. Madeline was to return across the Nile to Professor Hudson's camp as soon as she had seen her husband's straggling caravan of grunting camels disappear into the palm groves that edged the desert ; and presently she would appear out of the haze, a sad and lonely little figure.

He raised his eyes at length, and looked at the distant hills far away on the opposite horizon: a clear blue line rising into distinctness above the dusty haze of the valley. Somewhere amongst those hills his nephew was now riding eastwards, his heart half turned to the pleasure of the adventure ahead, half lingering in the memory of the happiness he had left. Father Gregory fervently wished him God speed, and, closing his eyes for a moment, offered up a brief prayer for his safety and success.

It was not long before the sound of hoofs for which he was waiting came to his ears ; and presently the figure of Madeline appeared out of the gathering darkness, much as he had pictured it. He arose and went down to the pathway to meet her, and she, on seeing him, reined in her donkey, calling out a cheery greeting. Then, summoning the small Egyptian boy who followed in her wake, she handed the bridle to him and dismounted.

"My poor little child . . ." he began, as she put her arm in his.

" Oh, don't," she protested, with a pathetic smile. " You must be very careful what you say to me, because I feel that I shall make an idiot of myself at any moment."

" You must be brave," he said. " And, you know, it isn't for long. Eight weeks will pass like a few days."

She uttered a scoffing little laugh: eight weeks, to a woman in love, is an eternity.

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" Let us sit down for a moment over there," she proposed, pointing to the mound." That's the place where I first met you. Goodness me !-what years ago that was ! "

" You were more unhappy then," he told her, " than you are now, you know."

" It was a different sort of unhappiness," she replied. " It was a dull, blunt misery, but this is a keen, sharp sword."

They sat themselves down; and Madeline, pulling off her hat, tossed her hair back from her forehead. The evening was warm and still, and there was the feel of the beginning of the hot season in the air. High over head the throbbing of wings told where a company of migratory cranes were passing northwards through the starlit sky, on the first stages of their journey back to Europe.

" Well, did you see him off safely ? " asked Father Gregory.

" Yes," she replied. " Of course, there was a good deal of confusion, and Robin had to be very angry with everybody before he got things in order. I never knew before how stern he could be."

Father Gregory pointed to the distant line of the hills, still dimly visible on the opposite side of the Nile. " Look," he said, " he is somewhere over there, just pitching his camp for the night amongst the rocks."

Madeline sighed. " I gave him eight little letters to read," she said, with a smile, " each sealed up and numbered. He is to open the first tonight, and the others one by one each week. Perhaps he will be reading the first one at this moment."

" What does it say ? " he asked.

" It bids him good-night," she answered simply. He looked at her gravely, " Ah, what a thing it is to be young ! " he whispered. " When I was your age, I, too, knew what love was. Sometimes you rather remind me of her ; but her hair was fair like a field of corn at harvest-time, and her eyes were grey-green like the northern seas she loved. I can see her now, when I let myself recall the picture. First come the black rocks against which the wild waves are breaking, and the curlews circling and screaming as they beat against the storm or turn to fly with the wind. Then I see a patch of close cropped grass on the top of the cliffs, and on this she stands, the storm blowing through her hair and fluttering her skirts out. . . ."

" What happened to her ? " asked Madeline.

" We were going to be married," he answered, " but the sea claimed her. She was out in a small boat, but the current was too strong for her, and she was dashed against the rocks. I saw the accident from the shore, and I swam out to her, fighting with the breakers and blinded by the spray. But when I reached the spot it was already too late ; I had to dive to find her, and my arms went about her amongst the seaweed and the rocks. I wanted to die too: I wanted never to come up to the surface again. I held her close to me, as we were beaten to and fro in the surf, until I lost consciousness. . . . They brought me back to life again, but her they could not revive. I thought my heart was broken, and all day I lay upon her grave at the top of the cliffs, drenched by the rain and buffeted by the sea-wind that went moaning amongst the tombstones.

But I couldn't die. The Master had work for me to do; and He came to me on the wings of the storm, there where I lay drumming on the turf with my fists and calling her name, and He said ' Peace, be still.' I had to follow Him, I couldn't resist the calling of His voice. And He took me away to the city and the slums ; and there, in the sorrows of the world, I forgot my sorrows, and my thirst was quenched in the tears of the outcast and the desolate."

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Madeline looked up into his aged face, and her eyes met his. "My little sadness of today must seem a very small thing to you," she said; "and indeed I am not really unhappy. It has seemed to me lately that a voice is calling to me, too, telling me that there is work to be done."

Father Gregory turned to her with eagerness in his face. "Not for one moment has He ceased to call you," he said. "I have known all these last weeks that He was standing at your side, His blessed hand upon your arm."

"Yes, I am beginning to listen," she whispered; and then, after a pause, she continued: "I have been reading a great deal lately, you know, and, what with that and my talks to you and to Henry Morland, I have somehow come to realize what it is that was wrong with my life, what it is that is wrong with the world. But it is not religion that is the thing needed,"

"No," he said, "in many cases it is not religion," and he sighed.

"What I hear is no supernatural voice," she went on. "It is the sound of the crying of the people, it is the voice of the weary world that I hear: a world craving for guidance, searching for a leader to lead them; a world in prison, beating against the bars."

There was silence between them for a while. "Do you remember," she said at length, "that first evening as we sat here you told me that what I needed in my life was not religion or Christianity, but just Christ?"

"Perfectly," he replied.

"Well, I want you to tell me exactly what you meant."

Father Gregory made a gesture with his hands, indicating his difficulty. "It is very hard," he answered; "to explain in words. It is something that can only be felt: but I will try to give you my

meaning. You know there are a great many people who feel in their hearts the need of religion. By 'religion' I mean not simply the spiritual love of God, but the actual adoration of God. To these people it is a very purifying and uplifting thing to kneel at His altars, and to be partakers in the mysteries of the Church's ceremonial. The beautiful words of our services, the ritual, and the worship, have an inner sacramental meaning to them."

" Yes," said Madeline, " I have seen it; but I have never quite understood it."

" All my life," he went on, " I have been in contact with the different aspects of belief ; and it seemed, and still seems, to me that that is not the class of people to which you belong. Worship is not the medium by which your soul makes its approach to God. Therefore I told you that religion in general, or our form of worship in particular, was not entirely what you required. I did not mean to say that to be a good daughter of the Church would not of course be a proper thing for you; but I felt that the Church would not fill your life in the same way that it fills the lives of some people. Shall I dare to say that it was not necessary for you ? What I thought that you needed was the personal appeal of our Faith, the direct vision of the presence of Christ. You required a guiding hand in your life. Your character appeared to me to be too independent for the congregational aspect of religion, too simple, too childlike, to need the deeper intricacies of our great mysteries. You wanted the direct word of the Master, delivered to your own heart. It was your right."

" My right ? " asked Madeline. " What do you mean? "

" It has always been my conviction," he said, " that to such as you He Himself speaks. For most of us we, the older souls of the world, the approach to Him can only be made through the Church : at least, so

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I have thought. We cannot presume—we who are old in presumption—we do not dare, in our lack of innocence, to approach so lightly, so easily, to His blessed presence. But some there are who, like little children, are able to go straight to Him, to hear His voice, and to feel the unutterable tenderness of the touch of His hands. Some there are who, though stained by the world, yet, by the mysterious power of their sheer simplicity, have the key to the greatest of all the mysteries."

He paused, and faced her. " You are one of those little children," he said, and his voice was low and intense. " You can go straight to Him and put your hands into His."

Suddenly she raised her eyes to his. " Tell me," she whispered, " why did you give up your public work in the Church? "

He drew in his breath: it was as though he hardly dared to answer.

" Ah, don't you see ? " he asked her passionately.

" Yes, I begin to see," she answered, so quietly that her words were almost lost in the night.

" It was because I also wanted to approach straight to Him," he said, with deep emotion, his voice fervent, his face raised to the stars. " I wanted Him, Madeline, I want Him now, and He was growing dim to me. All my life our great sacraments had seemed sufficient to me ; but as I grew old and weighed down with the responsibilities of my office, I felt myself becoming too complex in mind to be in harmony with His great simplicity. I tried to push from me the entanglements of my work so that I could come to Him ; but I was not a little child any longer I was an ecclesiastical dignitary. I feared lest He would not suffer me, a man old in the knowledge of the world, and grown grey in service before rich and magnificent altars. When He found me in the graveyard upon the cliffs I was still but a lad, and my break-

ing heart opened the way to His great heart ; but the years passed, and I became powerful and respected, a pillar of the Church. And then I could no longer see Him. Ah, don't you understand that I have more to learn from you than ever you could learn from me ? I have to forget what you have never known. Here in the desert I am trying to clarify my heart, I am trying to cast down the complicated structure of my religion, so that my mind shall become once more the fair and open fields of the Lord. I am trying to learn to be simple, so that some day I may go to Him in the fearlessness of a little child, and see His hands held out to me, as I have always, always seen them held out to you, and hear His voice saying 'Come! ' "

CHAPTER XXIII

THE MESSAGE

IT was fortunate that Madeline enjoyed hot weather, for as the weeks passed the temperature rose rapidly, until, when April had run half its course, the desert at Thebes had become a furnace during the mid hours of the day. Robin had told her that as soon as she began to feel the heat she was to go down to Cairo, where the climate is quite temperate until the beginning of May, by which time he would have returned from his expedition and they would go down to Alexandria. But she had no desire to exchange the freedom of camp life for life in a hotel ; and she proposed to stay where she was until April was nearer its close.

Professor Hudson had already shut down his excavations, after a short but satisfactory season ; and he and his staff were now engaged in cataloguing and packing up the antiquities which had been discovered. Father Gregory still remained in his retreat, with Henry Morland and one or two of the others; but the majority of his young men had already left for Europe.

Madeline's tent was ideally placed for the hot season. Onwards from an early hour in the afternoon the cliffs cast their shadow across it, and before tea was served the cool blue shade was spread over a wide area, so that the glare did not trouble the eyes, and the hot breath of the breeze seemed to be moderated as it passed through the richly coloured flap

of the doorway. As a defence against the morning sun she had caused a high screen of wood and dried corn-stalks to be erected at the side of the tent; and this, together with sundry awnings, gave cool protection until the greater shadow of the hills was dilated over all.

She did not, however, spend much of the day here ; for there was always, so it seemed, a great deal to be done in the camp. Sometimes she would lend a hand at the packing of the antiquities; sometimes she would patiently sort through the thousands of fragments of ancient vases that had been found, endeavouring to fit them together and rebuild the beautiful old shapes.

The delicate pieces of painted stucco or carved woodwork had to be preserved by the pouring of liquid paraffin-wax over them; the old necklaces had to be restrung ; concretions of congealed sand and lime had to be scraped and scrubbed from the fragile porcelain and alabaster. At other times she would help in the cooking of the mid-day or evening meal, and her achievements in this direction brought her the very genuine compliments of the party. Moreover, her knowledge of colloquial Arabic was a good deal more extensive than that of any other member of the camp, and often Professor Hudson called upon her services in the interpretation of the remarks of some particularly multiloquent native.

Her serene temper, her unruffled good humour and her readiness to make herself of use were very much appreciated amongst the party ; and these qualities, in conjunction with her great charm of manner and her always astonishing beauty, led to her being regarded almost with reverence both by her compatriots and by the native Egyptians. She was in very truth the centre of the camp ; and she could always be relied upon to bring laughter into the small-talk at the table when laughter was needed,

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or to awaken the interest of the listener when interest had flagged. Yet there was ever about her an almost mysterious dignity; and her nature had in it none of that hilarity which in life so often masquerades as benevolence. In all that she did, in all that she said, there was just a boundless and quiet humanity; and whether she were helping her friends in their work in the heat of the day, or smoking a cigarette with them in the cool evenings under the stars, her presence imposed a condition of cordiality and good will upon those around her.

Yet, in spite of these characteristics, she led to a great extent an extraneous and segregated life. Her tent was very decidedly her own sanctum ; and here in the early afternoons and again in the late evenings she sat alone, lost in her books or in the vast places of her thoughts. Sometimes to this secluded spot Father Gregory would come to talk a while with her; and sometimes Henry Morland would here sit before her, busy with his pencil or his paints, and occasionally aroused to new philippics against the conservatism of his fellow-men.

But, for the most part, she remained alone and aloof at these hours of the day, absorbed in the almost unconscious development of her own individuality. She missed very greatly the dear companionship of her husband, whom the desert had so completely swallowed; and often she hungered for his sane comment upon the movement of her thoughts. Sometimes, when her brain wrestled in weariness with the great body of her speculation, she longed for the touch of his lips upon hers, and for the feeling of the protection of his strong arms ; for therein was peace and the enlightenment of love. Often in the darkness of the night her hands were held out to the shadowy dream of his presence, and, remaining empty, were dropped again in sorrow upon her breast.

It was at such times that she was overcome with

the consciousness of the minuteness of her entity, and she felt lost in the vastness of the tremendous world about her. Again, as in the days of the past, she was aware that her friends did not quite understand her, and she seemed to be, in a special meaning, alone. But this feeling was no longer accompanied by the baffling sense of frustration that she had known in those almost forgotten years—the sense of having something locked inside her which could not be reached. The key had been found, the doors thrown open, and all her thoughts were flooded by the illumination that had so long been shut behind the barred doors of her heart.

She knew now that she had something to say, she knew what it was, and she knew that it had to be said. Her thoughts, as by a kind of inspiration, were rapidly grouping themselves into a definite shape, and soon their formation would be fixed, and they would stand forth, like a strong man's castle upon the hilltop, white and distinct against the dark clouds. Her conversations with Father Gregory had chastened and smoothed her ideas, rounding the sharp angles that had been formed under the keen chisel of Henry Morland's invective ; and love and happiness had helped to lay the stones upon the foundation of her experiences.

To Father Gregory, upon one of his visits, she declared that the whole aspect of things had been altered to her since she had read the New Testament ; but if in that he saw with joy the workings of God, she hastily attempted to disillusion him.

" Reading the life of Christ," she said, " has at last effectually banished from my mind the great bogey of religion, for now I see that the character given to Christ by Christianity is largely spurious. I now know the significance of his mission, I now hear clearly his message ; and I find that what he had to say was to be said, so to speak, on week-days, not on Sundays. I find that he preached a purely

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democratic code, such as the man in the street requires ; and in this present age his teaching is hopelessly reduced in value by being regarded as a religious and mysterious doctrine suitable only to be chanted by priests in sacred buildings. In fact, in a word, the piety of outward religion is a dagger in the heart of the true Christ."

" I want you to explain your meaning," said Father Gregory. " I do not quite follow you."

" Will you think it very insufferable," she asked him, " if I say that I, as a sinner and once an outcast, a girl from the gutter, without religious education, without any trained reverence for higher things, must necessarily have a quicker perception of his meaning than one taught from childhood to revere his name ? You see, as he so often said, he preached to me and my sort."

" I have already told you," he replied, " that I have more to learn from your untutored heart than you have from me."

" I don't altogether agree about that," she smiled, " but I do feel that his words must of necessity be more easily understood by those to whom they were directed than by those of a naturally religious mind."

" I dare say that is so," he answered.

" He was the friend of 'publicans and sinners,'" she went on, " and I am one of those who will listen to a friend rather than to a supernatural being. Now, Christ and his teachings having become a religion and not, as I think he meant, a practical guide and code for ordinary human beings without much reference to heaven and hell, have been given a sort of mystical significance which they were never intended to possess."

" I don't quite follow," he said.

" I will give you two simple examples," she went on. " Take the name 'Jesus.' It has come to have

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a peculiar, solemn sound, like a deep mystery. Religion has given it that sound. It is actually a very common and ordinary name, corresponding to Tom or Dick. Now, if it really sounded to us like Tom, the man in the street would be ready enough to say 'Let's hear what Tom's got to say.'

But since religion has given it a fearful, holy sound, he shies at it, feels a little ashamed of uttering it, and hopes nobody heard. Then, again, take just one simple statement of his: 'I am the way, the truth and the light.' Religion has given the words a strange transcendental significance, so that if you tell the man in the street that that is what Christ said, he will probably think it a pious saying relating to the affairs of the soul, with which he can't be bothered. But he would at once prick up his ears if you quite casually remarked: 'Tom says his way of looking at life is the right way'-which expressed the same thing in other words. He would at once answer 'Well, let's give him a hearing.'

That is what I mean when I say religion is killing the real Christ. In olden times people would listen the more readily if a teaching was presented to them in a religious aspect ; but now, in the twentieth century, to present it in that way is, in the case of the great majority of us, absolutely fatal."

Father Gregory looked at her sadly. " And is that the message you have for humanity ? " he asked.

" Yes," she replied. " That is the message that is what is in here "-she tapped her breast " waiting to be uttered. You see, my dear, I am only a guttersnipe after all, just an urchin with a grubby little soul, who stands in the roadway whistling a tune as the good folk go to church. But some there will be who will stop to listen, and will follow me ; and I shall lead them to a simple carpenter's shed, where a working man shall talk straight to

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them as never parson preached. The sound of his hammer and his saw shall be finer music than any peal of bells, the smell of the newly cut wood shall be sweeter than any incense, and the sweat of his brow more genuine than any holy water. And he shall tell us in plain, simple words how to live our lives so that society may be bettered and laughter revived on lips that are parched with depression, and so that misery and want and desolation shall be abolished for ever. He will not make a sacramental mystery of it ; the dullest and most stupid of us will be able to understand him ; for he will talk in the language of the man in the street, and not with the awful voice of religion."

Father Gregory was very troubled by this conversation, and as he walked back to his house his head was bent in thought and his thin hands were tightly clasped behind him. Had he been wrong, then, in supposing Madeline to be a woman inspired as from on high ? Was she after all, as she said, just an urchin, one who could not appreciate the spiritual beauty of the faith, who desired only to disestablish all those tender sentiments so endeared by tradition ? Was she in such actuality an outcast, a lamb lost to the fold of the refined and the cultured ? He could not believe it. And yet the whole trend of her thought now seemed to be towards an operative practicality. It was as though she could not see with the eyes of the soul, but only with those of the body. She could see Christ only as a working carpenter, an artisan : not as God.

She could appreciate Him only as a young man of the masses, speaking their untutored language and wearing their rough clothes : not as the enthroned king of the universe. Was this, then, her simplicity? Was this her function as one of God's little children ? Did she approach to Christ only, so to speak, to put her tongue out at His divinity ? He had always

recognized that she did not belong to that class of people who found their joy in the beauty of religious service ; but he had never before doubted that the spiritual aspect of things was apparent to her. Was she, in spite of all, still just the adventuress from Port Said ? His mind refused to accept the definition; and yet what else could he think ?

Meanwhile, Madeline continued to develop her thoughts along the lines she had indicated ; and her mind was full of a growing excitement. She had so much that was waiting to be said, such great things to tell the sad world. If only Robin were here, so that she might talk it all over with him! He would probably disagree with her on certain points, for he was greatly under the influence of tradition ; but, nevertheless, she kept saying to herself in her purblind enthusiasm, he would understand.

She realized with delight that it was now not long before he would return ; but with that thought came the certain knowledge that when he did come back to her she would at once be held in the imperious bonds of a sweeter passion, and would have no desire to talk upon any subject save that of the great Me and Thee of love. Her heart seemed to stop beating for a moment as her imagination pictured his return. He would take her in his powerful arms, and all speculation would be blinded by the glorious sense of contact with him. In his embrace the union of body and soul would be complete, and there would be no place for any thought of the world outside their own merged individualities.

When her mind thus dwelt upon her love she seemed to be gripped by superhuman forces, and she became the sovereign of life and death. The past generations of the world lived once more in her existence old loves, old passions, old romances, struggled back to life on the current of her vitality, and she became the microcosm of the human race. And the unborn future, likewise, was brought to fruition in her own person, so that her thought embraced the joys and the passions of coming ages and devoured their sweetness.

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The fervour of motherhood at such times possessed her, and the little life that in secret was growing within her body seemed even now a reality to her. Already she felt the touch of the tiny hands to be, and watched the first smile of the little mouth, and the wide gaze of the eyes wherein she would see herself repeated, her Robin reproduced, in indivisible union. And with this picture her mind returned once more to its definite speculations, and wholly unconscious of the troubles she was laying in store for herself, she was eager to give forth her message to mankind, so that the world in which her child was to live should be a better place than ever she had known.

Professor Hudson did not fail to observe in Madeline this suppressed excitement, which she could not altogether conceal ; and stray remarks of hers had given him some inkling of the direction in which her thoughts were moving. One evening, as she was helping him with his work, he asked her, in his abrupt way, to tell him what was in her mind.

" Oh, nothing that would interest you," she replied quickly. " I am beginning to get some very clear ideas as to what is wrong with society in general ; that is all."

"You feel, I think," he said, "that you have something to say to your fellow men and women."

" Well, yes, I do," she answered, a little abashed. "Then, don't say it!" he exclaimed.

"Take my advice: leave people to work out their own salvation. Let sleeping dogs lie."

That would be cowardly," she responded.

" No, only wise," he said. " My dear girl, I am a historian by trade, and it is my business to know

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human nature. I have seen civilizations rise and fall, I have seen society and its laws created and destroyed again a hundred times. I have seen leaders and reformers arise, and I have watched the people flock to their standards; but the mob have seldom understood what was said to them. They have just followed and rioted, shouting that the Millennium was come; and then the King's men have tramped on to the scenes, and the people have dispersed to their homes once more, whispering that the Millennium was not yet, and the leaders have gone to the scaffold."

" But some concessions have been given to humanity," she interposed ; " some advance has been made."

" Yes," he replied, " slowly, surely, the world is righting itself. The other day you were speaking about the prosperity of the Church, and were comparing it, to its disfavour, with the poverty of the original evangelists. Have you ever heard of Arnold of Brescia ? "

" No," she said.

" Well, he was a priest who lived in the twelfth century. He declared that clergy who possessed riches, bishops who vaunted their regalia, or monks whose orders owned property, were the sons of Satan. He demanded that the Church should give up all her possessions and live in poverty, according to the law of Christ."

" He has my sympathy," Madeline remarked.

" Do you know what happened ? " the Professor asked, fixing her with his eyes.
" The mob, fired by his preaching, began to sack the churches and the monasteries."

"Well?"

" Oh, that was all," he said. " Arnold of Brescia was burnt at the stake as a heretic, and things went on as before."

CHAPTER XXIV

THE REPRESENTATIVES OF LABOUR

THE necessity of making certain purchases had obliged Madeline to arrange to go over to Luxor ; and one morning, while the fierce sun was still low in the leaden sky, she mounted her donkey and set out upon the long ride down to the river, which, nowadays, she took at a slow and steady pace. Remembering that Henry Morland had asked her to execute a small errand for him, she chose the path which led to the Nile by way of the ruins of the Ramesseum, for she knew he was here engaged in painting an early morning subject.

On reaching this temple she dismounted, and made her way in search of him through the cool shadows of the great halls, and out into the dazzling glare of the court. She found him in an open patch of flaming sunlight, seated on a fallen block of red granite, his easel set up before him, a large umbrella making a pool of blue shade about him. He was wearing a white cotton shirt and a pair of grey flannel trousers, held up by a multicoloured native sash twisted around his waist. She herself was dressed in a short white skirt and a cream shirt, open at the neck ; and on her head was a broad-brimmed felt hat which, together with the cigarette in her mouth, gave her a very boyish appearance.

" Oh, how delightful! " she exclaimed, as she saw the water-colour painting upon which he was engaged. " Really, you are a genius!"

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" It's a good subject, isn't it ? " he answered, with enthusiasm. " The ruins, and the tamarisks reflected in that pool, and that vivid field in the distance. I began it with the idea of selling it to your friend Mrs. Jones. She's written to me commissioning me to do two or three paintings for her. But the subject, frankly, is altogether too good for her. I'm sure she'd rather have the pyramids and a sunset and an Arab saying his prayers. So I am going to make a sketch and copy it as the grand setting for my portrait of you. You are to be the sort of destined figure rising from amongst the ruins, with the morning sun shining in your face."

Madeline laughed. " You get a new idea for that portrait every day, don't you ? " she said.

"Well, you see," he replied, "you appear to me in so many guises. Looking at you now, you are a sort of cavalier, a beautiful dare-devil, just a symbol of youth and vivacity and high courage. But usually I see you as an embodiment of hope and inspiration, a figure rising out of the dead places of the world. By the way," he said, " I have rather an awkward question to ask you."

" Ask away," she laughed.

"Well, whatever form I see you in, I always get an impression of a sort of shedding of old customs and obsolete ideas. It's as though you were dropping from you the habiliments of the times."

" Well ? " she asked, as he paused.

" I want to paint you with the dark garment of the world slipping from your shoulders. Would you mind if I painted you like that-I mean half nude ? "

" No," she replied, without hesitation, " I wouldn't mind."

" I know this isn't the Victorian age," he went on, " but still . . . "

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" You know," said Madeline, " the great difference between Victorian times and the present day, I often think, is this: that then people were ashamed of having bodies, and now they are ashamed of having souls."

He looked at her intently. " It's a good thing," he mused, " that I am first an artist and afterwards a man. If that were not so, I expect I should be horribly in love with you."

" I thought you were," she calmly replied.

" What would be the use ? " he asked, with a short laugh.

" None," she answered.

"Yes," he said, slowly weighing his words. " It would be useless, and I hate doing useless things."

"I'm glad to hear it," she declared. "Your friendship means very much to me. I want always to keep it."

" It shall always be yours," he affirmed, and there was something very fervent in his voice. As he spoke the confused sound of the jangling of donkey trappings came to their ears, and turning round, they saw a large party of what appeared to be tourists riding up to the gates of the ruins.

" Good Lord ! " exclaimed Morland. " Tourists at this time of year ? The devil take them ! "

A few moments later the party had dismounted and had entered the ruined halls. There must have been some forty men, and at least a dozen women. For the most part the former carried their jackets and appeared in their shirt-sleeves ; many of them were burly, bearded men, and all seemed to be much troubled by the heat. They mopped their red faces with large handkerchiefs and speedily made their way into the shade cast by the undestroyed colonnade. Both they and the women wore very new looking sun-helmets, and all carried equally new fly-whisks, which they waved to and fro unceasingly, as though they were much distressed by the persistence of the flies, to whose attentions

they were evidently unaccustomed.

" I know what they are," exclaimed Morland suddenly. " Of course! Father Gregory was speaking about them the other day. They are a party of British Labour representatives and Trade Unionists and Fabians and cranks. They are going out to Australia to attend a conference or something, and they're having ten days in Egypt on their way. It's jolly plucky of them to come right up here into the heat."

Presently Madeline became aware that many pairs of eyes were turned upon her; for, indeed, she and Henry Morland must have presented a rather surprising picture, in their cool garments, seated unconcernedly amongst these ruins, which to travellers fresh from the busy towns of Lancashire and Yorkshire must have seemed to be situated at the fiery boundary of the earth.

" I'm going over to talk to them," she said, at which her friend hunched himself over his painting as though to shut out some disturbing sight. She threw away her cigarette, drove her hands deep into the pockets of her skirt, and strolled over to them across the sun-baked open space.

An elderly giant had seated himself on a fallen pillar, a short distance away from his friends, and was, at the moment, pouring a bottle of beer down his throat. To him Madeline directed her steps, coming to a halt immediately in front of him, so that when his head, which had been thrown back in the ecstasy of the draught, resumed its normal angle, he found himself, to his great astonishment, staring into her face.

" Nice day," he said, wiping the moisture from his grizzled moustache with the back of his hand.

" Very," Madeline replied. " I expect you find it a bit hot, though."

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"Aye, it's like one of our furnaces in the steelworks where I come from. But you don't look as if you felt the 'eat : you seem to be as cool as yon pool."

"Well, you see, I'm used to it," she answered. "I've been camping over here for two or three months."

"You don't say!" he exclaimed. "Whatever for ?"

"Oh, just for fun," she replied.

"Give me Yorkshire for fun," said he, with conviction, as he mopped his forehead. "I'd like to know your name, miss."

"Beechcroft," she told him; "Mrs. Robin Beechcroft."

"Any relation to the explorer ?" he asked. "Yes, he's my husband," she said.

He held out his large hand and gave hers a hearty shake. "I 'eard 'im lecture onst up at Bradford : 'e's a fine cup o' tea, 'e is-a reg'lar devil-may-care. My fancy you being 'is missis ! Is 'e with you 'ere, or off risking 'is neck somewhere ?"

"He's away," she answered, "on an expedition over there in the eastern desert. But he'll be back soon now. I'm going down to Cairo in a day or two to meet him."

"We start back north tomorrow evening," he told her, as he lit his pipe. "We came up by train, but Egyptian Government 'ave lent us a steamer to go back on. You'd better come with us ; us'll be glad to 'ave you."

"That's very kind of you," Madeline replied. "We must talk about it later."

The idea tickled her greatly: she had lately very much wanted to meet, and talk to, the representatives of Labour. "May I ask your name ?" she said.

" Cottar," he answered. " James Cottar. Ever 'eard the name ? "

" Yes, I have indeed," she ' answered. " Are you the Member of Parliament ? "

" Aye," he said.

" I've read some speeches of yours," she told him, " in Robertson's' Soul of Labour.' I'm most awfully glad 'to meet you. You know, you're one of my heroes."

" Well, I never ! " he exclaimed, with a thunderous laugh. Then suddenly he turned to his party. "Mary! " he called.

A stout woman of middle age, who looked excessively hot, came over to him.

" Let me introduce you," he said. " This is my sister, Mrs. Crouch: Mrs. Robin Beechcroft, my dear, wife of the great explorer. You remember us going to Town 'all at Bradford to 'ear 'im lecture, that night when our Bill got the pneumonia."

" Why, dearie me, yes," said Mrs. Crouch, as she took Madeline's hand in hers. " We was just wondering who you could be."

Madeline beckoned to Henry Morland, who, reluctantly obeying the summons, came over to them and was forthwith introduced.

" Are there any more of you over 'ere ? " asked Mr. Cottar.

"Yes, a few," said Madeline. "I'm staying in the camp of Professor Hudson, the Egyptologist ; and Mr. Morland is staying with my husband's uncle, Father Gregory, who has a house over here."

" What a place to live! " he exclaimed. " It don't seem quite natural like, some 'ow."

" It don't indeed," said Mrs. Crouch, shading her eyes with her red hand as she gazed around her with awe at the sun-scorched scene.

" Yet this was once the greatest city in the world," said Morland.

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"Aye, there's nout so queer as folk," muttered the Member of Parliament.

Henry Morland presently excused himself and went back to his painting; and, as the dragoman was now showing the party over the ruins, Mrs. Crouch also wandered away, as at the call of a painful duty.

" Don't you want to go over the ruins too ? " Madeline asked her new friend.

" Nay," he answered decisively; " I'll bide 'ere. I'm doing nicely."

" Well, tell me about yourself," she said. "What are you doing here in Egypt ? "

" We're on our way to Australia," he explained, " and we thought as 'ow we'd like to study conditions 'ere on the Nile a bit."

" Oh, then," said Madeline, " you are not simply sight-seeing."

" Of course not," he answered. " We've come to 'ave a look into things, to see 'ow the British Government is running this country."

" And is it all satisfactory ? " she asked. " You know, to me, Egypt always seems a model State."

" Aye," he said; " there's not much wrong 'ere."

" I think it very fine of Labour," Madeline commented, " to interest itself in these sort of matters."

" Well, you see, it's like this," said her friend, taking his pipe out of his mouth and using it as a kind of pointer. " When Trade Unions first began to feel their feet, like, they 'ad to turn all their energies to getting better conditions for the men, and I tell you they 'ad a champion fight. There wasn't much time left for thinking about other things : there was just the long up 'ill struggle for better wages and fair treatment. Then came the day when we got organized enough to return some of our leaders to Parliament ; and by gum ! that made people sit up and take notice, I can tell you ! But, of course, these new Labour Members were only asked to watch the in

terests of the working man : they weren't expected to pay much attention to things like international affairs, or 'igh politics, or finance. Today, 'owever, Labour is a power in Parliament, and we're beginning to tak' a share in the real government. Aye, we 'ave a moment now and then to ask the reason why about all manner of things; and soon you'll find that Labour will 'ave a word to say in all State affairs. That champion driving force that obliged the employers to give the men better terms is now turning its strength outwards, like, in other directions. It is pushing its way into the councils of the nation ; it is even beginning to 'ammer on the doors of the Foreign Office itself, and shouting through the key'ole : "Ere, 'ere, not so fast, please, with your secret treaties and your intriguing diplomacy! ' You see ? That's why some of us are out 'ere now. We want to see for ourselves 'ow all these young English gentlemen are governing this 'ere country."

" And you find they're doing it all right ? " said Madeline.

" Mrs. Beechcroft," said he impressively, " I take my 'at off to 'em. By gum, they're fine ! "

The voice of the dragoman was heard calling his flock together. " Thees way, leddies an' gentlemen. Now we go to the temple of Medinet Habu, varry great, varry fine, what Ram'ses him build to his god. Come 'long, blease."

Mr. Cottar rose to his feet. " Well," he said, " I suppose I must say good-bye."

" No, not yet," answered Madeline. "I'll come along with you to Medinet Habu."

She went over to Henry Morland. " I like them so much," she said, " I'm going on with them."

" That's right," he replied somewhat coldly. " Make Cottar talk: he ought to be well worth listening to." As the cavalcade made its way along the dusty road, Madeline was introduced to other members of

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the party. Somehow she felt very much at ease with them: there was a facile honesty in their speech which delighted her. Quickly she found herself discussing subjects of wide importance with them, and exchanging views on democratic matters ; and in her first enthusiasm it seemed to her that her idealism was very close to the practicality of these representatives of the people. By the time they had reached the great pylons of the temple of Medinet Habu she felt herself to be amongst real friends ; and the respect for James Cottar which had been engendered in her mind by reading his rugged speeches had developed into a great admiration.

" You've done a bit o' thinking, my lass," he said to her, as they seated themselves in the shadow of the portal. " I wouldn't ha' believed it of you. When I first saw you I thought you was just one of these stylish young ladies of London, with your cigarette and your 'ands in your pockets; but by gum! you've got brain and guts as well as a pretty face ! "

Thus it came about that Madeline presently rode to the Nile with the party, and, having executed her errands in the town, lunched with them on board their steamer, and returned to the camp after arranging to meet them on the following morning in the Valley of the Tombs of the Kings, and later to go down to Cairo with them. This meant her leaving Upper Egypt a few days earlier than she had expected ; and that evening, therefore, she had to busy herself with her packing. She despatched a note to Father Gregory asking him to come over to the camp next morning to say good-bye, and she sent a message to Henry Morland to the same effect.

A wave of sadness swept over her as she glanced around the tent, which had been to her the tabernacle of her love and Robin's, and in the more recent weeks, had become a sanctuary of quiet thought.

She was loath to leave it and to make her reappearance in the polite surroundings of civilized life ; but the thought that she was going northwards to meet Robin was measure for measure, fully indemnifying her for the termination of her weeks of secluded peace and for her impending return to the crowded highway of modern life.

CHAPTER XXV

IN THE VALLEY OF THE TOMBS

THE next morning, after an early breakfast, Madeline set out on foot for the Valley of the Tombs of The Kings, ascending the intervening hills by the bridle path which she and Robin had climbed on the ever remembered night of their marriage. Here on the summit of the cliffs, the cool wind from the north mitigated the heat of the sun, and she walked with buoyant step over the ringing surface of the rock, the fathomless blue of the sky above her, the hazy valley of the Nile on the one hand, and range after range of rugged hills on the other. Her blue shadow went dancing along beside her over the hot, broken stones at the edge of the path, or slid over the wayside boulders, where pale desert lizards slipped away into the crevices at her approach. The ubiquitous wagtails raced over the path ahead of her on their needle-like little legs, or darted past her on the wind; and once she stopped abruptly to allow a whip-snake to glide across the track in front of her.

Her mind was full of excitement and replete with the quality of life ; for, having severed the quiet continuity of her days, she was now eager to face the world of action once more, to laugh and talk with her fellow men and women, to enjoy the comfort and the protection of Robin's presence, to love and be loved. Her new friends, the party of working men whom she was presently to meet, made a curiously powerful appeal to her by reason of their contact

with the realities of existence. Here were indeed ears ready to listen to the words that her heart desired to say; here were minds able to comprehend her meaning and to weigh her opinions in an honest balance.

She found in them certain qualities that she so much admired in Robin : virility, strength, health, courage, unpretentiousness, honesty, uprightness; and forgetting how far her individual thoughts had moved during his absence, she felt how much he would enjoy meeting them. Perhaps he would arrive back from his expedition before the party had left Cairo, and she would be able to introduce James Cottar and others to him. Robin, probably, would be a little reserved at first, for he was highly developed in the unique art of the English gentleman, the art of minding his own business and remaining unexpansive to his fellow men.

She recalled with a smile how he had explained to her that, amid the appalling malevolence of mankind, the Englishman of the upper class made his way simply by a wholesale ignoring of his fellow-men. But the warmth of these representatives of Labour would soon break through this restraint, she said to herself, and the great heart of her husband would be revealed in all its natural poetry and affection and kindness. She did not realize that the path which her recent mental development had taken might not be running parallel to that which her husband had followed.

With thoughts such as these, and with heart aglow, she descended the path into the Royal Valley, where, at the mouth of one of the great tombs, she sat herself down to await the arrival of her friends. She was not left long to enjoy the abeyance of action which so pleasurably follows a walk in the sun and the wind; for presently the shouts of the donkey boys, the jangle of the trappings and the drumming

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of many hoofs resounded through the valley, heralding the approach of the cavalcade. Down here in the hollow, enclosed by the cliffs and shut off from the wind, the sun was intensely hot, and its rays seemed to bound back at her with violence from the dazzling white roadway and from the burning faces of the rocks.

Madeline felt a little anxious in regard to herself, for she understood that women in her condition were apt to be very easily upset ; but actually she had never felt better in her life, and hardly once had she experienced the slightest discomfort. She was not altogether easy however, about her new friends, as she stepped out into the open to greet them, for she saw at once that their faces were flaming red and bathed in moisture. None of them, however, showed any signs of collapse: they were all full of energy, and merrily laughed at one another as they mopped their foreheads with their handkerchiefs and stamped their feet to ease the stiffness caused by the long ride.

James Cottar came forward with joviality and shook her vigorously by the hand. " An angel at 'ell's mouth! " he exclaimed. " You're a caution! How did you come ? "

" I walked over from the camp," she replied, pointing up to the summit of the cliffs.

" Over them 'ills ? " he asked, with awe.

Madeline nodded. " Yes; there's a bridle-path that runs right over the top," she said.

" Eh !-but you're a wonder, a regular champion!" he laughed, putting his great hands upon her shoulders and looking down at her with a wealth of admiration in his hearty face. " I shouldn't be surprised if you come with us on all the excursions we're going to make on trip down the river. We're going to the Temple of Abydos tomorrow, I believe. It's a fairish journey, they say."

" Oh yes, I'll come! " laughed Madeline.

After a brief rest in the shade of the great entrance of one of the royal tombs, the dragomans called the party together and led them down into the cavernous depths beneath the cliffs, where the sculptured halls of the dead, carved out of the solid rock, soon rang with their many footsteps and their voices. Madeline remained seated at its entrance ; for she had often visited the necropolis before and its wonders were very familiar to her. Suddenly, as she sat lost in thought, she heard a footstep coming towards her, and looking up, she saw Henry Morland striding up the path in the dazzling sunlight.

" Ah ! " he exclaimed, as his dark eyes caught sight of her. " So you're bored with your friends already."

" No, I'm just resting," she answered, perplexed by the suppressed violence that she noticed in his manner. " Why have you come over? "

" To tell you what I think of you," he said, with a short laugh. " I got your note last night saying that you were leaving on their steamer today."

" Yes," she replied. "It's a bit of luck, isn't it ? "

He frowned angrily. " I suppose you've quite forgotten," he said, " that you had promised to travel down to Cairo with me, and that you were to let me make some more sketches of you today and tomorrow."

" This has changed all my plans," she told him.

" And you're just going off with hardly a good-bye," he retorted bitterly.

" My good man," she cried, " what's the matter with you? "

" Oh nothing," he answered. " Only I thought you'd have more consideration for my feelings."

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She looked up into his fierce, black-bearded face, and there was a troubled expression in her shadowed eyes. "You've got out of bed the wrong side," she said.

" I haven't been to bed at all," he retorted. "

Why on earth not ? " she asked.

" Oh, don't you see ? " he blurted out. " Are you blind ? Don't you know I can't bear to let you go ? Don't you know that I'm . . . Well, I won't say it : it's obvious."

" Oh, what nonsense ! " she exclaimed. " Pull yourself together, man. You know quite well that your friendship is of real value to me : you know we're always going to be friends. Do you want to spoil it all and rob me of a thing that gives me such real happiness ? "

For answer, he caught hold of her, putting his fingers upon her throat as though he would throttle her. " I love you, Madeline," he gasped, " I love you !-d'you hear? "

She thrust him from her. " Yes, I hear," she said," and I can't tell you how sorry I am. What are we going to do about it ? "

His face lit up." Why ?-do you feel anything like that about me ? " he asked, coming towards her again.

" No: I like you-that's all," she answered.

His eyes dropped before her steady gaze: he was evidently labouring under great emotional stress.

"Now, look here," she said. "Let's have this out. You know quite well that I happen to be in love with my husband, that I belong to him utterly, and yet you have the cheek to lay your hands on me and push your horrid black beard into my face. What d'you mean by it ? A man who can't control his passions ought to be locked up."

" Oh, you're cold, cold! " he muttered. " Women

like you make men mad. I haven't thought of any thing else but you for weeks. You're in my mind all the time. I can't do any work . . ."

Madeline looked at him with pity, as he leant against the wall, passing his hand across his eyes ; and anxiously she considered the various ways of dealing with his case. At length an idea occurred to her.

" Look here," she said, " I'm going to tell you something that ought to make you feel differently about me. I'm going to have a child."

" You're what ? " he almost shouted, standing over her with clenched, fists.:

" I'm going to have a baby," she repeated, " and if there's a spark of manhood in you, you'll understand that when a woman is in love with a man, and is going to bear him a child, she can hardly enjoy the amorous attentions of another man. Now, go and think that over, and if it doesn't put me out of your thoughts I don't know what will." Very slowly he turned from her and walked away.

" Come back," she called, " and say good-bye properly."

She held her hand out to him, and, with a dazed look in his eyes, he took it in his. " I'm sorry," he said. " Please forgive me."

" There's nothing to forgive," she answered. " Men are so uneducated in these sort of matters. You've all got a lot to learn. Well, you make good friends, and, by your leave, I'll retain your friendship. I can't think why you ever let things get beyond just friendship."

He swallowed painfully. " But don't you see ? "he protested, " your letting me come into your tent sometimes and sit on your bed talking to you, and your saying you'd pose semi-nude for me, made me think that perhaps you . . ."

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Madeline raised her eyes. "Oh men, men!" exclaimed. "What minds you've got! No wonder women have got to be so careful. I'm just beginning to realize what we're up against. Somehow I'd, never noticed it before."

CHAPTER XXVI

FAREWELL TO THE DESERT

THE heat in the barren Valley of the Tombs soon caused the party to set out again on the return journey to the river; and Madeline, promising to join them on the steamer in the late afternoon, climbed the glaring path up the side of the precipice, and so passed over the barrier of the cliffs and descended once more to the camp. At the door of her tent Father Gregory was seated awaiting her, having walked over, in response to her note, to bid her farewell.

" I shall be leaving here myself in a week's time," he said, after they had discussed Madeline's plans; " and if Robin is able to keep to his timetable, we shall all reach Alexandria about the same time. There I shall stay about a fortnight before sailing for England; so I hope this is only good-bye for a few days."

" Somehow," Madeline mused, " I have moments when I dread returning to the world. It has been very peaceful here in the desert."

" You don't dread it more than I do," he replied. " Even the quiet of the English countryside, where I spend my summers, has not the aloofness that this beloved desert has. But I quite see that you, my child, have much to face. I shall daily pray that all may go well with you. I wish . . ." He paused, looking at her with grave eyes.

" What do you wish, my dear? " she asked.

" I wish I knew," he said, " where God is leading

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you. In a peculiar sense I feel that you are under His hand : I have always felt it, since I first met you."

" Wish for me," she replied earnestly, " only that I may not develop into an easygoing British matron."

" That you never will become," he said, with conviction. " I shall always pray that the flame that has been kindled in your heart may burn steadily, lighting you to great adventures, great deeds, great works, and at last guiding you safely to your final haven. At the end of it all it will be a wonderful thing to be able to say, like Paul, ' I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith! ' "

Madeline gazed in front of her into the glare of the sunlight, where the heat quivered above the rocks and the sand. " I am beginning to feel," she said slowly, " that perhaps it is going to be a fight, and that the day of battle is very near."

Father Gregory did not stay long. Somehow, during these latter days, he had felt that Madeline was passing on to a mental position to which he did not altogether desire to accompany her. He had had two or three conversations with her which had left him with very mixed feelings; for her meditations had not followed the usual or expected lines, and he was at a loss to decide whether the road she was walking was the narrow path of the blessed or the broad highway that leads to destruction. He thought no longer of her as a lamb that had strayed from the fold : he pictured her now as a little wild sheep of the mountains that ran by itself.

Her presence disquieted him, for she suggested one train of ideas after another to his aged brain, thus holding him back from that quiescence of spirit which was now his paramount desire. He could not rid himself of speculation in regard to her, and time

and again his thoughts turned to her as though compelled thereto by some magnetic attraction. But, try as he might, he could not define his attitude towards the present workings of her mind. At times he felt that she was very close to a great truth, at other times she appeared to him to be wandering in a vast wilderness; but always he had the impression that she-the once disreputable little sinner of Port Said-was in some way a selected being, a chosen vessel, and the inadequacy of his advice to her baffled him. It was as though a voice whispered to him " Hands off !-let her be! " ; but he could not tell whether or no that voice were from on high.

Today, when he returned to the seclusion of his whitewashed room, he went down on his knees and fervently prayed that God's will might be revealed to him in regard to her, so that he might know in what directions she was to be encouraged.

In the late afternoon, when the sun had long passed behind the cliffs, Madeline left her tent for the last time ; and as she dropped the flap across the entrance, she felt that she had closed a door upon a very definite epoch of her life. She then walked across to the camp to bid good-bye to her friends; and having shaken hands with the members of the staff and with numerous natives, she went over to Professor Hudson's tent, where she found him packing a box of ancient pottery. Beside him, on the table, was an open tin of biscuits into which he was diving his hand. His mouth was full as he greeted her. For a few minutes they talked of times, ways and plans, and presently Madeline thanked him for his hospitality; but this he checked with a gesture.

" If you utter a word of thanks," he declared, " I shall blow my nose continuously until you stop, and so I shan't be able to hear you."

" Very well then," she laughed, " you'll have to see my gratitude in my eyes."

" Your eyes are too full of other things," he said, munching a biscuit.

" Are they ? " she asked; " what ? "

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" Oh, stupid benevolence, foolish enthusiasm, wrong-headed inspiration," he mumbled, " and many other things. Listen! I'm going to give you a word of advice. Don't let yourself be carried away by the interests of humanity. You have a fine, strapping husband. Give your youth to him: you'll find it will repay you in happiness. Leave the problems of the world to middle age."

" So much has to be said and done," Madeline replied, " and the time is so short."

Professor Hudson put his hands behind his back and stood looking at her with his keen eyes, his head on one side. " It seems to me," he remarked, " you've been advancing pretty rapidly in thought while your man has been away."

" Well," she answered, " I've been reading a good deal, and having long talks to clever people like yourself and Henry Morland and Father Gregory."

" Oh, bosh ! " he exclaimed. " Your thinking has been stimulated from within. You've had a sort of conversion, like the Salvation Army goes in for ; only yours is not a religious one; it's mental. Well, I hope your husband will approve."

" Of course he will," she replied. " Robin is a great thinker himself."

He regarded her for a moment silently. " I suppose if he objects," he said, " you'll give it up."

" I don't know that I will," she answered.

Oh yes, you will," he asserted. " Primitive, virile man has but to raise his finger and woman will forsake all and run to him."

" I'm not that sort," said Madeline shortly.

" You're very feminine," he replied. " My good girl, for heaven's sake take my advice. Love your husband, and use your amazing charms to keep his

love. Gather all the sweets of passion while you are young. When you are middle-aged, then you can turn to the things of the mind to fill the room that the wane of the things of the body has left." He held out his hand. "Good-bye," he said abruptly. " God bless you, my dear, and save you from yourself ! "

Madeline looked at him anxiously for a moment, and then shrugged her shoulders. " Good-bye," she responded, " and thank you for all your . . ."

The end of the sentence was lost, for Professor Hudson suddenly blew his nose with a blast like the trumpet of the resurrection.

Madeline reached the steamer as darkness was falling; and her friends, who were congregated on deck enjoying the fast cooling air, gave her a hearty reception. The vessel was one of Messrs. Cook's floating hotels; and Madeline found the comforts of civilized life far more thrilling than she had remembered them to be. The warm bath before dinner, the iced melons with which the evening meal began, the iced peaches with which it ended, the electric fans, and so forth, were amazingly appreciated after her long absence from such niceties of modern life. Curiously enough the North-country working men, whose guest she was, appeared to be entirely at their ease in these luxurious surroundings ; and their manners, regarded in general, could not have been bettered.

It is true that some of them ate with their knives or spat into the river; but so, undoubtedly, did King Charles and his elegant court. Such things pertain to the fashion of the period-no more. Until a late hour of the night they sat on deck under the stars, the ripple of the waters of the Nile, the hoarse cry of the night-herons, and the occasional howl of a jackal forming a dreamy accompaniment to their conversation. Madeline's eyes constantly sought the black mass of the Theban hills, outlined

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against the spangled sky; and it was with a feeling of sorrow that at length, as she retired to bed, she took her last look at them. She had been very happy up there in the desert.

When she woke up next morning the steamer had already journeyed many miles downstream. During the morning she amused herself by trying to arrange in some kind of rough order the notes she had taken in the process of her recent reading ; and seated in a deck-chair in a shady corner of the deck, she remained busy with her pencil and notebook until at lunchtime the steamer moored against the river bank at Baliana, the little town which is the starting-point of the excursion to the famous Temple of Abydos.

In the early afternoon the party set out upon the long journey to this temple, which stands on the edge of the desert, some seven miles or more from the river. Most of the company made the trip on donkey-back ; but four or five rickety old carriages had been provided, and in one of these Madeline drove with Mr. Cottar and his sister, Mrs. Crouch. At the head of the party rode two native policemen upon prancing Arab horses ; and the rear was brought up by crowd of servants, donkey-boys, and donkeys loaded with refreshments. The sun was intensely hot, and pugarees and white umbrellas were everywhere in evidence, so that the procession, as it moved along the parched road in a cloud of dust, provided endless entertainment to the natives whom it passed.

James Cottar was in a talkative mood. During the early part of the journey he asked Madeline a hundred questions in reference to the land and the natives, and when her own knowledge failed her she consulted the coachman, who sat, with his knees up to his chin, perched upon an enormous bundle of green food provided for his miserable horses. Her Arabic, now fluent after her months in contact with

the natives, surprised her friends ; and Mrs. Crouch remarked that education was a wonderful thing.

" Oh, that's not education," said Madeline. " I was born and brought up at Port Said. The wonder is that my Arabic vocabulary is as small as it is."

Do you speak any other languages ? " asked Mr. Cottar.

"Five or six," said Madeline. "You see, I've knocked about the world a good deal. I've never really belonged to any one nation: I'm thoroughly cosmopolitan."

" You're a little friend of 'umanity, like," he remarked, smiling at her.

The conversation passed naturally from this to the subject of English insularity, and thence to the discussion of social ideals. Mr. Cottar pointed out how much there was on which he believed the views of Labour would have a beneficial effect in Parliament. He was in no way hostile to the representatives of the upper classes, but he felt that an occasional jog from Labour was necessary for them, and he looked forward to the day when the voice of the people would be heard on all important matters.

"So often," said he, "life is just a pastime, a study, or a clever game, to the upper classes ; but it's we who deal in actualities, it's we who've suffered and 'ave learnt in the bitter school of experience."

" It seems to me," Madeline asserted, " that one of the main things wrong with society is that people don't realize the huge importance of friendliness. Friendliness and good will ought to be the great rule of life : I don't mean an attitude of ' Hail, fellow, well met ! ' or a gushing effusion towards people, but simply a kindly way of looking at them, even when you don't want to know them. One can be independent and reserved and aloof, and can very thoroughly mind one's own business, and yet be well-

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disposed to all men. It ought to be drummed into us from early infancy."

Aye, that's the ticket," said Mr. Cottar.

" Enmity, private or public feuds and quarrels," she went on, " should be considered a vulgar offence, as hard to justify as, let's say, the breaking of the marriage laws or any other upsetting of the rules of society. It is the main feature of Christ's teaching, it is absolutely essential to Christianity ; and yet how many people are there who practise it ? Honour and fair play are taught with great care at school, but the art of friendliness is utterly neglected."

" Aye, and it's a sight worse with the upper classes than it is with us," Mr. Cottar remarked. " When a working man meets another, a stranger, 'e calls 'im 'mate' ; but I 'aven't noticed that the young gentleman who 'as to speak to a stranger addresses 'im as 'Friend.' Nay, by gum !-'e treats 'im as a potential enemy. 'Ave you ever noticed 'ow all socialists and social revolutionaries always start by calling each other ' Comrade ' ? They seem to feel, like, that friendship is their one 'ope, their one longing."

Madeline had had many talks with Professor Hudson in regard to the precarious international politics of the time, and had discussed with him the news of the world when, each week, the budget of papers arrived. She was now, therefore, closely acquainted with the general movement of events; and the world's diplomacy was a subject in the forefront of her mind.

" If," said she, " honour and fair play and friendliness are essential to society at home, the thing that's wrong with the world at large is that they have so little place in international relationships."

" Aye," he replied; " we don't seem to admit, like, that in the service of their country statesmen mustn't act in a way that in private life would be

punished at once by a taboo. We've come to think that artful tricks and juggling with words and 'oodwinking and bamboozling and breaches of good faith are all right if their object is patriotic. It's a rum world! "

He laughed; but Madeline's face was intensely serious.

" Yon lass 'as done a tidy bit o' thinking," he said to his sister, indicating Madeline with his thumb.

" Aye, you're a real surprise," Mrs. Crouch assented. " It's that 'ot, I wonder at either of you being able to talk at all."

" If only," Madeline went on, " we could establish a code of international decency which would make it not only desirable but absolutely essential that all statesmen should represent not the cunning but the chivalry and good will of their race ! "

" Aye," he answered, " people may write rules of conduct till they're black in the face, but their work's wasted unless the nations recognize between themselves, like we try to do between individuals, the laws of honour and uprightness and good will. By gum!-that's what Labour's got to teach the world. Labour's got to get into the Foreign Offices of every country and say: 'Diplomacy's a failure ; let's try honesty instead.' "

Madeline clasped her hands together. " Oh," she exclaimed, " I have so much to say! "

" You must give us an address," said Mrs. Crouch. " Us'd listen to you."

" Aye, that's it," Mr. Cottar agreed. " You must get up and talk."

" Perhaps I will," she answered, and she was amazed at her own audacity. At last, in a cloud of dust, they passed through the village of El Arabah el Madfuneh and came to a halt in front of the ruined Temple of Abydos. Madeline had visited the ruins four or five months ago in

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the company of Prince Paolo in those dark days before the great lamp of her life had been lit ; and she preferred, this time, to rest quietly in the great hall, while the others were taken round by the dragoman. She sat herself down, therefore, on a fallen architrave at the foot of a sculptured wall, pulled off her hat, shook back the curls of her short dark hair, and lit a cigarette.

CHAPTER XXVII

A PREACHER IN THE TEMPLE

SHE was still seated, lost in thought, when the representatives of Labour wandered back from their tour of the temple. It had been decided that they should not start on the long ride to the Nile until after dark ; for the day had been very hot, and a journey in the coolness of night seemed more promising of comfort. The donkeys and carriages had been ordered, therefore, for an hour after sunset ; but as yet the sun had not reached the hills of the horizon, and there was plenty of time for rest and refreshment. Soon the dragomans were busy handing round bottles of ginger-ale ; or which were more popular, bottles of light beer ; and when the contents of these had been consumed, pipes were lit and buckles loosened.

High on the beautiful white walls the sculptured Pharaohs and deities gazed silently before them as they had gazed for the last three thousand years and more ; but it was the smoke of a new kind of incense that floated up to their delicate nostrils from the briar bowls beneath them, and the music of unknown chants that rose to their ears. For presently the party had begun to sing gentle old English songs, and their perfectly harmonized voices were soothing to the ear and full of tenderness.

Madeline closed her notebook, in which she had been writing, and turned to Mrs. Crouch, who had seated herself near by. " Their singing is beautiful," she whispered. "It is so full of sadness and yearning."

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" Yes," her friend replied, " they are singing the songs of the people, and they sing with the voice of the people."

James Cottar put his hand on her shoulder. " You promised to talk to us, my lass," he said. " Now's the time."

" Oh, I don't think we want any talking just now," she said. " It is so quiet and peaceful here, and your singing is wonderful."

Without answering her he turned to his friends. " Gentlemen," he said, " I suggest that we ask Mrs. Beechcroft to address us, and tell us something about what she's been writing in that there little book of hers."

"Mrs. Beechcroft ! " cried a chorus of voices. " Speech, speech ! "

There was silence and peace here amidst the ruins, but a tense feeling of excitement now throbbed through Madeline's veins. Could she put into words the thoughts that were aching within her for utterance ? Would expression come to her now, when she had so much to say, or would she stutter and make a fool of herself ?

The sun was setting in its amazing splendour behind the white walls of the temple, and the capitals of the mighty limestone columns were turned to blazing gold : but below, in the great court of Osiris where they were resting, the soft blue shadow lay like a deep enchantment upon sculptured walls and altars and fallen architraves. The company were seated upon the cool white stones of the pavement or upon the bases of the columns. Some had discarded their jackets, their shirts being thrown open at the neck and their sleeves rolled up. They were rough, bearded men, many of them , and their bronzed faces and arms looked like fine copper against the smooth white and blue of the surrounding stonework. Others were of more exalted types, having the deep

eyes of the dreamers of the North set like clouded amethysts in the shadow of their thoughtful brows.

" Speech, speech ! " they cried again, their frank gaze riveted on Madeline's inspired face. A slight flush had mounted into her pale cheeks and her eyes burnt with an unusual fire. Slowly she rose from the fallen block of stone on which she had been seated, and stepping up on to it, stood facing her audience like a saint of old. The light of the sunset was reflected in her face as she tossed the unruly clusters of her brown hair back from her smooth forehead and spread out her arms to them in a splendid gesture.

" 'Ho, everyone that thirsteth,' " she cried, and her voice rang through the ruined halls like the voice of a herald of heaven, ' come ye to the waters ; and he that hath no money, come buy and eat ! Yea, come buy wine and milk, without money and without price ! ' "

The magnificent words of Isaiah startled her hearers into attention, and instantly there was silence amongst them as they looked up at her fervent face. It was as though she had summoned them with trumpets to the steps of her throne ; and ere the call had died from their ears she had led them far into the subject of her discourse. At the outset she spoke of the almost hopeless condition of society: diplomats of one government intriguing against, and endeavouring to trick, those of another ; the wealth of the world unevenly and unjustly distributed, so that some starved in penury while others were surfeited with good things ; the fierce efforts of business men to press their rivals out of the markets ; the growing malevolence between labour and capital. And when, in burning words, she had drawn the picture of a world already sunk in the mire and surely, plunging towards destruction, she asked her hearers suddenly what hope

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there was of saving mankind from the inevitable consequences of this condition of affairs.

" There is only one way out," she said, " one way only of bringing peace and contentment and happiness to mankind ; and that way is so simple that a child can understand it. Study the teaching of Jesus of Nazareth, and put into actual practice the code that he preached, and the gates of the fair millennium will be opened and happiness will reign on the earth !

" In what I am going to say to you," she went on, " I want you to understand that there is no element of religion. I belong to no Church and no creed. If you ask me whether I believe the Master to be the Son of God, if you ask me whether I believe there is a God in touch with us at all, I will tell you that I don't know, and that religion is no concern of mine. In my opinion the Christian religion as we know it in all its varying forms is based largely upon a misrepresentation of what Christ taught. He preached a system of social rules. by the following of which mankind can be raised to a condition of contentment and well-being here below, which he named the Kingdom of God or the Kingdom of Heaven, that is to say, the Reign of Peace and Good Will on earth. But around his memory the vast and complicated religion of Christianity has grown up, a belief in which is supposed to secure you a safe-conduct through the clouds and an endless residence in Paradise.

Christ said, 'Except ye become as little children ye shall not enter into this Kingdom of Heaven'; but Christianity says, 'Except ye can understand the complex metaphysics of the brain-staggering Athanasian Creed ye shall not go to glory when ye die.' Christ taught the way men should live in order to secure *on earth* a condition of general well-being; but Christianity teaches a much modified version of the Master's rules, with a view to securing in *heaven* a state of individual bliss. What I say to Labour is this

Follow Christ, put into practice his simple rules; and, if so you will, you can for ever give up religion and all its complexities. For the Christian Religion and the teaching of Christ are two absolutely separate things. In people's minds they have become entangled and confused, and before we can understand what it was that Christ taught we must do a great deal of disentangling. But, believe me, this is well worth the trouble."

She paused, and her eyes travelled over the intent faces of her hearers. The perfect modulation of her voice, the beauty of her face and form, and the extraordinary magnetism of her personality held them spellbound. Her meaning came to them not so much by the words she uttered as by a kind of telepathy which accompanied and explained them. It was as though wires of communication passed from her to the inward ear of each member of her audience ; and here in the quiet shadows of the white temple there was nothing to interrupt or blur these lines.

" Listen," she went on, " and I will tell you some of his rules. I have made no profound study of them, a few weeks ago I had never read the Gospels or the Epistles. But so simple is the Master's teaching that, though I dare say one can be too clever to understand it, one can never be too uneducated, too dull, to grasp its essentials, and to realize that it sheds the pure light of plain common sense upon the darkness of man's crass stupidity. His teaching is the perfection of simplicity; it is the unambiguous, unequivocal translation of all complexities into terms that any brain can comprehend."

Madeline opened the small notebook which she had been holding in her hand. " This morning, as we came down the Nile," she said, " I spent a few hours in trying to sort my note and classify these rules ; for it is impossible to read the Gospels and the Epistles without observing that

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the teachings come under a number of headings which are able to be formulated into a definite code for the furthering of the establishment on earth of that reign of peace and good will amongst all men which Christ calls the Kingdom of Heaven."

She then reminded them of the principles for which the Master stood, and at the head of these she placed his injunction to his followers to league the nations of the earth together.

" Put out of your mind all exclusiveness," she said, " all national prejudice, all the petty side of patriotism. The Jews of the time of Christ were the most exclusive people in the world ; but the Master endeavoured to break down the barriers, and he sent his disciples out to preach his doctrine to Jews and foreigners alike, without distinction, an attitude which must have filled them with astonishment. 'Many shall come from the east and the west . . . in the Kingdom of Heaven,' he said; and Paul wrote, 'There is no difference between the Jew and the Greek' ; and again: 'Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners.'

'Go ye, therefore,' said Christ to his disciples, 'and teach all nations.' Let us not think firstly of ourselves as Englishmen, or Frenchmen, or Italians, or whatever we may be ; but let us primarily be citizens of the world. Of course you will love your native land, and in your hearts you will each believe that your race has in general a superiority over other races ; but do not attempt to impose that belief upon the world, for therein lies the destruction of mankind."

Then she went on to speak of his teachings in regard to Patience ; for she said, "the importance of this quality was paramount at the present time, and the principle was one of the main features of his whole system."

" ' Warn them that are unruly,' said Paul, 'that they be patient towards all men.' ' Follow after

patience be sound in patience let us run with patience the race that is set before us ' ; ' for ye have need of patience. Christ was always advising his hearers, in different words, to keep their tempers and not to flare up into any violent outburst ; and when you are betrayed by your friends and wronged, he said, 'in your patience possess ye your souls.'

" It is such a temptation, always, to lose one's temper and hit out, especially when you are up against the stupid, obsolete opinions of others ; but the common sense of the matter is that the man who keeps cool wins in the long run. Even when your forbearance means personal loss and pain, it is better to convert your opponent by the pressure of public opinion or private example than by knocking sense into his silly head with your fist. "

" Do not think that this is a sort of religious exhortation, only fit for milksops. Patience does not mean resignation ; it is not throwing up the sponge. It is a stern, courageous doctrine for determined men, men who are intelligent enough to realize the ultimate uselessness and misery of violent strife against that which can surely be overcome by cool thought and firm insistence. 'We hope for that which we see not,' said Paul, and 'with patience wait for it'; for, says John, 'he that killeth with the sword shall be killed with the sword : here is the patience and the faith of the saints.' "

Another of the Master's great rules which she touched upon was that of being a friend to all men.

" 'This is my commandment,' said Christ, with marked emphasis, 'That ye love one another.' 'All the law is fulfilled in one word,' wrote Paul, 'even in this : Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.' This, said Christ, 'love more than all whole burnt-offerings and sacrifices,' more than all churchgoing and religious observances.

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" One often hears a person say : 'I can't know so and so any longer ; I must cut him.' But Christ's injunction is that you cut nobody, however far beyond the pale they may be ; that you do not turn your nose up through fear of injuring your dignity, or countenancing sin, or setting a bad example by giving 'Good-day' to a wrong-doer.

" Well, it will not be so difficult, you will say, to be a friend to all men when all men have learnt to be a friend to you; but, in the meantime, what are we to do in regard to those who are not filled with benevolence towards us ?"

" There is a rule of the Master which gives us the line of conduct which we should adopt. It is this, 'Return good for evil,' 'Overcome evil with good.' This is a hard saying, and the rule is very difficult to observe ; and yet it is the sheer common sense of the matter, it is the only practical way of promoting the state of universal good will for which we are all longing. Tit for tat, like the very sound of the words, is the silliest method of conduct that can well be imagined. It piles up the wrongdoing, and you remain ever in the vicious circle.

" There is another rule of much the same significance. It is : Avoid anger and violence. Be controlled, be courteous, be gentle, don't be provocative or rude, don't be proud of your fighting blood. We must put a final stop to the intolerable condition in which man has lived throughout known history, not because we are milksops, but because, in spite of, our fighting blood, we are sensible enough to see that violence leads to violence and not to progress. We must learn to think in terms of peace, not in terms of warfare. 'Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, be put away from you,' said Paul. 'Let not the sun go down upon your wrath.' Don't live in a continuous state of readiness to pull off your coat ; don't go clanking about

with knives and pistols stuck into your belt, so to speak. It is picturesque, but it is stupid ; and it is not going to lead to any betterment of social conditions."

Following on from this she emphasized the importance of forgiveness, for this was one of the Master's chief injunctions. " By forgiving," she said, " by practising the broadest clemency, we check the thoughts that rankle; and believe me, a thing that rankles is poison to our minds. The little maggot of the offence unforgiven is that which will eat out our hearts and render us useless to God and man. 'Forgive men their trespasses,' the Master said. 'Forgive if ye have ought against any.' 'Forgive until seventy times seven.' Don't think it fine to be implacable ; don't think it strong to say of an enemy, 'God may forgive him, but I can't.' Don't be unrelenting: it will hurt you as much as it hurts the offender."

She spoke now of the need of charity, kindness and tolerance, and next she reminded her hearers of the great Teacher's injunction to be merciful. " Be tenderhearted," she said, " be kind, have pity, be compassionate. Never, under any circumstances, be cruel or heartless. 'Blessed are the merciful,' said Christ, 'for they shall obtain mercy' ; and Paul wrote: 'Be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous.' "

Presently she spoke of another principle of the teaching which was often forgotten, namely, the rule that Power and Might should not be so slavishly admired as is generally the case.

" In international affairs," she told them, " do not let your Government rattle the sabre or try to terrorize its neighbours, and in private matters do not be influenced by power or force. Remember always that might and heroics have nothing whatever

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to do with that reign of right and peace and happiness which we desire to see established. 'God hath chosen the weak things of the world,' said Paul, 'to confound the things which are mighty.' 'Whosoever will be chief among you,' Christ declared, 'let him be your servant' ; and he reminded his hearers that 'that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God.' His teaching is wholly opposed to the display of power and strength ; for he saw in it the cause of rivalries, dissensions, and vain ambitions.

" And yet another of the Master's rules," she went on, " is that we should not love money. 'They that will be rich,' said Paul, 'fall into temptation ; for the love of money is the root of all evil, which, while some coveted after, they have pierced themselves through with many sorrows.'

" And, likewise, we are told to avoid ostentation. Christ preached against those who were impressed by any sort of public show or recognition; for although there is no great harm in what is called cutting a dash, its injurious element is at once apparent when such things are taken seriously and begin to impress themselves on the character. Don't be pompous ; don't be vain ; don't be an attitudinarian ; avoid the spectacular in real life ; confine the theatrical to the playhouse; be modest and unassuming; don't show off; don't be stuck up."

There were many other of the Master's rules which she touched upon. His injunction that Liberty should ever be respected was emphasized, and she reminded her hearers how St. James speaks of Christ's code as " the perfect law of liberty." She spoke of his rule that men should be broad-minded.

" Do not be bigoted," he said ; " do not insist that you are right and the other man wrong. Christ denounced the Pharisees, who keep strictly to the letter of the law, and thereby lose sight of its spirit,

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who 'strain at a gnat and swallow a camel.' He often shocked people by his laxity in regard to the strict religious observances of the Jews. He sat at meat with publicans and sinners; he sat down to the meal without performing the ceremonious ablutions which the Law prescribed; he broke the rigid rules of the time in regard to the keeping of the Sabbath. And, following his example, we should realize that any form of bigotry tends to build up barriers between individuals and between communities: it is fatal to that unity and understanding without which there can be no reign of peace and good will."

Finally she spoke of his great principle that a man should be happy. "This," she said, "is one of the most important rules. 'The Kingdom of God is joy,' said Paul; and those who would enter the Kingdom must be genial and gay and cheerful; for in that realm there is no place for the dumps. 'The Son of Man came eating and drinking'; and the doctrine that he preached is rightly called the 'glad tidings,' for it is the doctrine of happiness. The whole of his teaching could be written under the general title: How to be happy. If only you recognize that what he taught was not the idealism of a lunatic but the sound sense of a practical man, and if only you put his principles into practice, 'your heart shall rejoice and your joy no man taketh from you.' Be cheerful, be jolly, be merry, have a good time, therefore; for thus you will help to build up universal happiness. The griefs of the Man of Sorrows were griefs at the world's rejection of his doctrine of happiness. He preached the way to rid the world of its misery; and the world laughed him to scorn."

"But remember," she went on, after a pause, "it is going to be an uphill job, this establishment of good will on earth; and in carrying out some of these

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commonsense rules you are going to be given a pretty hot time! When you set your faces, for example, against Force and Might and Power, you will hear your friends and relations calling you milksops and ninnies.

" At first you will be terribly unpopular, and especially so owing to your attempt to bring Christ's rules into play in national affairs and affairs of high policy; but do not be daunted. Nearly two thousand years have passed since his words were spoken ; but do not suppose that those who are long-sighted enough to accept these wise teachings are going to have a much easier time now than did his early followers. The true disciples of the Master will be just as utterly scorned and denounced by modern Christians as was the little band of the elect by ancient pagans. Like Paul, you will still have to ' wrestle against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual weakness in high places.'

" Only have faith. Have faith that the code is practical both in its private and its public aspect. Believe that Christ came ' a light into the world' ; be convinced that he is 'the door ' ; be certain that his way is the only commonsense way to save mankind from the misery of the present state of things. 'This is the victory that overcometh the world: our faith,' said John; and Paul wrote: 'Stand fast in the faith, quit you like men.' Believe that the reign of good will shall one day be established on this earth by the force of public opinion ; believe that man's impulse to righteousness and right thinking will at last make itself felt universally. Fight the good fight of faith.'. ' Let us not be weary in well-doing, for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.' "

Madeline closed her notebook, and for a few moments was silent. The light was fading, and the first stars were visible in the great vault of the sky

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above them. The spell of her quiet voice had held her rough audience in intense silence; and now as she paused there was a rustle of movement and the sound of the taking in of breath. It was as though her hearers had awakened for a moment from a dream of the fair things to be, and with a great gulp had found themselves amidst the terrible things that are.

She made a gesture with her hands expressing weariness. " I can say no more," she said. " I am tired; and it is time we started back for the Nile." She stepped down from the block of stone upon which she had been standing, and immediately she was surrounded by the men of the North.

" Mrs. Beechcroft," said James Cottar, " I'm not going to tell you that I believe in all that you say; but, by gum ! as long as I live I shall never forget your voice, or the expression of your face, as you said it. It was the face of an angel."

Madeline of
The Desert

PART III

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE RETURN

TWO months' arduous travel and work in the glaring desert had made Robin eager to see again the soft green fields and palm groves of the Nile Valley ; and when at last, as he rode homewards across the burning sand, he topped a ridge of rocks and came into sudden view of the thin line of verdure that is Egypt, his heart seemed to bound within him, and he uttered a shout like that of a schoolboy. The track he had followed led down from the desert to Helouan, a point a few miles south of Cairo ; and from the eminence over which he was now riding he could see before him the sandy, open plain, stretching in a gentle gradient down to the distant cluster of white houses of the little town which was spread out at the edge of the sown land. Beyond, he could see the line of the river gleaming in the noonday sun and the dense palm groves on the opposite bank; and behind this the desert once more, dotted with the pyramids of the Pharaohs. Away to the right, in a haze of heat, lay the city of Cairo; and the slender minarets of the Mosque of Mohammed Ali rose out of the hot, dusty mist into the clear atmosphere above. The northwest wind, passing across the valley, blew gently upon his face as he trotted along ; and his camel, a swift, soft-footed mare, which, on the shortest water-rations, had carried him bravely over so many hundreds of miles, snuffed at the breeze

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with dilating nostrils, recognizing in it the scent of the irrigated earth, with its prospect rest and drink.

Robin was impatient to reach his journey's end for, now that his labours were over, his thoughts had rushed ahead, and were already clustering the presence of the woman who awaited him there in the shimmering city. Throughout his expedition he had kept with precision to his timetable, allowing for each portion of his journey and each area of his exploration the exact number of days that had been allotted to it ; and now he riding to his destination punctually on the date on which he had told Madeline to expect him. Unless any misfortune or accident had befallen she would at this moment be watching for his arrival at the Ritz Hotel ; and he saw in his imagination her graceful figure standing in the cool, dim of the hotel, from the tiled floors of which the carpets would now have been taken up for the summer and the green shutters closed across the windows against the heat of the sun.

It was consistent with his character that he had not felt, and still did not feel, any anxiety in regard to her health and safety. He did not hide from himself the physical condition in which he knew her to be ; but manlike, he found in that thought no cause for nervousness. It was not three months since the beginning of her hope and expectation ; and he did not suppose that she had yet experienced any great inconvenience, or undergone much change in her bodily appearance.

She had promised him to take the greatest care of herself while he was away, and to come down to Cairo as soon as she felt the heat of the Theban desert to be too much for her; and during the eight weeks of his withdrawal from the world, although he was in no wise inconsiderate by nature,

he had little experienced the pangs of anxiety on her account, though he had much endured the torment of the longing of his love.

His expedition had been very successful, and happy memories besieged his mind as he rode over the glaring plain, thinking of all that he would have to tell Madeline when once more they were together. So the miles were swallowed up, and having halted but a few moments to swallow his luncheon, the soft pads of his camel were soon drumming him through the streets of Helouan ; where, already in the full blaze of the afternoon, he dismounted outside the little railway station, and turned to await the arrival of his native servant, whom he had greatly outdistanced.

When at last that perspiring individual arrived, Robin left in his capable hands the arranging of his affairs, telling him to bring his personal baggage along to the hotel as soon as he could. He then boarded the train for Cairo, and, half an hour later, was driving, thrilled and expectant, through the streets of the capital. Arriving at the Ritz Hotel, at about five o'clock in the afternoon, he learnt with dismay from the English hall-porter that his wife had just gone out.

" By herself ? " he asked quickly, thinking that she might have gone for a short stroll to relieve the impatience of her heart.

"No, sir," said the man. " A gentleman came for her, and they drove away together."

" What was he like? " inquired Robin, trying to assume an air of indifference.

" A young gentleman," was the answer, " with a pointed black beard."

Robin gulped back a sudden feeling of anger. " Did he give his name ? " he asked.

" No, sir. Mrs. Beechcroft was waiting for him here in the hall."

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" How was he dressed ? " Robin persisted. .

" In a white suit and a grey felt hat. Somewhat carelessly dressed, sir, if I may say so ; like an artist, perhaps."

" Oh yes, I know," Robin replied casually. "Thank you."

He inquired the number of his room, ordered some tea to be sent up to him, and therewith slowly ascended the stairs, bitter disappointment gnawing at his heart, and another feeling, new to him, burning in his mind. So Henry Morland was in Cairo. Madeline and he had probably come down together from Luxor. Well, there was nothing in that ! It was, doubtless, very considerate of Morland to look after her. But surely she might have stayed at home today, the day he had named to her on which to expect his return from the desert : surely the inducement to go out must have been very great. Had she become such fast friends with this man that she could not resist the desire to be with him ?

Entering his room, he looked around him with a feeling of detachment, almost of coldness ; but soon the tender aspect of his love assumed the upper hand in his mind. There on the bed was her nightdress, a flimsy little shred of delicately scented pink *ninon* : and on the dressing-table her brushes, scent-bottles, and other charming articles of feminine toilet, were spread out. Near by was a large, open box of chocolates, and Robin smiled indulgently to think how on her return from the desert she had hastened to buy these for herself, after her months of absence from confectioners' shops. Here also stood a photograph of himself in a silver frame. He glanced from it to his reflection in the glass he was certainly somewhat thinned by his two months of strenuous life, and his face was deeply tanned.

He picked up a pair of scissors and attempted to trim his hair, which was by no means as tidy as it had been when the photograph was taken. While he was doing so his eyes fell upon a note which lay open beside the looking-glass; and thereupon the unaccustomed sensation of anger blazed up again within him.

"Will call for you at 4.30, my dear," it ran; and it was signed " H. M."

" My dear ! " The audacity of the man! But he must have received some encouragement from Madeline. No doubt there was something in her manner towards men, due to her earlier adventures, which caused them to be familiar to her. Well, she must learn that that sort of thing is not done. With a sudden impulse he picked up the note and tore it into pieces, flinging them on the ground. They fell upon a pair of his brown shoes, and he observed that new laces had been put into them. On a chair near by he saw a tin of polishing cream and a piece of chamois-leather. She had evidently polished the shoes for him herself ; and at this thought his heart was softened towards her, but annoyance again hardened it as he realized that she was, then, expecting him, and yet had gone out.

The door of the wardrobe was open, and presently he glanced inside. The costumes which were hanging there called all manner of dear memories to him, and as he looked at them he experienced a wonderful thrill. And behold ! there in the corner were two of his own suits of clothes hanging beside her dresses ; while on the lower shelf one-third of the space was occupied by his hats and the other two-thirds by some of hers. Truly it seemed as though she had taken pleasure in arranging their things together.

He hurried across to the chest of drawers, and, pulling two or three of them open, found that here too his garments and hers rested side by side: his

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pyjamas next to her nightgowns, his socks next to her stockings, his underclothes next to hers. Yes, there could be no doubt that love had guided the hands that had laid out these things in such marital proximity. A tremendous tenderness overwhelmed him: he wished he had not torn up Henry Morland's note, and thereby disclosed his mistrust of her.

There was a knock at the door. "Come in," said Robin; and to his extreme surprise Rosa entered the room—the fat, swarthy woman who had been Daisy Jones's maid at Heliopolis, and whose acquaintance he had renewed on the terrace of the Nile Palace Hotel at Luxor.

" Oh, pardon, monsieur !—good day, monsieur ! " she said. " I not know you 'ave arrive. Madame she expect you, but she go out. Ah, what a pity! " She beamed upon him, though her eyes watched him disconcertingly.

" How do you happen to be here, Rosa ? " Robin asked her. It gave him no pleasure to see her again.

" Ah, monsieur," she replied, " madame 'as be so kind to me. I was very misfortunate. When Madame Jones go away, I stay here in Le Caire, because she 'ave her own maid in England. But I can find no service, and I 'ave no money, and soon I quite starve. Oui, monsieur, really I starve. Then, yesterday, I saw Madame Beechcroft in the street ; and she say me, ' Come to the Ritz, and I make you my maid for little time.' And she give me three pound, monsieur, three pound, for what I owe and for something to eat."

" Oh, so you are now her maid," said Robin.

" Oui, nionsieur," she answered, showing all her fine teeth in a broad smile. " This morning I been unpacking your clothes and putting them away."

" Did you arrange them all like this ? " he asked, pointing to the chest of drawers, his heart sinking within him.

" Oui, monsieur," she replied, after looking care fully at the contents of the drawers. " I put your clothes and madame's clothes together-so."

" Why ? " he demanded.

" Oh, monsieur," she protested. " I think monsieur will be please'. Monsieur is not long married. Ah, what a pity madame is out when you come ! "

Robin looked at her dark, crafty face with repulsion. " But perhaps Mrs. Beechcroft will not like the arrangement," he muttered.

" Quelle idee ! " she exclaimed. " Madame 'as seen it. She just laugh. Ah, how sad that you arrive when madame is out with the young gentleman ! But she come back soon! "

She backed towards the door." Did she say whether she was going to be long ? " Robin asked.

" Oh, she come back soon," she answered. " She just go for a little promenade with the gentleman, pour la politesse, because he give her such beautiful bon-bons. "

She pointed to the box of chocolates, and again her teeth gleamed in a spacious smile.

" Thank you, Rosa ! " said he. " That will do." With a bow she left the room, and as the door closed Robin clenched his fists, a hot wave of unreasoning fury surging through his veins. His anger, however, would have been directed elsewhere had he been able to observe his wife's new maid as she walked down the corridor rubbing her fat hands together with a kind of gleeful satisfaction ; and indeed his wrath might have been changed to consternation had he been privileged to read the general report which was that evening posted by her to Mrs. Jones.

CHAPTER XXIX

DISQUIETUDE

ROBIN was staring out of the open window when, half an hour later, Madeline entered, the room ; and for a moment he did not see or hear her.

" Robin ! " she cried, and the great gladness of her voice came to him like the sudden, clear sound of a bell ringing through the black confusion of his mind. He turned round swiftly, and before he could speak, her arms were about his neck. With brutal fierceness he crushed her in his embrace, kissing her lips and her throat with uncontrolled passion, and so bruising her arms in the grip of his strong hands that she uttered a little cry.

" Darling, you're hurting me!" she murmured.

Robin immediately released her. " That's for keeping me waiting so long," he said, and his voice was unsteady, like that of a man who has been running.

" Oh, I shall never forgive myself for being out!" she cried. " I wanted so much to see you come into the room. I'd been picturing it all day. How could I have gone out ? "

" Well, why did you ? " he asked bitterly.

Madeline groaned with real distress." Oh, darling, you're angry! " she exclaimed, looking at him with wide, anxious eyes. Robin thought that never in his life had he seen such eyes, nowhere in the whole world was there a woman so beautiful ; but he was determined to make her suffer for her fault.

"Well, of course I'm annoyed," he said. " I think you might have stayed in today. This is the date I told you I should get back."

" Yes, I know, I know! " she moaned. " But I'd got so impatient with waiting and longing for you, and I didn't think Fate would be so cruel as to bring you back during just this one hour in the day when I was out."

" You arranged it yesterday with Henry Morland," he said, catching hold of her arm.

" No, I didn't!" she exclaimed. " I told him he might come round, and, if I felt like it, I'd go out with him." Her eye caught sight of the torn fragments of the note scattered upon the floor. " Oh Robin ! " she whispered ; " my darling, I've made you cross with me." Her arms were round his neck again, and her hand smoothed back his fair hair in a frenzy of misery, the tears starting into her eyes.

He pushed her away from him. " Tell me at once," he said, with impulsive heat ; " what is there between you and Morland ? "

Madeline looked at him in amazement. " Between me and Morland ? " she echoed. "Why, Robin, you . . . ? " Her voice seemed to die away.

" Tell me ! " he cried, again taking hold of her. " Did you two come down from Luxor together ? "

" No," she answered. " I came down by steamer He arrived by train yesterday, and came round to see me in the evening, just to ask how I was."

" Oh, you're great friends!" he laughed contemptuously. " He's been playing the gallant cavalier to you while I was away. I suppose you've made him madly in love with you."

Madeline did not answer. She put her hand upon his fingers and released herself from his hold. "

Answer me ! " said Robin, sharply, his jealousy mastering his natural restraint. " Is he in love with you ? "

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" Yes," she replied frankly, " I'm afraid he is." Robin clenched his fists and drew in his breath through his nostrils.

" I guessed as much," he muttered. " And I suppose you're in love with him."

Madeline's eyes flashed. " How dare you ! " she cried, turning away from him and walking aimlessly across the room. " You know I love you, and only you, and always you."

Robin went after her and took hold of her unresponding hand. " Forgive me," he whispered, feeling that the impulse of his anger had carried him too far. " Only, don't you understand ? That note in which he calls you 'my dear ', I couldn't help seeing it : it was lying open on the dressing table, and your going out with him when you were expecting me, and his sending you that great box of chocolates . . ."

" Who said he sent me those ? " Madeline asked, facing him again.

" Your new maid, Rosa," Robin answered.

"No, he didn't give them to me," she explained. "I gave him a sovereign last night and told him to go and buy them for me. He couldn't afford anything like that, even if he had wanted to : he's very poor."

" I beg your pardon," he, said.

Madeline saw that the unreasoning anger was passing from him, and she drew him towards her with a tenderness that was almost maternal.

" It's really all the fault of that stupid Rosa," she said. " It was she who persuaded me to go out. She kept saying that you would be sure not to come on the exact date you had named, and that to stay in all day was so bad for me . . . and it." Her voice dropped to a whisper.

At this mention of that which was soon to come into their lives, a sudden overwhelming passion of remorse and tenderness clutched at Robin's throat, and a torrent of words of love broke from him. He implored her to forgive him for his stupid suspicions, he asked a hundred anxious questions in regard to her health and physical condition, and he was now impatient to hear all that she had been doing since he left her. Speedily their misunderstanding was forgotten, and the sunshine of their happiness was made perhaps the more intense for the cloud that had passed over them.

For a long time they sat, almost like children, with their arms entwined, having so much to say to one another that the hustled words sometimes stumbled and slid from their lips in incoherent confusion, at which they both burst into laughter. Madeline's rippling laugh was always infectious, and the sheer happiness of its origin gave it, today, a character that was irresistible ; so that from time to time, as they talked, their voices were choked with merriment, or as they kissed, their lips were open with laughter.

At length it was time for them to prepare for dinner; but even while Robin splashed in the water, in the bathroom which adjoined their bedchamber, their delirious conversation was continued through the open door: Nor did the flow of their joyous talk, nor their merriment, nor their intermittent kisses, cease as, returning from his ablutions, he stood behind her while she sat before her mirror.

With the setting of the sun the heat of the day had passed off, and it was a pleasure to Robin to put on once more his evening clothes ; while the vision of Madeline costumed again in a Paris gown filled him with delight. She looked so beautiful, so radiant, that he could find no words to express his admiration.

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" You glorious creature," he said to her, "you're intoxicating! "

Madeline laughed, happily. " Robin," she replied, " I'll whisper something to you. I had almost forgotten how awfully handsome you were. You're simply splendid." As the dinner-gong sounded Robin went to the chest of drawers to find himself a handkerchief; and Madeline, her arm linked to his, drew his attention to the manner in which their possessions were arranged side by side.

" Yes," he said; " Rosa told me that that was her idea."

Madeline looked up at him indignantly. " Oh, the old romancer!" she exclaimed. "She had nothing to do with it : I put them like that."

Robin was puzzled. " But I asked her specially," he declared. " I wonder what made her say it was her doing."

She shrugged her shoulders. " I suppose she wanted to pretend to herself that she had a part in our happiness," was Madeline's generous explanation.

Dinner was served on the verandah of the hotel, overlooking the luxuriant garden, where the fountains splashed in the light of many little electric globes. Here the air was cool ; and the soft breath of the evening breeze rustled the foliage of the palms and faintly stirred the red silk shades of the lamps upon the tables. A few English officers, some of them with their wives, were scattered amongst the small company assembled at dinner; and the women's dresses, blending with the Oriental decoration of the awnings, gave a fine richness of colour to the picture. Amidst the tables the native servants moved to and fro in their Turkish liveries of crimson and white ; whilst the whiskered French wine-steward, with his chain of office, supplied a touch of traditional decorum to the exotic scene.

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" There's something to be said for civilization," Robin remarked, as they sat down at their table.

" Yes, at the right time and in the right place," Madeline replied. " A recherche dinner at a smart restaurant always has a thrill to it, unless one has had too much of it ; though ' a tonic for love's middle age ' is what Paolo used to call it. . . ."

A shade of annoyance crossed Robin's mind. " Dear, I wish you would completely forget Paolo and all the rest of them," he said.

" I'm very tactless," Madeline answered apologetically ; and she hastened to turn the conversation into other channels. Robin had found a bundle of letters awaiting him on his return to Cairo, and he had already read through those addressed in his mother's handwriting. Madeline asked him, therefore, if his news of her was satisfactory.

"Yes," he replied. "She's very well. She's awfully anxious to meet you, darling. She says you have written her two or three very nice letters."

"Her letters to me were very sweet," said Madeline. " I feel we shall be good friends."

" I think you will," Robin answered, " though' of course she belongs to a past generation, and is rather a stickler for the conventions."

" Would you call me unconventional? " she asked, a little uneasily.

" No, not very, now," he responded, after a moment's thought. " I think you are perfect."

" You know," said Madeline, " I feel rather nervous of England and all that it means. Oh, Robin, let's stay out here as long as we can."

" Why," he answered, with a laugh, " I thought you were telling me upstairs just now that you had so much you wanted to do in England in regard to social reform and all that sort of thing."

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" Yes, so I have," she answered, in a voice so low that it was hardly distinguishable from the rustle of the trees in the garden ; " but not till after our child is born. At present I want to be very quiet and happy, and alone with you as much as possible."

" Well," he said, " we shall stay at Alexandria now for a month or six weeks, while I'm doing my work there. That will bring it to the middle of June, and we shan't get home before about the beginning of July. Then we'll go to my little house in the country, where you can have all the quiet you want till the great event in November. I think you ought to be settled down, you know, by July or August."

" Couldn't I settle down in Italy or somewhere ? " she asked.

" But I have to be in England," he told her, " and I couldn't leave you alone."

" No, I suppose it must be England," she said, with a sigh; "but I dread it, Robin."

There was a look almost of fear in the dusk of her eyes, and a strange dreamy aloofness, a kind of solitude, which he could not understand. It was as though she were gazing at a picture that he could not see, a picture that troubled yet absorbed her. He felt, somehow, that in spite of their joyous and intimate time together which had followed his ill temper, she was a little estranged from him. The feeling was too slight to be submitted to the medium of words, yet it was there; and a sense of disquietude resulted in his mind. Women in her physical condition, he knew, often exercised this unconscious ostracism ; and he accepted her abstraction as a natural symptom, though this definition did not satisfy him.

" Anyhow," he remarked, by way of consolation, " you'll enjoy being at Alexandria : it is glorious at this time of year."

" Yes," she answered, " it will be amusing to visit

some of my former haunts and to see some of my old friends."

Robin glanced at her quickly. " I was forgetting for the moment that you knew anybody there," he said. " Still, I suppose they will have almost forgotten you by now."

" Forgotten me ? " laughed Madeline. " Of course not! There's old Madame Groyant, who had the *patisserie* at the corner of our street : she and I still write to each other. And then there's a great friend of mine, Felix Monier, the fishmonger, and his two good daughters; and Henri Legrand, who's a clerk in the Tramways - I still send him money every now and then because he's so poor and he's almost blind. Oh, and several others. I shall love seeing them again."

Robin did not answer. He was of too just a nature to ask her to avoid these old acquaintances, and yet the fact that she would meet them again troubled him deeply. He preferred now to change the conversation.

" Tomorrow morning," said Madeline presently, " I want you to come with me to the station to see my Labour friends off. They are going down to Port Said to pick up their steamer for Australia."

Robin smiled. " Will Henry Morland be there? " he asked. " Because, if so, I shan't go." He made a joke of it, but there was perhaps a suggestion of sincerity in his voice.

" No; he went by the six o'clock train this evening, just after I left him," she replied. " His boat sails at dawn tomorrow."

" Confound him! " said Robin. " He's made me jealous for the first time in my life. How dare he be in love with you ! "

Madeline laughed. " Oh, he'll get over that," she asserted. " I expect it was just the Egyptian air. He's only an impetuous artist, you know; and you

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can smack his head if you like, only you mustn't hurt him, because he's been a good friend to me, and really I've learnt more from his invective than from any of the panegyrics in my books. Besides, he might knife you: he's that sort."

" Well, who shall I meet at the station ? " Robin asked, dismissing the artist from his thought with an impatient gesture.

" The man I especially want you to meet," said she, " is James Cottar."

Robin looked up quickly. " Not 'By-Gum Cottar,' the M.P. ? " he exclaimed.

Madeline nodded. " Is that his nickname ? " she said. " Yes, that's the man."

" But, my dear girl," Robin protested, " he's a most dangerous character. He's always giving trouble in the House. Why, I believe he's been in prison once for causing a riot."

" He has a great opinion of you," she told him. " He heard you lecture at Bradford or somewhere, and he thinks no end of you." She then described her friend, and told him how highly he had spoken of the English administrative officials in Egypt.

"I'm glad of that," said Robin. "But, you know, my darling, you must be very careful of these Labour people. Many of them are fine fellows, but some are real cranks. James Cottar has got a pretty hot reputation! "

" Oh, Robin, he's a dear!" Madeline protested, as she noticed the look of disquietude in her husband's face.

When dinner was over they sat for a while in the garden, enjoying the cool air of the evening, while above them, seen through the dark foliage of the trees, the half moon soared amidst the multitude of pale stars. The great fruit-eating bats flapped their way from tree to tree in the dimness, and

somewhere in the black shadow cast by the side of the hotel an owl hooted portentously. The night wind rustled the dry leaves of the palms above them; but below, where they sat, the air was still and silent. On the softly lighted verandah the native servants passed to and fro, preparing the tables for the next morning's breakfast ; but in the shadow in which Robin and Madeline were lost, nothing moved.

A deep enchantment had descended upon the garden, and the cry of the creatures of the darkness seemed to them to be the incantation of the sorcerers of the night. Under the spell of this Egyptian magic, Love stole out of his lair and walked abroad in all his witchery; and soon his gentle touch had banished the vague disquiet of their thoughts and the passion of his idolatry flooded their hearts.

Robin was tired after his day's ride, and it was still early when he and Madeline went up to their room; nor was it long before sleep took them into its keeping and the silence of dream descended upon them as they lay in one another's arms. Once in the first light of daybreak Robin returned to consciousness, thinking that he heard his wife's voice ; but, as he lay awhile with open eyes, her quiet and regular breathing told him that she was in a deep slumber.

The gentle fingers of sleep were closing his eyes once more when again he heard Madeline's voice. She was muttering in her dreams, and in the dim light he saw that her lips moved, and that her eyebrows were knitted together as though in anguish. Her head was resting on his arm, and tenderly he drew her towards him, so that her face lay close to his; and very gently he smoothed back her dark hair. Then, suddenly, he felt a hot tear on his cheek, and he knew, with great consternation, that she was crying. He was about to awaken her and

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so end the sorrows of her dream, when his attention was arrested by the words that fell in a whisper from her lips, and he strained his ears to catch them.

" And you began to be sorrowful and very heavy," she murmured brokenly, "and you said, 'My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death.' And you went away from them about a stone's cast, and knelt down, and prayed, saying, ' Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me : nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt.' And being in an agony you prayed more earnestly; and your sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling to the ground . . ." Her eyes opened for a brief moment, but sleep still held her.

" Darling," he whispered, " what is it ? Don't cry."

She turned her tear-stained face to his. " Oh, Robin," she murmured, as though half waking, "hide me, hide me . . ."

For a time her quiet breathing told him of her unconsciousness; but presently her lips again began to move.

" I can't do it," she said, and she turned her face from side to side in despair. "Why me . . . me ? . . . Oh, don't look at me like that with those sorrowful eyes. . . ." Her white arm passed across Robin's neck, and she hid her face against his breast.

Suddenly she sprang up into a sitting position, her legs tucked under her, her hair tossed back, her hands clutching at the sheet. Her eyes, wide open, were staring into space, and in the increasing light Robin saw blank amazement and wonder in her face. Then, with a half-stifled cry, she fell forward abjectly, her head buried in her arms.

Robin was frightened. He had had no time yet to realize how deeply during the last eight weeks she had been pondering over the events in the great

Teacher's life ; and he did not know what a profound impression the ancient tragedy had made upon her mind. He became anxious about her health ; and, taking hold of her limp body, he laid her back on the pillows, where she lay white and silent. He switched on the electric light and stared at her nervously, wondering what he should do; but now he saw that her eyes were closed and that she was again breathing regularly as though deep in sleep, and, laying his fingers upon her pulse, he felt that it was slowing down to its normal beating. For some time he watched her; and then, finding that the dream appeared to have left her, he put his hand upon her shoulder and cautiously aroused her.

" What is it ? " she said, as she looked at him sleepily.

" You were dreaming," he told her; and, bending down, he kissed her. " What was it about ? "

" I don't know," she answered drowsily, " I've forgotten." She smiled at him, yawned like a tired child, and once more closed her eyes; nor were their slumbers again disturbed until the servant knocked at their door.

They ate their breakfast together on the verandah under the awnings; and soon after ten o'clock they drove to the station to speed the departing representatives of Labour. A special train had been put at the disposal of the party by the Government ; and the passengers, having already selected their seats and stowed away their baggage, were idly standing about the doors of the carriages when Madeline, followed by Robin, stepped on to the platform. Almost immediately three or four men hurried forward, effusively greeting her, and in a few moments she was the centre of a small crowd, on the outskirts of which Robin stood fingering his moustache, a look of anxious surprise in his blue eyes.

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" Ee ! but I'm glad to see you, lass," he heard a deep voice saying ; and he caught sight of a great figure standing in front of his wife, a large, hairy hand on her shoulder. " 'Ave you got your 'usband with you ? "

Madeline turned and beckoned to Robin, who pushed his way through the throng. " Robin," she said, " this is Mr. Cottar " ; and the two men shook hands.

The Member of Parliament looked at Robin with frank admiration. " Ee, but you make a champion pair! " he declared. " My lass, I congratulate you on your 'usband : e's one of the right sort, a bit of old England." Then turning to Robin, " Young man," he said, " you can see what we think of your missis. By gum h'er's one in a million! "

The somewhat abashed husband made a stammering reply, and they moved in a body towards the train, where further introductions were effected. Presently Mr. Cottar put his hand on Robin's arm and led him aside.

"I'm very glad to know you," he said; "I've always 'ad a liking for you, ever since I 'eard you lecture up at Bradford. You've done fine work, lad. But you'll 'ave to be more careful of your neck now, with yon lass to look after." He jerked his thumb over his shoulder in the direction of Madeline. " Aye, you'll 'ave to 'mind 'er. You've got a treasure there that's better worth discovering than all your unexplored countries. I'm an old man, lad, but I've never come acrost nothing like yon. She's a born leader-you mark my words; and when she says ' Come ! ' folk'll come, and when she says ' Strike ! ' they'll strike. We've been wanting the likes of her this 'undred year, and now she's come, with the sweetness of 'eaven in 'er face, and the sound of trumpets in 'er voice, and God in 'er 'eart. Ee, lad !-she's not yours : she's England's ! "

Robin was surprised at his earnestness, and his feelings were perhaps not altogether free from a sort of resentment, though he strove to overcome that which he knew to be unworthy. "Tell me," he asked, "why you've formed that opinion of her."

"Well," replied Mr. Cottar, "the way she talked to us in the temple-she spoke for an hour, and you could 'ave 'eard a pin drop; and then coming down the Nile on steamer, why, in 'alf a day she 'ad us all 'umming around 'er like bees after 'oney. We used to call 'er the Little Friend of 'Umanity. Look at 'em now," he said, pointing to the throng, "men *and* women, mark you."

A bell rang, and at once the party began to scatter. As he rejoined his wife Robin saw that her hand again and again was being violently wrung. The colour had mounted to her cheeks and her eyes were glowing.

James Cottar hurried across to her, and, taking both her hands in his, bid her farewell. "I've got you're 'usband's address," he shouted, as he stepped into the train. "I'll come and see you when I get back from Australia. There's work to be done!" Then, turning to his companions, he cried: "'Ip, 'ip, lads, for the Little Friend of 'Umanity!"

The cheers that were immediately given echoed through the station, and brought the native porters and officials suddenly to a standstill as they hurried to and fro. Madeline clutched at her husband's arm and gulped back the tears that seemed, as it were, to be rising in her throat. The train moved out of the station, but still the cheering continued, and hats were waved from all the windows.

Suddenly a look of fear came into the girl's eyes, and her hold on her husband's arm tightened. "Oh, Robin," she gasped, "I feel as though they

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were calling me, calling me to come to the place where I'm needed . . . and I don't want to go! " Robin glanced around at the smiling faces of the natives, whose dark eyes were fixed upon Madeline. " Come along," he said briskly. " Let's get out of this. It's like a circus!"

CHAPTER XXV

SOCIETY

THROUGHOUT the hot weather the San Marco Hotel, which stands upon the sea coast a few miles outside the city of Alexandria, is crowded with visitors ; as, indeed, are all the other hotels and *Pensions*, which, with a host of villas and bungalows, constitute Egypt's popular summer resort. The travellers and tourists from Europe who come to the Nile to escape the rigours of their northern winter usually return to their homes in the spring ; and the people one finds congregated here on the southern shores of the Mediterranean in the month of May are mainly residents in the country, whose endeavour it is to keep cool and comfortable. English, French, Italian, Greek and Levantine, officials and men of business, with their wives and families, here disport themselves upon the beach in the morning; they take their long siestas in their airy rooms in the afternoon, unless a race meeting or a game of tennis call them early again into the sunlight and the breeze; they swarm out for their fashionable promenades or drives towards sunset; and they spend the cool evenings at the theatres and cafes, or listening to the band in the gardens, or gaming and dancing at the Casino.

Many Europeanized Egyptian natives are also to be seen mingling with the gay and well-dressed throng, and here and there white-veiled Mohammedan ladies are to be observed in segregated groups, watching with tolerant disdain the free

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movement of their foreign sisters. The life is in many respects, much like that of a Southern French or Italian watering-place; but it has, of course, a more cosmopolitan character, and the wealth displayed by all except the English element, in jewels, clothes and equipage, is almost unique. The sun is hot, but the prevalent wind is cool and refreshing as it blows across the splendour of the sea, and the nights are often chilly. Indeed, the climate here in early summer is ideal, and there is a sparkling radiance and richness of natural colouring that seems to accelerate the pulse and enliven the heart.

The room which Madeline and Robin were given, when, a few days later, they arrived at the hotel, overlooked the sea, and the continual surge of the surf passed in through the open windows as the white curtains swayed to and fro in the breeze. After the glaring furnace of the desert and the heat of Cairo, it was strange to them to feel the refreshment of the cool air; and at night the need of blankets was a source of surprised amusement to them.

" I wish we could take a villa here," said Madeline, " and not go to England at all."

" Oh, but think of England in summer! " Robin exclaimed. " The great soft trees that you never get out here, the lanes smelling of honeysuckle, the gardens with their smooth lawns bordered by masses of flowers. Great, hollyhocks, my dear: think of them!-and clipped yew hedges behind them; and the little rock plants growing between the old flagstones; and the lily-pool with the misty beds of lavender around it ; and the sundial with the roses creeping up it ; and the swallows' nests under the eaves ; and the fat thrushes singing on the thatched roof ! Oh, you'll simply love my house at Fylton." " Yes, and the rain and the damp and the grey skies,"

Madeline laughed. " Look at the sea. Have

you ever seen such blues and purples ? And look at that group of vivid green palms and the sky beyond ; and over there in the distance, the shining white houses of the town, jutting out into the water. Look at that picturesque native fisherman squatting on the rocks and the man swimming. The water's so transparent you can see the white pebbles at the bottom. Oh no, Robin, this is the place! "

He laughed and put his arms about her. " You know," he said, " what I love about you is your appreciation of the place you happen to be in. You are a born wanderer-that is to say, one who feels the place he is in to be the spot where he will settle down; and he moves on before he finds out his mistake."

She smiled. " I dread England," she replied, " and that's the truth of it."

" Why? " he asked.

" I don't know," she answered. " I feel that so much awaits me there. It's as though it were drawing me to its clouded skies out of all this warmth and sunshine ; and I feel I've got to go, and I don't want to."

" But Fylton is beautiful," he told her. " I used to go there as a boy; and then, two years ago, when the old Manor came on to, the market I rushed off and bought it. But of course, if you don't like it, we can easily get rid of it."

Madeline turned with a sigh and stared through the long French windows at the vivid sea and the white surf which broke continuously upon the rocks. Robin could not help thinking how very beautiful she was as she stood there in the sunlight, the wind stirring her dark hair. He went across to her and kissed her bare throat.

" You shall do whatever you want, my darling," he said, as he looked down into the mystery of her shadowed eyes and saw the sadness therein.

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Robin's work at the Arabic Institute was of absorbing interest to him, and Madeline was left a good deal to her own devices. Some ten days after their arrival in Alexandria they were fortunate enough to obtain a six weeks' tenancy of a little villa which stood in an isolated position upon the rocks, about a mile from the San Marco Hotel; and into this they at once removed. Here the cool sea breeze blew continuously around them; and the sound of the surf, which beat upon the very foundations of the house, was music in their ears. On the sheltered side of the building gaily coloured flowers grew in profusion; and these, with the white walls and red-tiled roof, the blue and purple Mediterranean and the azure sky, constituted a brilliant colour scheme which was ever a source of delight to them. In this secluded spot Madeline lived her life in great contentment and the days passed swiftly by days of vivid colour, dazzling sunshine and cool shadows, and nights of starlight or moonshine gleaming upon the white breakers and the calm sea beyond.

During the first week Father Gregory was their guest, but after he had sailed for England, Madeline spent some hours of each day by herself. The fame of her beauty and charm, however, and the respect in which her husband's name was held, led to a good deal of social intercourse; and if any rumours were current with reference to her history, the society of Alexandria evidently agreed to regard them as untrue. There was something about her so very refined, she had such simplicity and frankness of manner, that no difficulty could have been felt in discrediting any reports of this kind; and the sweetness of her nature quickly supplied her acquaintances with that desire to do her service which was the surest check to the tongue of gossip. Moreover, an event had occurred which, of itself, had raised

her to a very high standing in the opinion of those who had been privileged to be present at the time.

A dinner party of a somewhat official character was given one evening by Lord Blair, the virtual ruler of Egypt, Madeline and Robin being amongst the guests invited. Assembled at the table were the brains of Alexandria, augmented by those of a colonial Bishop and an English statesman on his way back from a tour of the Empire. It must be admitted that the brains of Sir Horatio Brode, the statesman in question, were not conspicuous ; but he had certainly attained a high position in the public esteem, which, at any rate, indicated that he had made the most of his abilities. Madeline was taken in to dinner by a world-famed engineer; next to her on the other side, sat the principal British judge in the country, while opposite was the above mentioned statesman.

Towards the end of the meal the general conversation flagged somewhat, and the guests became aware that Madeline, the judge and the engineer were deep in some kind of discussion. Soon the whole table was listening, and the subject of their argument was found to be the future of Labour in British political life. It was not long before the conversation extended itself into a friendly debate, in which all joined; and from this it was found to be concentrating at length into a direct battle of wits between Madeline and Sir Horatio on the opposite side of the table.

Soon it was evident that, upon this particular subject at any rate, the politician's cunning was no match for his opponent's sincerity ; but it was also clear that Madeline was handling her victory so tactfully, and with such good taste, that the defeat of the enemy was spared the appearance of a rout, and Sir Horatio remained the only person in the room

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who was not aware that retreat had deliberately been made easy for him. The statesman had to leave at an early hour in order to attend a function at the Palace, and as soon as he had taken his departure, Lord Blair offered his congratulations to Madeline in a very outspoken manner.

"The man's point of view is out of date," he said, "and you simply walked over him; 'and I think we've got to thank you for having done three things. Firstly, you've let a glimmering of light into the darkness. of his mind; secondly, you've given us all one of the best expositions of the subject under discussion that I at any rate, have ever heard ; and thirdly, you so tempered your strength with mercy that he has left my table in the best of humours, and, I feel sure, positively likes you. You know, in my opinion," he added, turning to his guests, " to assist your defeated opponent to extricate himself gracefully is the very summit of good form."

This incident, and the official acknowledgment, as it were, of her intelligence and graciousness, at once raised Madeline to a position of importance in the society of Alexandria; yet though her company was much sought after, she managed to keep herself remarkably aloof. She explained to Robin that she was bored by social functions, and much preferred to lead her quiet life in their little villa ; but to the more pressing of the Alexandrian hostesses she confessed her physical condition, and made that the reason of her frequent refusals to accept their hospitality.

Nevertheless, in spite of this apparent exclusiveness, she lived by no means a solitary life ; for even had she so wished, she could not well have shut her doors against the many good souls who came to call upon her. Not that there lacked a

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certain number whom she disliked: there was the narrow-minded Lady Agatha Lawer, wife of a prominent official; a snobbish and very proper young diplomatic secretary, named Dregge ; and two or three others by whom her sense of freedom was outraged. But the great majority were pleasant enough, though she had little in common with some of them beyond a mutual desire to be friendly. When Robin returned each day from his work as the sun sank behind the distant houses of the city, he usually found two or three visitors seated with his wife on their little terrace which overlooked the Mediterranean ; and, until the short Egyptian twilight was fading, the sound of their voices and their laughter was mingled with the surge of the breakers on the rocks below.

During the mornings Madeline continued to read a considerable number of books ; and her lighthearted friends would have been greatly surprised had they been able to see her at that time, her writing pad on her knee, reading with absorbed interest the kind of volume that they might have supposed no normal woman would have chosen to peruse. Once, a young cavalry officer coming to the villa one morning to deliver a message, was astounded at sight of the beautiful girl seated in a basket chair with a Prayer Book in her hand, and, in her lap, a critical treatise on the Psalms of David by a well known Professor of Theology.

" Whatever are you doing ? " he asked, in awed surprise.

" Reading the psalms," she replied, with a smile, and marking the ones that seem particularly suited to Christianity. Listen to this : ' Up, Lord, and help me: for thou smitest all mine enemies upon the cheek-bone ; thou hast broken the teeth of the ungodly.' 'God shall wound the head of his enemies, and the hairy scalp of such a one as

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goeth on still in his wickedness. The Lord hath said : I will bring my people again, that thy foot may be dipped in the blood of thine enemies, and that the tongue of thy dogs may be red through the same. ' Pretty, aren't they ? Just the sort of sentiments that Christ would have liked his followers to indulge in! "

" Well, I suppose they must be, as they are in the Bible," he replied, and he was quite startled at the look she gave him, though what it meant he did not know. His mind was not sufficiently subtle to make any distinction between those who read the Prayer Book in search of comfort and those who chance to read it in search of truth ; and that afternoon he told his friends at the club that Mrs. Beechcroft was " religious," or, as he expressed it, " pi."

" Oh, rot ! " replied one of his companions. " A girl who dresses as well as she does, and drinks her glass of wine, and smokes her cigarette, and has all the graces and charms and wit and brilliance of a woman of the world, can't be religious:"

" Why not ? " asked the Padre, who had overheard the remark. He was a shy little mouse, but he liked to be taken for a man of the world, and his sentiments were robust.

" Did not Christ himself come eating and drinking ? The very first miracle he performed was at a jollification after a wedding, and he performed it with the idea of keeping up the fun a bit longer. And didn't he call attention to the beautiful clothes of the lily, and describe his teaching as the music of the piper played so that people should dance? I'm sure I don't know anything about the lady in question, but this I do know, that sackcloth and ashes are not necessary to salvation."

Robin, meanwhile, was very proud of his wife's popularity; and though, perhaps fortunately, he

did not give heed to the direction in which her thoughts were leading her, he was happy to think that she was recognized as being clever. He had always despised the man who could fall in love with a brainless beauty; and more than once since his marriage he had feared lest by any chance he should be regarded as such. But now the attention that was lavished upon Madeline was confirming, in an altogether satisfactory manner, the wisdom of his choice. No; he had not been carried away by her beauty, but by something far deeper, far more lasting, and the thought gave him a feeling of wholesome satisfaction.

It was surprising to him to think how much she had developed during the last few months; and he was perhaps not altogether without anxiety as to the influence under which she might be brought at this period of her first real mental expansion. He would have to arrange for her to meet some really clever men in England, whose views might serve to temper those of James Cottar on the one hand and those of Sir Horatio Brode on the other. The great thing, he felt, was balance, moderation, and the ability to go steady ; and he was not quite sure that Madeline possessed these qualities. She was so full of vivacity, so keen, so enthusiastic, that she might be carried away on the tide of some great movement ; for the ocean of the world's thought just now was troubled and the waves were running high.

Sometimes he felt that he was not quite in sympathy with her views, so far as he understood them; but she had discussed matters so little with him that possibly they were fundamentally in agreement. She had told him that somehow she did not feel that she could discuss abstract problems with him: their importance seemed to fade when he was with her, or if they retained their importance,

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they lost their timeliness. He was not indeed at all certain that he knew what she was driving at ; but that she was going through a great mental revolution was quite apparent, and he fervently trusted that it would in no way diminish the wonderful radiancy of their love.

There was one matter in regard to which he always felt uneasy. There had never been much doubt or anxiety in his mind as to the manner in which she would be received, provided that the more flagrant portions of her past history were unknown; but there was always a grave danger that some disconcerting fact would leak out, especially as Madeline had until recently, shown no consciousness of this danger, and even now only regarded a discovery of this kind as something that would hurt, not her but him. For her own part she seemed to think of those past years as being, in effect, dead and buried, and it appeared to be hard for her to imagine in what way they could rise up again to her hurt.

" I'm frankly sorry to have flown in the face of convention as I did," she told him, " and, on the whole, I now accept the wisdom of the attitude society takes about those sort of things. I think these little pretences of love have much too important an influence on life to be treated as lightly as I treated them. Really, letting oneself love a man one's not married to is almost as wrong as letting oneself be married to a man one's not in love with."

Robin's fears, however, were at length shown to be only too well founded. The trouble began towards the end of their stay in Egypt, when June was drawing to a close. At first nothing was noticeable except a sudden falling off in the number of visitors at the villa; but this might have been partly due to the fact that several officials and their wives were now going home on leave. Then, one afternoon at the Casino, Mr. Dregge, the very correct

young diplomat, deliberately - turned away from Madeline as she approached, and in so doing showed quite plainly that he did not wish to commit himself to any definite line of action. He was always a kind of weathercock in social matters, for the extent of his cordiality or frigidity towards his acquaintances ever precisely indicated the degree of their popularity in Alexandrian society ; and Madeline therefore gave some thought to his attitude.

One day, while Robin was away at his work, matters suddenly came to a head. Madeline was sitting in the shade of the awnings on her terrace, enjoying the touch of the wind, which was cool from its long journey across the sea, when Rosa came out to her with the news that Lady Agatha Lawer and Mr. Smith, the Padre, had come to see her and were waiting in the drawing-room. Madeline was conscious that Rosa looked at her with an expression of some curiosity as she gave her mistress this news, as though she were anxious to see what effect it would produce; and her dark face seemed to be wreathed in smiles that were more than usually expansive and unnecessary.

Madeline at once arose and went into the house, her hair tossed back by the wind and her eyes sparkling as though with the gleam of the morning sunshine and the glint of the surf. Entering the room, she held out her hand to Lady Agatha, and there was surprise in her face when the latter only bowed stiffly to her. With a look of inquiry she turned to Mr. Smith.

" What's the matter ? " she asked. "You both look as though you'd come to a funeral."

" Mrs. Beechcroft," the Padre stammered, " we have a very disagreeable task to perform."

" So I see," replied Madeline. " Sit down: you'll feel more comfortable." She pointed to a chair, upon the edge of which

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he seated himself. Lady Agatha declined a similar invitation and remained standing. "The fact is," said Mr. Smith, "Lady Agatha and I have both received anonymous letters warning us against you, and as these letters seemed to confirm certain rumours that have been going about regarding you, we thought . . ." He paused, at a loss for words.

"You thought you'd come and ask me if what you'd been told was true," Madeline put in.

"Precisely," he answered.

"That's very proper of you," said Madeline. "Thank you." There was an awkward silence. Suddenly Madeline went across to the door and flung it open. Rosa, her maid, almost fell into the room.

"Rosa, how dare you?" exclaimed Madeline, in surprise. The woman gasped and darted away. Madeline closed the door again and turned calmly to her visitors. "I'm sorry," she said, "but my maid suffers from inquisitiveness. I shall have to get rid of her."

"Oh, don't be hard on her," Mr. Smith protested. She only . . ."

A sharp look from his companion silenced him. "Do you know her?" asked Madeline, her suspicions aroused.

"Oh, no, no," the Padre stammered. "She . . . er..."

"I see," said Madeline.

Again there was a pause. At length Lady Agatha drew in her breath and braced herself. "These letters and rumours," she said, "relate to your past life. They make very serious accusations against you. That is why we are here."

"Yes, so I gather," Madeline answered. "Let me hear the worst at once."

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" Very well," said Lady Agatha. " It is said that you are an immoral woman."

" Most of us are," Madeline remarked. " Tell me exactly what I am accused of."

Lady Agatha turned to Mr. Smith as though asking him to take over the painful task. He nodded to her. " It is said," he told her, " that you used to live in a flat in the city with a certain French tradesman to whom you were not married, and that later on last winter, in fact-you went up the Nile with an Italian nobleman, that is to say . . . er . . . you lived with him in open sin."

" Is that all ? " asked Madeline.

" It would be enough," said Lady Agatha.

" Quite enough," she replied. " But wasn't there anything else ? "

" Yes," the Padre went on. " It is also hinted that these were not the only men you had lived with. In the days when you were somewhat in the public eye, as Madeline Rorke, it is suggested that you were leading a loose life.

" If I deny the whole thing," asked Madeline, " what will you do ? "

" Of course we shall be very much relieved," he answered, with obvious sincerity. "For my own part, I confess I shall be awfully pleased." His face confirmed his words.

" The facts are very explicit," said Lady Agatha coldly. " I hardly think a mere denial is sufficient."

" And if I admit everything, what then ? " she asked.

The Padre's face fell. " Well, of course," he replied, " in a country like this, where we are expected to set an example, we English people have to be more strict than might be really necessary at home."

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" I think you're quite right," said Madeline.

" Our moral tone," he went on, " sets the tone of the whole place; and I, as a Churchman, of course, feel that our Christianity has to be a very living thing here, where it is, so to speak, on parade."

" And, therefore," Madeline rejoined, " if I admit your accusations you will demonstrate your Christianity by shutting your doors in my face."

"Do you admit them, then?" asked Lady Agatha.

" Oh, yes," said Madeline, " it's all perfectly true."

Lady Agatha gasped. "Come, Padre," she exclaimed. " I don't think it is necessary to embarrass Mrs. Beechcroft any further." She made a movement towards the door, but Madeline stayed her with a gesture.

"Please don't go," she begged. " I have a lot to say. Do sit down."

" Sit down ? " Lady Agatha exclaimed. " Here? Oh, surely you are not so hardened as to be unable to realize that in my eyes you are something to be fled from."

" Yes," replied Madeline, looking at her in grave contemplation, " I suppose it requires a great deal of moral courage for a respectable person to sit down with a sinner, like Christ used to do." The Padre nodded to his companion as though begging her to keep her temper and remain ; and, with evident reluctance, she consented to do so.

" I want you to realize this," said Madeline, addressing herself to Lady Agatha. " You have been brought up to look at these things in a certain way; I have been brought up just anyhow. I had to teach myself the things that were taught to you during your ordinary training. I had no training. And now I have completed that part of my self education, and have come to the point at which I accept the attitude of the ordinary man or woman.

I'm sorry for what I did, I think it was very stupid. I'm not referring to my life in Alexandria, because that was at a time when I really had no idea that my relationship to the man I was living with was in any way open to criticism. But later on, after I'd seen something of life, I ought to have known better. When I went up the Nile last winter with my Italian friend, I knew quite well that it was morally wrong; but I felt a sort of defiance about it. I didn't see why a woman should be cold-shouldered for doing that sort of thing and a man hardly even censured. Without thinking much about it, I felt it almost right to ignore the hypocrisy of society and do just what I liked. I see now that I was wrong ; and I want you to understand that, whatever I may have been in the past, I am now just what I have appeared to be in your drawing-rooms, an ordinary married woman."

Lady Agatha smiled disdainfully. You can't get rid of the past so easily," she said.

" I beg you," Madeline explained, " to realize that what you think of me, or how you treat me, is only of consequence to me because I am very deeply anxious that my husband shouldn't suffer. For my own part, I live according to my conscience, and how I live is entirely my own affair. But what is your affair is how you, and what is called Society, are going to treat me. That directly affects me because it affects my husband. I want to know, therefore, what you are going to do."

There was silence. The Padre seemed to be exceedingly uncomfortable : he stared at a picture on the wall as though admiring it. Lady Agatha turned her back and looked through the open window at the dazzling sea. Madeline spread out her hands and threw her head back, like one who calmly awaits the thrust of a sword.

" Here I am," she said, " a self-confessed sinner, who has been what is called converted Let the one who is without sin cast the first stone."

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Lady Agatha leapt round, her eyes flashing. " There is no call to be blasphemous! " she exclaimed.

" Blasphemous? " cried Madeline. "Why ' blasphemous ' ? is it blasphemy to repeat Christ's words under circumstances so similar to those in which they were uttered ? "

" Well, if it's not blasphemy," Lady Agatha retorted, " it's impertinence. You seem to be insinuating that we also are not free of the stain of adultery." "

" I'm sorry," Madeline replied quickly; " I ought not to have said that. I'd forgotten that Christ's words were spoken in regard to a woman who had committed adultery. They don't apply in my case I have never committed adultery."

" I don't quite understand," said the Padre.

" There's honour amongst thieves," Madeline answered. "Even in the days before my eyes were opened, I saw that it was wrong to come between a wife and her husband. Even then I thought adultery wrong."

" Excuses don't come well from you," said Lady Agatha.

" I am not trying to excuse myself," Madeline responded; "only I had no idea you thought I was an adulteress."

" Don't let's mince matters," her ladyship answered. " If you prefer it, I will regard you simply as a prostitute, one who sold her body for gold."

" But you're quite wrong," she protested, with palpable honesty. " I've never done such a thing in my life. Money never entered into my thoughts."

" You accuse yourself, I fear," said Mr. Smith. " Was it merely lust, then ? "

" No more than in the case of many marriages," she replied. " I was just Woman; Woman wanting to ignore the fact that society will never condone in the female what it winks at in the male; Woman untutored, and acting just as a man acts ; one of the thousands who have never wittingly come under the laws of society at all :

free but not libertines, changeable but not mercenary, outlaws but not dishonourable, thoughtless but not cruel, affectionate but not vicious, unrespectable but not indecent."

" You give yourself a good character," Lady Agatha remarked contemptuously.

Madeline flushed. " I'm sorry," she said. " I was thinking of the class, not of myself."

" As a man," the Padre put in, " I, understand, perhaps, better than you do, Lady Agatha. Mrs. Beechcroft has spoken very frankly, and I should like to be able to squash these rumours."

Her ladyship stiffened. " I don't believe in these sudden repentances," she sniffed.

" You couldn't be expected to," said Madeline.

" In my opinion," he went on, " we ought to let bygones be bygones. Mrs. Beechcroft has been very honest and open with us. . . ."

" Brazen, I should call it," sneered her ladyship.

" I'm sure you would," Madeline retorted, her temper rising. " It would take more insight than you possess to see the difference between truthfulness and effrontery. Because I admit what I might easily have denied, you are going to make my husband miserable by shutting your doors to me."

" I'm sorry for your husband, I'm sure," Lady Agatha replied. " But if a man is so quixotic as to marry a woman of your reputation, he must bear the consequences."

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Madeline's limit of endurance was reached, and the colour mounted to her cheeks.' " Oh, you pitiless creature ! " she cried. " It is you and your kind who daily crucify the Christ you pretend to serve. You say in the Lord's Prayer ' Thy Kingdom come,' and then you do your best to encourage bigotry and hypocrisy and intolerance and mercilessness and implacable unforgiveness, and all such things as make it impossible for the Kingdom of Heaven to come. Can't you see that Society will never be decent until it learns how to be tolerant without being lax ? Wasn't Christ accused of being lax ? D'you think he cared what people thought of him so long as they learnt from him the lesson of charity ? You call yourself a Christian and yet will not listen to the teaching of Christ. You set yourself up as an example to the Mohammedans of this country, yet make no effort to practise what the Master so emphatically taught. You are blind and deaf to his message, and you seem to think that by your implacability you are doing God service. Oh, go and lock yourself up in your fortified drawing room ; shut out the breaker of your rules, lest you be deemed a traitor to your tin-god of respectability. But, remember, as your door slams it has shut out not only me, the sinner, but also Christ, the friend of sinners."

Lady Agatha, deathly pale, walked slowly towards the door, as Madeline, overwrought and very close to tears, sat down suddenly upon a chair. The Padre, nervous and troubled, endeavoured to pour oil upon the waters; but Madeline cut short his stammered words.

" Oh, get out, both of you! " she cried, " or I'll pull my shoe off and throw it at you."

CHAPTER XXXI

HOMeward BOUND

IT was very fortunate that this incident occurred at a time when Madeline and Robin were known to be about to leave Egypt; for when, that evening, the affair was discussed between them the temporary solution of their difficulty was at once apparent. There was no necessity for an open feud with Society, nor was there any need to face the hostility of those who so rigidly upheld the fair name of England in this gay and cosmopolitan city. They had expected to leave at any rate within ten days ; and now that Robin's work was finished, there was no reason why they should not travel by a liner which was to sail in two days time.

The next morning, therefore, they secured their passages by this vessel ; and long before the scandal had become public knowledge they were steaming across the Mediterranean towards Europe, nor could it be said that they had left with any precipitation. Amongst their fellow-passengers there were but two or three members of the little English clique which had been about to cast them out, and even these had heard no more than a rumour of the trouble, and were therefore under no obligation to make themselves unpleasant.

Before leaving the shores of Egypt, Madeline had dismissed her maid, a step she had intended to take in any event. She suspected, but was not quite sure, that Rosa had for some unknown reason spread

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the rumours which led to the catastrophe ; but, mercifully, the need of probing the mystery and cornering the culprit was able to be avoided. Madeline heartily disliked any kind of scene: and, indeed, she could not easily bring herself to suppose that a servant to whom she had shown such kindness had deliberately caused the mischief. She knew, of course-for Robin had told her-that Daisy Jones had some knowledge of her past history, and that, consequently, Rosa might be expected also to have heard something about it. Robin had recalled the familiarity between Mrs. Jones and her maid: and to this Madeline had added the fact that the woman had been aware of her quite open visits to Madame Groyant and other old friends.

But, on the other hand, why should Rosa have taken the trouble to do her this ill turn ? What was there to be gained by it ? The woman, of course, had absolutely denied all knowledge of the trouble and Madeline had no wish to add fuel to the conflagration by telling her at all exactly what had happened and accusing her of being the cause of it. Rosa had therefore left her service, as arranged from the beginning, when their stay at Alexandria came to an end ; and there had been no friction between them other than that caused by Madeline's quiet denunciation of servants in general who suffered from inquisitiveness.

The whole affair had caused Robin a great deal of misgiving; but he comforted himself with the thought that in England his wife would not be so open to scrutiny as she had been in the busy little drawing-rooms of Alexandria. He was beginning to realize that his marriage to Madeline would always be the subject of criticism, and he knew now that he would have to face a great deal of unhappiness on her account. He only hoped that these rumours would not reach the ears of his

mother, for they would assuredly cause her the deepest distress. In speaking to Madeline, he did his best to hide his anxiety and to make light of his concern ; but the fact that he had taken the whole thing so calmly did not deceive her, nor was she the less unhappy because he did not attempt to reproach her. To him it would have seemed the grossest injustice to find fault with her at this stage of their relationship, he had married her with his eyes open ; she had hidden nothing from him; and he must now accept the consequences with as good, a grace as possible. His love for her was still very deep, and there were moments when he felt some sort of satisfaction at being called upon by circumstances to play the part of her champion.

As he stood with her on the deck of the liner, watching the low Egyptian coast receding into the distance, he slipped his arm through hers ; and, like a giant conscious of his strength, looked down at her with tenderness. " What does it matter, my darling," he said, in answer to her unspoken thought, " if all the world is against us? There's just you and me and It nobody else counts."

Madeline looked up at him, and her hand tightened on his arm. " Oh, Robin," she whispered, " I told you I should bring you sorrow. It breaks my heart to think that you should suffer for me."

" Dearest, I'm not in the least worried about it," he replied, with pardonable untruth. " Lady Agatha and her friends can go to hell! "

The voyage home was uneventful. The course taken by the liner on which they were travelling was much more interesting than that followed by the vessels plying between Port Said and Marseilles. Having crossed the open sea, they passed so close to the shores of Crete that they could see the little

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red-roofed cottages clustering on the hillsides and reflected in the intense blue of the sea. Then steering their way amongst the Greek Islands, they steamed close under the sunburnt slopes of Ithaca, with its memories of Ulysses; and thence, passing other charming islands, they made for the port of Venice, which they reached one early morning before the heat of the July sun had enveloped the city.

No one can be said to know Venice who has not approached her from the sea. The steamer threaded its way through a maze of low-lying islands, verdant with gardens and rich fields ; and at last, as they moved up the broad fairway, the domes and towers of the city came into view, gleaming in the morning sunlight against the soft haze of the sky. On their left was the great dome of Santa Maria della Salute, and ahead of them the Campanile and the great buildings grouped about St. Mark's gleamed at the entrance of the Grand Canal.

Madeline was intensely excited at seeing again the places she knew so well ; but after her late experiences in Alexandria she had no wish to remind Robin of her past adventures, and she refrained, therefore, from giving vent to her feelings. Even as they steamed past the Lido, where she had once spent a summer, she only pointed at it with her finger, though her heart took wings of ecstasy and flew thither over the blue water.

While they were standing on the quay, awaiting the clearing of their baggage, a man in the uniform of a hotel-commissionaire suddenly rushed forward and bowed profusely to Madeline, who at the moment was standing a little apart from her husband.

" Oh, signora," he said in Italian, " you remember me ? Are you coming again to our hotel ? How is the gentleman, your husband ? " He uttered the questions loudly and excitedly, as though to emphasize his pleasure at seeing her

again; and Robin did not fail to hear. For a moment he wondered how the man could possibly know him; and then, with a sinking of his heart, he realized that the commissionaire was referring to Prince Paolo, or some personage who had posed as Madeline's husband when she was last in Venice.

Robin went across to his wife and took her arm. "Somebody you know?" he asked casually, indicating the commissionaire.

The man at once realized the slip in tact that he had made. " No, sir," he said in English, " I was just asking madame if I could be of service. I am from the Lido Palace Hotel." He bowed, glanced shyly at Madeline, and took himself off.

Robin clenched his fists. " Oh God ! " he exclaimed; "can we never be rid of your wretched past ? "

Madeline bit her lips. " Oh, my dear," she said, " let's go and buy a thick veil for me to tie my head up in; and then let's make a bolt for England. At any rate my life in London wasn't particularly outrageous, and I dare say when I'm buried at Fylton I shall be free of these ghosts." She laughed perhaps a little hysterically.

" I don't see anything to laugh at," Robin growled.

" There's a sort of awful humour about it," she answered.

" I call it tragic," he replied shortly.

" Yes; but it wouldn't be tragic if it wasn't for the Lady Agathas of the world," she said. " The way I look at it is this: from a genuine conviction I have given up that sort of life, and any really moral community ought therefore to make things easy for me, so that I may have a chance of finding my feet. But Society's whole idea seems to be to shut out the repentant sinner. The idea of making any fuss over the lost sheep that is found is thought by

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Christians to be just Christ's fun, I suppose. They don't dream of taking him seriously in this, or in any other matter. When Christ said to the adulteress, 'Go, and sin no more,' it all seemed so simple; but I'll bet it wasn't. I expect she found every door shut against her except one, and that one was in a back street, and sounds of drunken laughter and oaths and the smell of wine came from it. I'm sure I, personally, don't care a brass farthing how many doors are shut against me, except in so far as it affects you, my darling ; and I'm not asking for any consideration for myself. But it does seem all wrong somehow-this fear of contamination, or whatever it is. I'm not making light of my misdeeds. I'm not like the woman who had an illegitimate baby and pleaded that it was only a very small one. I admit my crimes, and only ask to be allowed to take my place amongst the people whose ranks by sheer conviction I've joined."

" The world," replied Robin, " has got to advance a long way before it reaches that point of view."

" No, it hasn't got to advance at all," she answered. " It's got to go back-back to the teaching of Christ."

The disquieting thoughts produced in Robin's mind by the incident, and by the consequent discussion, were soon dispelled by the fascination of travel. Madeline was a delightful companion upon a journey: she remained always unruffled and unworried by the little things that so often disturb the equilibrium of the traveller.

Many people who are making a long journey regard the place from which they have come and the place to which they are bound as two cities of refuge between which there stretches a howling wilderness, full of pitfalls, and inhabited by monsters in the shape of surly railway guards and porters, cruel hotel clerks, desperate hall-porters, and apparently dying

cab-horses; a vicious land wherein dragon-like locomotives scream and snort and belch out their fiery breath; where one's baggage assumes colossal and menacing proportions or suddenly fades into terrifying invisibility; where grinning clocks deceive and hideous cab drivers are deaf to reason ; where frenzied timetables jabber endless figures and stations are packed with wrong trains stolidly insisting that they are right.

But Madeline, being essentially cosmopolitan, was as much at home *en route* as others are in their own drawing-room. She spoke whatever language was current ; she possessed the art of travelling light ; and her attention, being undistracted, was wholly turned to the pleasures of the road.

As Robin sat by her side in the gondola which was taking them to the station, he was once again profoundly conscious of his wisdom in linking his life to one who was so essentially fitted to be the wife of a traveller. He looked at her trim, smart figure ; and, as his eyes caught hers, they both laughed from sheer delight. They had engaged a compartment in the *wagon lit* which would presently carry them to Paris, and soon they were comfortably seated in it, and were speeding through the sunlit plains of Lombardy towards the distant Alps.

They spent, a happy night in Paris, dining expensively, and looking in at an outrageously amusing revue; and next morning they set out for England, feeling themselves to be a "returning honeymoon couple whose life lay before them all radiant in the sunshine of their love. As the train neared London, however, and the smoke of the city cast a dull haze over the afternoon sun, Robin observed that Madeline had become restless and perturbed. She uttered a sigh when he asked her the reason of her disquietude.

" Oh, I don't know! " she said, with a deprecating

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gesture. "It's these slums, I suppose. Look at them ! Streets upon streets, all the same, all dirty and overcrowded. It's all very well to feel that one has something to say to the world ; but nobody can hope to make an impression on all that mass of squalor. It makes one feel so hopeless. It is one thing to talk ideals to a lot of picked labour leaders gathered together in a gorgeous setting : it's quite another thing to face the uneducated masses in the gloom of their own mean streets. And yet I've got to do it-somehow."

" What do you mean ?," Robin asked anxiously. " Did you promise James Cottar that you'd do slum work with him, or what ? " He looked closely at her as he asked the question, but there was something in her eyes that he did not understand. She was staring in front of her, and it seemed almost as though she did not see him.

No, I made no promises," she said, speaking slowly, her face slightly turned from him. " I don't know why I said I'd got to do it. It's as though something were forcing me along, obliging me to do what I don't want to do."

Robin pressed her hand, and laughed. He knew that women who were prospective mothers often acted in an abnormal manner and that their thoughts were wont to become exaggerated. Cottar had evidently put into her head the idea that she had a great mission to perform, and the suggestion had taken root. Inwardly he cursed the Labour Member for a fool.

The train steamed into the terminus, and a few moments later Robin was introducing Madeline to his mother. The elder Mrs. Beechcroft was a stout, grey-haired woman, imposing in manner and yet evidently kindly in nature. With a tremendous sense of relief Madeline realized at once that her mother-in-law was a woman with whom she would be at

her ease. They might view life from an entirely different standpoint, they might have little in common, their sentiments might even be opposed ; but there would be no awkwardness or shyness between them. This fact was apparent on the instant.

" So this is our dear Madeline ! " Mrs. Beechcroft exclaimed, as she kissed her daughter-in-law, and held her at arms length as though examining her. " Yes, you are just as my brother described you. Dear me ! what a relief it is to find that he was right for once."

Madeline laughed. " Why ? " she asked. " Were you afraid I'd be something horrible ? "

" No, no," she answered quickly, " only . . . Oh, you can understand a mother's anxiety." Madeline understood, indeed, well enough; and as they drove, in the warmth of the July afternoon, through the crowded streets to the house in Knightsbridge where Mrs. Beechcroft lived, the trio seemed to be enjoying a sense of remarkable comfort. The situation, which might have been so awkward, proved to be so easy to handle ; and again Robin congratulated himself on the wisdom of the step he had taken.

It had been decided that they should spend the night in London, and that next day the happy couple should go down to Fylton, where Mrs. Beechcroft had made all arrangements for their arrival. Fylton Manor was situated a few miles from Hulchester, a country town about half an hour's run by train from London ; and there Madeline would be mistress of her own house, and would be able quietly to await the great event which was expected to take place some time in the following November, while, at the same time, she and Robin would be able to keep in touch with London. That evening the three of them dined alone, afterwards

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sitting out on the verandah, which overlooked the Park, until the warm summer night was far advanced.

The house at Fylton proved to possess all the charm that Robin had described. It was a typical Elizabethan manor, standing in beautiful old-world gardens and furnished with care and taste. It was comfortable, and was fitted with what the agents call "all modern conveniences"; that is to say, it had excellent bathrooms, a good supply of hot water, and its own electric-light plant. Madeline was delighted with it, and Robin's happiness was very great as he led her from room to room.

"Yes, I'm sure I shall be awfully happy here," she said. "You were quite right: in summer, at any rate, the English country-side can't be beaten. The house is perfect, the furniture delightful, the gardens are glorious, your little car looks comfortable and your dog is a darling! I couldn't ask for anything more."

CHAPTER XXXII

GATHERING CLOUDS

ABOUT a fortnight after their arrival in England, Robin received an unwelcome piece of news which very considerably upset his plans. Throughout his military career his duties had never been onerous. He had seen a certain amount of fighting in various parts of the world, but he had never remained for long with his regiment, being generally chosen for special missions or other personal work. For months at a time he had been allowed to conduct his explorations, or to carry out research work, either for the Government or for some scientific institutes. His knowledge of Arab affairs had made him very valuable to the Foreign Office, and there had been no indication of any desire on the part of the authorities to confine him to his regimental duties. But now, suddenly, he received orders to join his battalion in their permanent camp in Berkshire ; and it was understood that in a few months they would be sent abroad.

He had expected to be allowed to work at home or in London in the preparation of his reports ; but the new arrangements made it impossible for him to be at Fylton at all frequently, and consequently Madeline was left very much alone during the autumn. It seemed, indeed, as though Fate were preparing the ground for some sort of domestic disaster, for absence does not invariably make the heart grow fonder.

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Mrs. Beechcroft paid her two or three short visits ; but she was a woman whose engagements - social, charitable, political and parochial - did not permit of her leaving London for long. She and Madeline were good enough friends, but they had little in common; and, indeed, on certain points they differed so radically that considerable tact had to be used in avoiding useless discussions. A number of people called at the Manor, but Madeline preferred at this time to see as few strangers as possible, and visitors were generally told that she " was not very well and was resting," a statement the cause of which was now common knowledge in the neighbourhood.

To say that she was happy would hardly have been true at this time. She was troubled in regard to Robin, for his military duties had taken complete possession of his mind. There had been some trouble in the Sudan, and his regiment was likely to be sent out there in the near future ; and he himself had been approached in regard to the conducting of a special mission into the interior, having for its purpose the winning over of a doubtful tribe.

Robin was full of the subject and could think of little else. A woman is certainly not at her best a few weeks before her child is born. She is sensitive, and is more conscious of her husband's shortcomings than she might be under normal conditions; and he, on his part, instinctively assumes the business like manners of the protective male creature.

An incident occurred too, which caused some little difference of opinion between them. Some of the upper rooms at the Manor required to be redecorated, and a man was sent over from Hulchester to do the work. He was a curious little Cockney; middle aged, very wizen, and probably consumptive. He had tired grey eyes, over which the lids drooped; and his stained teeth were worn down on one side

from the constant smoking of a pipe. Madeline talked to him one morning as he stood upon a board between two folding ladders, a can of paint and a brush in his hands.

"Well, Mr. Harris, what d'you think of the Member for Hulchester's speech in the papers this morning ? " she asked him, referring to the very conservative utterance which had been made.

The little man rubbed his hand upon the skirts of his white, paint-splashed coat. " 'E's a back number," he said. " It's time 'e laid out o' nights."

" It's what ? " she asked, perplexed.

" It's time he was put to bed with a spade," he answered.

Madeline was amused at his expressions, and for some time she discussed the questions of the day with him. The next afternoon she talked to him again, and still finding him interesting, asked him to come down into the drawing-room and have tea with her. The man was much taken back by the invitation, but Madeline helped him off with his coat and led him downstairs. She found him a chair by the fire, and handed him a cup of tea and a slice of cake ; then, seating herself on the sofa, she discussed house decoration with him until the daylight faded and the lamps were lit.

She was expecting her husband home late that evening: but, as chance would have it, he caught an earlier train than he had expected, and suddenly walked into the room at a moment when the painter was emphasizing his remarks with a spoon. The little man rose to his feet with such suddenness that he nearly upset his cup. Robin, having kissed his wife, stared at him in amazement.

" This is Mr. Harris," said Madeline. " He's painting the rooms upstairs. We've just been having such an interesting talk."

" I'm afraid I've interrupted you," remarked Robin.

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" No, sir," replied Mr. Harris nervously. " I was just a-going." He put his cup down hastily, and began to back out of the room.

" Oh, don't go," said Madeline.

" I think I'll get back to my work," he answered, and with some precipitation slipped through the door.

Robin turned to his wife. " Why on earth d'you give him tea in here ? " he asked.

" Because he's interesting to talk to," she laughed, as she drew him down on to the sofa beside her.

" But he's only a working man," Robin protested.

Well ? " she said. "Is that any reason why he shouldn't have tea with me ? "

" No; but it isn't usually done."

" He's a man with character and brains, an artist in his way. I shouldn't have invited him otherwise."

Robin knew that it was of no use to argue the point. He quite realized that his objections could not be defended. If he protested that the servants would think their mistress eccentric, he would lay himself open to the obvious retort that such criticism was of no importance. In his imagination he saw Madeline scandalizing the neighbourhood by introducing Lady Frogham of Frogham Hall to Mr. Jepp the butcher, or the Squire to Miss Wiggins of the Hulchester Model Laundry. It was all the fault of that confounded James Cottar and his crew, who had poured their utterly unpractical Socialism into his wife's ears.

Madeline put her arms about him. " I know exactly what you're thinking," she said. " But, darling, do give me credit for not being a crank. I'm not going to fill your drawing-room with impossible people, only, when one sees a funny

little man painting in a cold room, and finds he's a very amusing talker, I don't see why one shouldn't bring him downstairs. You can trust me to know where the limits are."

Robin took some time to recover from his annoyance; and Madeline, on her part, felt that she had been misjudged, and the thought did not add to her happiness.

It was on the fifteenth of November that her child was born. Robin reached Fylton shortly after the event, having been telegraphed for as soon as Madeline's hour was upon her; and his joy was complete when he was told that he was the father of a fine healthy boy. He was only able to stay with his wife for a few days ; but in that short time the greatest emotion of his life seemed to pass over him.

In the dimly lighted room Madeline lay white and quiet, her fingers gripping his hand ; and there was a look in her face so transcending all he knew of beauty and tenderness and peace, that his very life seemed to be shaken to its foundations. In the weeks which followed, Madeline again and again recalled to mind the words of love he had uttered as he stood by her bedside ; and the happiness which they brought her largely contributed to her rapid recovery. When the bells of Christmastide were ringing she was up and about, and life seemed to contain once more the blessed stimulant of physical well-being.

One of the first visitors-not to mention her mother-in-law-whom she received at Fylton was Father Gregory. Owing to certain complications in connection with his financial affairs he had decided, with many regrets, not to go out to Egypt this winter; and he had settled himself down in his small country house to battle, as best he could, with the inclemency of the English climate. He

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spent a long day with Madeline, discussing the past, the present, and the future ; and she found him to be, as ever, her friend and councillor.

On matters connected with spiritual subjects, however, there seemed to be a certain lack of understanding between them ; and Father Gregory's mind was by no means at ease in this respect. The direction of Madeline's thoughts had led her, it seemed to him, to take up an attitude too drastic, too mutinous, to be acceptable or even wise. Her months of quiet speculation and study had given her a remarkable command of her subject ; and she seemed to have at her finger-ends every essential passage of the New Testament, and she could uphold her statements with chapter and verse, often turning his own arguments back upon himself.

Sometimes when he wished to set her right he had the feeling that, on the contrary, she was performing the same operation upon him. It was like drawing the dentist's teeth. And yet he could not remove from his mind the consciousness which rightly or wrongly he had always had that she was, in some measure, inspired. He felt obliged, almost against his will, to listen to her. Nor was he able to feel towards her any other than tender sentiments. She was his child, and in a spiritual sense, he felt himself to be her father; yet he was conscious, as indeed sometimes a father is in regard to his offspring, that affection rather than understanding was the bond between them.

Certain remarks that she made, however, gave him cause for great thankfulness. There could be no doubt that slowly, very slowly, the Master was revealing himself to her in an aspect transcending human nature; and some glimmer of his Godhead was becoming apparent to her.

" You know," she said to him, " I have been feeling lately that the carpenter of Nazareth whom

you call God and whom I call the Christ, the God given Teacher, is not simply a memory, but is alive, is here, now. I can't explain quite what I mean ; for I certainly don't mean merely what the words convey. It is as though he were a force, a kind of energy, pressing itself upon me. Two or three times lately while I have been sitting in silence with my baby, or at night when I have been asleep, I have been conscious of something, something very tender, very loving, very gentle yet forceful, speaking to me. I sat up in bed one night suddenly, and, half-awake, heard myself saying 'Yes ? I'm listening : what is it ? ' But the sensation just drifted into a kind of general feeling of-what shall I call it ?-beauty or longing or something."

Before he left Father Gregory questioned her as to her child's christening, pointing out that the ceremony ought soon to be performed. Madeline, however, seemed to desire to put off the event, and it was obvious to him that she was evading a direct answer.

" Is there anything distasteful to you in the idea of your son being received into the Church ? " he asked.

"No," she replied. "It's not that. But I've been reading the baptismal service, and there are some things I can't tolerate. Don't be angry."

He put his hand on her arm. "My child," he said, " there are many things in the Prayer Book that require revision. Most of us admit it frankly. Tell me what it is that upsets you."

" Oh, the whole underlying idea," she answered. " A child is supposed by the Church to be ' conceived and born in sin,' and by baptism he is ' delivered from God's wrath.' The prayers ask God, ' who of his great mercy didst save Noah and his family in the ark,' to forgive the child his original sin, and they beg Him not to be furious with the poor little fellow

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any more, but to forget the unfortunate Adam and Eve affair and to allow him to become an inheritor of everlasting bliss. Forgive me, my dear, but it's all such nonsense."

" You are too literal," he replied, with a smile of gentle reproof. " Yet, in all the Prayer Book I know of no more wonderful passage than those words the priest speaks as he baptizes the child: ' We receive this child into the congregation of Christ's flock, and do sign him with the sign of the cross, in token that hereafter he shall not be ashamed to confess the faith, and continue Christ's faithful soldier and servant unto his life's end."

" Yes, that's beautiful," she answered. " I'll have to listen just to that and forget the rest."

" Well, don't delay it too long," he said.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE GREEN-EYED MONSTER

ONE morning in the early days of January, Henry Morland paid a visit to the large house in Mayfair where Daisy Jones lived with her father, Colonel Winterbottom. He brought with him two watercolour paintings which he had been commissioned by her to execute, and when he had delivered these into her somewhat unappreciative keeping, and had pocketed her very handsome cheque, he was invited to remain to luncheon. Mrs. Jones had a distinct leaning towards the amenities of society, and there were present at her table on this particular day a number of persons whose names appear (by what means is always a mystery) in the social columns of the leading newspapers. Augustus Blake too, was amongst the guests ; and throughout the meal he talked such pure magic to the young ladies on either side of him that the twentieth century must have faded from their minds in a very turmoil of wizards and witches, cauldrons and herbal odours, while, judging from their enthralled expressions, red devils must have seemed to sit on the edge of his plate and grim elementals on the back of his chair.

During the meal mention was made of Robin Beechcroft, and at this a heavy-eyed young woman, who was sitting beside Henry Morland and whose conversation until now had confined itself to art and the weather, aroused herself to some show of interest.

" I hear his wife has presented him with a bouncing boy," she said, turning to her hostess.

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" Yes," answered Mrs. Jones, " isn't it lovely for him ! I do adore babies."

" She's rather an odd woman, isn't she ? " the other remarked. " I'm told she has a lurid past."

Mrs. Jones laughed. " Oh, but she's very beautiful," she said, " and she has brains, and that of course, is really all that matters."

Augustus Blake glanced curiously at her. " Personally, I think she is just the right sort of wife for an explorer," he said. " She is so full of the love of life and adventure. Her aura is a blaze of colours, all except red, which means, at any rate, that there is no evil in her."

Mrs. Jones addressed the table at large. " If a woman is vivacious and beautiful," she remarked, " men forgive all the rest."

Henry Morland's heavy-eyed neighbour turned to him. " Do you know her ? " she asked.

" Yes," he answered shortly.

" And what's your opinion, as an artist ? " she queried.

" I'd rather give my opinion as a man," he replied, in tones which all present were able to hear.

" What is it ? " she said.

" I think she is altogether above our criticism," he answered ; and therewith a silence fell upon the company. When luncheon was finished and the guests, with the exception of Blake and himself, had departed, Morland returned to the subject.

" Have you seen Mrs. Beechcroft lately ? " he asked his hostess.

" No," she answered; " I must really motor down to Fylton one day soon and congratulate her. Why shouldn't we three go down together ? I can sit between you and Plato, and you can keep me warm."

As a matter of fact, I have something I want to do in Hulchester, which is quite close."

Blake laughed. " Why Hulchester, of all places ? " he asked.

" I want to interview a servant there," she replied ; " someone I've heard of, to replace one of my present housemaids-Mary, you know."

" What's wrong with Mary ? " asked Blake. " She's a pretty little wench. I'd like to have her myself."

" There you go again ! " cried Mrs. Jones. " She's pretty and so she can have no faults. Now, actually that girl is servant, maid, ox and ass all rolled into one, and yet nobody could possibly covet her." Mrs. Jones went across to her writing-table and glanced at her engagement-book. " Why shouldn't we go tomorrow ? " she suggested. " If it's fine, the air will do us all good."

Henry Morland began to make an excuse, but his hostess stopped him ; and presently the excursion was arranged for the following day. Thus it came about that the three of them arrived at the Manor early the next afternoon, Mrs. Jones having given them luncheon at Hulchester, where she had interviewed her prospective maid. Now it happened that Robin was on a brief holiday at home that day, and was sitting with Madeline before a blazing fire in the study, thoroughly enjoying a quiet rest, when the three visitors were announced.

" Oh, damn! " he muttered. " Oh, hang! " said she.

They moved their feet from the high fender upon which they had been resting, and, with many grimaces, went across the hall to the drawing room, which Robin entered a moment or two after his wife.

The greetings that ensued were remarkable. Mrs. Jones held out her hands to Madeline and made a

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sort of rat-tat-tat with them upon her two elbows. Then, saying " I simply must, kiss you," she suited the action to the word and produced an unusually loud noise with her lips, somewhere in the vicinity of Madeline's cheek. As she did so she caught sight of Robin, and the colour rushed into her-face in a most embarrassing manner.

" Why, this is a surprise ! " she cried, offering her hand with some traces of shyness. " I thought you were away in camp."

Meanwhile Madeline was shaking hands with the two men, and presently Robin and Henry Morland were face to face. Both obviously attempted to put some warmth into their greeting ; but their success in this was not conspicuous. Morland would certainly not have come had he thought that he would meet Robin, for, without actually disliking him, he felt a sort of hostility towards him as being the husband of the woman he loved.

Robin, on his part, had by no means forgotten the incidents in Cairo which had aroused his unreasoning jealousy of the artist ; and he now had to use a certain amount of self-control in order to take a sane view of the matter and to behave in a manner befitting a host.

" I brought Mr. Morland along," said Daisy Jones to Robin, " because he was saying such nice things about your wife yesterday at lunch ; and, besides, I thought the drive would do him good and take him out of himself. We didn't expect to find you here."

Her words were like poison in Robin's ear. Whether they were said intentionally to cause mischief between him and his wife, or whether they were the idle prattle of an idle woman, their effect was electric ; and without further comment he turned his back upon Morland and addressed himself exclusively to Mrs. Jones.

" You dear man," she went on; " why haven't you been to see me lately? It's fully a month since you last came to my house."

Madeline, who was speaking to Augustus Blake, glanced quickly at them, leaving some remark about the weather quite unfinished. She had not known that her husband had been to see Mrs. Jones in London : he had never mentioned the fact to her. A sudden cloud of annoyance passed across her mind, but this she dismissed with an inward shrug as she turned to resume her conversation with Blake. The goggle eyes of the mystic, however, were fixed upon Robin and Daisy Jones, and the antics of the barometer seemed no longer to interest him. Having some knowledge of past events, Madeline recognized the symptoms of jealousy in his face, and the sense of annoyance returned to her mind as she realized that her husband's relationship to Mrs. Jones, whatever it was, was still of a nature to upset the equilibrium of that little woman's cavalier. Finding her remarks in regard to the English climate unanswered, Madeline moved across to Henry Morland, who was now standing alone, and who evidently felt the awkwardness of the situation.

" It's nice to see you again," she said. " I've often wanted to have another talk to you about the things that interest us both. D'you remember our long talks ? "

" I shall never forget them," he, replied fervently. " Those were happy days."

As she replied, Madeline became aware that her husband's eyes were turned full upon her, and simultaneously Mrs. Jones observed that Robin's attention was concentrated upon his wife. It was a pentagonal business, and it boded ill for the success of the afternoon.

Augustus Blake broke the awkward silence that followed. " And how's the baby ?" he asked, addressing himself to Madeline. "We all want to see it."

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Mrs. Jones flashed a look of undisguised irritation at him. It was as though she imagined he had introduced the subject of the baby to remind her that Robin was a husband and a father.

" He's out in the garden in his pram," Madeline replied. " Shall we go out ? "

" Yes, please," said Blake, with a gay smile. Henry Morland moved away and stared desolately out of the window as the others began to leave the room. The thought of her motherhood was as a dagger turned in his wounded breast.

" Aren't you coming ? " Mrs. Jones called out to him.

" No," he answered. " I'm going to have a look at Beechcroft's antiques: babies annoy me. They're so badly drawn, and I hate anything pink."

" Oh, you nasty great big black-bearded beast," she laughed, showing the tip of her tongue between her teeth. " I believe you're jealous ! "

Morland swung round sharply. " What d'you mean ? " he exclaimed; but with a mischievous wave of her hand she darted from the room and shut the door.

The nurse was wheeling the perambulator to and fro on the flagged pathway at the side of the lawn, but now she came to a standstill as Mrs. Jones and Madeline, followed by Blake and Robin, approached.

" Is he asleep ? " asked his mother.

" No, he's awake and cooing to himself like a little dove," the nurse replied ; and therewith the party surrounded the perambulator.

" Oh, isn't he a darling !" exclaimed Mrs. Jones, clapping her hands. She glanced at Robin. " He doesn't take after you a bit, does he ? "

" No," said Robin; " he's going to have his mother's brown hair."

" I think he'll be darker than she is," Daisy Jones answered innocently. " Isn't it awful to think that that pink, downy face will one day have a great black beard !
" She held out one finger of her gloved hand and wagged it in front of the baby's face.

" You'll frighten him," said Blake; and, leaning over the recumbent little form, he made a grotesque and comical face, which apparently had no ill effect, for the gurgling chuckles that came from the small toothless mouth were not discontinued.

" Oh, look! " cried Mrs. Jones; " he loves Plato." Thus encouraged, Blake pulled a series of amazing grimaces. He raised his eyebrows and rolled up his eyes till only the whites showed. He squinted, frowned, and sucked in his cheeks. He shot out his tongue, showed his teeth like a savage dog, and then shut his lips and drew down his jaw. With each new expression the humour became less, the roguery greater ; and presently even the roguery was displaced by something else, something lewd and horrible. Then suddenly a high, wailing cry came from the perambulator; and Madeline, pushing him aside, leaned over her baby to comfort him. The cries, however, were not so easily stopped ; and presently Madeline had to take him in her arms and to rock him to and fro a struggling little bundle of wraps and woolly garments.

" There now, look what you've done," said Mrs. Jones, thumping Blake's chest; and at every thump he uttered a squeak like an india rubber toy. He was in a playful mood.

" It's what they used to do to me when I was a child," he remarked. " Dreadful faces . . ."

" Who did ? " asked she.

" I don't know who they were," he answered, and changed the conversation.

" I think you'd better leave me to it," laughed

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Madeline ; and therewith Robin led his two visitors away into the garden.

She carried her baby back to the house, and his cries having suddenly ceased, she left him in the nurse's charge and went to find Henry Morland, who, she supposed, would be thinking himself neglected.

She found him in the drawing-room, standing in front of a cabinet of Greek and Egyptian antiquities, fingering his black beard thoughtfully with one hand, while the other rested on his hip. Even in European clothes he was still a picturesque figure.

" Hullo ! " she said. " Why didn't you come out to see my baby ? "

" I was looking at your husband's collection," he answered.

Well, I think it very rude of you," she told him. "You ought to have been jumping about, and standing on your head, and making noises to amuse him ; that's what I expect my friends to do. We are friends still, by the way, aren't we ?

He looked at her with his dark eyes ablaze. " I haven't changed at all, you know," he said. " For me you are still the only woman in the world."

" Oh, bosh ! " she exclaimed. " We haven't even seen each other for eight months."

" Yes," he answered bitterly. " And I'm sure I don't know why I came today; somehow I wasn't able to resist the temptation."

Madeline looked at him with sadness in her eyes, and the magic of her smile should have been medicine of healing to his heart. " Oh, my dear," she said, "do put all that sort of thing out of your head"

With an obvious effort he swallowed back the words he wished to say and controlled his rebel emotions.

Madeline attempted to change the current of his thoughts by directing his attention to one or two pictures in the room which were of especial interest.

" That," she said, pointing to an early Russian ikon, " is supposed to be the Madonna. Or, if you prefer modern humour, over there are some of the originals of E. T. 'Reed's ' Prehistoric, Peeps.' "

He stared at them for some time in silence, but it was apparent that his mind was not taking in the impressions which his eyes received.

" I wonder," he mused, at length, "whether I shall ever do my symbolic portrait of you. I have enough sketches to work from, but my ideas move too fast for me. I see you generally with your arms raised. Hold them up a moment for me, will you ? Like this." He lifted his own arms to show her what he meant, and she imitated the gesture. "Throw your head back a little," he said; and, in the enthusiasm of the artist, he put his hands upon her wrists and bent her arms into the desired position. As he did so the door opened and her husband entered the room.

" What the devil are you doing ? " Robin exclaimed, his face flushed with anger.

Henry Morland swung round with a muttered oath.

" He's posing me," said Madeline, trying to laugh. A wove of jealousy, such as he had experienced once before in Egypt, swept over Robin's mind and overwhelmed him.

" Oh, really," he growled. "Well, I may be old-fashioned, but I don't care for my wife to be pawed about by artists.

" Robin, dear," Madeline protested. " Please . . ."

Henry Morland took a step towards the intruder and the two men faced one another. Robin was evidently endeavouring to behave himself like a gentleman, but somehow the thought that this hot-

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blooded artist would be in England, and within reach of his wife, whilst he himself was off to the Sudan, was intolerable to him.

Madeline deliberately placed herself between them and laid her hand on Robin's arm. He pushed her aside roughly, and, with clenched fists, seemed to menace the very life of his enemy. Morland was a smaller and lighter man; but he stood his ground, his face pale and his black eyes blazing.

" Now, understand me," said Robin, " after you leave this house I forbid you ever to see my wife again. D'you hear? "

" Yes, I hear," he replied between his set teeth ; " but you don't seem to realize that we are not living in the Middle Ages. Women are not goods and chattels nowadays."

" We needn't argue about it," was the infuriated reply, " unless you want your teeth knocked down your throat."

Again Madeline intervened. She was sick at heart and shamed, and she prayed only that the ground would open and swallow her. " Oh, Robin! " she cried ; "what is this unreasoning jealousy of yours ? "

" I'm not jealous," he answered; "but I'm not going to have any fooling about such as you indulged in before we were married."

The words had hardly passed from his lips, before he repented of them. He would rather have bitten his tongue out than have said them. He saw Madeline recoil; he saw the colour leave her face ; and he wished himself dead.

You cad! " exclaimed Morland, and in an instant he had struck Robin a smart blow across the mouth with his open hand.

Madeline uttered a horrified cry. " How dare you ! " she exclaimed ; but even as she spoke her husband leapt forward, and his two hands fixed

themselves upon Morland's throat. For a moment it seemed as though he would throttle him where he stood ; but, actually, Robin's heart was not in the fight: he was too ashamed of himself, too wretched, to permit his anger any longer to master him. His hold relaxed and he groaned aloud.

Thus released, Henry Morland sprang back. His hand dived like lightning into the pocket of his coat, and a moment later he had opened a large clasp-knife, and, like an assassin, was preparing to spring. Robin looked at him with uncomprehending eyes, from which all the light of battle had faded ; but Madeline ran forward in horrified apprehension.

" Put that knife down," she cried, and her voice rang out like a command. " How can you be such a savage ? "

" It equalizes matters a bit," he answered, with a short laugh.

" Will you please do as I tell you ? " she said. " I'm ashamed of you - you, with your brains - behaving like an uncontrolled child."

Very slowly he shifted his position, and something of embarrassment was to be seen in his attitude as, under her reproving gaze, he began to recover his senses. With a vicious snap the knife closed and was returned to his pocket. Then he rearranged his disordered collar and tie, and presently walked across to the window.

Complete silence ensued for the space of at least a minute. At length Robin turned to Madeline, and his eyes pleaded for forgiveness. " I'm sorry, I'm so sorry," he whispered. " It shall never occur again, I promise you. I feel an absolute idiot."

She took his hand and pressed it. " I was jealous, too," she replied, " just for a moment-about you and Mrs. Jones. But I put it from me. Robin, we've all got to put such feelings from us. They're the very devil."

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She held her hand out to Henry Morland, who had glanced in her direction. "Come, here a moment, please," she said.

He came across to her obediently. "Now look here, both of you," she began. "I love my husband, and this afternoon I have been jealous of his attentions to Daisy Jones. Mr. Blake appears to be in love with Daisy Jones and is jealous of Robin. Daisy Jones seems to be attracted to Robin and is jealous of me. Robin loves me and is jealous of Henry Morland. Henry Morland thinks he loves me and is jealous of Robin. Now, could anything be more childish, more undignified? For heaven's sake let's try to cast this thing from us as we would a serpent. It's a relic of some bygone age, and it's still the curse of humanity.

For God's sake let's root it out of our natures as something utterly contemptible, something that checks all progress, something that rises up like a foul fiend to bar our way in all directions. If we can't do anything else, let's kill it with ridicule. Let's laugh at it . . . always laugh at it." Her words were interrupted by the entrance of Mrs. Jones and Augustus Blake.

"We've been right round the grounds," said the former, "down by the stream and back through the stable yard." She glanced up at Robin.

"Why did you give us the slip?"

"To see about tea," he answered..

"Oh, what a fib!" she laughed, but there was such malice in her voice that all could recognize it. "You wanted to see that your wife wasn't succumbing to the charms of our bad bold artist. Oh, you men!"

She looked up into Robin's face with languishing eyes; and suddenly Augustus Blake turned sharply on his heel, thrust his hands savagely into his pockets, and walked over to the fireplace.

Madeline exchanged glances, first with her husband and then with Henry Morland. There was laughter dancing in her eyes-such sheer merriment that its infection was irresistible. For a moment she seemed to be choking it back, and her lips quivered in a convulsive manner that presently, as by magic, set Robin's shoulders shaking. There was an explosion somewhere at the back of his nose and throat ; and thereat Madeline threw back her head and gave vent to an intoxicating peal of glorious laughter. Morland looked from one to the other for a moment, and then, he, too, uttered a loud guffaw.

" Why, whatever are you laughing at ? " asked Mrs. Jones, somewhat bewildered.

Madeline controlled herself. " We're laughing at the most ridiculous thing in the world," she said.

"And what's that ? " asked Augustus Blake, who had turned to listen.

" ' Prehistoric Peeps,' " said Madeline.

CHAPTER XXXIV

AN INTERVIEW

IT was Sunday afternoon, and in the second half of January, when Canon Rutting entered his smart brougham to drive the three miles which separated Hulchester, of which he was vicar, from Fylton, where Madeline resided. He was a cleric of extremely High Church tendencies, and there is no doubt that he would have long since joined the Church of Rome had he not felt that it was more fitting for an English gentleman to support home institutions : especially one who regularly followed the hounds and was an excellent " short-leg " or " point " in the cricket field. Nevertheless, his views and beliefs were not quite in accordance with the principles of the Reformation ; but, after all, whose were nowadays ? He had just been conducting a military service-Hulchester being a garrison town-and his mind still dwelt upon the subject of his discourse. He had been telling the soldiers how God, in his infinite wisdom, sometimes brought wars upon mankind in order to awaken us all from the slothful sleep into which we so often fell ; and he felt that his address had been very stirring in its simplicity. His only regret was that his words had fallen upon such uneducated ears; and as he drove along the frosty road, he determined to repeat them on the following Sunday to his regular congregation.

" Of course," he had said in conclusion, " a great many brave men have to die for our dear flag; but

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they have their reward. There is a place beneath the ground where all departed spirits go, to wait the day of judgment. It is a beautiful place. It is called Hell, and our Creed tells us how Christ 'descended into Hell.' That of course, is only its name. It is really a place of rest after all the toil and turmoil of life. Christ went there for three days after he was crucified, so it must be beautiful. Think how many people have died since the world began ! They are all there ! Isn't that a lovely thought ? It must be a very big place, mustn't it? Big and beautiful! And everybody who is there-I mean all the older ones-will remember having seen our Lord during those three wonderful days, and they will be able to tell our dear soldiers all about him, for of course the only reason he went there was to let them know that he had died on the cross and thus had turned God's terrible wrath away from mankind.

" Wouldn't it be a sad place if he hadn't gone there to tell them ? But he did go, and so it isn't sad. And there all our brave fellows will wait the last trump, happy in the thought that God will forgive them all their sins because they laid down their lives for their country and their King. They will all be given the gift of everlasting life. Yes, they will all live again, in their own bodies, just as they were before the cruel cannon-balls and swords slew them. Isn't that a beautiful thought ? Of course they will be more beautiful than they were before, because they will have been washed, you see; yes, washed clean of all their sins. We know that they will all get their own bodies back, because the Creed says so. Oh, what a wonderful day the day of resurrection will be! No more pain ! no more sorrow! Just psalms and hymns of praise for ever. Won't that be lovely for our dear lads ? No wonder English soldiers fight till their last breath. On this

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sad earth everything nice comes to an end, but up there it is quite different. Whatever you like to do best you will be able to do for ever. Isn't that a lovely thought ? Of course, I am speaking of those who have been baptized ; but, thank God, most of our soldiers have been. And so they are safe."

Yes, it was a fine conception! But now he must turn his attention to the stern duties of his calling. The object of his visit, to Mrs. Beechcroft was somewhat unusual. He had known Robin since he was a boy, but this beautiful wife of his whom he had brought back from foreign lands was a mystery that had to be solved. He had called upon her soon after her arrival and had taken tea with her ; but the fact that she frankly told him of her expectations, and quite openly spoke of the date at which she hoped her child would be born, had made the meeting a little awkward to him, and he had not repeated his visit.

It was strange that she had not brought her baby to be christened by him ; but he supposed that the ceremony had been performed in the village church at Fylton. His mind was not altogether without prejudice on the point, for after all, his was the larger and more important church, and they could easily have motored over. But on all sides he had heard that Mrs. Beechcroft was somewhat unconventional, not to say eccentric ; and he supposed that, having lived so much abroad, she was not very well versed in good manners. Foreigners were so very odd!

She had much troubled him on his last visit by smoking a cigarette as she lay back upon the sofa ; and there were other features of the picture which his memory retained that distressed him: the fantastic cushions upon which her foreign-looking head, with its peculiar, short hair, had rested ; the bright-hued Spanish shawl that covered her ; a number of French and Italian newspapers, journals

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and novels that lay by her side. After all, there was no harm in such things, and he felt himself to be broad-minded enough to accept with grace the unfortunate fact that women in these days smoked in the best social circles ; but still his impression had not been favourable. Now, however, he had received a letter from Robin's mother, begging him to go over to see her new daughter-in-law and to have a talk to her.

" You are a man with a great knowledge of the world," she wrote, " and I want you to give me your candid opinion. My son's wife is a woman with views, and I want you to tell me what you think of her. My brother, Father Gregory, has a very great admiration for her ; but then, as you know, he is an idealist. I understand that she is very much mixed up with the Labour movement, and is a friend of that outrageous man James Cottar ; and Robin tells me she addressed a large Labour Conference, or something of that sort, in Egypt on the subject of religion. Personally, I could never get her to talk much to me on such matters when I was staying with her; but I think she might do so to you. I found her a very charming and beautiful girl, always polite and tactful, yet undoubtedly very unconventional ; but now that she has presented Robin with this fine boy, I am naturally anxious to have an unbiased opinion as to her qualifications for the task of his upbringing. I want you to talk to her and draw her out; and if you find she is very much off the lines, we must try to see what can be done, so that when the time comes for her to influence the child's mind her thoughts may have been brought round to those views which we all hold most dear and which we naturally wish to see handed on to our descendants."

" A very proper letter," thought the Canon when he had read it, and he had determined to visit

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Madeline at once. He quite agreed that Father Gregory was no judge of such things : in fact, in Canon Rutting's opinion, he was just a saintly old fool. But a little heart-to-heart talk and a few leading questions would soon determine the matter; and he was well aware that he had a strong, robust manner which generally appealed to the other sex.

At the Manor he was shown into the drawing room, where he was kept waiting for a considerable time ; but at last Madeline entered, and he had to admit to himself that she looked the picture of health and vitality, and was certainly extraordinarily, and indeed mysteriously, attractive. At the same time her clothes seemed to him to be very French ; and there was a delicate and he feared, Eastern perfume about her which was certainly not that of Pears soap. Her fingernails, too, were manicured and polished in a manner that appeared to him to betoken unnecessary care and fastidiousness.

" Do forgive me," she said. " I've been with my baby."

Canon Rutting fervently hoped that she would not think it necessary to mention the exact duty that had detained her. " I quite understand," he said quickly.

" I'm glad you do. I don't," she replied. " For some unknown reason he isn't gaining weight as he ought to be doing. I can't understand it. I've had to give up nursing him, and he simply hates a bottle. I've been all this time trying to make him take it . . ."

Canon Rutting coughed nervously. " What a cheery log fire! " he said, rubbing his hands. " It is freezing hard outside : most seasonable ! "

By dint of careful manoeuvring he managed at length to introduce the subject in regard to which he had come to Fylton.

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" I presume that you belong to the Anglican Church," he said to her.

" I don't know that I belong to any particular Church," she replied. " I'm just a follower of the teachings of Christ."

He was appalled, and his temper was sorely tried. He endeavoured, however, to press her on the point, and Madeline therewith gave him some idea of her views as to the practical aspect of the Master's teaching.

" I believe," she said, " that his injunctions are to be taken absolutely literally ; and I think that if you disentangle them from the theological doctrines with which they have got themselves muddled up, you will find them to be just what is needed in this age of democracy's arrival." Therewith she recited some of Christ's maxims, laying stress on their civil and non-religious bearing, following the theme she had outlined in the Temple of Abydos.

" At this point," said Canon Rutting, " I must ask you a very leading question."

" Ask away," said Madeline.

He coughed. " Do you believe in the divinity of our blessed Lord ? " he asked, eyeing her closely.

Madeline was silent for a moment. " You know," she replied, at length, " I'm beginning to think I do. It seems to me that he was mentally so far removed above us that the more I think about it the harder I find it to regard him simply as a clever man. His teaching, so far as we can judge from the scrappy Gospels and the rather laborious Epistles, is the most divine thing that the world has ever heard or is ever likely to hear."

" Ah ! " exclaimed the cleric, leaning back in his chair; " then if you believe him to be divine, why do you lay so much stress on the earthly purpose of his teaching ? "

" Because," she answered quickly, " it seems so

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especially directed towards the establishment of happier conditions here below."

" So that we should live our lives," said the Canon, " in such a way that we might go to heaven when we die, and exchange the afflictions of mortal life for a life of everlasting bliss in the new Jerusalem where there is no more sorrow." He sighed heavily, as though from force of habit.

" Oh, bosh ! " said Madeline. " He taught us to live our lives in such a way that the Kingdom of Heaven might be established on earth-that is to say, a condition of things so happy and peaceful and good that life might be worth living, and that the body might be a nursery of the soul instead of the soul's lethal-chamber. He had nothing new to say about the after-life, but what he had to say about this life was absolutely to the point. He formulated certain rules of conduct, all of which have as their object the bettering of human conditions, and he showed us what is really to be regarded as sin."

" You open a new subject," replied Canon Rutting. " What is sin ? "

" Sin ? " said she. " I'll tell you first of all what it is *not*. It is not simply the breaking of the law of the land, it is not simply crime; because the laws may sometimes be wrong, or there may be extenuating circumstances. It is not disbelief in the existence of a personal God; for God is incomprehensible, and to disbelieve something that is incomprehensible is at the very worst, only rather narrow-minded. It is not merely the committing of acts which the laws of society call immoral; for such laws differ in every country and no universal standard has ever been arrived at."

He smiled indulgently, though his heart felt no such tolerance as his face expressed. " What, then, is sin, I repeat ? " he asked.

" Sin," said Madeline, lighting a cigarette, " is 'to

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do, or to think, anything that is detrimental to the establishment of that reign of peace and good will on earth which is called 'The Kingdom of Heaven.' For-instance, to be bigoted is a deadly sin, to be unfriendly is a deadly sin, to be stuck up is a deadly sin. To be angry, to be disorderly, to be unforgiving, to want to be revenged, to be nasty, to be pitiless these are the sort of sins that Christ preaches against."

" Very interesting," said Canon Rutting, his voice thick with that emotion which he felt was due to the righteous indignation of an honest Churchman at the errors of a heretic. " But I take it you don't believe in individual life after death."

Christ believed in it," she replied gravely; " and I haven't found anything that he was ever wrong about. But what I think we ought to understand is that he did not offer individual survival after death as the reward of virtue. I think Christianity has gone badly astray in focusing people's attention on the after-life ; and it seems to me that those who say the object of being good is that you may escape the cruel flames of the everlasting fires of hell have very mean and material minds. The object of being good is to create decent conditions *on earth*. Goodness is a thing that has got badly mixed up with Religion ; and it's up to us now to disentangle it."

For a short time longer the interview continued, and Madeline submitted with as good a grace as possible to her cross-examination. At last, of a sudden, her ordeal was brought to a close : a wail from the nursery caught her ear.

With a hasty adieu she hurried from the room, calling " I'm coming, my precious! " as she went. Canon Rutting stood, somewhat bewildered, in the hall, until a maid appeared who showed him to the door.

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" A thoroughly wrong-headed young woman," he muttered to himself as he stepped into his brougham, " and a danger to Church and State. It is my duty to tell Mrs. Beechcroft that that is my opinion of her daughter-in-law."

CHAPTER XXXV

THE BLACK SHADOW

THE opinion expressed in the letter which Canon Rutting wrote that evening to Mrs. Beechcroft was duly brought to Robin's notice, and filled him with anxiety; and when, by the next post, he had the news from Madeline that she had been up to Town, though only for an hour or two, to attend a Labour Conference, he felt it his duty to warn her against allowing herself to be mixed up with the advanced thought of the day. " I should have thought," he wrote, " that you would have had your time fully occupied in looking after the baby."

The insinuation troubled Madeline very greatly. She felt it to be unjust ; for now that her maternal duties had been curtailed at the strict orders of the doctor, she knew she would be able to leave her home occasionally for two or three hours without running any risks. So absorbed was she in her little son that it required considerable effort on her part to turn her mind at all to other matters ; and the suggestion that she was neglecting a thing so dear to her, so fascinating, as her relation to her child seemed entirely ridiculous. What did Robin know of parenthood ?-what could he know ? Did he realize anything of the utter joy she felt in holding the small body in her arms in the still hours of the night, not daring, not even wishing to sleep lest she should disturb him ? Did he understand the intensity of her happiness as she sat beside the cradle,

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watching the dawn of consciousness in the beloved little face? Could he appreciate the vast hopes, the huge anxieties, that filled her mind and riveted her attention, so that she could not bear to take her eyes from those blue eyes that were beginning to recognize her ?

The birth of her child had immensely increased within her mind the passionate desire for the establishment on earth of conditions of peace and good will. She was beginning to realize that she possessed some sort of gift of leadership, that people would listen to what she had to say; and her heart was burning to propound to them the doctrines of the Master, and to remind them that the putting into practice of his rules must be their ultimate object. And now Robin was asking her to seal her lips and to say no word. The conference which she had recently attended in London was to meet again in a few days' time, and she had been invited to speak. Was she to remain dumb because her words might be misunderstood ?

The mental conflict with which she was faced was one between her conscience and her love of her husband. She knew that her activities annoyed him; and to cause him any distress was misery, utter misery, to her. He was about to risk his life for his country's sake : was she justified, at such a moment, in going against his wishes ? All day long the struggle raged in her heart; and through the dark hours of the night she tossed and turned, sleepless and wretched. She recalled Professor Hudson's words to her: how strongly he had advised her not to meddle with the problems of the world, but to give herself up to the happy contentment of love.

"Love while you, may," he had said; "for so soon we grow old and barren of heart. Count yourself blessed that you are married to the man you

care for. Don't play ducks and drakes with the passion the gods have given you; for presently the fires will have burnt themselves out and only the ashes will remain." But now she had more than herself to think of there was her son. Was she to strike no blow for what she considered the truth ? Was she to remain silent?

In her distress she wrote to James Cottar. She begged him to come down to luncheon or to let her come to him, so that she might be directed by his advice ; and to her great relief, he was able to find time to accept her invitation and to come.

" Ee, lass, but you're in great trouble ! " he said, when she had explained her difficulty to him, as they sat together two or three days later. "'Ow can I advise you ? I can only tell you that you're wanted by the world, but your 'usband will answer that you're needed by 'im. It's love against duty. Do you love 'im so much ? "

" So much," she answered, with passion, " that it is torture to go against his wishes." The tears came into her eyes as she spoke, and she made a pitiful gesture of appeal to him with her hands.

He looked at her with tenderness. " Love is but a little thing," he said, " a little light in the darkness, a candle that goes out so soon, 'ee, so soon ! But 'umanity is mighty, and the welfare of 'umanity is something above all else. Don't you 'ear the crying of the people for a leader ? Don't you know the stuff that's in you ? You preached to us once of the great Teacher who gave 'is life to tell us the truth. Will you play him false now, because love says 'I want you'? Aye, my little lass, you've got to remember the warning that 'e gave, all them years ago: ' Ye shall be betrayed both by parents, and brethren, and kinsfolks, and friends; and ye shall be 'ated of all men for my name's sake,' but 'blessed

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are ye, when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil! ' "

Madeline looked at him, and there was terror in her eyes. " If Robin should grow to hate me . . . " she whispered. " Oh, but he couldn't, he couldn't! He would see that I was right ; he would realize in time that I was doing it for the sake of our little son, for the sake of all the children in the world, so that they might live."

" The love of a lass for 'er lad isn't all," he went on. " It's a sweet thing, but it isn't all. It's a thing that comes with youth and blazes up like, and maybe dies as a quenched fire. Sometimes it dies early, sometimes it lasts till death puts it out. But the love of 'umanity lives for ever, and you can watch it growing, bigger and spreading out over the world, till you see it shining in the faces of multitudes, and smiling at you from every street and alley, every window and doorway, from the 'ighways and the fields. Aye, the love for your man is sweet ; but the love of God passeth all understanding."

Thus it came about that Madeline went up to London a day or two later to attend the conference. She was to be away from home only four hours, just between luncheon and tea-time; but she left a hundred instructions with the trained and capable nurse who had been with her since her baby was a fortnight old. " Don't worry, mum," the woman had said, smiling at her anxiety. " The little lamb will be sleeping all the time you are away."

There was a large gathering in the hall, and a sea of faces appeared to be turned towards her as she took her seat upon the platform. She was aware that soon she would be called upon to speak, and her heart was beating fast as she gazed with anxious eyes about her. The subject under discussion was the attitude that Labour should adopt towards certain

Government measures. There was a good deal of unrest amongst the men, owing to the rise in prices and the consequently inadequate standard of payment ; but there was much difference of opinion as to whether any form of strike or forceful presentation of their case was wise. In general, Madeline's view was that the men should take no drastic steps that should harm the community; but it was to be understood that this quiescence was maintained because the Government was at the moment supposed to be engaged in a far-reaching scheme of social, reform.

It was not long before the time arrived for her to speak ; and to her great relief she found that the ordeal was no worse than that of playing the role of the Magdalene to the crowded audiences which she used to face a few years ago. Her words came easily, and very quickly she was absorbed in her subject. She spoke of the doctrine of force, and of its direct antagonism to the common sense preached by Christ ; and she urged her hearers not to resort to any form of violence in their struggle for their rights.

She unburdened her mind very vehemently, and with a kind of fervour, for twenty minutes or more ; and when at length she had finished, she did not wait to hear how her address had been received, although she was intensely anxious to know whether her points had been taken up. Her paramount thought was her baby; and, finding that with haste she could catch a train, she hurried out into the blustering wind and rain. Hailing a taxi, she drove straight to the station, where she jumped into the train a moment before it started; and thirty-five minutes later she was hurrying along the rain-swept platform at Hulchester, dodging her way through the crowd and making towards the gates, outside which her car would be waiting. She was just giving a cheery

" Good-evening " to the station-master when her chauffeur pushed his way up to her.

" Come quickly, mum," he cried, as he saw her. " The baby is ill."

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Madeline's heart stood still. " What's the matter ? " she gasped, as she ran with him through the driving rain to the car.

" He's had a convulsion," he said.

He led her, half dazed, through the crowd of vehicles which stood in the dimly lit station yard, and a few seconds later they were racing along the road to Fylton.

" He was all right when I left," he told her. " He had two seizures : nearly an hour ago the first one was. I went and fetched the doctor and then I came on to the station."

" Faster ! go faster! " she shouted to him, as the wind and rain beat in their faces. " What did the doctor say ? "

" He said the child had a good chance."

" A good *chance*? " she sobbed. " Oh, my God!"

The headlights of the car revealed an empty road before them, and they rushed through the darkness at reckless speed, splashing through the puddles and sending the water with an angry hiss into the leafless hedges. Madeline's hands were clenched, and her head was bent forward as she tried to pick up the landmarks that would tell her how much farther there was to travel. The black road seemed interminable, and she had begun to think they had taken the wrong turning when, suddenly rounding a bend, the lights of the Manor were revealed. A moment later they were racing up the short drive towards the open door, where a maid was standing awaiting them.

" How is he ? " Madeline cried, as she sprang from the car, numb with cold and fear and drenched to the skin.

" He's a little better," the servant replied.

" He hasn't had anotherMadeline did not wait for further information. She rushed up the stairs to the day nursery, at the door of which she encountered the doctor.

"There is no cause for undue alarm," he said, checking her. " Come in quietly: he's asleep." She crept across the room with beating heart, and hardly glancing at the silent figure of the nurse, bent over the cradle. The baby was sleeping peacefully, but there were evident signs of the recent paroxysms upon the little face. She wanted to take him in her arms, but the doctor restrained her, urging upon her the absolute importance of quiet.

" If he has no more seizures he will be all right," he said. " You had better go and take those wet clothes off."

Reluctantly at length Madeline tip-toed out of the room, and, hastening into the adjoining bed chamber, rapidly changed her clothes. Bitterly she blamed herself for having gone to London ; but at the same time she knew that had she remained at home the disaster in no way would have been averted. Those infantile seizures, so much dreaded by mothers, are as unavoidable as they are common ; and with terror she recalled how often they proved fatal. Her mind was strained to breaking point with the tension of the anxiety as she flung herself into a loose evening gown, and her trembling hands were still busy with the last hooks as she re-entered the sick-room.

The doctor was leaning over the cradle and his back was turned to her ; but before she had crossed the doorway the nurse ran forward and barred her way.

" Don't look, mum," she pleaded, in an agony of supplication; but with a fierce exclamation Madeline thrust her aside and ran to the cradle.

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" Get out of my way ! " the doctor cried. " Here, nurse ! look after your mistress."

Madeline struggled like one demented as the nurse caught hold of her; but a moment later the doctor turned and faced her.

" He's dead," he said.

Suddenly the room grew, dark and the floor and walls seemed to rock. The doctor and the nurse faded away into the far distance, and a sound like the roaring of waters surged in her ears. She felt herself falling, and madly she struggled to reach her child; but a weight of darkness, a huge, black shadow pressed her down, and she knew no more.

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE STORM

" **WELL**, thank heaven we're in a hut and not under canvas," Robin muttered, as he stood listening to the rain which lashed against the woodwork. It was eight o'clock in the evening, and he had just returned through the mud and slush from the large hut where the evening meal had been served.

" Is there any news, sir, might I ask ? " said his servant, as he helped Robin into the fur-lined coat which he was obliged to wear on these cold winter evenings. The regiment was to start for the Sudan almost immediately.

" Nothing fresh," he replied. " I don't suppose we shall be going for some days yet." He lit a cigar, and sat down at the table to write a few letters by the light of the draught-swept candles. The wind howled and shuddered around the hut, and through a leak in the roof the water dripped with a monotonous tattoo into an enamel basin set upon the floor. As his servant went out a blast of cold, rain laden wind rushed into the room through the open door, blowing out one of the candles and sending the sheets of note-paper flying from the table. Robin swore volubly.

He was depressed and in ill temper. It would have been difficult for him to have defined the exact cause of the disturbed condition of his mind, for there seemed to him to be so many reasons for it. They were all of them connected with Madeline

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and this fact in itself constituted the heart of his complaint. He felt that it was very unfair of her to have behaved in such a way as to have upset him in these his last days in England-perhaps his last days of life. At the latest by this time next week he expected to be off, and he knew quite well that the mission which he personally was to conduct was of an extremely hazardous character.

He remembered, of course, that she had always warned him of the independence of her nature, and had told him that she was not the kind of woman to be drilled into even the semblance of a dutiful and obedient wife. But at least she might have demonstrated her love for him by trying to free these last days of all worry, so that he might give his unclouded attention to his duties. Instead of this she had gone out of her way to offend Canon Rutting she had given that worthy man cause to regard her as a sort of heretic ; she had again associated herself with these Labour cranks, whose views were, to say the least, not above suspicion ; she might well be accused of neglecting her child; she had had men like Cottar down to lunch with her at Fylton. He could not bear to leave her here at home unprotected and unguided ; and it distressed him to think that, perhaps for many months, she would have to live her life without even the mild restraint which his presence imposed. It was not that he mistrusted her; but he felt that her unconventionality might lead her into all manner of difficult situations, justifying his mother and his friends in that anxiety which he knew was growing in their hearts in regard to her.

To put the matter in a nutshell, she was his wife and he was jealous ; jealous of her activities, jealous of her friends, and, in another sense of the word, jealous of her honour. It was his intense desire that his mother should think well of her, and that everyone

should know her to be not only beautiful to look upon but also worthy of all respect. Deep in his heart he was glad that she was not an ordinary or conventional woman; but, like most Englishmen, he dreaded too sharp a deviation from approved lines of conduct, and he shunned any course of action that should introduce outside criticism..

For some time he sat staring in front of him, unable to turn his mind to his correspondence; but at length he picked up his pen and prepared to write. As he did so there was a knock at the door, and a moment later his servant entered, as though propelled by the wind. " Telegram, sir," he said, as he saluted.

Robin opened the envelope, and his hands clenched as he read the message. It did not say definitely that his son was dead, but instinctively he knew that such was its meaning. It was unsigned, and he supposed (as was the fact) that it had been dispatched by the doctor; for the wording was not such as Madeline would have used. He sprang to his feet, and, giving a hasty order for the packing of his small suitcase, hurried out into the darkness on his way to find his commanding officer.

" I can only give you thirty-six hours' leave at most," said the colonel, when Robin had told him of the telegram. " I have just had word that we may be going sooner than we expected. You must be back here by breakfast-time the day after tomorrow."

Robin ran back to his hut. He would just be able to catch a train which would bring him to London in time to take the midnight express to Hulchester. His servant was ready with the suitcase and half a wineglass of neat whisky - keep the cold out, as he said.

Robin was glad of the stimulant, for his numbed mind was now beginning to feel the shock of the

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news, and his hand seemed peculiarly unsteady. As he fought his way against the wind and rain to the small station, a quarter of a mile distant from the camp, he was plunged in the deepest gloom. He wondered what Madeline was doing: whether she was behaving with stoical calm or had given way to her grief. He was full of remorse for his feelings of anger towards her ; and in this respect he suffered perhaps a greater distress than that caused by the news itself. He had seen so little of his baby son that his love for him was not yet overwhelming. He had always wanted a boy, and he had been proud and happy that he possessed one; but parental love had had no opportunity for growth in him, and what he was now experiencing personally was keen and bitter disappointment. His thoughts, however, were mainly directed to Madeline, to whom the blow, he realized, would be crushing.

In the train he could neither read nor sleep ; and the noise of the storm, as the rain lashed against the windows, seemed to blend with his thoughts into a nightmare of dismay. From time to time the suggestion returned to his mind that she had neglected the child, and therewith a cloud of anger oppressed him ; but always the sensation was overcome by the intense emotion of the protective tenderness which he felt for her. He wished that he had brought a flask with him, so that he might lull his active brain to sleep ; yet, at the same time, the very idea of sleep was strange to him, when so much had to be thought out.

At last, after an interminable journey, he reached Hulchester, where, at the station hotel, by means of a large bribe, he managed to obtain a car to take him over to Fylton. The noise of the storm and of the beating rain, as the car plunged through the darkness, added its full measure to the abomination

in his mind; and when, at the closed gates of the Manor, he dismissed the drenched chauffeur and ran up the drive, the tumult of his brain was as wild as the wintry storm about him.

The house seemed to be in darkness, and he had some difficulty in finding his way to the entrance. On his bunch of keys that of the front door still remained, and with it he now let himself in. A single shaded light was burning in the hall, but the adjoining rooms were dark, and there was complete silence, save for the moaning of the wind outside. Slipping off his wet coat, he went quietly up the thickly carpeted stairs, fearful and alert.

The upper hall was in darkness, but he quickly felt for, and touched, the switches, and then went straight to the day nursery, expecting to find . . . he knew not what. Silently he opened the door and turned on the light ; and his eyes passed immediately to the cradle which stood at the opposite side of the room. A moment later he was gazing down at the face of his little son : the eyes were shut and the tiny hands lay outside the quilt with its bright pattern of rosebuds. With beating heart he laid his finger against the wax-like cheek. It was as cold as ice.

Involuntarily he started back, and his breath seemed to catch in his throat. Then he bent forward, and stood for a while gazing in desolate silence upon the piteous little features. So this was the end of his dream! If now he were to be killed there would be no son of his to bear his name, no little life to bring comfort to Madeline. The brief months of their love would soon be forgotten, and there would be no link to hold her to his family and to his memory. She would just drift out again into the enormous world and be lost in its byways. There, in that gaily coloured cradle, lay the flesh of his flesh and the bone of his bone, cold and stiff ; and very likely

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he too would so be stretched before many days had passed. This was the end!
And Madeline ?

Where was she ? What was she doing ? Why was there no sound of lamentation, such as he had expected to hear ? Sick at heart he turned away and went out of the room ; and as he closed the door behind him he heard the wind wailing around the corners of the house like the voice of death. Crossing to the opposite door, which was that of Madeline's bedroom, he laid his hand upon the knob, and so stood for a moment, miserable, irresolute, and yet strangely wide awake in the midst of the nightmare of his thoughts. He could hear the rain pouring from the overcharged pipes on to the flagstones below, and the bare branch of a tree tapped like a ghost against a windowpane at the head - of the stairs.

Slowly he opened the door and glanced into the room. As he did so the nurse, who had been sitting in a chair beside the fire in the dim light of a shaded reading-lamp, rose to her feet. She put her finger to her lips.

" Hush! " she whispered. " She is asleep." Robin's eyes followed hers to the bed in the far corner, and there he saw his wife, clad in her pretty French dressing-gown, lying in a peaceful slumber. Asleep, he thought-asleep at such a time? Had she no feelings ? A wave almost of anger swept over him. He did not recollect that on occasions such as these a heavy sleeping-draught is sometimes administered to an overwrought woman.

" I think you had better leave us alone," he said to the nurse in a 'low, stern voice, as he held the door open for her.

She picked up the novel that she had been reading, and, with a frightened glance at his haggard face, went silently out of the room, shutting the door behind her.

Robin walked over to the bed and laid his hand upon Madeline's shoulder. She turned and muttered something, but did not open her eyes.

" Wake up! " he said. " I'm here."

Suddenly she sat up and stared at him ; and he could see the horror of remembrance growing in her face. " Robin! " she cried. " Oh, Robin, Robin!"

"

Her voice sounded like the wailing of the damned. With a sudden surging flood of emotion he took her in his arms, covering her pale face with his kisses. He could feel the trembling of her body as his hands clasped her close.

" He's dead, Robin," she whispered; " he's dead ! "

For some time he held her to his breast. There was no need for words : nothing that he could say could comfort her. At length she freed herself from his embrace, and he noticed with surprise that there were no tears in her eyes.

" How did it happen ? " he said.

Briefly, and in a voice that seemed to lack all emotion, she told him of the sudden seizure.

" But was there anything to account for it ? " he asked her.

" The doctor said it was due to improper feeding," she answered. " We must have been giving him the wrong sort of milk or something. He'd lost weight the last two weeks : I was going to take him to a specialist."

" You ought to have been nursing him yourself," he told her.

" I wanted to," she replied, " but they wouldn't let me."

There was silence for a while, and suddenly he noticed that Madeline yawned. Such is the natural, and wholly unavoidable, effect of a sleeping-draught ; but to Robin it was as though a blow had struck his heart. He fixed his eyes upon her.

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" How soon did the doctor arrive ? " he questioned her.

" Within a few minutes, I believe," she replied. " What d'you mean : ' you believe ' ? " he asked, and his voice was stern and cold.

" I didn't get in till nearly an hour after the first attack," she answered, making no attempt at excuse.

" Where were you ? "

" I was in London." Why? I was at a conference."

He sprang to his feet and seized her wrist. The estrangement which had been gradually growing, owing to his dislike of her views and opinions, suddenly flamed into furious hostility. " Oh," he exclaimed, " so that's how it happened! I told you you were neglecting him. He died of neglect."

She stared at him, half dazed. " Robin ! " she cried. "He didn't, he didn't! "

" He died of neglect," he repeated slowly and deliberately. " Well, what happened when you came in ? "

" Just as I'd changed my dress," she said, " he had another seizure."

" When you came in," he exclaimed, his voice rising, " you left him again, and went and put on a pretty dress ! For the doctor's benefit, I suppose. And when you had finished your careful toilet the child was dead! "

He thrust his hands into his pockets and walked across to the fire place. Madeline stood staring at him, her fingers pressed against her pallid cheeks.

" Robin ! " she cried, in a tone of utter reproach.

" I told you you were neglecting him," he repeated. " I told you you were not to go to those damned conferences, didn't I ? "

She did not answer.

"And now," he went on, " I find you calmly sleeping, with the baby dead in the next room. And just now you yawned in my face!"

Still she did not answer.

" Very well," he said. " You've killed my son; you've killed my love for you. You can bury both together. We're going to Egypt the day after tomorrow, probably. I don't suppose I shall see you again: I hope to God I get my throat cut."

Without another word he walked out of the room, slamming the door as he saw Madeline throw herself towards him. In the hall downstairs he put on his coat ; then, unlocking his suitcase, he took out his brushes and one or two other articles, thrust them into his pockets, and flung the case aside. As he opened the front door a gust of wind and rain beat into his face ; and with bent head he forced his way forward into the teeth of the gale.

CHAPTER XXXVII

BELOW THE SURFACE

IN England there is perhaps no hour so dreary as that of a bleak winter morning, before the light of day, such as it is, has brought even the semblance of hope into the desolate countenance of the sky. Robin reached London while it was still dark, and as he hurried across the empty station his heart seemed like lead within him. He had spent some hours in the waiting-room at Hulchester, his outer clothes drenched with rain, his boots sodden and his feet like ice; and in the milk-train, which had at last brought him up to town, he had shivered miserably throughout the tedious journey. He was living in a kind of wakeful nightmare; and his brain refused to do more than direct his weary limbs towards some place where he could sleep and forget.

Entering the station hotel, he secured a room, in which a fire was soon lighted by the yawning night porter; and having sent his wet clothes and boots downstairs to be dried, he swallowed a cup of atrocious coffee and went to bed. Mercifully, unconsciousness soon descended upon him, and it was not till noon that he awoke. His brain was still stiff and numb, and black depression held him as in an iron vice ; but mechanically he took his bath, and thereafter dressed himself with habitual care. Then, going downstairs to the barber's saloon, he was shaved by a talkative Swiss, who told him with painful animation of the recent wreck of his native village by an avalanche. But Robin felt no compassion. The bowels of mercy were frozen within his heart and he was hardened against all suffering.

Both before and at luncheon he drank heavily, and the horrible gloom of his mind was somewhat lessened as he walked to his club. His leave was not up until the next morning, and he could not bring himself to return at once to camp. In London there was some possibility of occupying his mind in camp there was none. At the club he played a game of billiards with a man with whom he was not well acquainted, and he was glad not to be called upon to give any account of his recent doings. Had he been asked any questions of a domestic nature he would have lied.

At about half-past three he drove over to a music hall, where a matinee was in progress; and strolling up and down the promenade, he came upon a friend whom he had not seen for some years, and together they chattered at the bar for a little while, drinking whisky and soda. Robin had never before known any great misery in his life, and he was not experienced in the handling of it. He wanted to drink enough to blur the sharp outlines of his thoughts and to bring a glow of warmth into his frigid heart. He wished by laughing and jesting with his friends to displace the intolerable vice that held him.

When he was alone again a woman came up to him and touched his arm. She had the soft brown eyes of a cow and the figure of a wet-nurse. Physically, she would have made an excellent mother.

" You do look glum ! " she said, and she uttered a kindly laugh.

" I feel it," Robin answered.

" One of your pals done you down ? " she asked. " No," he replied.

" Has your girl treated you badly, then ?

" .. Yes."

" Won't marry you ? "

" She is my wife."

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She nodded sympathetically. " Women are not worth bothering about," she said. "We're only fit for one thing, and some women haven't much talent even for that." She turned her sleepy eyes to the ceiling and made a clicking sound with her tongue, as though to express contempt for her sex.

" Have a drink? " asked Robin.

" No, thanks," she replied, " but I'd like a glass of milk."

They sat down upon a sofa in the noisy saloon, and the milk was presently brought for his companion, while he himself again indulged in something stronger. He talked about his dreary life in camp, but he gave little attention to his own words. " Are you on leave ? " she asked.

"Yes," he answered. "We're off to the Sudan in a few days. There'll be some fighting."

" Nervous ? "

"Not a bit," he said. " I want to be killed."

Her eyes filled with sadness. " Poor boy! " she sighed, putting her hand upon his. " Take it from me: no woman is worth that. I expect you've been too kind to her. We're not used to it. We lose our heads, get uppish, if men don't knock us about we think it's weakness. You try a strap on her."

He laughed. " I'm not that sort," he said.

" It's a shame," she went on. " A fine-looking boy like you, too ! You oughtn't to fret about a woman : you've got things to do, men to lead, niggers to kill. Take my tip : forget her. What are you doing tonight ? "

Robin shook his head. " Nothing in your line," he answered, as he rose from the sofa.

"Well, take my advice," she said. "Have a damned good dinner and a bottle of fizz ; and if that wound in your heart still hurts, come round to me and I'll kiss it and make it better. That's what women are for." She handed him a visiting-card, and, with a friendly nod, strolled back into the crowded promenade. It was now five o'clock, and Robin wondered what on earth he could do with himself for the remainder of the day. His brain was somewhat affected by his liberal potations, and though his thoughts could not be described as hazy, they were certainly overspread with a gossamer veil of many colours, not all dark. He did not wish to go to his mother. She would not yet have heard the news of the death of his child, and he could not tolerate the thought of telling her about it. Suddenly an idea came to him, and he hurried to the telephone. He turned over the pages of the directory rapidly, and soon had found the number he required.

" I want to speak to Mrs. Jones," he said, when the connection had been effected. "Captain Beechcroft speaking."

" Hullo! " came the answer. " This is me Daisy."

" I want to ask you something," he said, when they had exchanged a few jaunty greetings. " Do you remember you once said that if I was in trouble you would like me to come to you and you'd try to cheer me up ? "

"Yes, yes," she answered. "Are you in trouble ? "

"I'm very depressed," he told her. "May I come ? "

" Of course, you dear man," she laughed. " Come at once. I'm all alone in this great house. My daddykins is away. I was just wondering what to do with myself."

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"Right: I'll come now," he said; and a few moments later he was driving towards the house in Mayfair where Daisy Jones resided.

The door was opened by a footman, who ushered him in without question. "Madam is in her boudoir," he said, "if you will come straight up, sir."

On his previous visits to the house Robin had been shown into the drawing-room; but of course, he thought to himself, Daisy Jones would have a boudoir, and of course it would have a wallpaper of pink roses, and there would be pretty chintz curtains and chair-covers, and some French prints upon the walls. But in this he was mistaken, for, when the door was opened, he beheld a most remarkable room, which seemed, somehow, to be an entirely inappropriate setting for the plump, fluffy little woman who stood before him. The walls and carpet were black, the woodwork and ceiling gold. The furniture was of black lacquer, the curtains of cloth of gold ; and upon a low divan there was a mass of richly coloured cushions of strange shapes and surprising size. There were no pictures upon the walls, but disks of many-coloured glass were let in, and these were illuminated from behind. The light was subdued, and there was a faint smell of incense in the air.

"Good heavens! What a room! " Robin exclaimed after he had shaken hands with her. " When did you have it done ? "

" It's just finished," she answered, " just in time for you to perform the opening ceremony."

" Did you design it yourself ? " he asked.

" Oh no," she said. " I paid a fabulous sum to a Russian prince to do it for me. He's such a real artist, and so pure-minded. He just sits on the floor and talks about lilies and nakedness. Of course I told him what I wanted. I said: ' It must be a place where I can get into touch with my own soul, and think quietly about death and all those sort of lovely things. . . . ' "

" Lovely! " Robin interrupted bitterly.

" Of course they are lovely," she said. " Death is only a passing over into the Great Unknown. It's really a very beautiful thing. I've just been reading a book written by a spirit who passed over three years ago. He said dying was a very nice sensation, and that if he could he'd like to do it again; but Plato says that that would be wrong because it might grow into a habit. I ' think I should love to die. . . ."

" So would I," Robin remarked, with such feeling that she glanced at him apprehensively.

" Oh, there! " she exclaimed ; " I was forgetting you were in trouble. Now, tell me all about it, you poor dear."

" My son is dead," he said.

Mrs. Jones gave a little gasp of distress and bit her lip.

"Dead!" she whispered. "Why, he was only born the other day."

" He was only two and a half months old," said Robin, " and she went out and left him, and he died of neglect."

" Your wife neglected him-left him alone ? " she asked incredulously.

" Yes," he answered, " and I've left *her*. She's killed my love for her."

He was sitting on the edge of the divan, looking into the fire ; and Mrs. Jones came across to him there and knelt in front of him.

" Oh, my dear ! " she whispered. " When did it happen ? "

" It seems ages ago," he answered " Don't let's talk about it. I want to forget it all. That's why I came to you."

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" I'm so glad you came," she murmured, looking up at him with eloquent eyes. She took his hands in hers, and for some moments there was silence. The fumes of alcohol were in Robin's head, and the warmth of the room seemed to bring comfort to his heart. He looked down at the soft, fair hair before him and noticed that it was pretty. Then his eyes, wandered downwards, and he observed that she was wearing a dress of mole-coloured silk and white fur, which certainly became her.

" I like your dress," he said.

She looked up at him with her innocent eyes. " Do you ? " she smiled. " It's a favourite of mine, too. I've just put it on especially for you. I see you so seldom that I like to look my best when you do honour me."

" How long can I stay ? " he asked. " What are you doing this evening ? "

" I've kept myself quite free for you," she answered, " and you're going to dine with me here, and I've told them to telephone for a box for Drury Lane afterwards, and then we can come back here and have some supper."

" I've got to catch the last train back to camp tonight," he told her, " or else the six-thirty tomorrow morning."

Daisy Jones clapped her hands. " You shall stay the night here," she cried. " It will be awfully shocking and nice. I'll give you a room on the third floor; then it'll be quite proper, won't it ? and there'll be no danger of . . ." She paused. "And besides," she added, " Rosa can chaperon me."

" Oh, is Rosa with you again ? " he asked. " She never left me," said Mrs. Jones.

" Yes, she did," Robin contradicted. " She was with us for some weeks, you remember. We took her on because she said you had paid her off and left her to her fate."

" Oh, the old fibber! " she laughed, and hastily changed the subject by asking him whether he had seen the Pantomime at Drury Lane, to which he replied in the negative.

" I love pantomimes," she said. " I love to see all the children laughing at the things that their parents can't raise a smile at, and the parents laughing at the things that don't amuse the children. Of course, I myself generally laugh when the youngsters do ; and I always get so excited when the fairy queen defeats the king of the demons. I don't know why it is: I can't grow up. I'm such a little silly, aren't I ? "

There was a knock at the door, as the footman entered, bringing in various ingredients for the making of cocktails, and also delivering to his mistress the ticket for the box at the theatre, which had been sent across from the agents.

" We are going to have. an early dinner, if you don't mind," she said to Robin when they were alone once more; " in fact, I must go and change my dress at once."

Having dexterously prepared a cocktail, she took his hands in hers and playfully pushed him on to the divan. Leaning over him, she arranged the cushions behind his head, and, lifting his two feet from the ground, stretched him at full length upon this comfortable, damask-covered couch. Fetching a small black table, she placed it by his side, and upon it she put the cocktail and a box of cigarettes. Then she collected a number of illustrated papers, laid them beside him, and having poked the fire into a blaze, stood back to contemplate her work.

" There ! " she said. " I shan't be more than half an hour. You must just lie here quietly and think of all the beautiful things in this beautiful world. And, look, there is a speaking-tube that goes up to my room You pull out the whistle and

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blow down that hole, and I shall answer, unless my mouth is full of hairpins."

She gave his cheek a gay little pat with her hand and trotted out of the room. As soon as the door was shut Robin swallowed the cocktail almost at a gulp, and then, lying back upon the luxurious cushions, gazed at the golden ceiling, which gleamed in the flickering light of the fire. After all, he thought to himself, she was not a bad little soul, and she was certainly very fond of him. Perhaps he had misjudged her in Egypt; or perhaps . . . He could not bother to continue the train of thought. He felt drowsy, and his eyes closed. . . .

The whistle of the speaking-tube sounded and recalled him momentarily from slumber. " Oh damn ! " he muttered, and buried his face in the cushions. Twice more the whistle blew, but Robin took no further notice than to cast a mild oath in its direction. When again he awoke Daisy Jones was standing by his side.

" Oh," she exclaimed, " I do believe you were fast asleep, and I've gone and disturbed you, just when you needed sleep so badly."

She bent over him, ostensibly to rearrange the cushions, and Robin observed that the pink low-necked gown she was wearing certainly enhanced such charms as she possessed, though it could not be called by any stretch of imagination a creation from Paris. Drowsily he put up his hand and drew her head down to him, till his lips met hers. Then, as though entirely unconscious that anything unusual had occurred or that any dramatic moment had been reached, he pushed her aside, stretched himself, and got up.

" Will you ring," he said, " and tell them to show me where I can make myself tidy for dinner ? "

Daisy Jones seemed not to hear him. She was flushed and appeared to be breathing hard. Then she uttered an hysterical sort of titter, and after making a few futile movements, pulled herself together and did as she was bid.

The dinner which presently ensued was made pleasant for Robin rather by reason of the potency of the wines than by any sparkle of conversation or charm of company. Mrs. Jones talked, or rather babbled, continuously, and her guest swallowed the good things placed before him and smiled so vacantly at her that, had she been a woman of discernment, she might have supposed him to be a man in a state of sensory extinction, and not as actually she imagined, one in the grip of her overwhelming attraction. Only once during the meal did he ask an intelligent question, to wit, whether she saw much of Augustus Blake.

" Poor old Plato ! " she laughed. " He is working so hard just now that he doesn't get much chance of seeing much of me. But he often. pops in for a half-hour late in the evening. He's a very mysterious personage nowadays, and most of his work seems to be done at night."

" Why, what's his job ? " asked Robin. " Drains ? "

" No, no ! He's something very important in the Secret Service."

" A Spy? "

" Yes; something frightening like that."

" He must be in his element," he said.

" Oh, you are naughty! " she laughed." He goes about disguised, and sits drinking - I mean, pretending to - in wicked cafes in Soho, getting the bad women to talk to him and tell him things. Then he writes it all down on blue paper and sends it to the King or somebody."

" A dirty job," said Robin.

" But it's very important," she protested. " That's

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the way the Government knows what's going on. You see, the traitors and bad people are fascinated by the women's lovely white bodies and tell them their secrets ; then the women are fascinated by Plato's tall figure and tell him all they've heard ; ' and then Plato . . ."

Robin interrupted her. " He's fascinated by the exquisite rustle of five-pound notes and tells the police."

When dinner was finished they drove over to Drury Lane, and Robin watched the pantomime through a haze of inertia. Daisy Jones appeared to him to be clapping her hands for a great part of the evening and laughing excitedly; and during the love songs (in that strange green moonlight which casts two distinct shadows) he was aware that she sat very close to him. Once or twice he dropped off into a half-conscious sleep ; but towards the close of the performance his mind became very much more clear, and there were moments when his senses were invaded by a tremendous and horrible gloom. He wondered what Madeline was doing, and at recurring moments he felt that he had wronged her; but soon these lapses into clemency were checked by a return of his anger towards her, and once more his mind resumed its stern resolve to put her out of his thoughts.

As they drove home in Colonel Winterbottom's luxurious automobile, Daisy Jones nestled herself against Robin's shoulder, and during the greater part of the journey his chin was buried in the white fur collar of her opera-cloak, while her yellow hair almost touched his face. In an experimental manner, and without any considered purpose, he put his arm around her and drew her towards him, and he could feel the quickening of her breath.

" Oh, you mustn't do that! " she whispered.

" Why not ? " he asked laconically.

Well not here," she said. " Wait till we get home. You men are so impatient."

Robin was not conscious of any impatience on his part, but of this he was aware, that he was committing himself to a saturnalian evening; and, in the growing sanity of his thoughts, he was startled at the increasing insanity of his actions.

Mrs. Jones let herself into the house with her own key, and she explained that it was one of her father's strict rules that the servants should never be kept up.

" Only Rosa stays up," she said, " and *she* doesn't matter."

" Doesn't matter ? " Robin repeated. " What d'you mean ? "

His hostess corrected herself awkwardly. " I mean she is a foreigner, so we let her do what she likes. She's such a night bird."

An excellent little supper was laid on the dining room table, and during the meal Daisy Jones drank her full share of the bottle of champagne, thus making up for a certain abstemiousness she had shown at dinner. Her cheeks were flushed and her eyes sparkling when at length they went upstairs to the drawing-room, and she sat herself down on the sofa with a suddenness that tested the efficiency of the springs.

" Come and sit beside me here," she said, catching hold of his hand ; and in a moment their arms were about one another and their lips were pressed together. Their embrace had no grace in it, nothing to give it beauty, nothing to endear it afterwards to the sober memory. There was just a struggling jumble of hands and lips, a rough contact of flushed faces, a mingling of hot breath; and Robin was standing once more beside the fire-place, arranging his tie, and Daisy Jones was picking up her fallen hairpins.

" Oh, you are rough ! " she panted.

" I'm sorry," he said.

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" No, I love it," she answered quickly. " I love your strength."

There were blotches of deeper red upon her pink throat as she arose and came over to him, and her bare arms, which now she put around his neck, bore the marks of his fingers on their mottled surface.

" Stay here tonight," she said.

"No, I must go," he answered, looking at his watch.

" Oh, stay, do stay! " she pleaded. " You can't be so cruel as to leave me. I have always wanted you, and now you are mine : you belong to me."

Robin looked at her with misgiving. He belonged to nobody: His was not a nature, it seemed to him, that could be bound by any woman, certainly not by this warm little animal who was pressing herself against him. Suddenly the front-door bell rang, and, with an exclamation of annoyance, she separated herself from him.

" Who's that ? " he asked, not without relief at the interruption.

" I don't know," she answered. " Perhaps it's Plato."

Robin went to the window which overlooked the entrance to the house, and drawing aside the curtain, looked out ; but it was too dark for him to see.

"Come away!" she cried. "Don't let him see you."

She ran to the door of the room, and opening it, called down the stairs to Rosa.

" If it's Mr. Blake," she said, " say I've gone to bed. Don't let him come in."

Rosa's reply was inaudible. Mrs. Jones ran back into the room and stood listening at the door, an

expression of mingled excitement and dismay upon her face. After a few moments of suspense Rosa entered, in the manner of a whirlwind.

" He say he must see you," she panted; " I put 'im in the dining-room."

" Oh, you fool! " exclaimed her mistress. " You utter fool ! He'll see the supper things on the table. He'll know I'm not alone."

Rosa looked helplessly at Robin. There had been no time to pay her respects to him, but she gave him now a momentary smile of greeting.

" Don't stand there grinning," cried Mrs. Jones. " Tell him to go away; tell him anything you like, only make him go." She pushed the woman out of the room and shut the door.

" Spoiling everything like this . . ." she hissed, and there was venom in her voice.

She went over to the fireplace and poked the fire viciously. Robin sat himself down on the sofa and lit a cigarette. Then, suddenly, the door was opened, and the tall figure of Augustus Blake stood before them, his round, glassy eyes staring from one to the other.

" I saw you at the window," he said to Robin, " and I felt I must come up and say ' How d'you do?'"

Mrs. Jones confronted him. " I told Rosa to say I was engaged."

" Yes, I know," he answered, running his hand over the dome of his bald head. " But it was only me, you see, and so I thought you wouldn't mind." He spoke with a curious metallic intonation, as though his mouth were dry ; and his smile was fixed and mask-like.

" How are you, old fellow ? " he said to Robin, as he shook hands with him, " and how's the wife ?"

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Daisy Jones put her hand on Blake's arm before Robin had time to reply, and the look she gave him must have told him clearly enough that he had made a faux Pas, and that, for some reason, Mrs. Beechcroft was not to be mentioned. The atmosphere was strained, and it was largely due to Robin's tact that there was not open friction. He was unquestionably glad that Augustus Blake had come upon the scene ; for there was still half an hour before he need set out to catch his train back to camp, and the situation between himself and his hostess had got badly out of control. He therefore talked to him with some animation, while Mrs. Jones fumed and fretted in ill-tempered silence.

He could not quite define Blake's attitude to him. At times he was conscious that the man was appealing to him, with something approaching wistfulness, not to poach upon his preserves ; at other times he thought he detected a burning hatred lurking behind his smooth words, and an attitude of fierce defiance. There were lapses in the conversation every now and then, and it seemed to Robin at these moments as though Blake were feeling his way, making mental notes and drawing deductions.

At length the mystic arose, as though upon a sudden impulse, and stood staring into the fire, holding his long arms out towards the leaping flames. He looked very gaunt in his black evening clothes, and his soft white shirt-front seemed in Robin's imagination to conceal a framework of bare bones, while his bald head was more than ever reminiscent of the egg of an extinct monster.

" I feel psychic tonight," he said suddenly, in a sepulchral voice. " I believe I could do things tonight. "

" Oh, please don't ! " Mrs. Jones begged him. " It is so late, and I am so sleepy."

Without paying any regard to her words, he stalked across the room to a small table whereon stood a large crystal, such as is used by clairvoyants. This he picked up in his two hands, and, returning to the fire, sank into a chair, holding the crystal before him.

" Yes," he murmured, as though talking to himself, " the pictures form rapidly tonight."

" I suppose," said Robin, mildly interested, " the crystal simply helps you to concentrate your thoughts."

" Yes, that's all," Daisy Jones put in, and she turned her eyes piteously to Robin. For some moments there was silence, and then Blake's voice was heard, speaking at first almost inaudibly.

" All alone," he murmured, " all alone! Her heart is heavy as lead, and the wind sighs around the eaves. I feel the presence of death. The lights are low in there, in that room. . . ."

Robin sat up with an involuntary start, and suddenly he seemed to be wide awake and intently listening. He had the feeling that this man was no longer a mountebank, but a genuine seer, a reader of that which the eye cannot see. There was the power of true magic in his whispering voice, and he spoke with the insight, the awful penetration of one whose vision no distance nor darkness could obscure. The secrets of his heart seemed about to be revealed.

" Don't! " he exclaimed, with sudden intensity ; but Augustus Blake's eyes did not so much as flutter, though there was a pregnant pause in his words.

" Plato, don't ! " Mrs. Jones cried sharply. " His son is . . ." she stopped abruptly.

Blake shivered. " It's cold," he went on ; " cold as ice. Neglected! So young and so fair! Neglected, neglected ! "

Daisy Jones leant forward and glanced at Robin. " You said he died of neglect," she whispered.

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Again Blake paused. Then: "Dead, in that room," he muttered. "The little life that was so sweet. And he says she neglected him. How can he say such things ? Why isn't he with her to comfort her whose heart is breaking ? "

Mrs. Jones sprang up, and seizing the mystic by the shoulders, shook him violently.

" It's trickery ! " she cried. " You guessed it from what I said."

A sudden blaze of passionate anger seemed to sweep over her, and with her open hand she hit him a stinging blow on his cheek. Blake sprang to his feet, and with a crash the crystal fell into the fireplace and was smashed to atoms. Mrs. Jones uttered a cry of rage.

" My crystal! " she almost screamed. " You fool! - you've broken it."

Robin stared in amazement at her.

" And talking all that nonsense ! " she went on, panting as she spoke. " Oh; I know your game! You're trying to paint a picture of the deserted wife, so that he shall go back to her and leave the coast clear for you. It's your dirty trickery. You think I can't see through you. You've always tried your best to separate me from the man I love."

She ran at him again with her hand raised, but before the ghastly expression of his face she recoiled.

" Oh, please . . ." said 'Robin.

Blake swung round and faced him. His eyes were bulging out of his head and his weak mouth was twitching. There was no longer any suggestion of mysticism about him.

" Yes," he gasped, " and if I've wished to keep you and your wife together, what d'you think *her* game has been ? " He pointed a lean finger at Mrs. Jones. " She's done her best to separate you. Why did she leave Rosa behind in Alexandria with orders to try to insinuate herself into your wife's good graces? So that Rosa might try to cause friction between you in a hundred subtle ways. Oh yes, I knew all about it ! "

" It's a lie," panted Mrs. Jones, " a cruel lie ! " Robin looked from one to the other, and a sensation of nausea overwhelmed him. He walked to the door.

" I'm going," he said.

Mrs. Jones uttered an hysterical cry. " Don't go ! " she exclaimed. " Don't leave me with this devil incarnate! "

Robin turned his back on them and left the room. As he hastened down the stairs he heard their voices raised in violent quarrel behind him, and again there was the loud sound of a slap, followed by a shriek from Mrs. Jones.

"Damn you, you beast, you beast!" he heard her shouting.

He found his coat and cap and went out of the house, slamming the door behind him; but even in the street the uproar followed him. He had not gone many yards when, turning round, he saw the door" open again, and a grotesque, dark apparition leapt down the steps, followed by a string of feminine imprecations.

Robin drew back into the deeper darkness of a gateway, and the repulsive yet ludicrous figure went bounding past him, his breath sounding like the hiss of a serpent, and, even in the blackness of the night, his round eyes glowing like the horrible lamps of hell.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

UNCONSECRATED GROUND

DURING his journey back to camp, and later, as he lay awake in his wooden hut, Robin's thoughts revolved incessantly around the death of his child and the attitude he had taken up towards Madeline. There were moments when he felt that he had behaved in a very brutal manner; but such intervals of lucidity were followed by a return of belief in the justice of his actions. It was necessary to be stern sometimes.

In one matter, however, he realized that he had been mistaken : his love for his wife had not been killed, nor had it turned to hatred. He was very angry with her, and he felt that she had not played the game in regard either to himself or to the community. But he could not bring himself to think that she had entirely passed from his life, unless that life were to be cut short in the scorching plains of the Sudan, a contingency which, with returning sanity, he no longer desired. Undoubtedly, if he were spared, he would come back to her; and though things might never be quite the same, he could well imagine that some day she would ask his forgiveness and that a normal condition of affairs would be resumed.

As a result of these hours of calmer thought he dispatched a telegram, early the following morning, to his uncle, Father Gregory, begging him to go down to Fylton, and declaring that the need of his presence

there was urgent in the extreme. He did not give any details, and to his mother he wrote not a word.

To himself he pretended that this silence on his part was due to his desire to spare her the shock of hearing suddenly of the death of her grandson, but actually his reason for not writing was rather that he knew she would at once go to Madeline, and then his relationship with his wife would be sure to come under some sort of discussion. That, he could not bear.

He did not mind admitting to himself that possibly his marriage to Madeline had been a mistake, but the idea of anybody else thinking so, or offering him their sympathy, was very repugnant to him. He preferred, therefore, to leave things to the tactful handling of his uncle. The regiment was to leave for Egypt the next morning, and a brief telegram of farewell to his mother, in which he would say that there was no time to write, would meet the case ; for a week ago he had seen her and had said his real good-bye.

Meanwhile, at Fylton, the beginning of this second day after the tragedy found Madeline dry-eyed and hardly able yet to realize the full measure of her loss. The most horrible thing of all was the need of making arrangements for the funeral, but fortunately the main part of this sad business was undertaken by the doctor and the nurse. It had been decided that the dead child should be buried in the graveyard of the church at Fylton ; but the vicar had recently died, and the church was in charge of the vicar of Hulchester and his curates.

That morning Madeline received a note from Canon Rutting stating how shocked he was at " the death of the little infant who might have borne so honourably his father's honourable name," and expressing his willingness to " perform the melancholy office " in the churchyard at Fylton on the next day; and this message was presently followed by the Canon himself, who drove up to the Manor in his comfortable brougham

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soon after Madeline had made her pretence of eating breakfast.

" Dear, dear, how very ill you look! " he remarked, as she came in to him in the morning-room. " I am afraid this has been a terrible blow to you."

He was indeed quite disturbed at the deathly pallor of her face and at the strained look in her eyes which indicated that she had not slept. These foreigners or semi-foreigners, he thought to himself, were so very emotional: she ought to pull herself together and remember that she was a soldier's wife, with a British tradition of stoical reserve to uphold.

" You must trust in the mercy of Almighty God," he said, " and remember that he visits us with these afflictions for our own good."

A faint smile played about Madeline's lips as she thanked him for his kind words. " I always get pale like this," she replied, " when I haven't slept properly. It's nothing."

" I thought I would come over myself," he said, " and offer you my personal sympathy, and at the same time make the arrangements for our sad little ceremony tomorrow."

" Thank you," she answered, and there followed an awkward pause, during which they both seated themselves.

" Would it be any comfort to you," he asked, at length, " to take me up to see the body ? "

Madeline drew in her breath sharply. " No, no, no ! " she exclaimed, looking at him with an expression in her face akin to that of horror. " I couldn't ! If you don't mind . . ."

He held up his hand. " I quite understand," he answered. " To some the presence of a priest of the Church in the chamber of death brings a

certain solace ; but we are not all alike in our feelings."

" Don't think me rude or ungrateful," she begged him, " but I can hardly bear to let *anybody* into that room."

" Of course, of course ! " he said, warming his hands at the fire. " But I think you will find Messrs. Bull and Grimthorpe, the undertakers, very good people, who do their work with unobtrusiveness and dispatch."

Madeline stared at him with growing terror in her eyes.

" And now tell me," he went on, " how will three-thirty suit you? I have to attend a parochial meeting here in Fylton at four : and so that will just give me time." He took , a small note-book and pencil from his pocket. " Shall we say three-thirty, then ? " he asked.

" Oh yes, yes! " she answered wildly; " I don't care when it is."

" The poor little chap ! " said Canon Rutting. " Let me see, when was he born ? "

" The fifteenth of November," she answered.

" H'm ! " he mused. "And now we are at the end of January. Just two and a half months old how very sad. When was he baptized ? "

" He wasn't baptized," she replied.

Canon Rutting started. " What ! " he exclaimed. " Two and a half months old and not baptized ? But this is most awkward. You ought to have seen to it long ago."

" Yes, I know," she answered lifelessly.

A tone of anger came into his voice. " But you don't seem to realize the position. Why was he not baptized ? "

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" I didn't like the Prayer Book service," she told him.

An expression of undisguised anger appeared in his face. " You didn't *like* it ! " he repeated. " It was not your place to criticize. You have taken too much upon yourself, Mrs. Beechcroft. Do you realize what you have done ?-do you know that none can enter into the Kingdom of God except he be baptized ? "

" I don't know anything about the rules of the Church," she answered.

" You have denied heaven's bliss to your own son," he declared, with solemnity. " God will not hold you guiltless. I am sorry, but I shall be unable to read the burial service in this case. It isn't as though he had died before there was time for him to be received into the Church. You have deliberately rejected on his behalf the remission of his sins . . . "

" He had no sin," she exclaimed.

" He has died with the weight of man's original sin upon him," he answered, visibly stiffening; " and you have refused to accept the mercies that our blessed Lord has permitted his Church to extend. You don't suppose, do you, that under these circumstances I am now entitled to commend him to God's forgiveness in the words of the burial service ? "

" No, I suppose not," she said listlessly. " What's to be done, then ? "

" I am afraid I can be of no service to you," he answered coldly. " It is a law of God that the sins of the parents are visited upon the children ; and in this case the punishment of your arrogant spirit is no less than this, that the gates of heaven are shut against your child."

Very impressively he bowed to her. " I see nothing to detain me here," he said, and without another word he left the room. Madeline's anger flamed up as she followed him into the hall; but without turning his head, he opened the front door and went out. For a moment

she entertained a passionate desire to go after him and to shout at him that he and his like were the Pharisees of the modern world ; but with an effort she controlled herself and put her fury from her. Half an hour later the doctor called to inquire after her health ; and to him she related what had occurred. He was much concerned; but he begged her not to worry, telling her that he would make all arrangements for the funeral himself, and would let her know later in the day what he had done. Drearly the hours passed. She tried to interest herself in the new books from the library; she went for a melancholy walk along the muddy lanes between rows of leafless trees ; she wrote a letter to Madame Groyant in Alexandria. At about tea time the doctor returned, saying that he had seen Canon Rutting and had received his permission to have the grave prepared in a portion of the cemetery which had not been used, but that no service would be performed.

" I call it scandalous," said the doctor, " but there it is"; and he was surprised at the reply he received from Madeline.

" No," she answered; " he is quite right to refuse the burial service for my baby, since I had refused baptism for him. What angers me is to think that he believes he has outlawed that pure little soul from heaven."

It was at dusk on the following afternoon that Father Gregory arrived at Fylton. Having been away from his home on the previous day, he had not received Robin's wire until a few hours ago ; but, setting aside all else, he had hurried straight to Madeline, and thus had reached the Manor not many minutes after the arrival of the telegram he had dispatched from London to announce his coming. Robin had given him no information in his message, but it was quite apparent from the wording that something serious had happened; and it was with a sudden and dreadful sinking of his heart that he observed the drawn blinds in the windows.

Instantly the thought occurred to him that Madeline herself had been seriously ill when Robin had telegraphed and now was dead ;

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and while he waited for the bell to be answered, he anxiously questioned the chauffeur of the hired car which had brought him from Hulchester. The man, however, could give him no information. The tension was acute as the door was opened, and his voice trembled as he questioned the maid.

" Your mistress ? " he exclaimed.

" She is not in, sir," the girl answered.

Father Gregory uttered a sigh of relief. " What has happened ? " he asked. "The baby?. . ." The words failed on his lips as the girl ominously nodded her head.

" He's dead, sir," she said. " Hadn't you heard ?

The old man clenched his hand and held it for a moment pressed against his mouth.

" When ? " he almost gasped.

" This is the third day," she replied. " He has just been buried. Mrs. Beechcroft hasn't come back yet from the funeral."

Rapidly he questioned her further, ascertaining that the burial had taken place in the village cemetery at about three o'clock. It was now nearly five. He learnt, further, that Madeline had refused to permit anybody to accompany her to the grave ; but the maid could not say what clergyman had officiated at the ceremony.

Without waiting further, Father Gregory, therefore, set off to walk down to the cemetery, which was distant not more than half a mile from the house. The afternoon was mild, the sky being overcast with grey clouds, and there was a slight haze hovering around the bare trees and bleak little cottages.

Grey, too, was his heart, and full of apprehension, as he walked through the village towards the silent church, which rose, dark and sombre, against the fading light of the western sky. He did not understand why Robin had not told him more explicitly what had occurred, nor why the elder Mrs. Beechcroft was not present to comfort her daughter-in-law. There was some mystery in the circumstances, and a sense of heavy anxiety and depression weighed him down yet urged forward his flagging footsteps.

As he passed the small building which served as the parochial hall, he came face to face with Canon Rutting, who was about to step into his brougham; and so eager was Father Gregory to obtain further information that he hardly observed the efforts of the other to avoid meeting him.

"Have you just come from the funeral ? " he asked the Canon, as they shook hands.

" No," was the brief reply. " Who officiated, then ? "

" Nobody There was no service."

" No service ? " Father Gregory ejaculated. " Why not ? "

" That is for your niece to answer," he remarked, with evident coldness.

Father Gregory quickly guessed the reason. " Was the child not baptized ? " he asked.

" He was not," came the laconic reply.

" But you could have read the prayers that are generally used in such cases."

" No," said Canon Rutting sternly. " She deliberately refused to let her child be received into the Church, and there was therefore no alternative for me. I had to refuse to officiate.

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If the poor little infant's soul is thus lost, her sin is upon her own head. I must be going." He took a step towards his brougham, but the other stopped him.

" Surely that is unnecessarily severe," he said.

" I am a strict Churchman," Canon Rutting answered, and there was a pugnacious gleam in his eyes which the failing light did not hide. " There is a limit to the clemency of the Church."

Father Gregory looked steadily at him. " There is no limit to the clemency of God," he said.

Canon Rutting's temper, it was obvious, was sorely tried. " I made one concession, however," he declared, as he took his seat in the carriage; " I allowed the body to be interred in the precincts of the holy ground-in an area which, as far as I know, has not been actually consecrated, but which is, nevertheless, part of the churchyard. That is all I felt justified in doing."

" Do you mean to say you let that poor girl bury her baby with no one to aid her but the gravedigger ? "

" It was entirely her own fault," Canon Rutting replied. " She had placed herself and her infant outside the pale of God's elect. Surely you take my point. No one is more distressed at it than I."

" Yes, I take your point," he said, " but I think it was an error. It is the duty of Christ's ministers to give comfort whenever and wherever they can, especially to those who have, perhaps, strayed from the fold."

Canon Rutting closed the door of his brougham. " You are, of course, a latitudinarian," he replied, with ill-concealed hostility. " In these matters I believe it my duty to be absolutely orthodox. Good-night." With a sigh Father Gregory turned and continued his way. He was deeply distressed that Madeline should have postponed the baptism until it was too late, and should have declared her objection to the ceremony; but that a priest of God should be im-

placable, even when the Church he served had been slighted, was almost beyond his comprehension.

A walk of a few minutes duration brought him to the graveyard, which, in the grey dusk, appeared to be entirely deserted ; but on passing round to the back of a dark clump of low-growing fir-trees he observed the figure of a man moving in the distance, and towards him he directed his steps.

As he quietly approached he saw that the man was engaged in filling the grave; and now, drawing nearer, he made out another figure, that of Madeline, seated upon the ground, her back turned to him. He was but a few yards away from her when she glanced around and saw him. She did not move. Her fingers were idly playing with the loose gravel upon which she crouched.

" Madeline ! " he cried, hurrying forward, his arms stretched out.

She held up her hand as though to check him. " Why are you here ? " she asked, in dull tones. " Who told you to come ? "

" Robin wired to me," he said.

" Robin ? " she repeated. " Robin ? This is my affair. I wonder that you deign to tread upon this unconsecrated ground."

" Madeline ! " he whispered, in pained surprise. The gravedigger laid down his shovel, and, touching his cap, drew Father Gregory aside.

" I'll leave 'er with you now, sir," he said. " She's been sittin' like that there for more'n an hour, just watchin' me. Maybe you can make 'er go 'ome. She'll catch 'er death. .."

Father Gregory nodded, and the man took his departure, his shovel over his shoulder and his coat across his arm. Madeline arose and looked silently at the grave. It was not quite filled in, and a certain amount of earth and gravel was still heaped at the side. With

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her foot she pushed some of this into the unfilled space.

" They've buried him pretty deep," she said, and her voice was heart-rending in its- monotony. " I suppose that was by Canon Rutting's orders, so that there'd be less chance of him hearing the last trump. He wasn't baptized, you know. That's why he's lying all alone over here. He's quite by himself, a little outcast from heaven, so they think, because his mother couldn't believe that such a thing as the spiteful anger of God existed or needed counteracting."

Father Gregory took her hands in his and looked into her eyes. " You would not have objected to him being signed with the sign of the cross ? " he asked.

She made a gesture which indicated that the question need not have been asked. "

That sign I made upon his forehead when he was first put into my arms," she said; and then suddenly, as though some memory had unlocked a door in her heart, she uttered a desolate groan. " Oh, my baby, my baby, my baby! " she cried.

She stretched her arms upwards to the darkening sky, her fists clenched. " Oh God! " she moaned. " Why did you take him from me ? Why? why ? " At last her tears came, and in the paroxysm of her grief she sank down upon the ground, her body seeming to be torn by her sobs.

Father Gregory knelt on one knee beside her, and folded her in his arms." Hush, my darling! " he whispered, holding her close to him. "Have faith; oh, have faith even yet a little while."

" He was so sweet," she said, her words broken by her weeping. " And Robin said I had neglected him. He said I had killed his love for me because I had listened to the call that was ringing in my

heart and had left my baby for three or four hours. They are both gone from me."

Father Gregory did not need to question her he now saw clearly what had happened, and his distress was almost as great as hers.

" We were so happy together, Robin and I, out there in the desert," she murmured. " But it was all a dream. And then when my baby came I thought that sorrow had gone for ever from me. But I am accursed, accursed. . . . I want happiness, and there is no happiness for me . . . only dust and ashes, dust and ashes. Oh, why didn't he let me end it all that night at Port Said ? "

Father Gregory laid his hand upon hers. " Because the Master had need of you," he said.

Very quietly he began to speak to her of that One to whom all things are known and in whose mighty love all love's loss is swallowed up; and as he spoke it was as though a sweet soothing influence encircled her, shutting off the cruel facts of her life and uplifting her mind to the hill-tops of her wider vision. There was such assurance in his voice, such rapture in his venerable face, such utter faith in his eyes.

"Put all these sorrows out of your mind," he whispered. " He has need of you, as you have need of Him. Turn your face wholly to Him, who changeth not, and whose joy no man can take from you. He is calling to you, my darling: go to Him. Lay your hands in His : place all your cares upon Him, for He careth for you, my little girl, my little girl ! "

He pulled out a large handkerchief from his pocket and attempted to dry her wet cheeks. He held her close to his frail form. Presently she looked up at him silently, and her tears ceased to flow. Her lips were pressed together, as though by an effort she were checking the force of her emotion, and

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slowly an expression of dawning resolution and hope came into her face.

" Yes," she said at length. " There is work to be done."

The darkness was fast gathering, and the night wind had begun to stir the bare branches of the trees. Suddenly she stood up and faced him.

" Come," she said; " let's be going. I must pack my things tonight : tomorrow I shall go to London to begin my work."

For a moment she looked silently at the grave, and then, taking Father Gregory's hand, and, like a child, holding it fast in hers, she turned away.

CHAPTER XXXIX

A LEADER OF MEN

MADLINE'S success as a leader was immediate. With such energy, such singleness of mind, did she throw herself into her work that the force of her personality was irresistible ; and before the month of February had passed her name had become a very watchword in the mouths of those who worked in the cause of Labour. The rooms which she had taken for herself in the neighbourhood of Westminster soon became a kind of headquarters of the party; and daily the leaders of the movement sat around her table discussing their plans and their ideals. Without a qualm or regret she handed over to them, for the benefit of the needy, two-thirds of all the money she possessed, retaining for her own only enough to keep herself independent and moderately comfortable.

By a powerful and persistent effort of will she kept her thoughts fixed on her work, and seldom allowed them to wander back to the events, sweet or bitter, that were past, nor permitted them to fare forward to the possibilities of the future. Only at the end of the day, when she lay in bed awaiting sleep, or in the early morning, when the grey light penetrated, cheerless and grim, into the room, did her courage fail her; and at these times her pillow was wet with tears.

During this strenuous month she had received three post cards from Robin, which had been for-

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warded from Fylton, but his words were of a more or less formal character. He told her that he was well and busy, and in the last of the three he said his special mission was accomplished and that he was back at headquarters at Khartoum. In a corner of this third card he had written : " Don't fret," and this had brought a ray of light into the deep darkness of her heart. After all, she said to herself, there were many women who from one cause or another were bereft of their husbands. On all sides, if one only looked, there was self-abnegation and sorrow borne nobly; yet few were sustained by such enthusiasm for their work as she, and none received in such a high degree the stimulant of achievement and success.

What would be the outcome of it all she knew not ; but her duty was set before her like a lamp to illumine her way, and if her heart failed her, she had but to put herself in contact with the dumb hopelessness of the poor, and in their distress her own unhappiness was forgotten. Sometimes it seemed to her that her heart was dead within her ; and yet her laughter and good humour never forsook her, and none would have guessed the misery that lay behind the radiance of her smile.

Father Gregory visited her on more than one occasion, and kept himself in touch with her by a frequent exchange of letters ; but of Robin's mother she saw nothing, nor did she receive any message from her other than the single letter of condolence which had reached her a week after her child had died. Mrs. Beechcroft, Father Gregory had told her, was too old-fashioned to approve of her association with the Labour Party; and, unfortunately, Madeline's name was now frequently mentioned in the papers in connection with the activities of the party, and in conjunction with the name of James Cottar, a fact which of itself would be sufficient to

arouse the keenest resentment on the part of her mother-in-law. Madeline bore her no ill will on this account, and, in fact, sympathized with her sentiments ; for she could well see that the breaking away from convention and tradition must of necessity be painful to the elder generation. She had no idea whether Robin had told her of their misunderstandings or not, but Father Gregory had declared that, so far as he knew, nothing of that kind had been said.

Madeline had little time to brood upon these matters. James Cottar had not been slow to make use of her great talents as a speaker ; and, as well as her work of organization, she was often called upon to address the meetings which, in these anxious days of social upheaval, were frequently held.

There was something peculiarly arresting in her individuality upon the platform. Not only was she beautiful to behold, but there seemed to emanate from her small person an influence that was stimulating and, at times, absolutely electric. Those who had not heard her before were at first astonished at her youth, and at the almost boyish grace of her figure. Usually she began her address in low tones, and the richness of her voice was not appreciated until she had spoken for some minutes.

She would commence with her hands thrust into the pockets of her well-cut costume and her wide-brimmed, Spanish-looking felt hat, pulled down, at a decided angle, over the crop of her thick brown hair. Then, gradually, as she warmed to her subject, she would punctuate her remarks with a sweeping movement of her right hand, while her left rested at ease upon her hip ; and sometimes, without the least affectation, she would suddenly pull off her hat, shake the hair back from her beautiful forehead, and, thus relieved, would speak with such passionate fervour that the listener was involuntarily carried along with her.

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With her great eyes fixed upon the back of the room and a smile of extraordinary radiance playing about her lips, she seemed to lead her audience far away from the terrible circumstances in which they were living, away from the dreariness of their lives and the routine of their daily tasks, onwards, upwards, until through the power of her vision they viewed the things that were to be, and found them indeed worth the fighting for. In her addresses she employed a certain number of quotations from the Bible, and the ancient words assumed new enchantment as they rang through the room.

" The Lord is my Shepherd," she would cry, " I shall not want : he leadeth me into green pastures " ; and in the imagination of her hearers the pastures of the world's new order were indeed green and glorious to the eye. " Rise up," she would exhort them, "for, lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone ; the flowers appear on the earth " ;' and, as she spoke, there blossomed in their minds the gardens of the kingdom of happiness wherein their children's children should walk when the day of their ideals had dawned and the shadows had fled away.

At the end of February, at the instigation of James Cottar, she was approached as to whether she would accept a position as one of the official leaders of the party, and she was asked to attend a meeting at which the proposal would be put to the vote. It was realized, of course, that she was not sufficiently versed in the detailed history of the movement to be successful in the handling of technical points ; but her magnetism, her fervour and her vivid personality were qualities that had instantly asserted themselves. The chiefs of the movement, therefore supported her, nursed her, watched over her - and, indeed, exploited her, as though she were some brilliant jewel that had suddenly dropped into their

hands ; and the rank and file gazed at her almost with awe, regarding her as a potential Joan of Arc who, with the rapidity of a shooting star, had rushed out of nowhere into their midst.

At the meeting which was held for the purpose of her election she gave an address in which she returned to the line of thought first suggested to her in Egypt and later developed in her mind by the books she had read. There were present in the audience a number of men who had heard her speak at her debut in the Temple of Abydos in Egypt, and her views on the subject of the teaching of the Master were familiar to them. She spoke of the Party's invitation to her to become one of their official leaders and gracefully thanked them for it ; but suddenly her rich voice became intense and the fervour of her thought was seen upon her face.

" There must only be one supreme leader in this movement," she said, " one leader, one teacher, one captain, and that is Christ ! Most of you know the opinions I have formed on this subject, but, if you will hear me, I will repeat them. When you think of Christ's teaching I want you to forget all about Adam and Eve and the Serpent, and the Flood, and the covenant with Abraham, and the Ten Plagues, and the Doctrine of the Atonement, and the Articles of the Creed, and so forth. Don't regard Christ at first in a religious sense at all. Think of him just as a man, a common artisan, a village carpenter, who, until he was some thirty years of age, spent his time in sawing wood and hammering nails and making hen-coops and pigsties, bedsteads and cupboards, and putting up doors and windows for the inhabitants of a disreputable village called Nazareth, a place of very ill fame. He was just Dick or Bill, the young joiner, the son of old Tom, whose shop was down there in the High Street, opposite the inn. But while he was sawing

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and hammering he was thinking hard and studying the lives of his customers, and suddenly he started to tell them what he thought of them and of the world in general ; and for a year or two he went about preaching and teaching. Then, of course, he ran foul of the police and was arrested. But what he taught in that short time was such sheer common sense that today, nearly two thousand years later, I ask you to accept him as your sole leader.

" Don't listen to what modern Christianity says about him : go to his original words and read for yourself what he said. Passionately he desired all men to be contented and happy: and he preached the great truth that happiness can only be obtained by peaceful means, not by violence ; by patience, not by anger ; by love, not by hatred. Love all men, he said, both friends and enemies ; return good for evil ; and especially forgive. Forgive, forgive, forgive ! That was his constant command. Be kind, be generous, be merciful, be tolerant, not judging or criticizing one another adversely. Respect the point of view of others : respect every man's liberty. Be sympathetic, be courteous, be considerate, be fair ; be honourable, truthful, sincere ; be peaceful-minded ; be orderly, temperate and sober, not given to uncontrolled outbursts of temper, not spiteful or revengeful or riotous:

" But what happened ? A few centuries after he died, his doctrine received a blow from which it has never recovered. The Emperor Constantine was converted to Christianity, and thereafter the whole of the ruling class became Christians. But they were not going to give up their wealth and their privileges or share them with the masses ; so the teaching of the Master had to be adapted to meet the views of the rich and the powerful, and its real meaning was lost.

" For all these centuries the Church has been

unconsciously keeping the true doctrine from the world. It has entangled the simple rules of the great Teacher in a network of ceremony and superstition, taking his practical, common sense principles and dressing them up in sanctimonious, priestly vestments. In mystic rituals and holy incantations and chantings and genuflexions, and talk of heaven and hell, it has lost sight of the fact that Christ preached just everyday common sense to plain men and women, telling them how to work for the Kingdom of God, that is to say the ideal social state, where there shall be no more warfare nor violent upheavals nor pauperism nor cruelty nor sorrow.

" And now I ask you, the ordinary people to whom he preached, to undo the work of modern Christianity, which has done so much to kill the real Christ ; and I want you to accept him as your leader. If he is divine, it is his teaching, his wonderful teaching, that should make us think him so, and through his words he still lives. He still stands at the door and knocks: will you let him in ?
"

For a moment she stood gazing in front of her, the light of the afternoon sun striking upon her through the begrimed windows, her hands clasped, and an expression of fervour in her shadowed eyes. Then she sat down.

CHAPTER XL

REUNION

IN her address Madeline had made a point of emphasizing the teaching of Christ in regard to the avoiding of violence and anger; for she was aware that at that time, the men belonging to one of the most important Trade Unions were in a state of ferment, and a strike was threatened at any moment. Both Madeline and James Cottar were opposed to the strike, but in conference with the disaffected leaders they found the utmost difficulty in discovering any mutual basis for discussion. The men's temper was up, and the spirit they displayed was not pleasant. There was open talk of a revolution ; and the journalists who recorded the activities of the movement in the daily papers were now beginning to hint darkly at the danger ahead. It was felt that the smallest accident might cause an explosion.

It was in the first days of March that Madeline went down to the headquarters of the strikers one evening and addressed a large gathering of men. At first they listened politely enough to her; but when she began to urge upon them the great principle of " No violence," which had become with her one of the main articles of her creed, they received her words in sullen silence.

" Don't play with fire," she said. " Can't you see that violence only leads to violence ? If you lose your tempers and start to riot, as your leaders are urging you to do, you may call public attention

to your grievances, you may get some temporary measures passed for your relief ; but you will have sown the wind and assuredly you will reap the whirlwind. You will set an example which will certainly be followed, and the end of your anger will be the beginning of the fury of others. ' They that take the sword shall perish with the sword' ; for if you encourage sword play, somebody else will think it a promising method of settling a dispute, and one day the same weapon will be turned upon you. The ending of your grievance, important though it is, is not so urgent as the need of upholding the ideal of law and order in men's minds."

An interrupter answered with a poignant question. " When," said he, " the cultured governments of the great nations settle their disputes by warfare and bloodshed, do you suppose the people, who've never been given an opportunity of becoming cultured, are going to be satisfied, with peaceful persuasion ? "

" It is for the people to set an example to their governments," Madeline replied; but her words were received with laughter.

" What you preach is all very well in theory," said one of the firebrands, a man named Pewse, " but it won't do in practice. We shan't get listened to till there's been bloodshed on one side or both. We don't want ideals: we want more money! "

"Good old Pewse ! " somebody shouted amidst much laughter.

" Are you also Christians only in name, then ? " she cried. " Do you also accept only the adapted version of the Master's teaching? Do you too regard him, then, as a crank who preached an impractical code, fit only for priests ? "

Pewse was a fanatic who had openly advocated a resort to arms. He wanted to lead the country into red revolution, and his threats of violence had led him to many a sharp encounter with the peace-

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loving Madeline. He was a little man with a lean, hungry face; and when he was aroused his voice sounded like the bark of a jackal. He hated the upper classes of society with a ferocity that was astonishing; and though usually he had little influence over his saner friends, his power was in the ascendant now that their tempers were up, and he sneered openly at Madeline.

But if his influence had made it difficult for her to establish any mental sympathy with the leaders, it was far more difficult for her to do so with the men. This was the first time that Madeline's ideals had been confronted by the concrete argument of an opposing prejudice, and the result of the clash was so disheartening that she left the meeting with tears in her eyes. Her disillusionment came as a violent shock to her: of a sudden she saw her friends stripped of the fair garments of the great Ideal, and in their nakedness they became repugnant to her. There was no doubt about it : she had *failed*.

It was after ten o'clock when, utterly dispirited, she arrived back at her apartments. It was raining; and as soon as she had let herself in at the front door she removed her damp coat and hat and hung them up. She was about to ascend the stairs to her own rooms, when her landlady, Mrs. Hindes, rushed forward out of the darkness of the back premises, waving her two hands in the air and uttering inarticulate noises, her mouth being at the moment full of a large portion of her supper.

" What's the matter ? " asked Madeline.

Mrs. Hindes swallowed violently. " Your 'usband ! " she spluttered. " 'E's waiting up there for you."

Madeline gasped and looked incredulous. Then, seeing that the woman was not joking, she ran up the stairs as fast as her legs would carry her. In an instant the sorrows of the last few weeks were

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blotted from her mind, and she was conscious of but one thought: he had returned. She did not ask herself in what frame of mind she would find him, nor did she consider what attitude she should adopt towards him. She had never been by nature an actress, and she knew quite well that, even had she wished, she could not in his presence hold for one minute the pose of the wronged wife. Her spontaneous nature invariably expressed itself from the fullness of her heart, not from the agility of her mind : and at the moment she was too happy to attempt to appear otherwise. She realized only that he had come back to her, that she wanted him; and the fact that he had treated her with harshness and cruelty was wholly forgotten. Her heart seemed to be beating in her throat as she flung open the door of her sitting-room.

Robin was seated at the writing-table, turning over the pages of a magazine. He had not removed his overcoat, and his gloves were still held in his hand. As he saw her he rose to his feet, and the gloves and the magazine fell unnoticed to the floor. No word passed his lips, but his arms opened, and suddenly they were around her.

" Robin ! " she cried ; " oh, Robin!"

Still he did not speak, nor at first did he attempt to kiss her. He held her close to him, his eyes seeming to gaze into her very soul; and presently his hand moved upwards and smoothed back the dark mass of hair from her white forehead. Then slowly he bent his head and their lips met.

At the touch of his mouth upon hers, Madeline drew in the breath through her nostrils, and he could feel the trembling of her body as her eyes closed and her head fell back upon his arm. At last he released her, and placed his two sun-burnt hands upon her shoulders as she stood before him.

" You have forgiven me ? " he whispered, and his voice was unsteady.

" I love you," she answered. " Love forgives everything."

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He looked intently at her, as though he were attempting to read her inmost thought. " I must have been mad," he said, and he shut his eyes for a moment under his knitted brows. " I've gone over it in my mind again and again, but just during these last few days I've seemed to see it all so much more clearly."

" Don't talk about it, Robin," she pleaded." I can't trust myself yet to think of the little life that went out . . ." Her voice faltered. She bit her lips, and her hands clenched themselves upon his.

" I wronged you Madeline, " he said. " I shall never forgive myself."

She did not answer. Presently she began to unbutton his overcoat. , " How long have you been here ? " she asked him.

" Half an hour or so," he replied.

" Why haven't you taken your coat off ? "

" I didn't know whether you'd want me to stay," he said, with a smile that had some shyness in it.

She helped him to remove the coat, and then, leading him to the sofa which stood in front of the fire, she seated herself beside him upon it, and, for some minutes there was silence between them-a silence glorious with the ardour of their reunion.

" Where are you staying tonight ? " she asked him suddenly.

He shrugged his shoulders. " I don't know," he answered. " My thoughts haven't been able to go as far ahead as that yet."

She got up and rang the bell, which was presently answered by her landlady in person.

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" Oh, Mrs. Hindes," said Madeline, " my husband is going to spend the night here. I just wanted to tell you."

Mrs. Hindes was at once eager to be of service. " I dare say you could do with a bite of supper, sir," she said, " and I've got a bottle of claret in the house, if you'd care to have it." She bustled around the room in an excited but quite futile manner, passing her hands over the table as though doing something magical to it, peeping into the sideboard cupboard, and then glancing into the bedroom which adjoined the sitting-room.

Madeline turned to him as she went out. " What's brought you back to England ? " she cried. " Thank God, you're safe."

" I've been sent home to report on the special mission I conducted," he answered. " It was all very simple and successful."

" How did you know my address? " she asked. The question had not occurred to her earlier.

" I knew Uncle Francis was in town; so I went straight to him and he told me where you were. I haven't seen mother or anybody else yet."

It was not long before Mrs. Hindes returned with supper; and it was at the end of this exhilarating little meal that Robin made a startling announcement.

" Now for my news," he said suddenly, as they lit their cigarettes. " I think you are going to be pleased. I have been offered a permanent job in Upper Egypt. There will be no difficulty about taking you out with me. We shall be able to live in Luxor."

His words came with a rush, and as Madeline took in their meaning her heart bounded within her. Egypt! Luxor ! The sunshine and the blue skies! The glorious desert with its warm, golden sand ; the palm groves rustling in the breeze ; the lilting songs of the happy peasants; the vessels moving

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up the placid Nile with their great sails spread! As she pictured the brilliant scenes the room seemed by contrast to grow chill, and she was aware of the dismal rain beating against the windows. To get away from the gloom of the darkened streets of London, to forget the men who had turned upon her, to begin life anew with her husband in the free air of Egypt ! It was like the unbarring of a prison door to a captive ; it was like the opening of a cage to a bird.

" Well ? "" said Robin. " What d'you think of it ? "

Madeline was silent. Suddenly the thought had come to her that in Egypt her past life would also be remembered, and that her husband might have to face again the unpleasantness that they had experienced in Alexandria.

" Don't you want to go back there with me ? " he asked, in surprise at her hesitation.

" More than anything else in the world," she answered, in a low voice. " But, Robin, don't you fear the talk about me ? "

He laughed. "Upper Egypt isn't like Alexandria," he protested. " Oh, don't let that worry you in the very least. Besides, I don't care what people say, now that I am with you again, my darling."

At this assurance the fair visions of Egypt came crowding into her mind once more; and so uplifted were her spirits by the prospect that all the disappointment and dismay which had weighed on her heart as she entered the house were utterly dismissed. She had given her message, she had told her fellow-men her interpretation of the teachings of the Master, and when it came to the test they had rejected it. Yet the seed had been planted some day it might come to fruition. And meanwhile, all that she most wanted was hers. Her husband had come back to her; and in her imagination she saw herself on board the liner,

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speeding with him to the land of her fairest dreams, watching with him the fading coasts of Europe, or gazing with him upon the sun-bathed shores of Egypt as the vessel approached its destination. With him she stood in the moonlight upon the banks of the Nile ; or on warm summer nights, she sat with him in the shadowed gardens where the scent of many roses was wafted to her nostrils upon the gentle breath of the evening. With him she rode out into the limitless desert and rested upon the soft, warm sand; with him she scrambled over the sunburnt cliffs and turned her face to the racing north wind. No longer should the cold rains of England drench her weary body, nor the biting gales freeze the very marrow in her bones. No longer should her eyes be dulled by the sight of the dreary houses of London's mean streets, nor her spirits damped and daunted by the squalor with which so many of her recent followers were seemingly well content.

She rose from the table and slipped her arm about her husband's shoulder. " I can't tell you what this means to me, Robin," she said. "It's like the morning that follows the darkness of night."

" I want you to come out to me as soon as you like," he told her. " I myself shall be going back at the end of the month."

" I'm ready now," she answered.

" And your work ? " he queried. " What about that ? "

" I am ready to give it up," she said; and briefly she told him of the events of the last few days.

" Nice specimens your Labour friends are ! " he laughed. " The papers tonight are full of their threats. They'll be rioting tomorrow."

" I've done my best to keep them quiet," she said; " but they won't listen to me any more now that their blood is up."

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A wave of depression swept over her; and Robin, seeing her dejection, did not pursue the subject. He was so heartily glad to be with her again, he was so stirred by her beauty, so enthralled by her personality, that he had no wish to discuss with her the problems of life. He wanted only to hold her in his arms, to lose himself in the depths of her wonderful eyes - those eyes which were so full of mystery and so tender with love, and to forget all things in the intoxication of her presence. He spoke, therefore, only of the sweet today and of the brilliant future; and soon he had wooed her back to happiness and laughter. It seemed to him that never had he realized so keenly as now her extraordinary fascination, never had she appeared to him to be so wholly lovable. Her eagerness to set out again upon their travels, her elation at the thought of turning their faces once more to the East, was infectious ; and for more than an hour they talked of their plans, and of the delights of the country to which they were going.

At length they retired to rest ; and soon the fair mantle of their love had wrapped them about, hiding their eyes to all things save only the vision of their Paradise, and stopping their ears to all sound but the surge of their passion. And when at last the gentle goddess of sleep stole to their side, her tender hands laid themselves upon two hearts that beat closed-pressed to one another, and upon lips that in the wonder of reconciliation still murmured, " Love, love, love! "

CHAPTER XLI

THE DEMONSTRATION

IT was close upon two o'clock in the morning when James Cottar knocked at the front door of the house and hesitatingly pressed the bell. He had come direct from a midnight conference of the strikers, where he had failed to prevent a resolution being passed in favour of a demonstration in Trafalgar Square. He had warned the men that any such gathering would be broken-up by the police, in conformity with the orders recently issued by the Home Office; but their blood was up, and they were determined, if necessary, to give blow for blow. The hour was pregnant with danger: at any moment the whole country might be plunged into the horrors of revolution. Finding all other hopes of pacifying the hot-heads unavailing, he had decided to solicit the help of Madeline. It was possible that, if she spoke to them while they were gathering, her eloquence might persuade them to disperse and thus avoid a fracas with the police. He did not know to what extent events had really undermined her influence; but certainly there was no one else living who could move them from their allegiance to the fire-eating Pewse.

The rain poured down upon his tall figure as he stood in the darkness, and dripped from the brim of his hat. He was distressed at having to disturb her thus in the night; but the demonstration had been fixed for ten o'clock that morning and there

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was no time to be lost. As he rang the bell for the third time he began to wonder whether he would fail to make himself heard, for no sound as yet came from the house and no light appeared in the windows.

Madeline herself was the first to be recalled from the region of shadowy dreams. Drowsily she sat up in bed and listened. The fire was still burning in the grate, and in its dim glow she could see that Robin was asleep. As quietly as possible, so that she might not disturb him, she arose, and, slipping on her dressing-gown, crept out of the room. Mrs. Hindes had evidently not woken up, and Madeline therefore went down the stairs in a dazed fashion to answer the summons herself. Opening the front door, she stared in bewilderment at her visitor.

" Ee, lass, I'm sorry to disturb you," he said, as he stepped into the passage and closed the door after him. " You'll catch your death o' cold in that flimsy gown."

" What's the matter ? " she asked ; and in reply he told her briefly what he wanted her to do. Madeline was not fully awake, and his meaning came to her with a sort of horrible distortion. " No, I couldn't do it," she said. " They wouldn't listen: they'd just sweep me aside. No, I couldn't, I couldn't. . . ."

" There'll be bloodshed if you don't," he muttered. " Pewse is on the ramp."

Madeline shuddered. Through the cracks of the door the wind whistled, and against the glass panes above it the rain beat drearily. " You don't understand," she went on. " My husband has come back. He's upstairs now. . . ."

James Cottar started. " Aye, then it's useless asking you," he said, and he heaved a deep sigh.

" The lads 'll 'ave to 'ave their fight. You alone could 'ave persuaded them ; but with you your 'usband comes first. Ee, love is a dealer in slaves ! "

" But what could I do ? " she asked, and she made a gesture of despair.

" What could you do ? " he repeated. " Why; it's you that's been reminding us what Christ taught, 'ow to be patient, long-suffering and quiet. You've always preached against violence. You've told them that violence will never help them so well as concerted orderly pressure. They listened to you once ; they'll listen again when they see you coming amongst them in their trouble."

" No, no, they'll never listen now," she said, " I've finished my work. I'm going away. My husband is going to take me to Egypt at once."

He was silent, but his eyes were eloquent as he gazed reproachfully at her.

" Out there in the sunshine I shall be happy," she sighed. " Here I have been miserable." She spoke as though she were in a dream, and her shadowed eyes seemed to be looking at things far off. " I was born to love and to be loved. My nature requires warmth and happiness, and the brightness of the sun and laughter and good company. Once I had those things, and wanted everybody else to have them too. That is why I kept telling them to listen to the Master's teaching; for Christ is laughter and happiness and good cheer. Here in England my happiness was taken away from me and I have known utter misery, but now, today, joy has come back to me, and life is holding out its hands to me once more. Life, life, life ! That's what I want ! Just to live : fully, richly, recklessly happy!" She broke off suddenly and shivered. " Listen to the rain," she said. " I'm getting cold. I must go back to bed. I believe this is all a dream."

" My lass, it's stern reality," he replied. " You've ratted."

Slowly he opened the door, and without another

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word passed out into the rain. The intense darkness of the street immediately swallowed him; and then, a moment later, so it seemed to her overwrought brain, he had come back and was standing silently upon the doorstep. The rain beat in upon her, yet she did not move. Her eyes were fixed upon the figure before her ; but the night was so black that she could not, indeed, be quite certain that her senses had not played her a trick.

" Why are you standing there ? Why don't you say something? " she said; and as she spoke she seemed to see the figure move, though no more than a dark outline was visible.

Then, gradually, there stole over her a sense of unreality, a feeling that she was dreaming. Yet she was conscious that her heart was beating violently, and not only her eyes but her whole being, her very soul, strove to penetrate the darkness. Slowly she became aware that this was not James Cottar who stood there so silently in the rain and the wind. He had gone home, and in his place there was somebody else-something else : something that awed yet did not frighten her, something that seemed in its very silence to be speaking to her, and speaking words to which her heart and not her ears listened.

" Who are you ? " she whispered, and her voice was lost in the sound of the wind and the rain. Yet, as though in answer to her question, a sudden wave of tenderness passed over her, a sudden flood of happiness entered the gates of her heart. It was as though the rain no longer fell, as though an unseen sun illumined the darkness, as though night and the chill of winter had ceased to be. To her inward ear there came as it were the sound of the singing of birds, and to her inward eyes there was revealed a vision of the fair places of the earth.

Then, suddenly, she knew who stood there upon the doorstep. Whether she were dreaming, or

whether this were indeed reality, seemed little to matter. She had recognized Him; at long last His divinity was revealed to her, and her heart leapt within her.

" Master ! " she cried. " My Lord and my God!"

For some moments it seemed to her that she lay at His feet, bathing them with her tears, till the touch of the wonderful hands upon her shoulders soothed her to unfathomable rest. Then very slowly the pressure of the healing fingers lightened, and as she raised her eyes the vision faded. Yet even as the figure dissolved into the darkness there came the sound of a voice, clear yet gentle, commanding yet full of infinite tenderness " Feed my sheep."

A silence as of death followed ; and then, suddenly, she was aware that she was staggering up the stairs to her room and that the front door was shut behind her. Half dazed, and almost bereft of the power of thought, she crept into bed ; and in a moment oblivion was upon her.

She awoke as the first dreary light of the winter morning penetrated into the room; but still Robin slept. For more than an hour she lay staring in front of her, while her thoughts battled with one another, until through the confusion a clear passage was made for her actions. Whether the vision in the night had been a true revelation or but a figment of her own imagination, the great change had come upon her. Her Master was God ! And in the glorious light of this new illumination the call of her conscience was clear : it had to be obeyed. And with this determination, a profound sense of happiness and well-being returned to her, and with a feeling of physical vigour she went to her bath.

When she returned, Robin was awake; and together they ate the light breakfast which Mrs. Hindes had sent up on a tray, laughing and talking the while like two happy children. When the meal was finished, Madeline continued her dressing, while Robin lay in bed, hardly taking his eyes from her.

"Shall I tell you," he said, "what strikes me most about you, after having been away from you ? "

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" What ? " she asked, coming to him and putting her arms about him.

" That all your actions seem so definite. Each movement counts; you don't fiddle about or have to do things twice. That, and your gracefulness."

" Has anything gone wrong with my looks ? " she asked. " People usually notice *them* first."

He held her close in his arms. " You are the most beautiful woman God ever made," he said, and there was the fervour of passion in his voice.

Suddenly Madeline drew herself away from him and glanced at the watch upon her wrist.

" Why are you looking - at the time ? " Robin asked her. " You haven't got anything special to do, have you ? "

It was nearly ten o'clock. Already the strikers would be gathering in Trafalgar Square; but if she told Robin of her intention to go there he would be sure to attempt to dissuade her.

" I want you to get up now, darling," she said, " because Mrs. Hindes likes to get the bed made early. She is very particular about it."

" All right, I'll have my bath now," he replied; and a few moments later he went across the landing to the bathroom.

Instantly Madeline sat down at the writing table and rapidly scribbled a few words on a sheet of note-paper.

" There's going to be trouble in Trafalgar Square this morning," she wrote. " I must try and prevent it. James Cottar came round in the night, while you were asleep, and begged me to talk to them and persuade them to disperse ; but I refused. Then

Somebody else came, and to Him I couldn't say no. Don't be angry with me. I love you."

She slipped the note into an envelope, on which she wrote his name, and placed it on the mantel shelf where he would be sure to see it. Then she went into the bedroom, and fervently kissed the pillow upon which Robin's head had rested, and a few moments later she had put on her hat and coat and had hurried from the house.

The morning was fine and the air mild ; and larger numbers of people than usual appeared to be moving about in the vicinity of the Abbey, while towards the bottom of Whitehall the crowds seemed to be dense. Hailing a taxi, Madeline told the driver to take her to Trafalgar Square ; but the man shook his head.

" I wouldn't go there, miss, if I was you: not today."

" Why ? " she asked, fearful lest the trouble had already broken out.

" There's a demonstration going on," he answered, " and things look a bit ugly."

She suggested that he should drive her through St. James's Park as far as the Admiralty Arch ; but again he shook his head.

" You can't get through that way," he said. " They've drawn a cordon right across the Mall. I suppose they're afraid of the men marching to Buckingham Palace."

" Well, then," said Madeline, " you must take me along the Embankment and round by Northumberland Avenue."

To this he agreed, though not without warning her further of the danger ; and a few minutes later he had deposited her on the outskirts of the crowd that was rapidly gathering around the Nelson Column.

Here at the corner of Northumberland Avenue and the Strand there seemed to be no cordon at the

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moment, but a body of policemen was marching up from Scotland Yard in that direction; and Madeline realized that, had she been a few moments later in starting, she might not have reached the scene at all. Glancing down Whitehall, she saw that the police were drawn up right across the roadway; for no doubt the strikers would wish to demonstrate in the Downing Street region.

The men formed a solid mass in the middle of the Square: there was not a woman amongst them. But on the outskirts of the crowd there were several women and men of the better classes, and numerous soldiers were to be seen, whose attitude appeared to be hostile to the malcontents. These obvious lookers on, however, did not move very far away from the foot of the Strand and St. Martin's, for this was the best means of escape from the area, if any trouble should occur.

Things certainly looked very ugly. It was clear that the police were prepared to resist the strikers and to bar their way to the Government offices or to the other important areas; but it was equally apparent that the men were determined to put up a fight. Even now they were singing songs of a revolutionary character, and some of their leaders were shouting fiery injunctions to them from the base of the column.

For a moment Madeline faltered in her purpose. It was not that she lacked courage ; indeed, she hardly knew what fear was *in* regard to herself. But it seemed so useless to attempt *to* pacify the angry spirit *of* these men. Her hesitation, however, was only momentary, for in her ears, like the sound of a distant bell, there still rang those three words ;

" Feed my sheep." These men were like sheep looking for their shepherd who should lead them into green pastures. . . . *Suddenly*, as she was pushing her way onwards,

she noticed that a change had come over the mass of men in front of her.

They were moving forward towards Whitehall in compact formation; and as they *did* so the onlookers scattered in all directions. More than once she was nearly knocked over by the retreating crowds, and warnings were shouted to her not to go forward. At this moment she descried James Cottar standing beside one of the lions, and apparently shouting to the men, urging them to keep the peace. But his efforts were evidently in vain, and soon he was lost once more in the press.

Madeline found it impossible to thrust herself forward through the mass of the retreating onlookers but in the direction of Whitehall the crowds were not so dense, for here was the danger zone away from which they were all hurrying. Presently she found herself almost alone in the deserted space between the police cordon and the advancing phalanx of the strikers.

People shouted to her to get out of the way, and a police officer violently waved his arm at her. But now the excitement of the moment had taken possession of her, and there was but one thought in her mind : she must stop the advance of the strikers ; she must fight a duel with the ferocious Pewse, whom now she discerned in the forefront of the men.

Straight to their approaching ranks she ran; and as she was recognized there came a shout from a hundred throats, which was presently taken up by the ranks behind. In the clamour and confusion of the rapidly moving events the men *did* not know whether she had come to lead them or to urge them to go back, and only those immediately around her heard her impassioned appeal to them to avoid violence. Whatever her purpose, however, they *did* not wish her to remain in her exposed and dangerous position ; and *opening* their ranks, therefore, they

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pressed her towards the rear as they themselves swept onwards.

Soon she was crushed in amongst the excited crowd, and it was not long before she was forced to move forward with it. In the enthusiasm of the moment two men hoisted her up on to their shoulders, and as her figure was seen above the heads of the crowd, there was again a great shout and much waving of hands. And so, gesticulating and appealing, hatless and flushed, she was carried forward, until presently she found herself down again amongst the swaying press of excited men, pushed to and fro, and the breath nigh squeezed out of her. She could not see a yard in any direction, but the shouts and cries and imprecations told her that the clash with the police had taken place. Then came a roar of cheering, and the mass swayed forward, spreading itself out. She felt the pressure slacken around her ; and, a moment later, she realized that the cordon had been swept aside and that Whitehall was open before them.

The strikers now seemed to be divided in their purpose, and large numbers from the head of the phalanx moved towards the Admiralty Arch, where a free fight with the police still continued. Others advanced along Whitehall; and Madeline, owing to this deflection of the men in front of her, presently found herself once more in front of the moving mass, a clear space before her. She had been much jostled by the excited crowd, and she was hoarse from shouting at the men, urging them at least to keep their heads ; but they were now wholly out of hand, and she herself was approaching exhaustion. Not far from her she again saw Pewse. He had drawn a red handkerchief from his pocket and was waving it above his head.

Suddenly, a few yards ahead, she saw the troops forming up across the roadway. She knew that

the authorities were empowered to act with all the rigour of martial law and that the rifles facing her were loaded. An angry cry arose from the ranks behind her, but the momentum of the advance was not lessened. With breathless horror she saw an officer give some sharp orders to his men. A ray of sunlight broke through the grey clouds and glinted upon the row of levelled rifles. Behind her the men had come to a halt, and a shower of stones and bottles was hurled at the opposing force. She saw some of the soldiers shift their positions, and one of them staggered and fell. The officer again gave an order. Madeline realized what it meant, and with a cry she leapt forward. A stone struck her on the shoulder, and she staggered. It seemed impossible that she could survive in this hail of missiles.

"Don't shoot!" she shouted to the soldiers. " In God's name, don't shoot! "

In a moment she had crossed the narrow open space between the solid mass of rioters and the rigid line of the troops. The rifles were pointed at her breast : she was but a yard or two from the officer, whose command his men awaited. She saw his white face.

"Wait, wait, oh wait!" she sobbed. "If you fire, there'll be a massacre on both sides ! Oh, have patience with them! "

The brickbats and bottles ceased to fall about her. The men were non-plussed by her action. They did not wish to hurt her. She spread her arms out as it were to shield the angry rioters behind her from the consequences of their rashness, or maybe to protect the soldiers from the next volley of stones. It was as though in one supreme gesture, the gesture of the cross, she opposed herself at once to revolt and to repression.

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Suddenly from the crowd behind her the wild figure of Pewse ran forward.

" Damn you ! get out of the way! " he yelled. Madeline turned. A sudden silence seemed to fall. It was as though every man present realized that a tremendous moment had arrived and that the very fate of the country itself hung in the balance.

Pewse dived his hand into his pocket, and in an instant he was covering her with a revolver. " To hell with traitors! " he shouted, and before any man could stay his hand he fired point blank at her.

Madeline swerved back, and her left hand clutched at her breast. For a few seconds she stood her ground, and her eyes passed down to her hand with a look almost of surprise as she saw the blood dripping through her fingers. At the same moment the tall figure of James Cottar burst through the crowd, and his mighty fist crashed full into the face of Pewse, who fell like a log to the ground. Then, bounding over the senseless body, he rushed forwards across the open space and caught Madeline by the arm as she swayed backwards.

The officer shouted something, and one of his men put down his rifle and also ran forward to the girl's assistance, taking hold of her other arm. Her senses were fast leaving her, and a ponderous darkness was closing over her eyes ; but even as oblivion engulfed her she knew that the danger was past. She had created the diversion : the outrage upon her had brought the men to their senses ; the one touch of nature - a man from either side hastening to assist an injured woman had once more proved the whole world kin. The day was won.

CHAPTER XLII

BODY AND SOUL

SHE was unconscious when she was lifted on to the stretcher by the ambulance men, but James Cottar was able to give the necessary information as to her identity and address; and it was not long before she was lying upon her own bed in her rooms at Westminster. Robin had gone to Trafalgar Square in search of her, and there, from the silenced and pacified crowd, he had heard the news which had brought him back breathless to the house a few moments after she had been carried upstairs. A doctor was speedily sent for and a rapid operation was performed ; but there was not a great deal of hope. The bullet had penetrated deep into her body, and in its transit, so the doctor said, had probably injured vital organs ; and he considered it doubtful even whether she would recover consciousness before the end.

Robin's brain was numbed by the shock. It seemed impossible that she who a few hours ago was so full of the glory of youth should now be lying limp and almost inanimate. The transmutation from pulsating life to this cessation of being was too sudden to be realized ; and for hours he sat with his eyes fixed upon her face, his mind almost devoid of thought. He was only conscious of her childlike beauty. Her pale face seemed to be so untouched by the turmoil of life; her hair, tumbled upon the pillow, was so like that of a sleeping child ; her

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closed eyes, fringed by those wondrous so innocent of care.

Miserably he turned to the doctor, "She was only a child, he murmured."

The doctor wrinkled his brows and shook his head. " Yet it seems that she is the saviour of her country," he said.

It was early in the afternoon when Madeline opened her eyes and consciousness returned. Robin was staring dejectedly out of the window, watching the silent crowd of working men who stood awaiting a further bulletin, when he suddenly heard the doctor speaking to her and reassuring her, and, with a beating heart, he hastened to her side. Her eyes rested on his face, and there was such tenderness in them that the words he wished to utter seemed to stick in his throat. At length her lips moved, and, bending over her, he could hear the whispered words.

" I don't want to die," she said.

It was useless for him to assure her that she would get well : she felt that he did not speak the truth. Presently, in the passion of his sorrow, he asked her why she had thus faced the bullets and the brickbats.

" If I'd not done it," she whispered, " he would have given the order to fire."

The doctor interposed, warning Robin that he must not let her speak; and for some time there was silence in the room, while Madeline's fingers rested limply upon his hand and her eyes remained closed as though in weariness.

Robin had sent a message across to his uncle asking him to come over, and soon after three o'clock he came into the room. The grief he felt was not able to be disguised, and the tears were running down his cheeks as he stood at the bedside. Presently she made a sign to him that she wished to speak to him, and when he had bent down to catch her laboured words, she asked him whether he would like to say some prayer, over her. He shook his head.

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" But oughtn't you to do something or other to fit me to meet my Maker ? " she asked, and there was a curious light in her face.

" No, no," he answered. " You are not going to die, my darling. The Master has you in His keeping. His arms are about you now, my little girl ; the tenderness of His infinite love wraps you around; His voice is whispering to you ' Well done, well done, true and faithful servant.' For you no prayers of mine are needed ; but, Madeline, if you will, I would like you to pray for me."

She looked at him with deep affection in her eyes, and he felt the pressure of her fingers upon his hand. Again there was silence in the room for some minutes. Then she turned her face to Father Gregory.

" What was it St. Paul wrote ? " she whispered. " ' I have fought a good fight ...' "

" ' I have fought a good fight,' " he said; " ' I have finished my course ; I have kept the faith.' "

" ' I have kept the faith,' " she repeated, and her great eyes gazed up at Robin's face, as though she would have him mark what she said.

For some time she lay with closed eyelids, while silence reigned in the room. Then suddenly the watchers by the bedside observed that a little smile played about her lips, and, opening her eyes, she looked at them with an expression of infinite peace upon her face.

" ' I know that my Redeemer liveth,' " she whispered.

It was as though in her spell of unconsciousness her soul had gone forth and had come back to her aflame with tidings of great joy. She uttered the splendid words with such conviction, her smile had

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in it a quality of such calm assurance, that she seemed to convey to those around her the force of her certainty, so that, their hearts beat higher and a great exultation, they knew not for what reason, come upon them. She closed her eyes again ; and Robin, filled with this sudden positive sense of confidence, went over to the doctor and whispered to him, asking what he thought of her chances.

" Well," he replied, with uncompromising brevity, " miracles do happen."

Father Gregory, who was standing by the doctor's side, looked up with a smile. " The miracle has happened," he said.

Impelled by this unaccountable sensation of hope, the three of them crept back to the bedside, and as they did so Madeline once more opened her eyes.

" Robin," she whispered.

He bent his head. " Don't tire yourself by talking, my darling," he said.

She smiled: almost she laughed. " I must tell you," she murmured. " I am going to live. It's so strange that all these months I never knew . . . I never realized that I'd been given this special job to do. . . . now, I've done it, and I'm free, Robin. . . . I'm free to come out to you in Egypt. . . . Egypt, Robin, Egypt . . . and the desert. He has given me back my life ; for you and me He has opened the gates of His Kingdom of Happiness."

The doctor put his fingers upon her pulse. " Jove! " he exclaimed. " I wouldn't have believed it possible ! What a magnificent constitution she must have. Father Gregory smiled.

CHAPTER XLIII

LOVE IN THE DESERT

MADLINE's recovery was rapid,, and indeed phenomenal ; and when, a month later, Robin went out to Egypt to take up his new work, she was already convalescent. The speedy regaining of her strength was largely due to the happy state of her mind, for, somehow, she seemed in these days to be entirely devoid of care. So exhilarating was her apparent enjoyment of life that even her grave-faced doctor was stirred to outbursts of startling hilarity by the infection of her rippling laughter.

" You see," she once explained to Robin, " I have had a sort of burden to bear all these last months, and now it has suddenly gone from my shoulders. In fact, all my life I've been oppressed by a feeling that I had something to give out, something to do; and now - I can't quite explain, but I feel as though I'd *done* it. There's a weight off my mind. I feel like somebody who has come out of the valley of the shadow of death, mentally as well as physically, and life is spread out before me in all its glory and its enticement."

In the warm summer days which followed she went down to the sea with her nurse, for nothing would induce her ever to return to Fylton, and she was joined for a few weeks by Father Gregory, whose company was always congenial to her. From all sides she was constantly in receipt of messages of respect and affection ; for since the

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great riot, she had become a national heroine. The discontented element among the working classes had hailed her as a martyr for their cause, and those who stood for law and order believed that the averting of revolution itself was due to her bravery on that never-to-be-forgotten day. To her surprise she found herself regarded as one of the greatest of English patriots; and even the elder Mrs. Beechcroft declared that she was proud of her.

It was in the middle of September that Madeline, accompanied by Father Gregory, went out to Egypt, and ten days later she and Robin were on their way across the Nile to stay for a few days at their uncle's house in the desert, whose hospitality, as a special mark of his favour, he had for this week extended to one of the opposite sex.

The hot season was not yet quite over, and the fierce rays of the sun had seemed to bombard them as they rode up from the placid Nile along the dusty pathway, the parched earth shimmering in front of them and the sky brazen above. The desert and the cliffs were ablaze in the morning light, and the few natives who loitered around their huts appeared still to be in that condition of torpor which the summer imposes upon them. The Egyptians have a proverb which says that only dogs and Englishmen walk abroad in the heat: and Robin recalled the words to mind as he saw them glancing with mild interest at himself and his wife.

The group of palms and tamarisks in front of his uncle's house looked green and cool as they approached; and when they had entered the cloistered court of the whitewashed building, with its welcome shade and its promise of ease and quietude, the both realized that here truly was a sanctuary where a man might dream the hours away in gentle contemplation. They glanced through the white archway into the luxuriant garden beyond,

and their eyes rested for a moment upon the doorway of the little chapel, about which the purple bougainvillea clustered. There, in that chapel, they had been made man and wife ; and the thought, somehow, was more sweet, more thrilling to them now even than it had been before. A hundred birds were singing in the trees, and high up in the deep-hued sky above them the desert lark trilled out his morning hymn to the sun. In the scented air the bees hummed as they passed from flower to flower; and the touch of the cool north wind made music in the rustling palm leaves.

" Do you know," said Robin to his uncle, when they were alone together, " I have the feeling that Madeline and I belong to the desert. She was always a child of the sun. Oh, why did I ever take her to England ? "

Father Gregory looked at him gravely. " I don't think you can be said to have taken her there," he answered. " I think the Master called her."

It was cool in the airy white-walled chamber which Father Gregory had assigned to them, and through the open windows the breeze passed into the room, bringing to their ears the drowsy creaking of the waterwheel at a well among the distant palm groves, and the piping of the goat-herd who sat lazily under the trees. Here all was peace and sweet contentment, and the slums of England seemed but the vision of a nightmare from, which they had awakened. Here the everlasting vigilance and stress and agitation of Western life was hushed into the quiet drone of the East, and the mighty sun poured down its wondrous gift of peace upon all things. Here tomorrow was as good as today, and for all men's business there was time and to spare. That which was amiss would in its due season be righted, and that which was ill-seeming to the mind would presently be shaped anew.

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After all, mused Robin, happiest were those who, in the manner of these children of the Nile, gave up their brains to no process of analysis, who took no great thought of the morrow. That was what Madeline had taught: be happy, don't worry, don't let yourself be fretted into anger, avoid the causes of ill will, be simple, forgiving and forgetting like children. Yes, that was what she had preached, that was the cause for which she had so nearly laid down her life; and the revelation of this meaning of Christ's teaching had come to her in the desert, in the warmth of the sun, here where the gloom of mean streets and the squalor of the slums were unknown.

A feeling, of mental repose descended upon his mind in regard to the past. It had been all just the *Kismet el Allah*, the destiny decreed by God. And now the future stretched out before them once more, full of wonderful things that were to be done, fine deeds that had to be dared, glowing hopes that assuredly would be attained. His reunion with Madeline was intoxicating to him. She seemed to be endowed with some stirring quality which, even in the days of his first love, he had not so vividly felt. There was a pulsating sense of life about her, a thrilling vitality, which communicated itself to him, so that he knew not how to steady himself. And in her eyes, in her face, in her gestures, he could see that she, too, was nigh drunken with love and happiness.

During these enchanted days they spent many hours in long, rambling walks over the Theban hills and up the cavernous valleys. Here they encountered no human beings: they were alone with their beating hearts. Hardly a living thing stirred, save an occasional bird, and sometimes a vulture circling in the blue vault above them. In the brilliance of the day the jackals kept to their

lairs; and for many a mile they walked along the narrow paths trodden by their pads, but saw no sign of the path-makers. On the heights, as they stood to survey the endless vistas of the desert hills, or as they gazed down upon the narrow valley that is Egypt, with its thin belt of verdure on either side of the winding, snake-like Nile, the north wind blew strong and cool about them, seeming, as it were, to sweep from their eyes the remembrance of all unkind events and to brush from their lips the memory of all unhappy words. And down in the echoing valleys the burning sun beat through the quivering air upon them as though it would scorch from their bodies the recollection of every sorrow they had ever known.

In the evenings, as the light faded and the stars began to glitter in the vast heavens, they would wander through the great, deserted courts of the temples at the foot of the cliffs, or seat themselves in profound silence in the pillared halls, where the infrequent cry of an owl served but to increase the stillness of the dusk. Here they seemed to see with inward eye the pageant of the ages pass before them; and in that splendid company they seemed to behold themselves marching triumphantly along, at one with all the loves of the past and in step with all the joy of the future. In these mysterious and luminous moments before the darkness of the night had fallen, they were conscious of the eternal movement of the years, and they saw how the conglomerate soul of mankind went forward, irresistibly, endlessly, towards its goal, each passing age captained and led, under its distinctive banners, by those who in life had dared all for the advancement of the unconquerable love and idealism of humanity.

On the morning of the day on which they were to leave their uncle's house and take up their residence at the bungalow which had been built for them at

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the edge of the desert a mile or two away, Robin arose early, while the stars were still visible in the sky and the advancing glow of the sunrise had not yet reached the Milky Way. For some minutes he stood at the open door of the courtyard, looking out upon the desert, and down to the distant fields beside the Nile, and across to the far-away hills behind the town of Luxor. In the palms near by the sparrows chirped and fluttered as they awoke from their sleep, greeting the new day with their busy chatter, and from the scattered native habitations there came the crowing of the cocks and the lowing of the cattle. Overhead a long, trailing flight of storks passed across the sky, moving southwards on their journey from Europe, their black and white wings and pink legs illumined by the first light of the coming day.

Presently the stars faded, and the delicate hues of the dawn were shed over all things. It was as though the eastern hills were made of translucent amethyst, the fields of beryl, the nearer desert of alabaster, and the great cliffs behind him of amber and carnelian. The air was still, and here and there the smoke of an early fire went upwards from the whitewashed hut of some sleepy peasant like a thin blue line, unswayed by any movement of the atmosphere. Then, from the minaret of a mosque, down in a village amongst the fields, there came the gentle sound of the call to prayer.

With a sigh of supreme content Robin turned and went back across the shadowed courtyard, and so passed into the walled garden. Here the scent of the roses filled the air ; and in the branches of a tamarisk a blue rock-thrush was singing his morning song, while on the dome of the chapel a turtle-dove cooed softly to his mate. The reflected light of the sunrise was now touching the top of the cliffs which towered above the white walls of the

garden, and the sky was flushed with the warm opalescence of the dawn.

For a while he walked slowly to and fro in the coolness of the morning, breathing the fragrance of the flowers and listening to the gentle miscellany of the birds ; and as the languor of the night passed from his limbs, his heart began to expand to the coming delight of the day. Presently he heard a footstep upon the path behind him, and turning round, he was greeted by his uncle.

" You're up early, Uncle Francis," said Robin.

" I was up before you, my boy," Father Gregory replied. " I have been in the chapel."

Together they strolled through the archway into the outer courtyard and sat themselves down beside the well, under the spreading foliage of the tamarisks. Their conversation turned at once to the subject that was uppermost in Father Gregory's mind; and, as they sat watching the increasing brilliance of the day, they talked freely of Madeline and of the cause to which she had dedicated herself during those months in London.

" She is always so full of the power of enjoyment," said Robin, " so full of the ability to laugh and be happy. I can never quite understand why she took things so seriously. It's like a dream from which she has awakened."

" Perhaps," Father Gregory answered, " she was a sort of messenger, and her letters had to be delivered."

" I can't think that, exactly," said Robin. " One can hardly imagine Almighty God, to whom all ways are open, intervening in that way."

" He chooses many instruments," his uncle replied. " His ways are inscrutable."

" I can imagine some great convulsion being the instrument of God's purpose; but . . ." He paused

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" There is a quaint old tradition," said Father Gregory, " which relates that when King Jesus ascended into heaven, he was met at the drawbridge by the archangel Gabriel, who politely questioned him as to whether he had accomplished the purpose of his ministry on earth, and had made suitable arrangements for the carrying on of his work. 'Well,' said King Jesus, 'I've given my message to a girl or two, and a few fishermen . . .' Gabriel raised his eyebrows and whistled. 'Is that all your Majesty has done?' he asked in surprise. 'Surely there is some other plan that you've made in case this one fails.' But King Jesus replied 'No, there is no other plan.'

Robin made no comment and for some moments they sat in silence, while the sun, now risen above the eastern horizon, cast its fiery rays upon the cliffs behind them, turning them to blazing gold. At length, he stood up and stretched himself, running his sunburnt hands through his fair hair.

" Well, I shall go and have my bath," he said. " Let's have breakfast early : I feel jolly hungry."

He entered the bedroom where Madeline was still asleep, and with his kisses awakened her. She stretched out her luxuriously and folded them about his neck, drawing his head down to her breast.

" Oh, Robin, she laughed, " isn't it glorious to be alive ?"

THE END