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THE DREAM MAN

WARNING

WARNING

A NOVEL

BY

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CHAPTER I.

Joan Mansfield lived at Streatham. Not in one of the roomy, old-fashioned houses standing in the middle of a large garden, that one associates with a prosperous suburb like Streatham, but in one of the more modern semi-detached villas that are to be found now in all the new roads that run from the Streatham High Road down to Tooting Bec Common. Joan's mother was a widow, she had been left a widow when Joan was fifteen. Mercifully Joan's brother Gerald had just finished his last term at Cambridge when his father died, so he had been able to go straight into the old established firm of solicitors, in which his father had been a junior partner. I say 'mercifully,' because Mrs. Mansfield was not left at all well off. The firm allowed her a pension of two hundred and fifty pounds a year, and she had about a hundred of her own. But three hundred and fifty pounds a year, since the War, is just about equal to one hundred and fifty pounds a year before the War. So there was not much superfluous cash knocking about in Number eight, Fallowfield Road, S.W.2, and naturally, as a result of this, Joan's education had to be rather curtailed. Mr. Mansfield had always longed for her to finish her education abroad, he had sensed the charm that lurked behind the square-cut brown fringe, and he knew that a High School, however excellent, is not the place where charm is considered of any account. Prowess in the hockey field,—excellence in mathematics—these count in the High School world. However, Mr. Mansfield had died, swept off in an epidemic of influenza, and Mrs. Mansfield, reviewing her slender resources, had seen almost at once that any idea of the finishing year on the Continent was utterly out of the question. So Joan had finished her education at the local High School. But Joan had absorbed,

without knowing that she did it, her brother Gerald's strictures on the girl friends that she brought to the house, and when she was sixteen, and had begun to think about her appearance a little, she suddenly declined to play hockey any more, and began to jeer at cricket. Her life in the Fifth Form was made a burden to her, but she remained firm.

"My brother says that girls who rush about a hockey field thinking that they are as good as men are only parasites," she said. "They aren't any good at their own things, and they aren't any real good at men's either. They might just as well not be alive at all!"

There was a howl of derision at this frank statement of fact; but Joan, a little flushed, and rather damp round her neck where the curly bobbed hair clustered—stuck to her guns, for she had a last shot left in her armoury. "Anyhow, you were all mad to dance with him at the last show we had here," she said, "and he wouldn't look at any one but Betty Firth. And you know how you howled at her because her mother couldn't afford for her to play games as well as learn to dance, and she chose to learn to dance. And I am going to give up all games and learn to dance really well too." And Joan Mansfield, surreptitiously wiping the beads of moisture off her short upper lip—for a schoolgirl audience is a very dreadful audience to face—flung the remainder of her books into her satchel, and stalked out of the fifth form class room, to walk home with Betty Firth, whose road lay the same way as hers.

But this had all taken place long ago. Joan was now eighteen: Gerald was married—not to Betty Firth, who as a matter of fact had been the daughter of the proprietor of the largest greengrocer's shop in Streatham, but to the rather stupid only daughter of the head of the firm—and Joan and her mother were living alone in the little house in Fallowfield Road. And it was dull—deathly dull, almost insupportably dull, Joan had now found it for rather more than a year.

"Darling, if you would only get something to do." Mrs. Mansfield, herself perfectly content with her morning among the shops, and her rest after lunch, and her teaparty, and perhaps bridge for the early part of the evening, spoke almost querulously. It was like having a big restless dog always in

the house, she thought as she looked at the girl sitting by the window.

And as a matter of fact there was something rather like a dog in Joan Mansfield's face, she had all the twitching eagerness, and repressed energy, and almost the appealing look of anxiety to please, that you see sometimes in the eyes of a spaniel. She was slight, and small, and really very pretty indeed, but her type did not appeal to the type of Streatham youth, who frequented the High Road on its way to Streatham Hill Station, there to embark on its daily excursion to its Bank or Insurance Office. No, Joan Mansfield had been voted "weird," or "not a bit cheery," and was therefore studiously left alone at the last dance she had gone to, and after suffering the torments of the damned by sitting neglected for nearly the whole evening—not because she herself minded so much, but because she knew other people would think she did—she had vowed in the privacy of her own little bedroom, clutching a sopping handkerchief, that she would never go to a dance again. Although in her heart she felt it was so unjust, she had lots to say for herself, and she felt somehow that she wasn't really dull. But when it came to little familiarities, and silly jokes about things like sitting on people's knees, and kissing, then she couldn't help showing that she thought they were familiarities, and sillinesses, and the Streatham youth, who knew he was terribly in request because there was only one of him to about ten of the opposite sex, didn't like being criticised and naturally preferred to bestow his favours where he was sure they would be appreciated at their true value. So Joan was really very dull, and at the time of which we write, about six o'clock on a heavenly summer evening, she was sitting at her bedroom window, staring out on to the thin line of washing that flapped vigourously in the next door garden, feeling that if something didn't soon happen to break the deathly monotony she would go mad.

"Joan!" it was her mother's voice at the foot of the stairs.

"Yes mother: what is it?" Joan's small face instantly assumed an odd semblance of cheerfulness: she always felt that she was unnatural in her feelings towards her mother: she walked out on to the landing.

"The Brandons have written to ask us if we would go to the Browning Society tonight. It is to be held at their house, and they have a foreigner of some kind coming to read the paper." Mrs. Mansfield was looking up rather despairingly between the bannisters.

"Oh, mother, how frightful!" Joan began to go slowly down the stairs, her hand trailing along the curved rail. "The Brandons are so *common!*" she said.

"Yes, well, I know they are," Mrs. Mansfield spoke rather apologetically. "But you know Mr. Brandon gives all his business to the Firm" (Mrs. Mansfield still felt that the Firm belonged to her) "and I do feel that for Gerald's sake we ought to keep in with them—; at least, perhaps that is putting it rather too strongly—but at any rate not offend them. And evidently they are anxious to have a good number at the meeting tonight—" Mrs. Mansfield referred again to the sheet of thick notepaper in her hand—"because of this man who is coming to read a paper on India."

"India!" Joan's eyes suddenly became alert. It was the one place she had always craved to go to.

"Yes."

Mrs. Mansfield began at once to wonder what she should wear. Joan was going, she could tell that by the sound of aroused interest in her voice. And they would not have any too much time to change, and get the simple supper ready before it was time to start. The Mansfields did not do without a servant altogether, but she came in for the day only, and left after clearing away and washing up the tea things, so that the getting of the supper—generally corned beef, or ham, or something that did not need to be cooked, usually devolved on Joan.

"But how could anyone in this stupid suburb know anything about India?" went on Joan scathingly.

Mrs. Mansfield winced. She always felt ashamed that she found so much happiness in the same stupid suburb. But there was something about a morning of dodging in and out of shops buying the little day's marketing that filled her very soul with joy. She nearly always met someone that she knew, and Brandon's so often had a Sale. But in Joan's voice she heard her husband over again. He could never understand why she liked shopping. When he had been alive

they had still lived in Streatham, but in a much larger house. They had lived in Streatham because it was such an easy place to get up to town from, and Mr. Mansfield had been a great student, as well as the Master of a City Company, and he liked to be in touch with things that were going on in London. But he had never been able to understand his wife's rapture in flattening her face against shop windows, and after a time it had irritated him, and he had shut himself up in his study more and more, so that by the time he died, except for the curtailment of income that it involved, Mrs. Mansfield had been relieved than otherwise. But she often felt very aggrieved that in her daughter she had to suffer the same thing over again—the sort of unspoken criticism, the sort of feeling that you weren't living up to the standard that you were expected to—it was tiring, to say the least of it. And Gerald was almost the same, only being away from home it did not matter so much. It was hard that neither of her children should have taken after her, often thought Mrs. Mansfield, feeling rather dejected.

"Mother! let's go!" Joan's grey eyes, rather round, were suddenly animated.

"Very well, darling, I should thoroughly enjoy it, if you would." Mrs. Mansfield slipped the expensive notepaper back into its crested envelope, and started to mount the stairs, Joan dodged back along the passage into the kitchen. For some reason or other, she suddenly felt very much excited. The sound of the word India, always stirred some sort of unexplainable feeling in her,—it was almost as if some part of her had been there before and wanted to get back to it. The Brandons were common, desperately so, and there was a hulking son who made facetious remarks, but tonight he would be in abeyance, because there would be other people there. India! Joan dashed about the kitchen, her short hair lying close to a damp forehead, her passionate little mouth a splash of scarlet in her rather colourless face.

. . . . . .

The Brandons lived quite near to the Mansfields, only their house was one of the few beautiful big ones that still remain to fringe the edge of Tooting Bec Common. It stood in what Mr. Brandon liked to call "The Grounds," the "grounds" being really nothing more than a large and very

beautifully kept up garden, crammed with flowers. Mr. Brandon was the head of the Company that owned Brandon's, the large draper's shop standing at the corner of Fallowfield Road, and he was a self-made man, but Joan had showed the intolerance of youth when she labelled him as 'common.' Fat, he was, and his accent was not all that it might have been, and his hands were pudgy and rather red; but he had a heart of gold, and he was a very keen gardener. And no one who really loves flowers, and helps them to grow beautifully, can be called common, in the literal sense of the word.

He stood now, in the elaborate over-furnished hall, welcoming his guests, his wife beside him, a nice smile on his cheerful face. Mrs. Brandon really was very common, so we will leave her here for ever. But Mr. Brandon's nice face beamed with the truest hospitality as he welcomed each guest individually, and he held Joan's hand a little longer than he did anybody else's—there was something in the small face that always attracted him very much, and also reminded him of Joan's father, and Mr. Brandon had been a great admirer of Mr. Mansfield. He and the scholarly lawyer had had many a talk pacing round the smooth well-rolled gravel paths of the "Turret's" garden, and as well as entrusting all his legal business to him, he had made him the recipient of all his hopes and ambitions. Brandons was his idol—he thought and planned for the big shop as one plans and thinks for a beloved and only child. He had an only child—a son—but he was more or less of a failure, an expensive education having spoiled him for anything but sprawling about the house smoking expensive cigarettes, and putting in an occasional day at the counting house, and then spending the evening in jeering at the people he had met there.

"Well, Miss Mansfield, it's very nice of you and your mother to favour us with your company this evening," he said, and he smiled down at the animated face.

"It's nice of you to want us, Mr. Brandon," replied Joan. "I am always madly interested in anything to do with India."

"Well then you've just hit on the very evening that'll do for you," said the kindly man. "We've an Indian gentleman staying with us at this very moment, a friend of my son Alf, they were at Cambridge together; I'll get hold of him and introduce him to you, it'll make the paper more interesting

to you if you know the man who's reading it. Alf!" Mr. Brandon beckoned to a stoutish youth crossing the hall, "Where's Mr. Mohammed Khan, I want to introduce him to Miss Mansfield."

'Alf,' advanced, a cigarette hanging from his lower lip. He did not trouble to remove it as he bowed exaggeratedly low in front of Joan.

"Mr. Mohammed Khan is having a bath," he said.

Joan flushed scarlet.

"What do you mean, Sir?" Mr. Brandon was an old-fashioned man and he was angry.

"What I say, Dad."

"But Mr. Mohammed Khan is reading a paper to us tonight.

"Oh, yes, he'll be ready to read that all right," said Alf, standing with his feet rather far apart, and smiling down on to the top of Joan's cropped head. She was deuced pretty, that Mansfield kid when she blushed, he was thinking. Pity she had that way of taking you up so quick—didn't do now-a-days.

But Joan had turned to her mother, standing talking to Mrs. Brandon.

"Mother, let us go and sit down shall we?" she said, "then we shall be able to get nice and near the front."

They moved off together, Joan's heart hot within her. This was the sort of thing they had to put up with, she thought, a sort of dreadful being *of* all this commonness, and yet knowing all the time they were really quite different. Sometimes she thought that her mother didn't mind it, for Mrs. Mansfield was already settling herself quite happily into a seat next to Mrs. Brandon's sister, and Mrs. Brandon's sister was just as common as Mrs. Brandon. And she was evidently now very much worked up about something, and glad of a listener, because directly she saw Mrs. Mansfield's settling skirts she turned and began to talk. Only she talked in rather a low voice so that Joan could not hear what she said, unless she leaned a little forward.

"Yes, you know, wasn't it unfortunate—Mabel, you know, my sister—always so enjoys a little piece of roast pork—just nicely done with a little apple sauce, you know, and with the crackling—one enjoys it oneself, I don't mind

admitting to it. But to-night it was most unfortunate; the parlourmaid, you know, Emily, she had only just put the joint down in front of my brother, and my poor sister all unconscious, just tapped it with her fork and nodded across at Mr. Mohammed Khan, and said as she does wanting everything to be pleasant, "There, Mr. Mohammed Khan, you don't often see a pretty little piece of pork like that in your own country, I'll be bound," and he got up from his seat, and laid down his serviette, and walked straight out of the room."

"But why?" Mrs. Mansfield was quite at a loss.

"Why, because he is a Mohammedan, of course. They think a pig an unclean animal in India. My poor brother was so upset. And he wouldn't come back to the table at all, and I believe he's been having a bath ever since, at least so Alf says, and he's been up two or three times to see, and the bathroom door is still locked.

"But aren't we going to have the paper about India, then?" Joan, a little breathless, was leaning across her mother and speaking.

"Why, it's little Miss Joan! Yes, my dear, the paper will be read all right, Mr. Khan called out to my nephew that he would be down at half past eight, and it's just on that now. But such an upset, and such a nice dinner spoilt too, because the pork went out from the table just as it came in, my brother wouldn't have it touched. 'Leave it for the servants' hall—' those were his very words."

"Dear, dear!" Mrs. Mansfield's voice was sympathetic.

"But supposing Mr. Khan won't read the paper after all!" Joan's eyes were wide. She suddenly felt that she would not be able to bear it if she did not see this saintly man. Just fancy having your religion so close to your heart that you would forego a meal rather than transgress its slightest rule. And what horrible things they ate. It was suddenly borne in on Joan that English people almost lived on pork! They themselves, for instance—it was their idea of a nice breakfast to have bacon and eggs. And for lunch, sausages, with a hump of mashed potato in the middle. And for supper cooked ham from the confectioner's; why, it was pork the whole time. And somehow there wasn't anything else, at any rate for breakfast. . . . .

"But what does Mr. Khan have for breakfast?" she said. "He never comes down for breakfast," said Miss Brandon. "Has something that he calls 'chota hazri' in his room. Tea, and toast, and a little butter and marmalade. But here he is. Look, Mrs. Mansfield, don't you think he is a good looking man?" Miss Brandon was whispering excitedly. "Such a presence, as I say to my sister. And I daresay he is a Prince, you never know with these Indian gentlemen." . . . .

There was a flutter of intense interest among the prosperous members of the Literary Society as Mr. Mohammed Khan walked into the big drawing room followed by his host, and his host's son. He had evidently recovered from his little upset, as he was smiling. He was a tall man, and his coal black hair was brushed straight back from a rather low forehead. His eyes were very large and very black and they gleamed out of an olive face. His mouth was very red and when he smiled he showed two rows of dazzling teeth. He was clean shaven.

Mr. Brandon sat down at a small table, and Mr. Mohammed Khan dropped with a sinuous motion into a chair by his side. As Mr. Brandon made his little opening address he stared round the room, and one of the first people he saw was Joan. And his slumbrous Eastern eyes absorbed the sensitive passionate little mouth, and the square fringe close down on to the wide innocent eyes. And he made up his mind that as soon as this stupid meeting was at an end and they adjourned for supper, he would get to know her. Young Brandon would introduce them. . . .

"And now I will ask Mr. Mohammed Khan to give us his most interesting address"; Mr. Brandon was smiling hospitably round the room. The affair at dinner had upset him dreadfully, he felt that he had failed in the elements of hospitality in setting before his guest food that must literally have stunk in his nostrils. But now apparently he had got over it, so kind Mr. Brandon felt happier, and he smiled again and waved an introductory hand at the lecturer.

Mr. Mohammed Khan got on to his feet amid a subdued murmur of interest. There was something in the lithe sinuousness of the dusky figure in evening dress that struck at the very vitals of the stodgy middle-class suburban

Khan after all. When he smiled his red mouth seemed to spread all over his face. And his teeth were so very white, more like artificial ones than real ones. And his eyes . . . you couldn't see through them . . . they were like cows' eyes, sort of opaque . . . no getting through them to the spirit at the back of them. But as she was thinking this, Mr. Mohammed Khan stopped smiling, and looked at her again thoughtfully.

"You have been to India?" he said.

"Oh, no!" Joan dimpled. "I have never been anywhere. I would rather go to India than anywhere in the world."

"And why?"

"Oh, because it is so full of everything that you can't see. Don't you know, in England everything is sort of *there*. In India it is all hidden, mysterious. Don't you know . . . like you were telling us . . . .about the Indians believing that trees marry. The mango tree marrying the jasmine tree. Fancy anyone believing that. Why, you can't believe it possible. . . ."

"And would you like to marry a mango tree?" said Mr. Mohammed Khan, his opaque eyes on the eager face in front of him.

For some reason or other Joan flushed scarlet.

"Well, I don't know that I should," she said, and then wished that she had said that she wouldn't mind. There *was* something about Mr. Mohammed Khan that gave an uncomfortable feeling in the region of her waistbelt. It was a feeling of fear, coupled with a feeling almost as if she was not properly dressed. It was a most extraordinary feeling, a feeling that she had never had before. Joan leant back in her chair and tried to analyse it.

But Mr. Mohammed Khan, who had the almost uncanny intuition of his race, saw that he had made a mistake and he steered the conversation on to abstract subjects. And as he was a very clever man, he soon had Joan thoroughly interested. By the time that the tongue on the two plates had been despatched, she was leaning over the table her eyes alight with mischief.

"I adore hearing everything that you are telling me," she said. "But wait half a minute. Do you think it would

be frightful to have salmon now? I do love it so, and I forgot to choose it when you asked me what I would have. She'll come and take our plates in a minute. Say if you think it would be awful to have it after tongue!"

"Not at all," said Mr. Mohammed Khan who was now thoroughly enjoying himself. Joan was quite different from any other girl that he had ever met. She had the complete *insouciance* of a child, coupled with the most delightful and unusual intelligence. "We will both have salmon," he said. "I too have a partiality for that excellent fish. Miss," he beckoned to the maid, who as a matter of fact spent most of her time in staring at him, thinking he was a Prince, "we will have salmon, bring it at once please."

"How brave of you to ask," said Joan admiringly, as she crunched the exquisitely cut cucumber between her little square teeth.

"But in this world those who do not ask do not get," said Mr. Mohammed Khan quietly, his dark eyes on the white parting that ran like a clear furrow through the brown curls.

Gerald was the first to hear of it. And he did not hear of it first from his mother as he ought to have done, but from an anxious red-faced man who sat in the comfortable room lined with black japanned tin cases, and leant over the table a look of real distress in his honest eyes.

"I wouldn't have had it happen for anything in the world, Mr. Gerald," he was saying. "And it began at my house, on the night of the Browning Society. And unknown to me the wife seems to have encouraged it. Asking Miss Joan just to drop in informal like to meals, don't you know. As a rule we don't see much of little Miss, not that we are not glad to see any of your dear father's children at any time, but we know our position, and with the exception of the Literary Society, when we are proud and glad to give of our best, having the big rooms and all, we keep ourselves to ourselves."

"But does my mother know anything about it?" said Gerald Mansfield, looking, as kind Mr. Brandon thought to himself, uncommonly like his father.

"I think she does know, Mr. Gerald," said Mr. Brandon, feeling terribly uncomfortable.

Gerald Mansfield put the tips of his fingers together and swung round a little in the revolving chair. This was intolerable! His sister and a native!

"Do I understand you to say that this Mr. Mohammed Khan is a Mohammedan?" he said.

"Yes Mr. Gerald. As black as your boots. He was at Caius College with my Alf. A clever fellow, took Honours and what not. But there is something about them Indian fellows what fair sticks in my gizzard," said Mr. Brandon getting a little excited.

Gerald nodded once or twice. "But you know they do well in the Law," he said.

"Yes, I don't gainsay that they do," said Mr. Brandon, "and this Mohammed Khan here, he's going out to practise as a Barrister in Karnmore, I think he said. And I don't doubt that he'll do well. But when it comes to a proposal of marriage to a white girl, and to a girl like little Miss Joan . . . so sweet and innocent and like a child with her pretty ways, its more than I can stand," said Mr. Brandon, getting up and beginning to walk about the room.

"A proposal of marriage!" said Gerald Mansfield, also standing up only not knowing that he did it.

"Yes." Mr. Brandon came back to the table and leant on it, his big hands trembling. "When I got back from the shop last night, I found them all of a twitter, the wife and my sister and Alf. Miss Joan had been to tea, and after tea they had strolled out into the garden, she and Mr. Khan. And just before dinner Mr. Khan came in alone, and said that Miss Joan had gone home. And then it all came out—he had proposed marriage to Miss Joan, and she had run home all in a flutter, not knowing what to say."

"But how did it come out?"

"Mrs. Mansfield came round after dinner, and told the wife," said Mr. Brandon.

"But it's intolerable," said Gerald Mansfield, and there was a sharp ring in his voice. He thrust both hands into his pockets, and walked over to the window, and stared down at the mass of humanity streaming down Water Lane. It was nearly five o'clock, and the offices were emptying. Oddly

enough, at that very moment, two Indians holding one another's hands were walking together down the other side of the road. Law students probably—Gerald Mansfield followed them with darkening eyes. Estimable fellows doubtless, but the idea of one of them as a husband for his own sister . . . He swung round and walked to the table and sat down again.

"But, as you say that my sister went home to think it over, there is still hope that she will come to her senses," he said.

"That is so, Mr. Gerald. But if I might make so free as to suggest it I think that it is very desirable that you should come out to Streatham at once and speak to Miss Joan yourself. I should be very glad to give you a lift in my car if you cared to avail yourself of it," said Mr. Brandon.

Gerald Mansfield thought for a minute. He had promised to be home early as his wife was having people to tea and badminton. But this washed all that out—Edie would be the first to be appalled when she heard about it. She was very fond of Joan—not that she saw much of her—Pinner was right on the other side of London to Streatham, and lately there had been a new baby, and all that sort of thing. But she would be fearfully upset at anything of this kind. He pressed the electric bell, let in just under the edge of his writing table.

"Just 'phone to Mrs. Mansfield that I shall not be home until late," he said to the clerk who came into the room, "and tell her that I have gone out to Streatham, would you please?"

"Very good, Sir." The Clerk, well trained automaton as he was, turned and went out again, but as he walked to the telephone in the corner of the room, he winked to a man sitting at a table. "Found out about Miss Joan and blackie, I don't think," he remarked. "My sister saw them on the top of a tram the other day. Thick as thieves. My sister's in the haberdashery at Brandon's and she hears a lot. Bad look out, I call it, I've no fancy for those black fellows myself."

"Oh, I don't know." The man at the table was keen on foreign missions, and he was annoyed.

"Well, I spent four of the b. . . y . . t hot weathers that I ever hope to live through in Umballa with the Territorials, and I do know," said the clerk tersely; "marriage with

a blackie means a brood of whitey brown kids, and a lot of other things too, that I won't upset your young mind with as you're a sensitive fellow. And I know that I wouldn't have my sister do it for something either," he concluded, as he rang the telephone bell viciously.

CHAPTER II.

The little house in Fallowfield Road looked very small as Gerald Mansfield walked down the road towards it. Mr. Brandon had put him down at the corner, next to the shop, the elder man feeling sensitively that if he drew up in the big car outside the house where Joan and her mother lived they might feel uncomfortable. Not that he had the least fear of Gerald telling them that he had been the informant as to how matters stood between Joan and Mr. Khan; as a matter of fact, he felt pretty certain himself that Mrs. Mansfield knew he disapproved of the friendship between her daughter and the Indian. But he did not want to be there to witness their discomfiture, so to speak.

Joan opened the door; she had a big blue pinafore over her dress and her face was flushed.

"Oh, hullo, Gerald!" . . . . there was the faintest hint of a hesitating pause as she stood, the door handle held tightly in her fingers. "Come in, mother will be awfully pleased." She led the way into the narrow hall.

The house smelt of cooking. Gerald hung up his hat and felt glad that he did not live in a semi-detached house. His house at Pinner was a nice solid one and stood in a big garden. But then Edie had a little money of her own. . . .

"Why it's Gerald!" Mrs. Mansfield had heard voices and she opened the dining room door, and looked out. "My darling boy, how nice to see you," she clung to her only son and kissed him affectionately. She saw so little of Gerald. Somehow she and her daughter-in-law seemed to have nothing in common. And it really was more than a day's journey from Streatham to Pinner. But to see him now so late was very extraordinary she thought—was there anything wrong with Edie or the baby? she wondered. She asked him anxiously.

"No, no . . . I only thought I would run over and see how you were, and old Brandon was in at the office and offered to give me a lift. By Gad, that's a topping car of his. . . . Gerald sat down by the open French window, that gave on to the strip of garden. There were children evidently in the next door garden. Someone kept on kicking the tall palings that lay between the two exactly similar strips, and someone screamed in rather pronounced Cockney from an upper window.

"Cheerful neighbours, what?" Gerald stretched his long legs out in front of him and felt for his cigarette case.

"Yes, they are very bothering sometimes. Joan minds them more than I do." (Joan had vanished). "But I feel glad we have any garden at all and I like the company. But now for you, my boy . . . you will stay and have something to eat, won't you?" said Mrs. Mansfield feeling just a little anxious all the same. She and Joan had a hybrid meal that they called high tea. It was an easy meal to prepare, something like pressed beef or fish went well with tea, and bread and butter and jam to end up with, but men never liked it, she thought helplessly.

"Oh well, I don't know . . . yes, perhaps I will. But as a matter of fact I came over with something rather important to talk over . . . . . will Joan be coming back, mother?"

"No, not for a moment or two, she is frying the fish." Mrs. Mansfield spoke quietly but her heart gave an uncomfortable twist. Gerald suddenly looked uncommonly like his father. He was going to say something about Mr. Mohammed Khan she felt sure. Mr. Brandon had told him, and he did not approve of it.

"Brandon tells me . . . . I could scarcely believe it, but he assures me that it is so—that Joan has got to know some native friend of his son's, and that they are very friendly. Is that so, mother?" said Gerald Mansfield.

Mrs. Mansfield blushed painfully: "Joan met Mr. Khan at the Brandons' house," she said.

"Yes, so I believe, and by now Mr. Brandon is heartily sorry that she did. But I cannot imagine that Joan . . . *Joan*, could ever admit an Indian into anything approaching intimacy. I mean to say . . . the idea is simply too

awful . . . . ." said Gerald Mansfield getting up and walking to the mantelpiece.

"But why awful ?" Mrs. Mansfield was terrified of what she knew would very soon have to come out, and she tried to cloak her terror under a semblance of indignation. "After all, Gerald, all that idea of their being an inferior race and all that sort of thing is absolutely done away with now," she said, ending up, however, more feebly than she had begun.

Gerald Mansfield leant his elbow on the edge of the marble mantlepiece and looked down at his mother. "Would you like to have a black grandchild ?" he said.

Mrs. Mansfield got painfully scarlet. "Really, Gerald !" she exclaimed.

"Well, that is what it would probably mean," he said.

"Not of necessity, surely ?" Mrs. Mansfield now felt a little more able to tackle the situation now that she knew that the awful task of breaking the news of Joan's engagement was not to be hers. Someone had done it for her, Mr. Brandon, evidently.

"Well, give it the benefit of the doubt and call it blacky white," said Gerald, still looking down at his mother, and letting the smoke of his cigarette trail unheeding up the chimney.

"But supposing she did not have any children ?"

"Joan would be certain to have children," said Joan's brother, hating to have to discuss his sister in this way.

"But supposing she didn't ?" persisted Mrs. Mansfield with weak obstinacy.

"Well, granting that she didn't," said Gerald Mansfield, flicking a little of the ash off the end of his cigarette. "Have you any conception what her life among the Anglo-Indian community in India would be, married to a native ?"

"No, . . . but I know that a great deal of the ignorant prejudice against the Indian is being done away with," said Mrs. Mansfield resolutely.

"On the surface, yes," said Gerald Mansfield. "Deeper down—*no*. You must remember, mother, that I do know what I am talking about. And I have been at Cambridge too. And I have met scores of men like Mr. Mohammed Khan, in business as well as at college. And I know that the feeling against mixed marriages is just as strong as ever it

was. I don't say that the Indian isn't an excellent fellow in his own way. But he wasn't meant to marry a white girl, and the best men among the Indian community are the first to admit it too."

"But Joan is so" . . . . Mrs. Mansfield began to pant a little. Gerald looked strangely like his father. She began to feel like she had always done when she had begun to argue with him . . . all the things that she had had to say sounded futile. She would leave it to Joan to settle . . . Joan although she looked such a child had a very decided will of her own. . . . "Let us have our supper quietly and then you can see your sister alone," she said. "After all you are more of an age, and she will be more likely to listen to you. And Mr. Khan is not coming in tonight . . he had some engagement in town. . ." Mrs. Mansfield stumbled over the last part of the sentence and wished the moment it was out of her mouth that she had not said it. Gerald would be angry if he thought that Mr. Khan had the freedom of the house.

But Gerald had heard the rattle of a tray and he guessed that his sister was on her way to the dining room. He guessed too by what his mother had just said that Mr. Khan was in the habit of dropping in whenever he liked, and it did make him exceedingly angry. But he was determined not to lose his temper unless he was obliged to; losing your temper was a fool's game, his profession had taught him that.

"All right, I will talk to her after supper, mother, if you will leave us alone," he said. "Don't say anything about it now. Come on in, Joanie," he said, speaking in the voice that he used to use to her when they were boy and girl together, and walking over to the door and opening it. "Gad, what a whopping tray for a little snip like you to carry," he said as he took it from her kindly.

"Yes but I'm used to carrying trays," said the girl in the big blue apron. "And Gerald, you'll simply loathe the muddly meal mother and I have—fish . . . and a sort of jammy ending up with tarts. Do go round to the Brandons, they'd love to have you, and they'll have a proper dinner there."

"No, I'd far rather be here . . . . and I had a colossal lunch at the Cheshire Cheese with a client, so a little starvation won't do me any harm."

"Oh well, if you really won't hate it too awfully . . . ?" but Joan began to move round the table with a rather heavy feeling at her heart. Gerald had come over to say something about her engagement, she knew he had. And her mother, who up to that moment had been quite pleased about it, would now begin to find all sorts of reasons why it wouldn't do . . . And it would all drift back to what it had been before . . . a little doddery walk to the shops in the morning . . . . a little despairing killing of time until teatime . . . . then another little doddery walk . . . a worse one this time because after tea somehow there always seemed to be a feeling of possibility in the air. You could go out on to the Common, and as well as it being lovely out there . . . with a sort of dying flushed loveliness, the possibilities of romance lay all to your hand. Because the main line of the London, Brighton and South Coast Railway cut right through the centre of the Common. And in the sight of a train . . . especially an express train, Joan always found an unquenchable source of wonder and romance. Once with her heart faint and trembling within her leaning over the fence she had seen the line of a very well shaped head bent over a small and quivering face in a first class carriage. An empty carriage except for those two people. And Joan, as the huge train roared its way past her, and swept screaming into a tunnel, had realised with a heart hammering as if it would burst, that these two must have been going away on their honeymoon. Think of it . . . . that girl . . . just about her own age, left all alone with that man. Did she love him ? . . . Was she filled with that half shrinking wholly delicious, terrified rapture that she knew she would feel in the same case ? His own—belonging entirely to him in a sort of special dreadful way. What did the girl feel like at that very instant ? . . . Joan had gone home feeling strangely shaken. Would she ever be taken away by someone with a smooth well brushed head and teeth that showed suddenly white ? For Joan had seen his teeth —he had looked up for a minute and smiled. And now,—she was going to be taken away by someone . . . not by any one quite like that certainly . . . but taken away . . . that is unless mother and Gerald between them upset it all. Joan moving mechanically between the sideboard and the table jerked her head rebelliously.

Gerald, watching his sister, saw the jerk and wondered what it meant. He felt strangely touched at the sight of that small diligent figure, slogging away to get the meal ready. He felt all of a sudden that they ought to have done more for her, he and his wife. But somehow she and his wife didn't seem to hit it off too well. Edie liked the things most women liked, he thought vaguely, things like a day's shopping in town . . . and a morning of sewing and having a good talk about all sorts of things. But Joan didn't care for that . . . . he suddenly remembered really rather an uncomfortable week that she had spent with them soon after they were married. And her one wish had been to pack up a little lunch and go off for the whole day. "Isn't there a real wood we can find, Edie, don't you know, where we can burrow right away into the middle of it, and look up and see the sun all slanting through the trees? And where it will be wetty and mossy, and we can put our faces into the moss and sort of breathe in the earth. The real country, Gerald . . . you know what I mean . . . ." And Gerald had known quite well, only with his very new wife's rather pretty dismayed face in front of him he had not liked to say so, so he had dissembled and suggested an early lunch and a coming up to town to a matinée instead. And that had had to do. But since then there had not been another visit—one baby had followed another rather quickly—and Edie was almost always immersed in a whirl of going out and coming in, or giving a baby a bath because the nurse was out, or angrily running to the top of the stairs because the nurse hadn't come in—anyhow there never seemed any time for the Streatham people either to come over or to be visited.

But now the brother, who had a good deal of his father in him, sat in the rather shabbily furnished dining room (the Fallowfield Road houses only had two sitting rooms) and felt his heart yearn over his sister. She was so awfully pretty . . . . pretty in a special sort of way, pretty in the wondering brief shining way of a mermaid that suddenly comes up to the surface and pushes the wet hair out of her eyes and stares round surprised. Pretty in an unexpected way . . . yes, that was it, Gerald suddenly laid his hands on it . . . pretty in an unexpected way . . . almost dazzling . . .

"Nearly ready" . . . Joan laid two table napkins in

silver rings down beside the plates, and smiled at her brother. "I'll get you a clean one, and then bring in the fish. You'd like to wash. You know the way to the bathroom. Half a second—I'll get you a clean towel at the same time. . . ."

Joan went out again, her heart hammering. Why had Gerald come? she thought bitterly. It wasn't as if he would come again for years and years . . . but it had just upset everything now. She had been quite fairly happy—not absolutely happy, that is, but happy enough to be just content to go on her own way feeling that she knew what she was going to do. But now everything looked different . . . she walked along the narrow hall into the kitchen with head bent. But in the kitchen her common-sense reasserted itself. The frying pan was not to be found—it was not on the hook where it ought to have been and that in itself was an irritation. Then when it was found, half behind the copper, it had to be scraped because Matilda had put it away dirty. Then when that was done the dripping jar was found to be much more empty than it ought to have been. That and the final hunt for matches to light the gas stove brought Joan back to her usual condition of exasperated intolerance with the acute discomfort of a life lived under such conditions. It wasn't even as if you were getting anything out of it, as she thought—this was only just to keep things going; if you didn't do all these maddening, fiddling, stupid things you actually remained hungry! And probably everyone in the same stupid road was doing the same thing . . . loathing it, wishing that they could do without it, longing to give it completely up, and eat their meal off the edge of a saucer so that they wouldn't have anything to wash up.

"By Gad . . . it's like the exhaust of a car!" Gerald coming into the tiny kitchen met the cloud of blue smoke and stooped his head with his hand over his eyes. "Pooh, let's open a window or something! By Gad . . . talk about a fried fish shop!" He stumbled to the little scullery door.

Joan laughed. "You go out, Gerald, it's awful if you aren't used to it. And if you smell this smoke for long you won't want anything to eat. Go into the dining room, I shan't be a second now."

Gerald obeyed. But as he went he wondered. When in his own well ordered house he sat at the head of the table

and saw at his elbow, lying on a nice white paper mat thing in a silver dish, a couple of beautifully browned slices of fish, had this dreadful exhaust process to be gone through first? If so, how could you ever get anyone to be a cook? And in the summer too—and it was summer now! Joan, his pretty little sister . . . . he went back into the dining room with a very definite feeling that things had got to be altered.

"Must Joan spend her life grubbing about in that filthy kitchen, mother?" he said as he sat down in a wicker chair as close to the French window as he could get.

"Which filthy kitchen, dear?" Mrs. Mansfield spoke with a faint reserve in her voice. She was very proud of the Fallowfield Road house. "I trust that the kitchen is not filthy," she said; "if it is I shall speak very severely to Matilda when she comes in the morning; or I may get Joan to speak to her for me perhaps." This last with a swift recollection of the one time when she had taken upon herself to reprove Matilda, and the consequent acute discomfort as Matilda had declined to come for a week.

"All kitchens are filthy. At least for people like Joan to spend their time hogging about in, they are." Gerald spoke angrily. He suddenly saw his mother as his father must have seen her: incapable, unimaginative. And his soul yearned anew over his sister. He had neglected her. Edie had got to do something to help. No wonder she wanted to get out of it all. It was a dog's life for a girl like that. Some girls wouldn't mind, but Joan . . . with eyes set wide apart, and her rather short upper lip! Nothing to do but to dodder about a place like Streatham. Dodder out in the morning, dodder home to lunch. Have lunch. Rest, or dodder out again. Have tea . . . Gerald had a vague recollection of having heard that the servant went away for good after lunch so the tea would have to be got by Joan. Wash it up . . of all greasy horrors . . . Gerald had recollections of the aftermath of various feeds during his public school days. Then dodder out again—the evening dodder haunted by the thought of the coming exhaust process. Then back again to the exhaust process . . . why, it was a slave's life. How did women endure it, because there must be hundreds of women to whom it was a matter of daily occurrence, the eternal slog just to keep things going. Gerald

moved his feet impatiently . . . why hadn't it all come home to him like this before ?

" Sorry to have been so long." Joan without the blue apron came round the door with a little burst, and with a silver dish in her hands. " Gerald, you must be ravenous. Mother, come along."

Mrs. Mansfield beamed. Her two dear children ! What a difference it made having the boy about ! And how different Joan looked, too. Lately it had been such a mature almost stern Joan, professing happiness in the attentions of the tall Indian certainly, but all the same, not looking at all happy. And now perhaps Gerald had come over just in time to make Joan see reason. For the mention of a black grandchild had made Mrs. Mansfield very seriously uneasy and she would not have liked to have suggested that possibility to her daughter—she could not mention anything of that kind to her under any circumstances whatever. All the rest of the affair had sounded so nice—and Mrs. Brandon had more than once half hinted that Mr. Mohammed Khan was of noble extraction—ancestral home on the frontier . . . And certainly there was something very weird about his eyes ; Mrs. Mansfield always felt very uncomfortable when she caught the glance in them ; it was as if they were looking at you from behind a guard, almost like having on coloured glasses . . . you couldn't in the least see the soul that lay behind them. But Mrs. Mansfield caught her thoughts up with a jerk—of course, that was what Gerald had come over to talk about, and it was getting late . . . she must make an opportunity for the brother and sister to get away alone.

" Now that we've finished," she said looking rather nervously across the table, " you two children will like to have a chat. Joan, I will clear away, dear—leave it to me. Gerald won't you smoke your cigarette in the drawing room ? "

Gerald rose to the occasion and pushed back his chair. But Joan sat still, and all the blood rushed in a flood to her forehead. This had been arranged beforehand. Her mother and Gerald had already talked her over . . . it wasn't fair . .

But Gerald was smiling kindly at his sister. His heart was very warm within him, his nice little Joanie—looking little more than the child who used to swing off to the High School with a mountain of books strapped on to her back.

He would have a good talk to her and put everything right. He got up.

"Yes, come along into the drawing room, Joanie," he said, and he slipped his arm affectionately round her waist. "I've heaps of things I want to say to you. Come along and sit with me while I smoke . . . there's a nice child."

And Joan went. But she went unwillingly, and with all the small white teeth in her head pressed tightly together. This was a ruse—a ruse to get her to give up the idea of marrying the man she was determined to marry. But nothing was going to make her do that. She had made up her mind to do it, and she was going to stick to it. So she walked out of the rather fishy little dining room, her head held uncompromisingly high.

Gerald saw the set of the little head and the uncompromising angle at which it was held, but being a very clever lawyer as well as an anxious and affectionate brother, he did not take any notice of it. He held the white painted drawing-room door open for his sister to pass through, and then led her to a little Chesterfield sofa and dropped his long length on to it, drawing her down beside him. The sun was sending its last rays in to the leaded panes—the Fallowfield Road houses prided themselves on being built like cottages, and so they were, if a wobbly flagged path up to the front door, and an imitation leaded window in the drawing-room meant anything.

"Joanie, I have been frightfully worried by hearing that you have got mixed up with some native friend of the Brandons," said Gerald, going straight to the point, and trying not to see Joan's suddenly rigid profile turned abruptly to him. "I know you must think it's no end of cheek for me to come and poke my nose into your affairs, but in a thing like this I simply must. After all, you see, mother doesn't know anything about a thing of this kind. She never did know anything about the world, poor old mater. So I feel that it's rather for me to take the thing up, don't you know," ended Gerald Mansfield, laughing, but without any mirth in his voice.

"But why need anyone take it up?" said Joan turning a little as she sat.

Gerald Mansfield drew on his cigarette a little more deeply

than he generally did. This was going to be a fight; he could see it in the tilt of his sister's chin.

"Joan, you cannot possibly marry a native," he said.

'And why not?"

"Because the very idea of your doing such a thing makes me see blue murder," said Gerald Mansfield, taking the cigarette out of his mouth and pitching it into the fireplace.

Joan moved again a very little and Gerald Mansfield knew that he had made a false start. Here was hostility flaming between them—just what he had most wanted to avoid.

"And why should it make you want to see blue murder?" she asked.

"Because . . . . because . . . . Oh hang it all, Joan. Joanie darling, they aren't like us—I mean to say I am sure this Mohammed Khan fellow is a very decent chap in his way and all that, but as a husband for you . . . I mean to say it's absolutely out of the question. You can see it, dear, can't you? I mean to say, one meets them in business and all that, one has to, but as for anything else—I mean to say it simply isn't done; you can see it, dear, can't you?"

"No, I am afraid I can't, Gerald," said Joan Mansfield turning round, "and frankly I don't see that you have made out anything of a case against it. All you have said is that it isn't done. Well, it is done—heaps of English girls have married Indians; I am going to marry one. I am absolutely resolved on that point. And it isn't the faintest use for you or mother, or anyone else, to say a word against it, I will."

Gerald Mansfield stood up, but Joan went on feverishly.

"I'm going to say straight out now what I really feel. It will sound hideous and unnatural to you I know, but I don't care. Look here, Gerald, mother and I live here, don't we? You see the sort of life we live. That's what it's like always. I don't mean to say that there's anything sordid about it really; nothing is sordid if you have your soul in it. I mean to say that even if we were much poorer than we are and I had to do it because it made mother happy or anything, I should feel that there was some reason in it. But it doesn't make mother a bit happy, she and I don't see eye to eye in anything. She loves all the little pottery things that I hate,

she and Aunt Belle like the same sort of things, and are dying to live together really. I am only in the way. I am stuck here .... I hate doing things about a house. I feel as if I should stifle and die. There isn't anything that has got to be done .... do you see what I mean? It's all so useless and futile. And what does it end in? I shall go on living here, probably for another ten years. And then what good am I? I shall be nearly thirty then. Or perhaps I shall marry some Streatham young man. And then I shall live in another road like this, and perhaps have a baby, and take it out in a pram in the mornings while the servant gets the dinner ready. Or perhaps I shan't be able to afford a servant, so the baby will have to stay in the front garden in its pram while I tear about the house just trying to keep up. Not getting ahead or accomplishing anything, but just keeping up with what absolutely has to be done. Just doing things because if I don't we shall literally be hungry. It seems to me that it isn't a life at all .... And I can't lead it. I've got a chance now to get away from it all .... into a world that is a world .... where people do things, and see things, and are something."

Gerald interrupted. "How have you got that chance?" he said.

Joan flushed. "Because I have met a man who sees beyond the ordinary little suburban rut. Someone who realises that there is a life for a woman beyond the maddening little everyday domestic round. Someone who understands .... who has great ideals, who sees the people of his country labouring under a great injustice, and longs to put it right. Someone who wants to take a woman from this country and set her at his right hand and work with her to raise the women of his own country. Someone who wants to show the ignorant prejudiced English people living in that country how sunk and steeped they are in prejudice. To drag them out of it. Someone ...."

Gerald interrupted again. "And this great fellow is Mr. Mohammed Khan, is it?" he said dryly.

Joan's eyes were gleaming. "Yes it is," she cried. "And although he may be .... dark" (she had nearly said black) "he is far, far above all these stupid conceited Streatham youths with their mad ideas of their own importance, and their wretched tuppenny ha'penny tennis clubs, and the

fuss about the line down the middle of their trouser leg. He is a man if you like . . . . he is . . . . is . . . ." Joan was almost crying.

"Oh, Joanie, Joanie!" Gerald Mansfield suddenly felt a lump at the back of his throat. His little sister! "Joanie, there are Englishmen who have some decent ideas. Don't lump us all together like that!" he said pleadingly.

"No, well . . . . I don't mean you," said Joan laying a swift hand on the serge knee. "But you know, Gerald—what I say is true. And it fills me with a sort of mad fury. And I see a chance now of getting out into something bigger. And I'm going to take it," she ended up, half under her breath.

Gerald sat down again. "Look here, Joan," he said. "Admitted that what you say about the sickening dullness of the ordinary suburban life is true. There are worse things than being dull. Marriage is a tremendously tough business. Mohammed Khan may have all these go-ahead ideas very near to his heart, I don't say that he hasn't. But it's extraordinary what a man will say and do if he wants a girl for his own. And as a rule the idea of the average native is to keep his womanfolk very much to heel. As I say, Mr. Mohammed Khan may be an exception to that rule, but frankly I shall be very much surprised if he is."

"He *is* an exception."

"Very well, we will say that he is. Now have you any idea what the opinion of the English community in India is on the question of mixed marriages?"

"I know that it is hopelessly unenlightened. That is one of the things that we want to alter. It can only be altered by people like us showing that we do not care what public opinion says on the subject. What do a handful of ignorant conservative frivolous English people know about a thing like that? Nothing."

Gerald got up again. "When you speak of a handful of ignorant conservative frivolous English people, Joan, you don't know what you are talking about. And if Mr. Khan speaks of them in that way too, he doesn't know either. I have never been to India, I know that, so you won't think that I'm qualified to speak. But I only know this. I came

across a good many of the Lahore Division in France in 1915, and a more gorgeous collection of superb men I never saw in my life."

"And what about the Indians in that Division," flashed out Joan.

"The climate was against them," said Gerald simply.

Joan was silent. What was the good of arguing with her brother? Her lover had prepared her for this. The deep-rooted unjust prejudice against a coloured race. Prehistoric, antediluvian. She sat still.

Gerald sat down again, and then got up. Somehow he felt that he must keep on moving about. Joan must be dragged away from this mad determination to wreck her life. But how was he going to drag her? She was steeled against him. He could feel it in every fibre of her. He thrust in his hand in search of his cigarette case.

But Joan spoke first. "Look here, Gerald," she said. "Don't let's discuss this any more, it only makes me wretched, and you angry, and it doesn't do an atom of good. I am going to marry Mr. Khan, I have absolutely made up my mind on that point. And nothing that you or mother can say will make the faintest difference to me. As a matter of fact, until you came mother was quite keen about it, and if you don't say any more against it she will probably stay keen. So leave it alone. After all you and I hardly ever see anything of one another, and it can't make any difference to you whom I marry. You needn't see him at all.

"And what about the black kids that you will bring home in a couple of years, eh, Joan?" said Gerald Mansfield roughly. This was no time to mince words. Joan had got to be jerked out of this ostrich-like condition into which she had got herself.

Joan stood up, and the colour flamed slowly scarlet all over her face. "It's frightful of you to speak like that," she said "and you have no business to. But if you want to know I don't care a bit if my children are black. Black's just the same as white really, it's only an idea that it isn't. Besides, perhaps I shan't have any children—lots of people don't. And if I do, I don't care what colour they are. You'll think I'm pretending when I tell you this—but I tell you I'm not. It's true."

Gerald put his hands in his pockets. "Joan, are you mad?" he said.

"No, I am not a bit mad; I am perfectly sane about this. I know that what I have just said sounds fantastic and far-fetched, and I know that you won't believe it. But I do believe it, so there it is. Let's drop it, Gerald, and talk about something else; this only makes us feel as if we hated each other. Let's go back to mother, and then I'll see about getting your room ready, and we'll play poker patience or something. Come on, Gerald, don't look like that," Joan spoke pleadingly.

But Gerald Mansfield twisted his shoulder out of his sister's grasp and walked over to the door without speaking, "I can't stop," he said, "I . . . I feel as if I wanted to break something. Tell mater that I've gone to the Brandons."

And Gerald Mansfield, his usually cheerful face distorted with anger, wrenched open the white painted door, thereby sending a tremor through the diamond-leaded panes, twitched his hat off the fumed oak hat-stand, and slamming the artistic front door behind him went down the wobbly flagged path at a run.

Mrs. Mansfield, feeling the reverberation, laid down the dish-cloth and put her head out of the little kitchen and saw her daughter—very white, with a mouth that was drawn straight across her face, crossing the hall on her way to the foot of the twisty stairs.

"What, has Gerald gone, Joan?" she said, and she took a step or two forward.

"Yes, he has." Joan took the polished knob of the banisters between her cold fingers. "He has gone to the Brandons, and I hope I shall never see him again. He has said the most insulting things about Mr. Khan. I loathe him . . . . I simply loathe him . . . ." The small face under its straight fringe was quivering with anger.

"Oh dear!" Mrs. Mansfield felt like she always did when Joan lost her temper. The house seemed to be heaving. "What, doesn't he like the idea of your engagement then?" she asked helplessly.

"No, he doesn't," said Joan curtly. "But I don't want to discuss it, mother. I have made up my mind about it and let us leave it there. You don't mind, mother, do you?" Joan stepped back off the lowest step and looked up pleadingly

into the rather stupid face. She suddenly felt that she must have sympathy from someone or she would die with despair. Gerald had called her Joanie to begin with too—just like old times. And now . . . .

"Well, dear, I don't know that I wouldn't rather he was white," said Mrs. Mansfield doubtfully. "But still I suppose God made us different colours for some good reason. Not that I shouldn't be upset if I had a black grandchild . . . ." Mrs. Mansfield said this last in rather a low voice—she wanted Joan to hear it and yet she was dreadfully afraid of making her more angry. "But perhaps I shouldn't have one," she ended more hopefully.

But Joan did hear: "I don't suppose we shall ever have any children, mother," she said, "so dismiss that fear from your mind for ever. Now I am going to bed. Do you mind locking up just for tonight?"

"No, of course I will." But as Mrs. Mansfield watched the small erect figure wind its way rather drearily up the little staircase, she had a feeling very akin to awe in her heart. How did Joan know that she would never have any children? In her day such a thing would never have been mentioned. But it was all so different nowadays. Was it for the better? As Mrs. Mansfield wiped and replaced the plates on the neatly papered shelves her unimaginative face was thoughtful. All this freedom and thinking that nothing was worth while, what did it amount to? After all there was only one thing that a woman was meant for, and that was to marry and have children, and make a house comfortable for a man to live in. But still . . . . Mrs. Mansfield's face suddenly put on a very humble look; she was, as she knew, very stupid. Her children thought so, her husband had always tried not to let her see it, but she had always known that he thought so too. Therefore it was really not necessary for her to express any opinion on a question like this.

CHAPTER III.

Mr. Mohammed Khan was coming along Fallowfield Road. He always enjoyed the little walk from the end of the road where the tram stopped to the little house set so neatly in amongst the other little houses. Being an Oriental he adored being stared at, and he was stared at in Fallowfield Road enough to please even him. Everybody stared—the servants sweeping down the wobbly paths and the little steps, the mothers bending over the big frilly prams standing outside the little front doors ; the errand boys with big oblong black hatboxes slung across their backs, with ' Brandon's ' sprawling over them in gold letters. Even the two men in uniform on the box of the motor delivery van bearing the transcendent name of Jay's stared.

Everyone always felt a little self-conscious when this van swept into Fallowfield Road because it always stopped outside the same house. And that house had not the sanction, so to speak, of Fallowfield Road. It seemed to stand alone with its exquisite curtains, and its little front garden crammed with flowers. And no one ever saw anyone go in or come out of it, only at about teatime sometimes a big beautiful car with a steel end to its pointed bonnet would come very quietly up to the little gate and throb for a minute or two and then a man with a hat just a little over one eye would step out, walk very quickly up the wobbly path, and vanish into the embrasure of the front door. And that was all. No one ever knew any more about the house than that. But to-day as the Indian came along, one resplendent man in uniform nudged the other one, and Mr. Mohammed Khan saw the nudge and was very pleased indeed. And he went on his way with a renewed swagger.

Joan was dusting the hatstand when she heard him ring, and she immediately shut the duster up in the flapped pocket place that divided the two hollows where you put the sticks

and umbrellas. Mohammed Khan did not like seeing her dust, she had found that out almost at once.

"Oh, hullo," she said unemotionally as she opened the front door and saw him standing there. But she flushed pink with joy.

"My little fragrant lotus flower," said Mr. Mohammed Khan, stooping over the curly head, and forgetting in his emotion to take off his hat.

"Oh, how heavenly to see you. It's been simply awful since you were here last." Joan pressed her face into the hollow of the striped serge shoulder. "Oh do come in and sit down. It seems such ages since you were here. I have heaps of things to tell you . . . . Mother's out—tea and bridge this afternoon, and lunch at the Army and Navy Stores first, so she won't be in for ages. We've got the house all to ourselves—except for Matilda, and she doesn't count. Oh, it is nice to see you . . . ." Joan was flickering round her lover as he took off and hung up his hat and settled his tie with a swift glance into the rather spotted piece of looking glass that surmounted the fumed oak hat-stand.

"My sweet little lotus flower!" Mr. Mohammed Khan slipped a sinuous arm round the soft little figure and drew it close to him with an entirely unpoetic squeeze. "My little fragrant Rose of Sharon."

"Oh, what heavenly things you call me!" Joan wriggled delightedly.

"Not more heavenly than you deserve," said Mr. Mohammed Khan, taking the small face between his rather chill brown fingers. When Joan had first shaken hands with him she had particularly noticed the nerveless india-rubber-gloved feeling of his hands. But now she had got used to it. It was all part of the wonder of him . . . . any ordinary person could have tough grippy sort of hands.

There was a sort of scuffle at the back of the hall, and Matilda, very self-conscious, peeped round the corner of the kitchen door. She smirked and bowed when she saw the tall brown figure.

Mr. Mohammed Khan raised a couple of long fingers to his forehead. "Salaam," he said.

"Ow, Salaam," Matilda retired crimson and bridling with excitement, and as she went Joan looked up at the impassive face.

"How good you are," she said fervently.

"Not at all." But Mr. Mohammed Khan spoke with a certain amount of complacency notwithstanding. He intensely disliked this enforced salutation to what he considered an entirely objectionable menial. But Joan had begged for it. "You see, darling, your being here—although mother and I simply adore it—makes a great deal more for Matilda to do. . . things like washing up and cooking. You do understand, don't you? And it makes it much easier for me if Matilda is in a good temper. And that keeps her in one. She thinks you most frantically wonderful, which you are, and she simply swells with pride if you take any notice of her. You do understand, don't you.? . . . ."

And Mr. Mohammed Khan, who did not understand at all, except that part about his being wonderful, because he came from a country where if a servant did not do as he was told he was well cuffed over the head, smiled and bowed and stooping over the eager little mouth kissed it rather more violently than he generally did. And somehow Joan had not liked it . . . but that was some time ago. Now she had got used to it, it was all part of the dark wonder of him. So pure and still and fathomless. So unlike these coarse fibred creatures of Streatham with their fatuous pink and white faces. When her lover kissed, he kissed with a sort of silent persistence. Not saying anything, but just kissing . . . . And Joan, who in spite of her emancipated ideas was almost childishly innocent about men, did not discern the beast that lay behind the silence. But now she tugged the lapels of his coat with an almost childish excitement.

"Come and tell me all about last night," she said, "how did the meeting go off?"

"It went off A.1.", said Mr. Mohammed Khan, walking into the little dining room, his arm still round the slim waist. "There was an immense amount of enthusiasm and a crowded hall. And it was wonderful to see the people respond to what they heard. Mr. Shunkeram had a wonderful reception, people falling down and kissing the hem of his robe. Wonderful . . . wonderful!"

"But why did they fall down and kiss the hem of his robe?" asked Joan.

"Because he speaks as a saviour of his people. He hears

the cry of their starving souls—'Deliver us from this oppression, this grinding of us under the oppressor's heel. Save us! Help us! Come over and deliver us from the arrogance, the insolence, the callous indifference to our misery. Come over before it is too late and we sink broken and tormented into the slough of everlasting despair!'" Mr. Mohammed Khan had begun to wave his hands about and his voice sounded like a chant.

"But how perfectly frightful to think that there *is* such hideous injustice going on in a country that is supposed to be free. Mohammed, it is perfectly awful. People over here don't *know*, I mean to say that the English are supposed to be a fair nation. And to think of it! The poor things! Who is it that suffers most? And how? It makes me absolutely burn when I hear of it, and I feel I must do something . . do something. Mohammed, who suffers?"

"All suffer," said Mr. Mohammed Khan sententiously.

"But how perfectly frightful." Joan sat down abruptly on the sofa. How ghastly it was! And to think that the only connection in which one heard India mentioned was as a place where one went to play tennis and dance and flirt with somebody else's husband. And one collected special clothes to do these things. Almost like Nero, fiddling while Rome burned. Dressed up! Callous! But to think that the great opportunity was coming her way; to try and relieve the suffering and misery to which to their everlasting shame the rest of her country-women turned a deaf ear! . . . It was glorious. "Oh how I long . . . simply long to begin to do something to help, Mohammed," she cried fervently. "You and I together. And surely other people will join in when they see how much in earnest we are? People like missionaries. Missionaries, Mohammed, you haven't said anything about them. Surely they can't be so unjust and cruel?"

"Missionaries!" There was an undercurrent of venom in the voice of the Asiatic.

"You are a Christian, aren't you?" asked Joan abruptly. Somehow it had never struck her until that moment. Of course her lover was a Christian. He wore English clothes. And he smoked. Someone had told her that a Mohammedan did not smoke. Nor drink. He did not drink, but then so

many men have given it up since the war. But somehow she wanted to hear him say it. "You are a Christian, aren't you, Mohammed?" she repeated.

Mr. Mohammed got up and walked to the French window. He wanted a little time. Then something he had heard in his undergraduate days flashed across his memory, and he turned round again.

"Your God shall be my God," he said, and he took the little figure into his arms.

When Joan emerged again her eyes were wet, and there was a look of almost fanatical devotion in their depths. If only people knew . . . if Gerald only knew what he was. Selfless, without guile, possessed of only one passionate desire, and that to help the people from whom he had sprung. He was a king among men and she inestimably blessed in having been chosen to sit at his side . . . . . She drew in her breath with a little sob.

Mr. Khan drew her down on to the sofa again by his side. He too was very much moved. For some reason that he could not explain even to himself he was very deeply in love with Joan Mansfield. There was something so virginal about her; it was like holding a spirit in your arms. And she was clever too. Of course she was foolish . . . like a woman . . . there had been a good deal of what was very foolish in things she had said. Things about having children, for instance . . . but he had smoothed all that down. What he had said he had really rather forgotten, but it had pleased her. And when it actually came to marriage—well of course that was a different thing altogether. . . . . and the thing was to hurry things along; because if he was not very much mistaken that conceited brother of hers was beginning to make himself objectionable. Alf Brandon had hinted at something of the kind. And he couldn't have anything coming in to prevent it now . . . he wanted this little white flashing sparkling thing for his own . . and you never knew with an arrogant brother and a foolish mother what might not happen when they got together.

"Little rose of my life," he said. "Let us cease to talk of others but now think only of ourselves and our love. When will you come to me to be my wife?"

"Oh, Mohammed!" Joan was genuinely taken aback.

All her soul and spirit had been one vast yearning over a downtrodden people. And now marriage! Suddenly sprung at her like this! . . . She gazed without knowing that she did it.

Mr. Mohammed Khan was looking at her. "Soul partners in a great work," he said.

"Of course." Joan's breath came evenly again. Just for one moment she had forgotten. . . This was going to be different from all other marriages—one of the spirit entirely—themselves forgetting, of the world forgot. Was that right? But what she meant was that they were not going to think of themselves at all. "Of course!" she clasped her hands in an ecstasy. "Whenever you like, Mohammed," she breathed. "And I think, you know, Gerald is not very pleased about it. And perhaps if he says anything to mother, she might . . . Nothing could come between us, but . . ."

The rest of the sentence was obliterated. The red mouth was hunting round the little pale face. Joan was gasping. This was what always surprised her a little; in the midst of saying something almost ascetic her lover was subject to these sudden onslaughts of—what was it? Passion? No. . . . no. . . . ten thousand times no. He was above all that, actuated by one motive only—the love of his people. Not exactly love for her, not love in the ordinary sense of the word, that is to say . . . but Love. The East . . . that is what it was, the East! People from the East were not the same as they—a kiss was a symbol. A symbol of something infinitely high. . . .

CHAPTER IV.

But things did not go quite as smoothly as they might have done. To begin with Mrs. Mansfield, in spite of her championship of Joan's lover, had been more impressed by what her son had said than she liked to admit. It was the thought of the black grandchild that worked on her mind. Although she was unimaginative, she realised what she would feel if by any chance Joan brought it home when it was small, and she, as the Grannie, had to take it out in its perambulator along Streatham High Road. People would look so surprised when they saw the little black face on the big white pillow. Instead of the soft yellow clustering curls that she remembered of her own children, there would either be tight black frizzly curls or the stiff strawlike hair of the Japanese doll. As a matter of fact there would have been neither—but Mrs. Mansfield was not versed in the different grades of colour; to her, anyone coloured was the same, a sort of cross between a negro and an Indian, with a little of the Chinese thrown in. But it preyed on her mind, all the same, and she was not made happier by a day spent at Denmark Hill, whither she wended her way—a dreadful cross-country journey spent in trams and trains and omnibuses—to talk over the whole thing with Aunt Belle.

Aunt Belle was very definite. Although she had always been a little afraid of Joan, the child being, as she considered, too modern and free in her ideas, she had had a great admiration for Joan's father, and she knew how horrified he would have been at the whole thing. She sat and looked at her sister a little contemptuously; Marion was so weak, she thought, and as she sat there gasping a little—the walk up from the station had been steep—she looked unusually ineffectual.

"You ought never to have allowed the affair," she said. "Harold would have been horrified at the whole thing. Joan is a pretty girl, and if she should find a man who could appreciate her, and understand her, she would very soon marry well.

But a native! One of these people who made Earls Court impossible at the time of the Exhibition! The idea is dreadful! What are you thinking about, Marion?"

"Oh, I don't know!" Mrs. Mansfield felt inclined to burst out crying. She had thought Belle would understand, especially as she always looked forward to a time when they could live together. And now even her only sister had turned against her . . . it was hard . . . . She began to cry a little quietly.

Belle was moved when she saw her sister in tears. But all the same she thought it a good thing that Marion should be really upset; she would be more likely to do something. "Just send the young man about his business, Marion," she said briskly.

Mrs. Mansfield shook her head hopelessly. "He would not go, Belle," she said.

Miss Fortescue got up and felt in a little black velvet bag that hung beside the fireplace. She drew out a duster and began to dust the ornaments on the mantelpiece, lifting up each in turn and carefully replacing it.

"Now listen to me, Marion," she said. "You remember when I was on the Committee of the Universal Zenana Mission? I shall never forget the state of excitement we were in when we heard that one of the younger Missionaries we had sent out had become engaged to her munshi—the munshi was the Indian who taught her Hindustani. It seemed really quite a great thing to us, and we passed a resolution wishing her all happiness. There was only one woman on the Committee who dissented, she had a son in the Indian Civil Service, and she was very indignant at our attitude and resigned her seat on the Committee shortly afterwards. Well, it ended in this way. A couple of years later this girl arrived home bringing a coal black baby with her. She came without her husband—as a matter of fact he proved not to be her husband at all, as he already had a native wife living, whom he had married when he was quite a child."

Mrs. Mansfield sat still: "Was he a Mohammedan?" she said.

"He was," said Miss Fortescue. Mrs. Mansfield moistened her lips with her tongue. A coal black baby, and not even a husband to account for it!

"Belle, what shall I do?" she burst out.

"Do?" Miss Fortescue replaced the duster in the little black velvet bag, and sitting down by her sister took hold of her quivering hand. "Do, Marion!" she said. "Just be firm. Appeal to the best in Joan. Tell her how her father would have disliked it. Try to make her see the folly of it."

. . . . . .

It all sounded so easy at Denmark Hill; but when Mrs. Mansfield got back to the little house in Fallowfield Road, and found her daughter settled happily in the drawing room, Mr. Mohammed Khan on the sofa beside her, she felt her heart flutter despairingly within her. How could she say anything? How could she be firm? Gerald had been firm, and look at the result! What was the good of it? Belle didn't understand .... So she just said a word or two, and nodded and smiled, and then went out of the room again, closing the painted door carefully behind her. She had noted the swift look of apprehension that had flickered into Joan's eyes when she saw her come in, and it made her sad. What was the good of rousing her daughter's antagonism and all for nothing? That anything she said would weigh in the slightest degree with Joan she had not the faintest illusion; she knew that it would only make her more determined to go her own way. So Mrs. Mansfield went slowly upstairs to take off her things, and made up her mind once and for all that she would not interfere with her child's love affair. She felt much happier as she went downstairs again, this time without her hat, and with a little soft lace collar round her neck to make her simple evening dress look a little lighter . . . Mr. Khan was going to stay to supper.

The two were beaming as she came into the dining room. Joan had dreaded the result of this day with Aunt Belle, but she could see by her mother's face that Aunt Belle had not prevailed. It was odd though how she took for granted that her aunt would have objected to her engagement, and it was still more odd that she did not stop to analyse the reason why. But the fact remained that she could see that her mother had come back untroubled, and so her heart was light —the more so as she herself had had rather a worrying quarter of an hour the night before, and she felt she could not stand very much more of it. It had been just as she was

going up to bed. Her mother had already gone, and Joan had waited behind to lock the front door. As she stooped to slip the chain into its proper place, she had seen the gleam of white in the letter-box. It was a very thick note she found there, a very thick envelope with a pointed uncut flap to it, and it smelt strongly of scent. There was no signature to the few words inside the envelope which Joan read under the small lamp that hung from the ceiling on a wrought iron chain.

"*Nice little girl with curly hair,*" it ran, "*don't marry a black man.*"

That was all. No signature. Joan took the note into the kitchen and read it again under the gas jet in the scullery. She was afraid that her mother might look over the banisters and ask what she was reading. She read it twice over before she quite got the gist of it. Someone, then, knew that she was going to marry an Indian, and wanted her not to . . . But who could it be? Someone in this road who had seen them walking along together? But who would care? Everyone was so absorbed in their husbands and babies and the struggle just to keep up . . . There was only one house where you never saw a baby or a pram or a rather tousled day girl, sweeping down the wobbly path, and that was the mysterious house where Jay's van came to anchor . . . Perhaps someone stood behind the beautiful thick curtains all unseen, and watched what went on in the road. But what was it to do with them? . . . Joan suddenly felt a gust of anger and she tore the expensive notepaper into shreds. An anonymous letter was a contemptible thing at any time, not worth thinking about. She would forget about it, for ever . . . But all the same it was not so easy, and therefore Joan was doubly thankful when she saw her mother's untroubled brow, and heard her answer cheerfully when her future son-in-law offered to carve her some tongue. As a rule Mohammed Khan did not care about exerting himself at meals, but tonight he was in excellent case. He had practically made Joan promise to marry him in a month's time, and he was feeling very triumphant. It fitted in excellently with plans; it was July now, they would be married in August,

they could spend the month of September at Joan's home, and in October they could sail for India. He would be going to Karnmore, and by the time they arrived there it would be quite cool—the rains would be well over and the cold weather just beginning. So he beamed on his future mother-in-law —whom he did not, in reality, at all care for—and he smiled tenderly at the girl that he did genuinely love—as love is understood by the Asiatic. And Joan felt happy—happier than she had ever been. This all seemed homey and natural —like it had been when her brother came—nothing strange or weird about it. . .

A little further up the road, in the house with the beautiful curtains and the garden crammed with flowers, two people sat in the exquisitely furnished little drawing room and discussed it, the woman with the tragic painted face, and the man with the weary lines round his mouth.

" It's awful, Tom . . . he's a pukka native. And she's the dearest little innocent thing, with a mouth that knows nothing yet and has the possibilities of knowing everything. Something ought to be done. But what ? I'm outside the pale—they wouldn't listen to me. But I tell you when I see that great ugly thing swaggering down this road with a cheroot in his mouth with the band still on I could scream. I did put a note in her letter box, but of course she would tear it up . . . ."

" Why don't you go and see her ? " The man with the tired eyes spoke with a drawl.

" Because I daren't. I know who they are, you see, Her aunt, Miss Fortescue, was one of our Committee in the old days. Don't laugh, Tom, it hurts . . . ." There were tears in the eyes of the painted lady.

" Sorry, old girl. But I can't help it. It's the idea of you as a Missionary . . . By Gad, it's distinctly humorous, that." The man with the tired eyes shouted with laughter. He was evidently very much amused.

So the lady with the painted face tried to be amused too. Men didn't care for you to show your feelings, she knew that only too well. But as she dabbed her eyes and blew her nose she felt the old old feeling again as if someone was turning a knife in her heart. He had just begun to talk—the funny little dusky thing with the big opaque black eyes. Where

was he now? Had they been kind to him in the big Home with the clanging gates? Or had they scolded him, perhaps, the first night when he cried in bed? . . . The lady with the painted face suddenly felt that she must scream. . . . .

"Oh, mix me a short drink, Tom." She got up and threw a cushion across the room.

"Righto! But it's your third since dinner, remember." The man with the drawly voice spoke with more of a drawl than usual.

"Oh, shut up! don't start the moral stunt!" The painted lady spoke impatiently, and threw another cushion. Not much of a panacea for a broken heart, perhaps, but the short drink helps quite a lot.

CHAPTER V.

The month of July flew. The Sales were in full swing and there was a white Sale at Brandon's, so Mrs. Mansfield was in her element. She drew thirty pounds out of her Post Office Bank account, and regularly gave herself up to the purchasing of Joan's trousseau. Joan learnt to appreciate Mrs. Mansfield's flair for shopping—she knew exactly what to buy and where to buy it, and Joan was also deeply touched at the interest her mother took in the tiniest detail of her outfit. Thirty pounds is not much to spend on a trousseau nowadays, but Miss Fortescue, seeing that the thing was coming off whatever she thought or said about it, came to the rescue with the promise to pay for two evening dresses. Gerald, with a very stiff note, sent a cheque for twenty pounds. So Joan felt that she was rich indeed, and the little house in Fallowfield Road hummed to the tune of the sewing machine, and Joan and her mother were at more unity than they had ever been in their lives before. Joan had a fair amount of presents—the Brandons sent her a beautiful fitted dressing-case. Matilda came forward with a set of crocheted ends for towels, Miss Fortescue gave a pair of silver shell butter dishes in a velvet lined case and Alf Brandon gave Mr. Mohammed Khan a set of enamel waistcoat buttons with which he was unfeignedly delighted. He displayed them to Joan with many exclamations of pleasure.

"They are really veree smart," he said.

"But when do you wear them?" Joan was looking at them with her head on one side. "They look more like the sort of thing that you would put in a blouse," she said.

"I shall wear them in my evening waistcoat," said Mr. Mohammed Khan. "Probably as you are a bride we shall be asked to dine at the Residency; they will be the very thing for that."

"Oh will they?" Joan was still looking at them. "Then people dress more gaily in India than they do here, don't they?" she said.

"They do not." Mr. Khan spoke a little huffily. Sometimes Joan irritated him with her frank way of speaking—almost a critical way of speaking. "In your sheltered life you have not mixed in large assemblies," he said. "In India we go in very largely for such things. Men blazing with decorations, women scintillating with diamonds, high officials radiating the insignia of their office."

"And barristers stuck all over with blue enamel buttons," put in Joan, laughing with her mouth open so that all her little pink tongue showed.

There was a little silence. This was what Mr. Mohammed Khan did not like. This sort of free repartee showed so very clearly that Joan did not realise her position as one of an inferior sex. Not in any disagreeable sense inferior, but just that—inferior. The women of England did not realise it—this was not the first time that it had been brought home to him. But afterwards he would be able to make it more clear, quite gently and kindly, of course, but none the less forcibly for that.

"Funny little, sweet little Rose of Sharon," he said indulgently.

Being called a Rose of Sharon always roused Joan to a trembling sense of rapture. It absolutely breathed romance, that heavenly term. That was what India was—a country full of wonderful romance. Trackless forests, blazing moons, quivering stars, a vast blue dome absolutely hung with stars, all much larger and brighter than stars ever were in England. And her lover had brought the romance home with him, it enveloped him like a shimmering silver lined cloud. Joan saw him through the glamour of it; she saw the heavy sensual face illumined with it, and it blinded her, as it has blinded many others much more sensible than Joan.

"Oh Mohammed," she breathed, "Oh Mohammed. Won't it be simply heavenly? You and I together in that wonderful country? Think what we shall be able to do, think what we shall be able to do! The people we shall be able to help. It's too much . . . . it's simply too much!"

There was only one more hitch and that was the attitude taken up by Gerald. He realised that it was quite hopeless for him to try to put a stop to the whole thing; it had gone too far for that. But with his legal knowledge he was determined to safeguard Joan as far as he could—not that he could do much in that way because Mr. Khan knew as much about English law as he did, and he also had the priceless advantage of knowing Indian law as well. But he would do what he could. So with this idea in view he wrote a short note to Mr. Khan at his chambers, asking him if he would be good enough to call round at the office some time whenever it was most convenient, and rather to Gerald's surprise the Indian had replied that he would call the following afternoon. Now the following afternoon had come; and Gerald sat at his big beautifully equipped writing table, in the luxurious room, and stared out at the rather dark cobbled street, the office had been for over a hundred years in the same street (one of those that run down from the great artery of Fleet Street to the river), and wished that the interview was over. A great roll of paper was being slung up to one of the windows of the newspaper office opposite; Gerald watched it mechanically; it reminded him of the times when he had come trembling with excitement to 'see Daddy in office.' And Daddy had stood him up on one of the heavy japanned deed cases and shown him how the great rolls of paper were gripped so fiercely in the big steel teeth and hauled up to the dark looming loft-like aperture. Gerald had never forgotten it. And as he cast his mind back and dreamed of this, one of the great paper vans came clattering down the street, rattling over the cobbles, and that reminded him too, of how on one of these childish expeditions Joan had come too, in a frock that stuck out, and as the great van had clattered down the narrow street, filling it all up, and looking to his childish imagination like a great devouring advancing monster, he had seized hold of her hand and held it tightly. And his mother had seen and been pleased: "That's right, darling, always look after your little sister," she had said. But now that was what?—ten years ago at least, and Joan had slipped out of his care for ever . . . It was very largely his own fault—that was the bitter part of it. Gerald swallowed once or twice, he had suffered a good deal since that last visit to Fallowfield Road. He had failed

in his duty towards his sister and he was very conscious of it. However, he would do what he could now . . . he swung round quickly as the door opened and a clerk stood at his elbow.

"A gentleman to see you, Mr. Gerald," he said.

"Show him in, Simpson." Gerald Mansfield took the card, and then laid it down on his blotting pad. 'Mr. Mohammed Khan, Barrister at Law, LL.D.' Swab!

Mr. Mohammed Khan was entirely unconscious that the relations between him and his future brother-in-law could possibly be anything but entirely cordial. He came in with a breezy swagger, his cheroot still in his mouth.

"How do, Mansfield," he said, and he smiled, and removing his cheroot he laid it down, still smoking, on the polished edge of the desk.

"How do you do, Khan?" Gerald Mansfield got up, and held out his hand. But as the chill indiarubber palm lay against his, he was conscious of an uncontrollable spasm of aversion. How could Joan!.... He pushed over a heavy brass ash tray.

"Oh, thank you verree much," Mr. Khan picked up the cheroot and laid it on it. But not before a trail of smoke grey ash had fallen on the carpet. Gerald noted it with annoyance. It seemed to him to be significant of more than just cheroot ash falling on the carpet. It seemed to embody a sort of carelessness of everybody else's feelings. The fine grained edge of the desk was singed too.

"As you are going to marry my sister, I thought it would be as well that we should meet and have a talk about things," said Gerald Mansfield, trying to speak cordially. "The wedding will be on us before we know where we are. I have not heard from my mother which church has been chosen. I suppose it will be St. Leonards."

Mr. Khan drew out a large and flamboyant silk handkerchief.

"Your sister and I, with the sanction of Mrs. Mansfield, have decided to be married at a Registry Office," he said, and as he spoke he wiped a few beads of perspiration from his upper lip.

Gerald looked up sharply. This was something new.

"But I understood that your banns were being read at St. Leonards," he said.

"That was to have been the arrangement. But we came to the conclusion, your sister and I, that a little more reticence was seemly. You see, Mansfield, my being an Indian makes things a little different. There is a prejudice—I maintain a very unjust one—but there is a prejudice against mixed marriages. So that being the case we think it wiser not to obtrude our union; and Mrs. Mansfield quite agrees with us."

Gerald Mansfield leaned back and put the tips of his fingers together. "You are a Christian, Mr. Khan, are you not?" he asked abruptly. Somehow he felt that everything that Mr. Khan had just been saying was a lie. But how was he to prove it?

"A Christian? Most certainlee, Mr. Mansfield."

"Do you mind—I am sure it must seem very impertinent of me, but you must put it down to a brother's natural anxiety to see his sister safeguarded in every way—do you mind telling me when you became a Christian?"

Mr. Mohammed Khan's opaque eyes became more opaque.

"I was born of Christian parents, Mr. Mansfield. My father is now labouring in the Mission Field. He relinquished a vast and rolling estate on the North West Frontier, to take up Mission work. 'Take up thy cross,' the Saviour said."

Gerald Mansfield suddenly felt sick. That this man was an accomplished liar he now had not the faintest doubt. But how was he to make Joan see it, or his mother? He suddenly got up and began to walk about the room. Mr. Khan watched him.

"Which registry office do you propose to be married from?" he asked abruptly.

"That is not yet decided," said Mr. Mohammed Khan. "But we will let you know as soon as it is decided."

"I should like to be at the wedding," said Gerald Mansfield. "And I should also like my sister to come in here immediately afterwards and sign her will. So you had better go somewhere near here—there is one in Treadweather Street, just off Ludgate Hill."

Mr. Khan ignored the last part of the sentence.

"You speak of a will?" he said.

"Yes," Gerald Mansfield had sat down again. "There is no money to speak of," he said, "but Joan will probably come into a thousand pounds or so when her mother dies.

And I wish to secure that to her absolutely. So as you probably know as well as I do she must make her will directly she is married. That will insure that the money, in the event of there not being any children, will come back into our family. That is also usual, as you doubtless also know."

"I do not know it at all," said Mr. Mohammed Khan. "In our country all that a woman possesses belongs to her husband."

"Yes, but it's different in England," said Gerald Mansfield bluntly. "We've gone ahead a bit, you see."

Mr. Mohammed Khan was silent. But underneath the rather low forehead his brain was working swiftly . . . . It would be perfectly easy to get Joan not to put her signature to any such will, he thought. So he would not risk a quarrel with this aggressive and exceedingly objectionable brother of hers.

"And now as to a marriage settlement," went on Gerald Mansfield. "You will wish to see Joan's future secured, of course. You have perhaps already had one drawn up. If not I shall be happy to do it for you."

"Thank you," said Mr. Mohammed Khan stiffly.

"When will it be convenient for you and my sister to come here for that purpose?"

"I will discuss it with your sister and let you know," said Mr. Khan.

"The time is getting short, you know," said Gerald Mansfield.

"Yes, I am aware of that," said the Indian, and he began to smile.

Gerald Mansfield felt the blood rising to his forehead. The man was being intentionally insolent. "Well, shall we say Friday?" he said, trying to speak easily.

Mr. Khan crossed one foot over the other, showing a good deal of mauve sock and the beginning of a brown leg.

"I should prefer, Mr. Mansfield," he said, "first to talk over all these matters with your sister. As you have just so wisely said, you as a nation are further advanced in your views on the rights of women than we are. Therefore it is only fair that your sister should have an opportunity of stating her views, before any definite decision is come to."

This was one up to Mr. Mohammed Khan and Gerald knew it. He meant of course to prevail upon Joan to have nothing whatever to do with any will, or settlement or anything, and he would very easily do it. But Gerald made one more effort.

"Won't you and Joan lunch with me on Friday in any case?" he said. "Then we can talk things over together."

"Thank you very much Mr. Mansfield," said Mr. Mohammed Khan, and he got up out of his chair. "But I should prefer to discuss everything with your sister before I accept any invitation on her behalf. Good day to you."

Gerald Mansfield also got up. He had done nothing by this interview—less than nothing, because he had made an enemy of his sister's future husband. But he held out his hand notwithstanding.

"You will be good to my sister, Khan?" he said.

"Most assuredly, Mr. Mansfield." Mr. Khan's handshake was more clammy and fishlike than usual. But the glance that he gave his future brother-in-law made up in warmth for anything that the handshake lacked. It was vitriolic. "Most assuredly, Mr. Mansfield," he repeated.

The moment the door had closed behind the sinuous figure of Mr. Mohammed Khan, Gerald Mansfield sat down and wrote to his sister.

"My dear Joan," he wrote,

"Khan has just been here. Joan, the man is a cad—and not only a cad, a liar. You're making a fool of yourself. I know you will loathe me for writing like this, but sometimes men can see things that women can't, and I feel that I must stop you somehow from doing this insane thing. Put it off anyhow until I have had time to make some enquiries about him—find out something about his people, for instance. After all we know nothing—the whole thing has been so rushed. Wait a year—I will try to make the year a happier one for you. I know I haven't done what I might. And then you may feel differently. Don't show him this letter, he detests me enough as it is!"

Joan's letter came by return. She wrote it in her bedroom, passionately sweeping the things off the top of the chest of drawers to make a place for her blotting pad. Her lover had spent the evening there, and as she had let him out,

the postman had dropped this letter from Gerald in the box. She had known it was from Gerald by the shape of the envelope, and somehow all the evening she had felt sure it was coming too. How dared he . . . how dared he!

"My dear Gerald," she wrote,

"Mohammed has been here so I have heard all about this afternoon. If you thought that you would separate us by abusing him to me, you are mistaken. He is terribly hurt at your attitude. I am not hurt, I am furious. You know nothing whatever about him; I do. The whole thing is because he is a native. You think that because a man is dark he must of necessity be a cad and a liar. I know that he needn't be. And I am going to show that I know it by marrying someone dark. I shall sign no document whatever. Mohammed has told me about that part too. Nor do I wish him to settle anything on me. I haven't the faintest fear in going to the other end of the world with him. He is going to take me into a life that will be a life, and where I may be of some use. So that's how I feel about it. And let's leave it at that, or we shall quarrel for ever. And I don't want to do that if I can help it—it's so awful when there are only two of us."

Gerald Mansfield got the letter as he was going out to lunch the following day. He took off his hat and turned back into his room again. When he had read it, he put on his hat again and walked out of the office his hands shaking. Oh to get at his throat, . . . the black swine . . . . the black swine!. . . .

. . . . . .

So now everything went along swiftly to Joan's wedding day; and it was her last night in her own house. She had seen her lover for the last time till they met at the little dark registry office in Treadweather Street the following morning, and she had clung to him as they said goodbye under the wrought iron lamp chain. It all seemed rather frightful now it had actually come to the point—sort of desolate. Why it should seem like this, Joan did not know. Somehow being married in a Registry Office was rather miserable. But after all it was only a sentimental feeling, and Mohammed had been so keen on it she hadn't liked to refuse. But as she went back into the little dining-room where Mrs. Mansfield sat knitting by the French window, she felt as if someone had

taken her by the throat. A sort of terror . . . . After all she had done this thing so utterly on her own. No one had wanted her to marry Mohammed Khan. And suppose it wasn't a success after all—no one would be sorry for her either. But it would be a success . . . . and she had a great work before her . . . . But somehow . . . .

She sat down in the wicker chair beside Mrs. Mansfield's and took up her work. She was conscious that her mother was not quite at her ease either; she moved her feet on the little wicker footstool, and kept on laying down her work, and hunting in the wooden workbox that stood on a table beside her, for something that she apparently could not find. But she kept her eyes on the sewing in her hand, a chiffon veil that she was hemming for the journey to-morrow; somehow she felt that if her mother began anything like a sort of ending-up talk she would die.

But Mrs. Mansfield was determined to say what she wanted to, although she found it dreadfully difficult.

"Joan dear," she said. "I want to say something to you before you are married. It is not easy, because I think mothers find it very difficult to speak about intimate things to their daughters. I don't know why it should be so but it is. But I feel that I must. I want you to tell me—"

Joan interrupted suddenly, her face flaming.

"Mother, please don't," she said. "I think I know what you're going to say. But I know all about everything. Please don't go on. I hate that sort of thing. I don't mean to be unkind, but I do. Mother . . . please."

But Mrs. Mansfield was unusually determined, although her unimaginative face was flushed with the effort she was making. Joan should not go, as she had gone, out into the Unknown, totally unequipped, as she felt quite sure that she was.

"Darling, I know exactly how you feel," she said, and she began to hunt feverishly in her work box again. "But although I understand I feel that I must say just one or two things to you before to-morrow. After all you are not marrying an Englishman, Joan, and it makes a little difference." Mrs. Mansfield's lips trembled. Oh, how she suddenly remembered the yearning tenderness of her own bridegroom, many years ago!

endless possibilities of work, and of doing good, it was to this little room Joan had fled again, and with burning hands and face had lain face downwards on the friendly little bed, and had vowed that whatever she felt about Mr. Khan, this was the opportunity of her life and she was going to take it. For in her innermost soul Joan did not like Mr. Khan being a native. She tried to subdue it, she flew out in a passion if anyone voiced this feeling, she told herself over and over again that it was a wrong feeling. But she had it all the same. And all night it had tormented her, and she had turned and twisted, and watched the little blobs of light that were always cast on the wall by the lamp post at the corner. But early in the morning she had slept; and now as she leaned out of the window, and breathed in the beauty and fragrance of the air, she felt reassured. It was all going to be all right, it had been ordained that she should do this thing. And in a way it made other people happy too, because her Mother would adore having Aunt Belle to live with her, and she would now be able to, and it also would mean that she would be better off. So Joan collected her sponge and towels feeling very much happier. If a thing made other people as well as you happy, then it must be right, she argued, and she wended her way down to the bathroom humming under her breath. Matilda had come—she could hear her lumping about in the kitchen, and Joan liked to hear the friendly sound. Besides, she had felt very much drawn to Matilda lately. Matilda envied her, and amidst a chorus of criticism a little envy has a very leavening effect.

. . . . . .

Breakfast was a sad meal. Mrs. Mansfield's face was rather pale and although she made valiant efforts to be talkative and cheerful, Joan knew they were efforts and therefore was correspondingly depressed. They breakfasted very early; the wedding was to be at nine at the Registry Office in Treadweather Street. Only Gerald was to be there. He had insisted on coming, and the Brandons were lending their car to Joan and her mother to go up to the City in. This was very kind of them; it made it seem more like a wedding, Joan felt rather forlornly, as she pulled the little grey velour hat low over her eyes and stood for the last time in front of the rather shabby dressing table in the small bedroom. She

was being married in a coat and skirt, grey, and very pretty, quite one of Mrs. Mansfield's greatest triumphs in the Sale line, and Joan looked very beautiful, as she gave a last polish to her small pink nails. Her luggage had gone on ahead to Euston; they were going to the Lakes for their honeymoon, so there was only the suit case to be finished now.

Joan walked down the twisty stairs with a lump in her throat. The end of this part of her life! Why did she suddenly feel that she hated leaving it? Why did the sight of her mother standing in the narrow hall in a new hat bring the tears into her eyes? Why did she suddenly get that mad feeling in her throat as if she wanted to scream out, "I can't go, I can't go . . . Mother! do something so that I needn't!" Joan gripped the knob at the front of the stairs and gritted her teeth together. Everyone felt this, when they were going to be married; she must wrestle with herself.

"Well, darling?" Mrs. Mansfield's lower lip was quivering. She forced a smile, more pathetic than tears.

"Yes, I'm quite ready, mother." Joan turned quickly. "I'll say goodbye to Matilda in the kitchen," she said.

Matilda was wiping a red and weatherbeaten hand on the roller towel behind the scullery door; she hurriedly settled her apron as Joan went in.

"Well, goodbye, Matilda. Look after Mrs. Mansfield." It was all Joan could manage without bursting out crying. "Goodbye," she said again.

"Goodbye, Miss" Matilda's face was also working. Weddings and funerals, they both brought the ready tears. "Goodbye, Miss, and I'm sure I wish you all happiness Such a noble man, as I always says to my Bert. Such a presence! Not that 'e will 'ave it, 'e's that sharp with 'is tongue. 'Not 'arf,' 'e sez, 'no niggers for me—give me a white man every time.' But then, as I tell 'im, 'e's that set up with 'is five years in the Territorials, there's no 'olding 'im." Matilda, all unconscious, held out an enthusiastic hand.

Joan took it, her tears all scorched up. Here it was again, the injustice of it! She walked out of the kitchen all on fire for her lover.

. . . . . .

Treadweather Street is narrow, and the big car had its work cut out to steer its way between the two pavements. But it

drew up noiselessly, and successfully at the dark entrance, and Joan and her mother got out, handed out by Gerald, who stood waiting on the pavement, rather pale, but very slim and well dressed in a grey lounge suit.

"Yes, Mr. Khan is here," Gerald answered the unspoken question in his sister's eyes, and he held her hand a little more tightly. What a child! and how pretty she looked! He led the way into the dark office, his nostrils quivering.

Mr. Mohammed Khan was wiping the moisture off his upper lip as the little party came in, but he put his gay silk handkerchief away as he walked from the littered office table. He greeted the girl who was to be his wife with real emotion. "My little Rose of Sharon," he said quietly.

Somehow that well known and much beloved term of endearment did more for Joan than anything else could have done, and she held her head high and stood with entire peacefulness while the funny little man like a dejected penguin gabbled through a form of words. As she stood there, there rang out on the dusty air a voice of heavenly beauty, cleaving through it like a sword of gold—'For He shall feed His Flock'—what was it—and where was it coming from? It was just as if they were being married in a Church after all. Then she remembered—a little further up the street was the Cathedral choir school, the boys must be practising. And as the divine melody rose and fell, all her soul suddenly surged up in a passion of longing—was she doing right in this marriage, was God pleased about it? She hadn't even thought of God in connection with it before, somehow. There hadn't been time, it had all been so fussing. But now—what happiness could she expect if He didn't think it was the right thing to do? And as the dejected penguin hissed 'ring,' and Mr. Mohammed Khan hunted desperately in every pocket but the right one for it, conscious all the time that the brother-in-law that he detested was staring contemptuously at him, Joan flung out all her soul in prayer to the One 'Who is always more ready to hear than we to pray.'

"Lord," she prayed, staring desperately at the shaft of light that struck straight down through the one dingy window on to the dejected penguin's bald head, "Lord, I suddenly have a feeling that perhaps I am not doing the right thing

about this. But I beseech You to stand by me: even if You think I ought not to have done it."

As Joan's little hand fell to her side again, carrying with it the symbol of eternal love, or what ought to be the symbol of eternal love, but is generally the symbol of something very much the reverse, Eternal Love Incarnate came near and stood very close to her side in that dingy office, But He smiled a little pitifully notwithstanding.

. . . . . .

Mr. Mohammed Khan had selected the Lake District for his honeymoon. It was a long way to go and an expensive journey, but he had very pleasant recollections of a very delightful holiday once spent there, and also he wanted to show the district to Joan. But it was principally the recollection of the holiday that had drawn him back there . . . it had been such a very delightful holiday. For he had thrown in his lot with a community of people, mostly young, who had their holiday headquarters in a glorious old manor house that lay very close to one of the principal lakes. There they discussed the glaring problems of the day, socialism, equality of the sexes, free love. The last, Mr. Mohammed Khan found, when he had got accustomed to hearing the opposite sex let itself go without any regard to the sex of the person to whom it was talking (he was younger then and in the country from which he had come the women didn't do it) provided a very promising foundation for flirtation, and Mr. Mohammed Khan availed himself of it fully. On the whole the women were not physically attractive: they wore strange garments, square, hanging straight from the neck, and did their hair badly. Some affected bare legs and sandals too. But there was one who was fair and slim and beautiful and did none of these unpleasant things, and with her Mr. Mohammed Khan fell violently in love. She called him her Prince of Darkness, which intrigued Mohammed Khan enormously, and things came very near to a definite declaration. But the Oriental is always very wary of committing himself definitely, and so it was left like this, that they should meet in London and carry on their friendship there. They met —the girl sweet and dewy, and flushed with the romance of it all, and Mr. Mohammed Khan very debonair and gay as to the tie. And all went well until the girl in the flush of her

happiness begged him to come out and take tea with her parents. "They will be so proud, Mohammed, you are so splendid, my dusky king." And Mr. Mohammed Khan went, and found the parents, dear simple folk, in their little parlour behind the grocer's shop in Peckham High Road. And that was the last that Peckham High Road ever saw of the dusky king.

But this was different, Mr. Mohammed Khan knew that Joan was socially just as good as he was—besides she was his wife now. So he was in excellent humour, and he spoke very kindly to her as she sat beside him in the taxi, wiping away the tears that somehow would fall although she tried to choke them back.

"Do not cry, my little Rose of Sharon," he said, frowning over her head in the effort to see how much the taxi registered; they had been held up at the corner of Chancery Lane.

"No . . . all right," Joan made a little snort like a child that is trying to control itself. "It's all right, . . . only, don't you know . . . it's saying goodbye to one's family. Somehow I feel as if I hadn't been fond enough of them. And mother looked so . . . so sort of alone." Joan began to cry again.

"But she is not alone; she has her estimable sister who is coming to live with her," said Mr. Khan practically.

"Yes, I know . . . but after all I was her child," sobbed Joan, giving up any effort at self-control. Somehow it all seemed so despairing. People in books sank into a sort of trance when they were married, and were perfectly happy; she only felt dreadfully wide awake. And was it critical? Mohammed's tie was so bright, and he had a gold ring round it, and his trousers had a sort of check pattern on them, they matched the coat of course, it was a lounge suit, but still, did you generally have a pretty lounge suit? Gerald had been so trim and unobtrusive. Joan suddenly felt a dreadful feeling of responsibility—she belonged to Mohammed now, and if he was not dressed right, she sort of shared in it. . .

Mr. Khan had found out that the taxi only registered one and tenpence, so he turned a benevolent, although rather chastened glance on his bride.

"But these tears are very strange," he said; "tears at

the very outset of a wedding journey. I do not understand them. Do you perhaps not feel very well?" He looked closely at Joan. How different she looked when she had been crying. All the radiance blurred and smudged away.

Joan saw the glance and understood it, and she rallied to it and blew her small nose, by now a vivid pink, and drew a couple of swift sobbing breaths in a desperate effort for self-control. But even as she did this, the thought leapt unbidden to her mind; how different an Englishman would have been! That man in the train, for instance, how he would have drawn that little frightened figure into his arms and tenderly kissed away the tears. But then common-sense came to her aid. Mohammed couldn't kiss her in the taxi; they were in the middle of a crowd of other taxis and omnibuses and things; people would see . . .

"I am sorry I cried," she said; "I think it was the newness of it all, and the feeling that I might have been nicer to Mother while I was there." . . .

"Well, well . . . . the journey will restore you, and the change of scene." But Mr. Khan spoke vaguely as he stared out of the window. Yes, they had come along well—Endsleigh Gardens, and a total of only half a crown. Without another stop two and eightpence ought to do it. It did; they slid down the cobbled slope and drew up at the entrance crowded with porters as the eightpence clicked into view.

"That's right." Mr. Khan stood, his Malacca cane tucked well under his arm and watched the few pieces of luggage being unloaded. He then counted some change out of his waist-coat pocket and handed it to the taxi driver, "Come," he said to Joan, "we will now go in search of your luggage that is, I believe, in the left luggage office." He led the way into the waiting hall.

But Joan was standing watching the face of the taxi-driver. He had a nice face, brown and good humoured, and he looked like an old soldier. He was showing the coins in his palm to a porter who was lounging against the wall, and both were laughing, half contemptuously. Wedding journey too! Picked 'em up at the Treadweather Street Registry Office. Nice look out for the lady, eh?"

"Pooh!" the porter put both hands in his pockets and lurched himself upright. "Didn't you see me dodge taking

on his blasted luggage? Just home from the b . . . . y country myself, know 'em too well!"

"That so? Well, cheerio!" the taxi driver clicked down the flag, let in the clutch, and steered carefully out of the station yard again.

But Joan, watching him go, put her hand up to her throat, and followed her husband into the glazed waiting hall. What had she done? When she got on to the platform, however, her fears receded a little. The guard was obsequious, he walked along beside them to their carriage and opened the door of it himself. And to her intense relief Joan saw that it was a first class carriage. She had had a dreadful fear after the incident of the taxi driver that perhaps they would be travelling third. Not that in itself she in the least minded the idea of travelling third, in fact she and her mother had never travelled anything else. But she knew that on your wedding journey you always did things better than at any other time, and she felt that to have to feel that Mohammed Khan wasn't doing what he ought to do, would be more than she could bear. But Mr. Khan was always ready to be generous when he got anything for it, and he dropped half a crown into the ready palm with an air, and smiled condescendingly as the guard turned the carriage key in the lock. Then as the guard turned to walk down the platform he looked down at Joan. She had regained her sweet freshness, he was glad to see. But there was something about her that he could not quite fathom; such an almost boyish freedom from self-consciousness; it was almost unnatural under the circumstances; surely there should be averted glances, and gentle bridling. Mr. Mohammed Khan felt that he was being done out of something that was his due.

"My little wife," he said gently.

Joan looked up and smiled: "Yes, isn't it odd?" she said, "And I don't feel an atom different, do you? Except that I am most frightfully hungry. When shall we be able to get something to eat? Oh, there is something, some of those heavenly Bath buns all sticky." Joan made a dive at the window.

Mohammed Khan followed her. Hungry? and for a horrible thing like a Bath bun! But he paid for two notwithstanding, and smiled, although with an effort when Joan

asked him to hold them. "Only for a second," she said, "while I get out a bit of notepaper to lay them on."

"We shall be having tiffin on the train," said Mr. Khan, with a faint note of reproof in his voice, as Joan rummaged in her despatch case.

"Oh shall we? what frantic fun." Joan lifted a flushed face. "Here you are, now let me take them. Yes, I thought we should be having something to eat later, but I am so desperately hungry now. You see we had breakfast so frightfully early. What time is it now, Mohammed?"

"Five minutes to ten . . . and the train leaves at ten."

"Oh, let's have a paper then, look, there's the boy. Quick, or he'll be gone." Joan dodged out into the corridor, followed rather more slowly by her husband. This was all very irregular. A paper! Reading on one's honeymoon journey! It was not at all his idea. However . . . . patience . . . especially at first. "The *Daily Mirror*—may I have that. And the *Sketch*? Oh but the *Sketch* is a shilling," said Joan, looking up rather anxiously.

This was more the attitude. Mr. Khan squared his shoulders magnanimously.

"No matter," he said and drew out a two-shilling piece. "I shall require change to the amount of elevenpence," he said to the shiny faced infant with the tray slung round his neck.

"Get it for you, Sir," said the infant and vanished.

Mr. Mohammed Khan hung out of the window almost to his whole length. This was intolerable. It was almost a certainty that he would never see the horrible little creature again. What a country! Several people loitering on the platform saw the heavy scowling face and wondered. Two men especially, talking, with a couple of suitcases on the ground between them.

"My aunt, Heriot, look at that." The shorter of the two spoke.

"What?" The tall lean man with eyes almost startlingly blue turned slowly round. He surveyed the train and then withdrew his eyes. "Don't, it's too early in the morning," he said and his teeth flashed suddenly white. "Besides, we've got away from that for a bit . . . . Gad, doesn't it remind you?"

There was quite a little stir on the platform as the dark head projecting from the window turned furiously from side to side. The guard, walking down the length of the train for the last time, stopped. "Anything I can do for you, Sir?"

"My change. That budmash of a paper boy has gone off with two shillings of mine. It is an intolerable state of affairs." Mr. Khan's voice was shaking.

"He's bound to come back, Sir." The nice guard was smiling. "Yes, here he is." He went on his way to the van as the child dived through a crowd breathless.

"Sorry, Sir, but they 'adn't any change at the main stall." He crammed the silver and coppers into the outstretched olive coloured palm.

"Intolerable, disgraceful!" Mr. Khan continued to grumble under his breath as he turned back into the carriage.

Joan glanced up from the *Daily Mirror*. "What's happened?" she said.

"That horrible paper boy" . . . . Mr. Khan had flung himself back into the padded corner.

"Why, didn't he bring your change?"

"He did, but only at the last moment. Tried his utmost to rob me of it."

Joan laid down her paper. This was odd. "Why, I have never known such a thing happen," she said. "They are generally absolutely honest. Why did you think he was trying to rob you of it? Would a paper boy do that in India, Mohammed?"

But Mr. Khan was on his guard again. It was not necessary to tell Joan that honesty for the sake of honesty is a thing unknown to the Asiatic. So he only smiled.

"My little Rose of Sharon," he said silkily.

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The long perfectly hung train swung on its way to the North, and Joan leaning back in her comfortable corner began to feel quite at ease and happy again. Mohammed had apparently gone to sleep; his head hung a little on one side, and his red mouth was slightly open. But Joan was not thinking about Mohammed Khan at all just now, she was thinking of how wonderful it was to be really launched on something new. All her life she had longed to get *out* . . . out into the world to do things. And now she was out.

And the first thing she had done when she was out was to criticise the person who had let her out. It had not been at all kind. He had, after all, brought her in a taxi to Euston when he could very easily have gone by the underground. And supposing he did not tip the driver, what of that? He had taken first class tickets when he could easily have taken third. She had misjudged him when she had had that stab of terror through her heart at the thought that perhaps he was mean. But now she knew that he was not mean and she felt a throb of joy at the relief of it .... The country looked heavenly; they had left the poorer streets behind them, and there were green fields with cows meekly cropping the grass, and woods open to the sky in wide mossy patches. A wood! It was Joan's idea of joy, she hung out of the open window and drew in long rapturous breaths.

"First lunch," a man in blue uniform thrust in his head. Mr. Mohammed Khan waked abruptly. "Come," he said, and they joined the single file of swaying people who were lurching along the corridor. Joan was vastly entertained, she would rather have died than confess it but it was the first time that she had ever had lunch in a dining car. She and her mother had always had to study economy, and when they had gone away anywhere—it was a very rare occurrence—they had carried little packets of sandwiches with them; and since to make a sandwich tolerable it has to be lined with masses of butter, and there never were masses of butter in the Fallowfield Road ménage, the sandwiches were always rather terrible. So this was all doubly exciting to Joan, and when they all stumbled through a van in which stacks of luggage were piled, and she saw her own pressed cane trunk labelled 'Keswick,' it was almost all she could do to refrain from pointing it out to the lady who walked just behind her. Somehow she did not think of pointing it out to her husband who walked just ahead of her; it wasn't the sort of thing that he would think interesting.

"Table for two, Sir?" They had arrived rather breathless in the first class dining car, and the attendant met them half way down the aisle.

"If you please." Mr. Khan beamed. He had thoroughly enjoyed walking through the third class car and seeing all the English people sitting there. He was first class, one

of a very few. Only a couple of men, clean shaven and studious looking, and a very grand lady with a glorious string of pearls round her neck.

Joan sat down, her face radiant. She smiled all round the car, showing her little teeth. This really was life, life with a capital L. Both men looked at her, and then at her companion, and then said something to each other. But Joan did not notice, she was absorbed in thinking, except for seeing her mother again, how thankful she was that she had left Streatham for ever.

Lunch was very nice, and as it progressed Mr. Khan became more talkative. He had really been very hungry. And Joan was looking beautiful . . . so animated, and her mouth was so scarlet. Mr. Khan's slumbrous eyes glowed. Yes, he had done well in his choice. Coffee came, and with it the bill. Mr. Khan sighed. But in a first-class car it was inevitable. And also they would probably have to have tea there. He laid two coppers with the other coins.

. . . . . .

The journey began to come to an end. Joan was tired, very tired, the day had been an exhausting one. But the enchanting beauty of the country through which the train cut its way was to her a revelation. Heaving moorland, purple with heather. Hills rising one behind each other, blue with the blueness of twilight. The exquisite chill of the air, chill with the chilliness of iced champagne. Joan drank it all in, in an ecstasy of enjoyment. Somehow she almost forgot about her husband. He had only reminded her of his presence once after lunch, and that was rather an uncomfortable incident which she preferred to forget. They had returned to their compartment, and Joan had settled into her corner with a sigh of happiness.

"Oh, it's heavenly," she said; "Mohammed, you are a dear to give me all this."

"Not at all," said Mr. Mohammed Khan graciously, and he smiled down at her, and then walking to the door he proceeded to pull down all the blinds.

"What are you doing?" said Joan.

"I wish a little privacy," said Mr. Mohammed Khan

"Whatever for?" said Joan, and her grey eyes were wide.

But Mr. Khan did not answer, he was trying the door to see if it locked from the inside. Satisfied, he turned, and sat down by Joan, and then as she looked up at him, he dragged her roughly to him.

But there was something about the deliberate way in which Mr. Khan had drawn down the blinds that made Joan uneasy. She could not have explained what it was but it had a sinister effect—like the way a dentist moves between the chair and the dreadful little cupboard where he keeps his instruments. So she cried out and pushed him indignantly with her hands.

"Don't," she said. "Don't . . . you are squashing my hat. Besides, the train isn't the place to kiss. *Don't*, Mohammed. I tell you I don't *like* it." Joan made frantic efforts to disentangle herself.

Mr. Mohammed Khan desisted, and let her go. But there was a very evil look on his mouth as he got up from beside Joan and let up the blinds with a jerk. This was not at all the behaviour of a dutiful wife. But still . . . he could afford to abide his time . . . He sat down again in his corner and took up his paper.

Joan was breathing rather quickly as she straightened her hat; being only kept on by a piece of elastic under her short curly hair, it very easily got out of the straight. And Mohammed certainly had been rough. But she could not help laughing inwardly. He had been going to have a kissing attack and she had warded it off. But how cross he looked now!

But all that had taken place after lunch. Now it was after tea, in fact it was a little past six, and they had changed at Penrith, and were making the last stage of their journey towards Keswick. Here the train stopped at every station, and on the platforms stood little clusters of people, all with walking sticks and many of them with knapsacks on their backs. Everyone looked happy, and everyone was sunburnt. There was a feeling of cheerfulness in the air. And the beauty of it! It brought the tears into Joan's rather weary eyes. Tucked away on the distant hills you saw little white cottages like forgotten patches of snow. Beside the railway line rushed and bubbled a foamy torrent. It was too beautiful to be borne. To the town bred girl, it almost

seemed like a glimpse of another world. They took the Hotel omnibus from the station to the hotel to which they were going. It was the best hotel on Lake Derwentwater, Mr. Khan liked to be comfortable, and he didn't mind paying for a thing when he got it, and he knew he would get it there. Evening had descended on the Borrowdale Valley, and Joan, very tired and a little overwrought with all the happenings of the day, felt a little sob rise in her throat as she saw the first evening star hanging like a tiny lamp over the Crags that guard the entrance to the valley. It was too beautiful; where had her life been spent that she hadn't known that there was such beauty in the world? The road lay along the banks of Lake Derwentwater, and dotted about on the wide black water you could see boats, little rowing boats, and a motor boat with the rhythmical clop clop of the engine came suddenly into view.

The wide hall of the Cataract Hotel seemed to Joan, rather bewildered with all the different things she had seen during the last nine hours, dreadfully full of people. Tall brown men in Burberry coats, women in short tweed skirts with felt hats. Everyone was talking, and here again everyone looked cheerful. She felt stupid and self-conscious, especially as when she and the tall Indian walked in among the crowd everyone seemed to stop talking.

"Number twenty one and twenty two." A smart attendant took possession of two keys from the young lady in the office and led them up the wide stairs. Mr. Khan had already written his name in the big calf-bound book. "Oh, how perfectly heavenly," Joan uttered a cry of joy as the attendant flung open a door, and she ran across and stood by the open window. It certainly was heavenly; the large window gave on to an expanse of lake and wooded hill, and there was the roar of falling water in the air. "Oh, whatever is it?" Joan stood, her head on one side.

"It's the Ladore Falls, Miss. They're in spate, we've had a lot of rain lately."

Mr. Khan stood looking on a little disapprovingly. He did not care for this free and easy way with servants. "Show me my room, please," he said.

The attendant flung open an adjoining door, bowed, and vanished. Joan followed her husband into the room. "Oh,

how tiny ! " she exclaimed. And it certainly was. A small single bed stood in the far corner. There was only room for a chest of drawers and a wash-stand. The window, very small, gave on to a stable.

Joan's heart was full. How good, how good he was ! She flung to him her eyes full of tears. All this for her—the beautiful journey, the expensive lunch, the palatial bedroom. And for him—this miserable little room, nothing more than a cupboard really. She looked round it with dewy eyes. " Oh, it's too small for you ! " she said. " It's not fair to give me so very much the best."

Mr. Mohammed Khan was stooping over a suit case, so Joan did not see the laugh in the opaque eyes. He straightened himself out a pile of clothes, and looked down at her.

" But you see there is a door in between the two rooms, so perhaps you will allow me to come into your more spacious one sometimes." . . . .

" Oh, yes, of course . . . ." But Joan spoke uncomfortably. People didn't walk in and out of each other's bedrooms . . . at least men and women didn't. But still . . . perhaps they did. She opened the door and walked into her own room, shutting the door carefully behind her. After all, married people . . . . . she began to think. Gerald and Edie for instance, they had one room—and a dressing room. But then they had a baby . . . that in some mysterious way was mixed up with it. But they hadn't had a baby at first, and she and her mother had helped to arrange the house while they were on their honeymoon. Joan suddenly felt a stab of quite unreasoning terror ; what was it that made her feel like that ? It was as if . . . She shook herself a little and walking over to the looking-glass she lifted the soft hat from the curls. She was tired—that was what it was—she was tired . . . .

. . . . . .

Dinner was quite a success. Mr. Mohammed Khan ordered a pint bottle of champagne, and drank nearly all of it himself. Joan was surprised because she had never seen him drink before, but he laughed and said that he was not married every day, and that it was to celebrate the occasion, and that she was to celebrate it too. So Joan had just half a glass of

it, and it made her feel better, and not so conscious of the curious glances that were being levelled at them. Because people did stare, there was no doubt about it. And not only did they stare, but they seemed to look hostilely at them, and Joan knew why it was. It was the same wicked prejudice that had dogged them in Streatham, and it was wicked and unjust as well. So it warmed her heart towards her lover, and she smiled at him and made little sallies, and Mohammed Khan was highly delighted, and as soon as dinner was over he suggested an adjournment upstairs. And Joan, who had been intensely dreading having to remain perhaps in the lounge, to be the target for the curious eyes of all those bronzed men and well dressed women, (for the short tweed skirt had given place to something infinitely more feminine) agreed with alacrity, and they went up the shallow padded stairs together.

"But I don't think I *can* talk," she said yawning at the threshold of her room, and showing her pink tongue and regular teeth. "Do you mind, Mohammed . . . just for to-night? I am so frightfully tired."

"Not at all," said Mr. Mohammed Khan, his eyes on Joan's white throat.

"Well then . . . goodnight," said Joan, and she held up her face to be kissed, like a child.

"Goodnight," said Mr. Mohammed Khan, but there was a red glow at the back of the slumbrous eyes as his lips met Joan's. Joan did not see it. She smiled again like a happy sleepy child as she went into her room and shut the door behind her.

It did not take Joan long to get undressed. But before she finally tumbled into the big bed with the black satin eiderdown laid so arrogantly on it, she leant her arms on the window-sill, and stared out into the night. It was so quiet . . . only the ceaseless roar of falling water broke the stillness. There was the faintest streak of moon, only you could only see it every now and then, because great black clouds kept on sailing across it. But it was the roar of water that enthralled Joan—how she was longing to see it, the great waterfall. Tomorrow . . . that was it! The first tomorrow of all the heavenly tomorrows that were opening out in front of her. Joan suddenly felt very humble and very grateful,

and as she turned from the beautiful expanse of lake and mountain, she fell on her knees beside the big bed, and thanked God that she was alive.

She was just dropping off to sleep, when something made her open her eyes again. What was it ? . . Someone moving .... But of course, in a hotel someone was always moving. She settled her face in her pillow again. But then again it happened, a movement—this time rather louder. Joan started up, the sheet dragged up to her neck. What was it ? It sounded like someone stealthily opening a door. How stupid of her, she ought to have locked it. In hotels you always locked your door ; and she had left her wrist watch on the dressing-table. "Who's there ?" she said loudly, her heart thumping. There was no reply, only a sort of furtive creeping sound on the carpet. Joan's throat was dry. The person, or thing, whichever it was, was in the room. What should she do ? She clutched the sheet closer to her.

"Who's there ?" she said again.

There was the sound of a little click and the electric light flooded the room. Joan blinked stupidly ; for a second or two, she could not see anything. Then she saw. Mr. Mohammed Khan, very tall and sleek as to the head, clad in striped silk pyjamas, stood under the light.

"Mohammed !" Joan's first sensation was one of utter bewilderment. What was he doing there ? Could he be walking in his sleep ? Was he perhaps intoxicated ? He was not used to champagne, and it might have gone to his head. What should she do ? She lay down again to think. Perhaps he would go away again. She turned her curly head a fraction on the pillow so that she could see what he did.

But Mr. Mohammed Khan had not the faintest intention of going away again. He was thoroughly tired of this boyish attitude of *insouciance*, and he walked up to the bed and stared down at Joan.

Joan flushed scarlet. But how dreadful ! Was this how they behaved in India ? She remembered now how she had heard that they walked about with very few clothes on, and had a meal that her husband called 'chota hazri' sitting on a verandah in a kimono. But this—this was England . . . besides, it was bed time. She gripped her hands under the blankets.

"Mohammed, go away," she said. "People don't come into your room in England unless you are properly dressed. Please go away. It makes me feel most frightfully uncomfortable."

But Mr. Mohammed Khan only stared, and somehow as he stared Joan's heart gave a great leap in her breast with terror. What did it mean? What did it mean? "Joanie, darling, let mother tell you" . . . why did the words come back into her mind? She bit her lip to stop the cry that rose to them.

"Mohammed," but Joan's voice was quavering. "Mohammed, please go away. You don't realise, but it makes me feel most awful—this. Please go back to your room. Or if you want anything very particular, would you mind just going and looking out of the window for a minute, and I will put on my dressing-gown."

This appealed to Mr. Mohammed Khan. He took a couple of steps towards the window, and then as he heard Joan's bare feet pad on the carpet he turned round again. And she had not quite reached the wardrobe before he caught her . . .

"Don't!" it was a scream of anguished terror that broke from Joan's lips. "Don't, I tell you, I'm not properly dressed. Let me go, I tell you." She fought blindly like a baited animal.

"Be quiet." Mr. Mohammed Khan laid a clammy hand over the frantic mouth. "Someone will hear, and it is not seemly."

"But of course it's not seemly." Joan, worn out and half mad with terror, began to cry wildly. "What is the matter with you? you've quite altered. Of course it's not seemly. There was never anything less seemly than going into someone else's room when they've only got a night-dress on. But then why do you do it? Go back into your own room, or . . . . wait"—as a sudden recollection of the meagre proportions of Mohammed's room came back into her mind,—"wait, you can have mine . . . it's much bigger, and there is an eiderdown too."

"But I am content to stay where I am," said Mr. Mohammed Khan.

"But we can't both be here," said Joan, backing very

very slowly. Another step or two and she could get at her dressing-gown.

"But I do not see why," said Mr. Mohammed Khan, his inscrutable eyes on the scarlet mouth.

"But I know we can't," said Joan, and as she said it she knew why. That was the deadly, deadly horror of it, it came over her like a wave of sickness. They were not the same colour, she and Mohammed Khan. There was something unnatural about it. It was awful anyhow to be in a room with a man when you were not properly dressed, but if it had been one of those lean brown men that she had seen at dinner so well groomed in an immaculate dinner jacket, she could have borne it. Besides, he would never have stayed if she had asked him to go, an Englishman never would. . . . . "Please go back to your own room, or let me get my dressing gown," she said.

But by this time Mr. Mohammed Khan was a thoroughly exasperated and aggrieved man. "I shall do nothing of the kind," he said. "This is all too ridiculous. I come as any man would come, to claim his wife, and I am met with abuse. I tell you I will not tolerate it. Come to my arms as a dutiful wife should. Come!" He held out long pink striped arms with the brown hands looking like gloves at the end of them.

"No," said Joan, backing against the wall, her grey eyes dilating.

Mr. Mohammed Khan came nearer. "You will be very sorree if you do not," he said.

"I would rather die," said Joan, knowledge coming to her in a sudden blinding flash. If only she could get out into the corridor; one of those lean brown men would help her. "I would rather die," she said again.

"Then take this," said Mr. Mohammed Khan, and with a lithe movement he caught at the fine muslin at her throat and tore it to the hem.

Joan fell on her knees. "Put out the light," she breathed.

"But I prefer it up," said Mr. Mohammed Khan.

CHAPTER VII.

Everybody liked the Kemps. They were typical Anglo-Indians, both of them. Not Anglo-Indians in the new sense of the term, forced on us by a Government that when it gets paternal is apt to get senile at the same time; but Anglo-Indians in the true sense of the term—men and women who have given their best to a country that in the opinion of many does not deserve it. But as a matter of fact the Kemps loved India, they made friends wherever they went, and they numbered among their friends many Indians too, and they were proud to call them their friends. So life was a cheerful thing to them, and when they were on leave, as they were at the present moment, they were able to enjoy it to the full, not being haunted, as most people are, by the thought of return. But Mrs. Kemp at the present moment was feeling rather distressed, and she touched her husband's brown booted foot with her own excellently made brogue, as a small figure came slowly down the staircase.

"What is the matter with that child?" she said.

Colonel Kemp raised his eyes from his paper without moving his head.

"Obvious, I should think," he said, and he let them fall again.

"But how do you mean?" Mrs. Kemp was trying to watch Joan without being noticed.

"My dear Kitty, you're very dense all of a sudden. Oh, you women! Can't you read a paper without turning it inside out, and back to front?" Mr. Kemp was struggling with the Times that Mrs. Kemp had adjusted to suit her own particular scheme of reading a little earlier.

"It's so funny the way a man always wants to hold all the bits together! Let me have the bit where Marshall's Sale is," said Mrs. Kemp, reaching out a beautifully manicured hand. "It will make it much easier to hold."

"Will it?" but Mr. Kemp's glance was full of affection although he spoke ironically. Kitty could not read a paper like an ordinary human being, but she was a darned good wife to him all the same. He settled himself a little lower in his chair, and crossed one furry stockinged leg over the other.

But Mrs. Kemp was still looking at Joan. She was standing on the big mat at the front door staring out into the rain that was drifting in perpendicular sheets through the beautiful valley. When the rain began to drift in sheets, people who knew the district and did not care about getting wet gave up any idea of going out, and got out their work whatever it might be. But Joan did not know the district and she was drearily wondering when it would stop so that she could go out. Mrs. Kemp's kind heart was wrung with pity for the look of leaden misery on the small pale face. Yet as a matter of fact Joan was feeling, for the first time since she arrived, a little less miserable. For the first time she was seeing a tiny tiny glimmer of light on the horizon, like a man who thinks he has been buried alive and then crawling, crawling, at last sees the speck of light that means for him, if not immediate release, a breath of air that is not foetid. It had happened like this. The night before, she had been awakened from her fitful, terror-haunted sleep by the feeling of a convulsion by her side. Mr. Mohammed Khan always slept entirely covered up; his face was never visible; like a large cocoon he lay swathed in blankets and sheet. But until the early morning of this day the cocoon was shaken from time to time by violent tremors, and Joan, after the first terror had passed that he was waking up, had come to the conclusion that he must be sneezing. And he was, for the next morning, when Joan, her pale blue flannel dressing-gown buttoned high up to her throat, stood by the side of the bed, the tray of early tea in her hand, a puffy face with sodden eyelids gradually emerged from the untidy heap.

"Oh, Oh!" Mr. Mohammed Khan slowly sat up and pressed a hand to each side of his head, "Oh, I am sick .... verree sick."

"How do you mean 'sick'?" said Joan, laying the tray down on the table by the bed, and looking round wildly.

"When I say sick, I mean sick," said Mr. Mohammed

Khan, and he sneezed again twice, with the noise of a maturing cyclone.

Joan turned to go. It had to be. After all, she had promised. 'In sickness and in health' . . . .

"Where are you going?" said Mr. Mohammed Khan. "Come back." He spoke angrily and with an injured dignity. "In the language of the country in which we now find ourselves, a country that has the most damnable climate in the world, the climate which has now laid me low, I am ill. Hand me my tea, perhaps it will revive me."

But it had not the desired effect, for when Joan returned fully dressed from the bath room, she found her husband still in bed, and this time uttering occasional muffled groans. "Oh what is the matter?" she said, peering down into the heap of bedclothes.

"I am sick, very sick. In fact I feel that my end is approaching," said Mr. Mohammed Khan, who was, like all his race, panic-stricken at not feeling quite so robust as usual. "I am ill in every fibre. In my head, in my limbs, in my very soul. And the moment you have finished your breakfast, in fact before, I shall require you to telephone into Keswick for the best doctor that such an antiquated town can produce."

"But are you as ill as all that?" said Joan, to whom the visit of a doctor meant that things were very bad indeed. After all, her husband had done nothing more so far than sneeze. And a sneeze only meant a cold, unless it was coupled with a rash, when it meant measles. But measles was a child's thing. "Are you sure you are as bad as that?" she repeated. "A doctor will charge a great deal for coming out here from Keswick."

"What is money compared with a life?" said Mr. Mohammed Khan, and he subsided again under the bedclothes.

So Joan, after she had run the comb through her short ripply hair, descended to the office, and after consultation with the book-keeper there telephoned to Dr. Crawly, whom the book-keeper described as the most modern and up-to-date doctor in the neighbourhood. "And he's a case at Grange," she said, "so he'll be along early."

When Dr. Crawly first saw Joan he imagined that she must be the patient, and he prepared to administer a very sharp reproof that she was up, and walking about the hotel. But Joan laughed at his snapped-out question, and led the way into the spacious bedroom. "Oh no, it's my husband," she said, "I am quite well."

Dr. Crawly, with the perspicacity of his brotherhood, was not quite so sure of that, but he made no comment, and followed Joan to the side of the bed, where nothing was visible but a mound of bed-clothes. He turned to the girl by his side: "But there is nobody here," he said.

And somehow that simple remark coupled with the look of dismay on the clever face struck Joan as the most exquisitely funny thing that she had ever heard. Her face began to twitch, and her lips were drawn back from her small even teeth in spite of her wild efforts to control them. She began to laugh, at first quietly, and then wildly. Dr. Crawly seeing, looked round, and then picked the small figure up in his arms, and carried it through the half open door into the dressing room. And he set her down on the bed and sat down beside her. "Don't try to control yourself at all," he said, gently, "just let yourself go."

Joan, not knowing what she did, clutched the capable brown hand in hers, and sobbed and cried and laughed, and sobbed again until with a shattering breath she came to herself. Then she groped wildly for her handkerchief, and looked up at the kind face, and spoke with a sob in her throat: "It's taken away that mad feeling in my head," she said piteously.

Dr. Crawly smiled: "I thought it would," he said. "And it's just between you and me. See? And now when you feel quite yourself again, we'll go in and see that husband of yours." But as they walked back into the big room, Dr. Crawly was thinking with all the force of his active brain what was it all about? And when, in response to a gentle touch from Joan's hand the hump at the side unwound itself, he knew, and although he spoke quietly his eyes were fierce.

"Well, we'll just go into this very thoroughly," he said, "will you be kind enough to leave us for a moment or two, Mrs. Khan?"

Dr. Crawly made a very exhaustive examination of Mr. Khan. He hung intent, stethescope clipped into his ears, over Mr. Khan's prostrate and terrified body until that worthy dripped with terrified perspiration. He made him say "Ah," again and again and yet again. He felt with dreadful searching expert fingers the ribs, and just below them. He laid two light but determined finger-tips on the chest and tapped with other fingers. He stripped off bed-clothes, and struck sharply below the knee and grunted when the leg that at a rapped-out command Mr. Khan had obediently crossed kicked out wildly. In fact he did almost everything that a clever doctor who means to frighten a patient thoroughly, can do. And he succeeded. When Dr. Crawly drew the sheet back over Mr. Khan, there was not much spirit left in that worthy.

"To begin with, there must be absolute quiet," said Dr. Crawly, and he sat down in a low chair by the bed and laid the tips of his fingers together, "absolute quiet and freedom from excitement. Warmth is essential, the chest needs care. Light but nourishing food. But quiet . . above all, quiet. And to ensure that I should recommend a change of room. That room is attached to this, I believe?" Dr. Crawly nodded towards the communicating door.

"It is," said Mr. Mohammed Khan in a husky whisper.

"Very well, then, I should suggest that you move in there. And as there will be a certain amount of nursing to be done I will see about getting a woman to come in for the day. There is a woman who takes cases of this sort for me and she lives in one of the cottages in Grange, so that will be very convenient, and will save the expense that having a nurse in a place like this always involves."

"A nurse!" Mr. Mohammed Khan's lips became pallid. "Is there danger?" he said.

"No more than there ever is in cases of this kind," said Dr. Crawly bluntly. "But in these days of influenza and its kindred evils it is always well to be prepared. Although, I think, we will not mention the word influenza in the hotel, as it is apt to cause alarm.

A groan rose to Mr. Khan's lips. "My wife!" he said.

"She must be out in the open air as much as possible," said Dr. Crawly, getting up. "And I will tell her so. Good-

day to you for the present." Dr. Crawly's keen face was rather grim as he went in search of Joan

So that was why Joan was feeling rather more cheerful. Dr. Crawly had sought her out, as she stood staring out of the window in the next room, and had explained briefly what he had explained rather more elaborately to Mr. Mohammed Khan. And Joan's heart flung itself out in a passion of thanksgiving. God had sent his angel to deliver her in the shape of this kind man with a face like a hawk.

"Will he stay in the other room?" she said, trying not to let her lower lip tremble.

"He will," said Dr. Crawly, flapping one dog-skin glove across the other.

"But he hasn't any pain, has he?" asked Joan, feeling a demon of unnaturalness that she did not mind more this laying low of her husband.

"Nothing perceptible," said Dr. Crawly. "But of course a heavy cold is always troublesome. And as I do not want you to catch it too, I have told your husband that I do not want you to be in the room more than is absolutely necessary. See? I want you to get out as much as ever you can. A very nice woman is coming in to look after him so she will do everything that is necessary. See?" said Dr. Crawly again, smiling.

"Yes, I see," said Joan, and then she caught suddenly at the brown hand: "I feel quite different since you came," she whispered.

"Well, I'm very glad to hear it," said Dr. Crawly, "because I think there was room for improvement! And now I must be off. I'll send nurse along in about an hour, and then you will have nothing to do but just to get out and about in this beautiful scenery. And I will drop in tomorrow at about the same time to see your husband again."

So Dr. Crawly had gone on his way, and now nurse had come, and Joan, after tidying the vacated room—somehow she had not felt able to put out her few little personal things before—was standing staring out into the rain, wishing that it would clear up.

"It can rain in this part of the world, can't it?" Mrs. Kemp had got up from her chair and had joined Joan on the

Joan started. Then as she met the friendly blue eyes she smiled; "Yes it can," she said. "What do you do when it goes on like this?"

"Well, if you are not afraid of getting wet you go out," said Mrs. Kemp laughing. "But of course you need a pair of very stout boots and a very watertight mackintosh. But I think it will clear at about twelve. "Come and sit down here beside me, and tell me who you are and where you come from. You remind me so much of a little niece of mine. She is younger than you and still at school, but there is something about you that is the same."

Joan followed Mrs. Kemp and sat down beside her. She felt frightened lest Mr. Kemp would talk to her, but he didn't, he only just nodded and smiled very kindly. "Just you keep my wife quiet," he said, "she has a habit of talking to me when I want to read the paper." And when he had said that he turned all the sheets over and rearranged them, and then settled himself again in his chair and became invisible.

Mrs. Kemp soon found out all she wanted to know about Joan, and what she did not find out she guessed at. She was very sympathetic about Mr. Khan's sudden illness, and said that she was quite sure that when he was well enough to see visitors her husband would like to go and see him: "You see we are proud to rank Indians among our friends," she said, "and my husband and yours will have many things in common to interest them." And somehow that touched Joan's heart as nothing else would have done. She dared not stop to analyse her own feelings about her husband; that she felt with an awful fear, would have to come presently. But just to have him spoken of without the usual undercurrent of criticism . . . it helped . . . . it was like oil on a burn; it seemed somehow to restore her self respect, and she revived under it.

"Why, do you know anything about India?" she said, and she lifted her little head like a flower that has been beaten to the earth by a hurricane of rain, and then feeling the warmth of the sunshine, responds to it.

"I should think we do," laughed Mrs. Kemp. "My husband and I have both spent the best part of our lives there. He, you see, is in the Indian Political Service, so he knows it

through and through. And this cold weather we go back for the last time : I can't bear to think about it."

"Why ? do you like it so much then ? " asked Joan.

"We simply love it," said Mrs. Kemp. "To begin with it is nearly always fine. And I love the sun. Then one has many many friends ; people get very intimate in India ; you see, being in a foreign country we all hang together. And that helps to make it a happy friendly life."

"I wonder if I shall like it," said Joan slowly.

Mrs. Kemp stooped to pick up her handkerchief. She had been very much hoping that she would hear that Mr. Khan had an English practice, but evidently he had not, And this sweet little girl was going to be pitchforked into the midst of that most terrible of all communities, an English community in an alien land, angry and intolerant that one of their number should have formed an alliance with an alien . . . But Mrs. Kemp was tactful, and tact means tender thought for the feelings of others. "Of course you will like it," she said.

. . . . . .

Long afterwards, when Joan could bear to go through the happenings of her honeymoon day by day, that walk stood out in her mind as one of the things that had helped her to keep her sanity—that and the visit of Doctor Crawly. They had shown her, these two kind people, that life isn't only what you yourself find it to be, that because you are smirched and befouled, and flung down in the mud, it doesn't mean that the basis of life is mud. No, you have got to crawl out of it somehow, on to the beautiful firm foundation of life as God meant it to be. So as Joan walked, her head up, swinging a little cane that Mrs. Kemp had lent her, into the shelter of the Jaws of Borrowdale, she began to stir a little in her slough of despond. It was so beautiful, so entrancingly beautiful : the sun shot aslant the misty cloud-capped hills, making them gleam with a green that was greener than the greenest emerald. The river that ran by the side of the road along which they walked, ran no more : it leaped and flung itself chattering with joy over the stones. Joan snuffed in the cool wet air with a gradually returning sense of the possibility of happiness—not for her, yet—but for other people. God's world was a beautiful world, only men made it as she had found it—unspeakable.

She and her husband had had one or two walks during the time they had already spent at the Cataract Hotel. Mr. Khan did not care for walking really; he liked to go a little way and then sit down. So the beauty of the Borrowdale Valley was still a closed book to Joan, and Mrs. Kemp found it the keenest pleasure to show it to anyone so appreciative.

"You shall come some really long walks with us," she said. "Generally about four of us go together, and we take our lunch with us, so that we can get a really long day. You will be able to do that now, as the doctor has given orders that you are to be out in the open air as much as you can."

Joan smiled, and not knowing how to express her gratitude for this hand held out to her in her extremity, gripped at the warm living hand that hung down close to her side and squeezed it passionately. "You are kind," she said, not daring to say more for fear of crying.

The postmistress at the Grange post office was friendly and delightful, as North country people generally are, and she brought out all her stock of picture postcards for Mrs. Kemp and Joan to look at. Joan chose four—and then remembered.

"I haven't any money," she stammered, "I forgot . . . I must come another time."

"But I have heaps of money for both of us," said Mrs. Kemp easily, and she jingled it in the pocket of her Burberry. "And when you have quite finished here, we will go into the farm next door, and have some milk."

But as she led the way into the beautiful farm house, with its garden that sloped down to the hurrying river, and its low flagged hall full of priceless old oak furniture, she wondered what was to be the end of this sweet child's disastrous marriage. For Mrs. Kemp had the conventional horror of a mixed marriage, although she did not let Joan see it. And also although she had never seen Mr. Mohammed Khan either, she loathed the very thought of him. He must be a cad and a brute, or Joan could not look as she did . . . . But she kept all these thoughts in her own mind, and did everything in her power to amuse and divert Joan, and she succeeded very well, and Joan leaning back in her rush-bottomed chair, suddenly burst out laughing.

"Oh, you do say the most excruciatingly funny things," she said, and the dimple just above the curve of her top lip showed enchantingly.

"Do I?" twinkled Mrs. Kemp. But as she looked at the illuminated face her own face was clouded again. One week only . . . and yet long enough to wipe every spark of happiness from it. She loathed Mr. Mohammed Khan more than ever.

But Mr. Kemp, to whom she confided her feelings as she dressed for dinner that night was more tolerant. He stood in front of the glass in his dressing room, twitching carefully at the ends of a black tie.

"Granted," he said, as Mrs. Kemp flung herself down into a low chair beside him—she was dressed very beautifully although perfectly simply. Mrs. Kemp's clothes were always a feature of whatever Indian station she went to—"Granted that what you say is correct, although how you know it all beats me, as you say that the child has told you nothing. Granted all that, you have no right to label the man as a cad and a brute. You seem to forget that Mr. Khan is an Indian. His whole outlook on life is different from ours. Even his religion, that should be the highest thing about him, denies the woman a soul. Well, what can you expect? He marries a girl and naturally expects her to be his chattel. She doesn't like it of course because she is an English girl. But that's her fault, not his. She shouldn't have married him. And I cannot believe that she did it blindfolded; somebody must have tried to stop her."

"All the same, I say he *is* a brute and I loathe him," said Mrs. Kemp obstinately.

"Yes, of course you do, because you are a woman and like all women totally unreasonable," said Mr. Kemp, and he took his dinner-jacket from where it hung carefully over the back of a chair. "But that doesn't alter my opinion. The man's an Indian and you've got to take him as he is. He's animal—he can't help it, his upbringing and his traditions make him so."

"He needn't be an animal unless he wants to," said Mrs. Kemp.

Mr. Kemp burst out laughing. "Oh Kitty!" He got into his coat and then stood over her as she lay back and looked

up at him. "You sweetest thing," he said. and drew her up into his arms.

Mrs. Kemp lay there without speaking for a minute, then she drew back and wiped her eyes with a wisp of a handkerchief that she dragged from the front of her dress.

"Jim, Helen would have been just about the same age by now," she said, "I think that's why I mind so much," and one bitter tear, that would not be denied, ran straight down and lost itself in the beautiful string of pearls, that ringed the white throat.

"My darling," said Mr. Kemp, and he held his wife very closely to him.

. . . . . .

On the whole Mr. Mohammed Khan rather enjoyed being in bed. To the Asiatic, movement of every kind is a thing to be avoided; for instance the merchant in his little dark shop in the bazaar in any typical city of India—prefers to keep shop lying down on a heap of cushions to standing up. He will always take a gharry rather than walk anywhere. To him, to be on foot is a sign of inferiority. And he will resent it greatly if he is not offered a chair when he comes to see you, although nowadays he will walk into your house with both head and feet covered, a thing he would not dream of doing to one of his own caste—nor to you either a few years ago. So far Mr. Mohammed Khan was really enjoying himself, especially as he was allowed to eat practically what he liked, and had someone specially to look after him. Mrs. Thwaites was a typical North-Country woman with a soft musical voice, and she looked with a certain amount of awe at the dark face and shining head as they lay on the white pillow.

"I'm sure he must be a Prince of sorts," she said to her husband, as they met on the dark road that lay between the Cataract Hotel and the tiny hamlet of Low Ghyll. Mr. Thwaites, who was the local carrier, always came to fetch his wife.

"Prince be danged," said Mr. Thwaites. "He's nowt but a nigger, and I don't like 'em. Fine carryings on there was 'ere, at yon holiday house, two year agone. And t'post mistress says that she's not so sure that it's not the same one—took a registered letter there th'other day and saw yon in the garden."

"Eh, but I'm sure it can't be," said Mrs. Thwaites, who although she had a sturdy and grown-up son, still had a vast store of unexpended romance in her heart, and who was lavishing it all on the prostrate Mohammed Khan, quite unconscious that he for his part regarded her exclusively as rather an expensive menial. "And Mrs. Khan, she's that quiet like a little mouse she is in and out, and hardly a word to say for herself."

"And I don't blame her for that," said Mr. Thwaites, who had a vivid recollection of sundry 'lifts' offered to and accepted by someone suspiciously like Mr. Mohammed Khan, on the long road between the Holiday House and Keswick. "Not so much as a 'thank you,'" as he had grumbled to a compatriot, "let alone a couple of coppers!"

But Mrs. Thwaites was silent. She liked her little romance . . . it reminded her of a lovely story she had once read in a magazine, where a poor girl out of a teashop had married a Prince, and had gone out to India, and lived in a palace all made of marble with nothing but black servants to fan her, and to fall down in front of her wherever she went. Mrs. Thwaites did not know enough of the country so vividly described to wonder whether there were bars to the windows of that marble palace. There probably were, but only the white face pressed frantically against them would know that. It wouldn't be anyone else's business to know it. For after all if you marry a native you throw in your lot with his. You must abide by his laws.

So Mrs. Thwaites dreamed on, and Dr. Crawly came every couple of days, and he watched Joan rather more than his legitimate patient, although Mr. Khan did need a certain amount of care because like all Asiatics, and especially Mohammedans, his chest was not his strong point. But Joan was beginning to lose that stunned beaten look, and once or twice, when Dr. Crawly found her in the hall, she was laughing like a child, and Dr. Crawly rejoiced, because he had never forgotten that morning when without knowing that she did it she laid her soul bare to him. So he kept Mr. Khan resolutely in bed, feeling quite clear as to his conscience, especially as Mr. Khan obviously enjoyed it. And Joan throve and went glorious excursions with the Kemps and their friends, and crept at intervals into her husband's room, to tell him about it.

But Mr. Mohammed Khan was not interested: "If Mr. Kemp is a member of that arrogant Service, the I.C.S." he declaimed, "he is no friend of mine. They are all without exception intent on the repression of the Indian and without conscience."

"Oh, but I don't think Mr. Kemp can be!" exclaimed Joan eagerly. "Because he said that he would so like to come up and see you, if you would care to see him."

This was a different matter altogether. Mr. Kemp was Commissioner of one of the Northern Provinces, and therefore a person to be cultivated. So Mr. Mohammed Khan smiled graciously and sent a message by Joan that he would be very glad to receive Mr. Kemp whenever he could find it convenient to come up. And to Mrs. Kemp's indignation Mr. Kemp was rather favourably impressed with Mr. Mohammed Khan.

"He's a darned clever chap," he said to her that night as they sat together in the lounge; Joan had just said good-night and gone. "As seditious as they make 'em of course but with a head on his shoulders. And he ought to go far in the law. But of course he ought never to have married that girl. To begin with he must be many years older, and also he is evidently a very loyal follower of the Prophet. And that means trouble."

"*What?*" Mrs. Kemp turned her head swiftly. "Why, Joan told me that he was a Christian," she said.

"Of course he isn't," Mr. Kemp laughed. "Why, look at the man, you can tell he isn't a Christian. And if he told her that he was one, it can only have been because she asked him point blank and he was afraid of her backing out of it if he told her the truth.

"Jim!" Mrs. Kemp's lips were white. "Jim . . . he may be married already, . . or if he isn't he may take another wife. Jim . . . it's perfectly awful for that child . . . we ought to do something."

Mr. Kemp drew heavily on his cheroot: "Kitty, its absolutely nothing to do with us," he said, "and don't you begin to interfere. Besides, I may have made a mistake, and he may be a Christian after all. Where were they married, do you know?"

"At a registry office," said Mrs. Kemp, with her eyes on her husband's.

Mr. Kemp stooped suddenly with a muttered exclamation. A shower of grey ash had fallen on to the lapel of his coat. He brushed it off impatiently.

"Do you think that means that he isn't a Christian," insisted Mrs. Kemp.

Mr. Kemp did not answer for a minute or two, and when he did he answered deliberately, keeping his eyes on the glowing end of his cheroot, from which a blue spiral of smoke curled slowly upwards:

"I don't think anything at all about it, Kitty," he said, "because I know that it is nothing to do with me. And I want you to remember that too. After all, although you have got to know the girl well here, she is practically a stranger to you. Leave her affairs alone. Do all you can to make the time pass happily for her here, I don't object to that, but don't let it go any further. See?"

But impulsive Mrs. Kemp suddenly wrung her hands: "But suppose it turns out that he has got a wife already?" she said.

Mr. Kemp got up, and walking to the door, he threw the smouldering end of his cheroot out into the darkness. Then he came back and stood in front of his wife:

"It might be the very best thing that could possibly happen," he said.

CHAPTER VIII.

Mr. Mohammed Khan had now been in bed nearly a fortnight, and even Dr. Crawly, much as he had Joan's welfare at heart, could hardly keep him there any longer without doing gross violence to his conscience. But when he saw Joan's face when he told her that her husband was well enough to get up, he hated himself, and wished that he had been able to follow his wife's suggestion laughingly flung at him that morning as he stooped and peered into the bonnet of his car before starting on his rounds. "Geoff, give the horrible thing something to make him ill again," she had said. But Dr. Crawly, who had a reputation to keep up, could hardly do that, so he stood in the empty hall—it was a divine morning—and stared out at the lake, lying blue as lapis lazuli against the black pines that fringed its edge. "He will hardly be able to resume his ordinary life for a day or two," he said, "and I have warned him to go slow, as after an attack of the kind the heart is often not so robust as it might be."

But Joan could only stare out into the beauty of the morning and wonder why she had ever been miserable about anything at Streatham. Things like not being able to find the frying pan, for instance, or having to get up and let in Matilda in the morning because she had forgotten the key. They weren't things that *mattered*, those things. They were things like . . . like . . . like having something in your eye when you might be blind, having a tiny back ache when you might be helpless on a sofa for the rest of your life . . . . . She turned tormented eyes to the tall figure at her side: "I . . . I . . . see," she said.

As Dr. Crawly went on his way into the green leafiness of the beautiful valley, he gnawed at his lower lip, and consigned to perdition the damned fools responsible for the collection of obsolete and antiquated laws, that made possible such a marriage. But Joan, left alone in the empty hall, still stared out at the lapis lazuli and emerald, and as she stared her

mind slowly began to work. Words began to form themselves in her brain, words over which she seemed to have no control. Over and over again they came—" For Thine is the Kingdom and the Power and the Glory . . . For Thine is the Kingdom and the Power and the Glory . . . for ever and ever, Amen." Something else, though ; something else came first . . . Joan wrinkled her forehead. Ah, yes, that was it, " Deliver us from Evil." Of course ! " Deliver us from Evil." Joan shut her eyes, the lids hurt as she pressed them together, and folded her hands over her knitted jumper. " Deliver us from Evil " . . . . if she began from there it would do, otherwise Mohammed would be wondering why she was so long downstairs . . . . And as she stood there, small and motionless, the big sheep dog that belonged to the hotel trotted noiselessly out of the office, and stood beside her, looking up and yawning. What was the matter with this female creature with short hair and soft hands, he wondered, and wondering he lay down at her feet and put a wet nose on her shoe, and closed his almost human eyes. Joan looking down saw what it was and shut her own eyes again. This was as good as a human being, she had seen this dog bringing in the sheep—only a speck on the hill side, yet responding to his master's voice, as the hugest liner answers to the faintest touch on the wheel. And she wanted another to make it perfectly all right—her prayer. " Lord where two or three . . . . where two or three," she prayed.

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Mr. Mohammed Khan was highly delighted at being able to get up again. Being in bed, even if you are allowed to eat as much as you like, becomes monotonous after a time, besides it annoyed him to see Joan enjoying herself so much. Also she had regained all her prettiness—her face was round and pink, and her eyes laughed. And last but not least, it was an expensive luxury to have a nurse to wait on you, especially as she only did the things that it was obviously the duty of your wife to do, and your wife would of course do them for nothing. So Mr. Khan dismissed Mrs. Thwaites with an air, but not until she had found all his clothes, and brought them to his bedside : " And then I shall not require you further," he said, with the Grand Bashaw air that always reduced Mrs. Thwaites to a condition of trembling servility.

As she walked away from the hotel with her cheque in her pocket, she looked up at the hills with eyes in which the tears stood heavily. It had been such a touch of romance in her uneventful life, this dealing with an Indian Prince. Because that he was an Indian Prince she maintained in the face of the stoutest opposition: "He's nowt but a nigger . . . and I doant like 'um," said Mr. Thwaites, and he leant over the fire and thumped the ashes out of his absolutely black pipe with emphasis. But Mrs. Thwaites stood still and stared over her husband's head into the glowing coals, and made up her mind that whatever anyone else did, she was going to enshrine Mr. Mohammed Khan in her heart for ever. And she did so . . . . but as nobody else ever knew it did not matter.

But Joan was not able to enshrine Mr. Mohammed Khan and her heart only gave a terrible torturing leap when he opened the communicating door between the two rooms and beamed at her as she ran the comb through her curly hair—the big booming gong had just sounded for lunch.

"Again I am restored to health, my little Rose of Sharon," he said.

Joan turned: "Oh yes so you are," she said, and stooped to pick up the comb that had fallen from her trembling hand.

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Lunch did not take long . . . Nearly everyone was out. For the last week the weather had been divine, and everyone was anxious to take advantage of it. The Kemps had gone to Grasmere for the day in a car with friends of theirs from the Derwentwater Hotel, so the hall was still deserted when Joan and her husband came out from the big dining-room. Mr. Mohammed Khan lit a cheroot and sank into an easy chair with his eyes on Joan.

"This is very delightful," he said, "and contrary to the prognostications of our estimable Dr. Crawlee I feel as well as I have ever done in my life."

"Oh do you?" said Joan. Somehow she did not seem able to think of anything to say that didn't sound stupid. Her brain felt as if someone had sat on it, and squeezed out all the part that you think with. "Oh do you?" she said again.

"Yes I do," said Mr. Mohammed Khan, but he frowned

a little. Such apathy as to his well-being was not seemly in a loving wife, he thought indignantly. A woman of his own race would have been anxiously crouched over her little fire cooking him succulent messes. A really hot curry drowned in ghee . . . how his soul yearned over it. After the tasteless colourless dishes placed before him by the proprietors of this English hotel it would be like a glimpse of heaven. It would be like the caresses of a woman of his own race after the trembling shrinking submission of Joan, thought Mr. Mohammed Khan, suddenly letting go of his own thoughts. He was tired to death of this foolish attitude . . . it had got to be altered. He got up.

Joan saw him get up and she got up too. "Half a minute while I just see if the post is coming along the road," she said, and she walked out of the door into the beautiful front garden. As she stood, her hands twisted together, her heart beating so that she could feel it all over her, dreadful vibrating beats that thumped in her head, she prayed that the post might come so that there would perhaps be a delay while Mohammed Khan read a letter—anything. Or if a motor would suddenly come to grief outside the gate—no one killed, but just something to happen. Anything! "Lord, Lord!" prayed Joan in her extremity. Then from just behind her, down the shallow steps trotted the sheepdog, and disregarding Joan he padded down the drive, and met with an ebullition of joyous barking, a short, rather stout figure dressed in black, carrying a basket, that had just turned in at the gate. Joan, trying not to look as if every atom of her life was screaming out with tortured anxiety, went rapidly forward to meet her: it was the postmistress from Grange, she recognised her.

The postmistress from Grange was laughing: "That dog, he's fair human," she said. "He must have heard me coming before I turned in at the gate. It beats me how they do it."

"Have you got a letter for me?" asked Joan, trying to control her lower lip.

"No, not this time, Miss," said the postmistress, who had never seen Joan except with Mrs. Kemp, and then only buying picture postcards.

"Oh!" said Joan, and she turned away.

But the postmistress was fumbling in her pocket, "I've a foreign telegram here, Miss," she said, "and it's addressed to someone of the name of Kahn. But the only people of that name here spell it different, K.H.A.N., so I brought it along myself instead of sending the boy. Do you know if there is two parties of that name in the hotel?"

"No, only one," said Joan, and she took the telegram in her hand.

"Can you point me out the gentleman?" asked the postmistress.

"Yes, I can, if you will come in," said Joan.

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The sheepdog lay on the mat, his muzzle flat on the brown fibre and watched the little group of three. The tall man with the olive fingers had once caught hold of his pink lolling tongue and given it a torturing nip, and laughed when the white teeth came together, very gently, but too late. The soft female thing with the small fingers that caressed, and the stouter female thing with the thicker harder fingers that also caressed but not so nicely. All were talking.

"But this is an intolerable state of affairs," Mr. Mohammed Khan was saying. "It means an immediate departure. I must immediately prepare for the journey." He started excitedly along the hall.

"Mohammed, the postmistress wants you to sign this," said Joan desperately, not knowing what her husband was talking about, and running after him with a slip of paper in her hand.

"Presently, presently," Mr. Mohammed Khan waved her impatiently aside, and then beckoned. "Come upstairs, and let the woman wait," he said. "Wait!" he said suddenly, facing round, and scowling.

"Very well, Sir," said the postmistress meekly, answering at once to the touch of brutality in the arrogant voice. As she said to Mrs. Thwaites a few days afterwards, "Such a presence; 'e might have been t' Sultan of Turkey hisself."

Upstairs in the big bedroom, Joan turned with trembling hands to the man by her side. He was looking angrily round the room in search of something: What was it? "Pencil . . be quick," said Mr. Mohammed Khan. "I must immediately reply. 'Returning next mail, hold over till

arrival,'" he muttered, as he wrote on the top of the chest of drawers, Joan standing by him.

"Returning . . . where?" asked Joan, mechanically taking the paper held out to her, but searching her husband's face with straining eyes.

"Where? where? to India, of course," replied Mr. Mohammed Khan, opening the door into his dressing room, and walking over to the window. "My suitcase . . . holdall" . . . he began to count out loud.

Joan followed him: "But what about me?" she said.

But Mr. Mohammed Khan was still counting: "Two suitcases . . . holdall . . . . the station 'bus. It will be sufficient and it must be ordered. When you have returned from giving the receipt to the woman order the station 'bus for seven o'clock tonight," he shouted over his shoulder, then started angrily at the touch on his sleeve. "And why are you delaying?" he snarled.

Joan's face was pale. "Mohammed, what about me?" she said. "You say you are going back to India, and you seem to be going to start off somewhere tonight . . . . Yes, I'll take it down in a minute, but just tell me first. Am I going? Would you mind just telling me that, and then I won't bother you about anything else."

Mr. Mohammed Khan stopped struggling with the refractory hasp of the larger suitcase, and looked down at his wife. And some glimmerings of kindness stirred within him suddenly, kindness mingled with a faint contempt for anything so small and defenceless and so obviously incapable of taking care of itself. He put his arm round her: "You will not be able to accompany me," he said, "there is no time. But you will follow me in a couple of months' time. I will arrange it. And meantime we will approach the estimable Commissioner and his wife to see if they will be willing to allow you to remain with them here until the end of the week, when they also, I understand, return to town."

"Do you mean that I stay here without you?" breathed Joan.

Fortunately Mr. Mohammed Khan did not see the look in Joan's eyes: he was again stooping over the suitcase.

"Yes, it is inevitable," he said. "This is an affair of a lawsuit, and cannot be disregarded. But now you will please

hasten to deliver the message about the 'bus, and return the receipt, and reply paid telegram to the woman who is waiting."

But Joan was already walking towards the door. There was a funny feeling in her knees though, they seemed to quaver as she walked down the stairs. As she went, she spoke out loud, the same words whispered again and again: "God, You are good, God, You are good," she said, and she clenched the flimsy paper with trembling hands.

But only the big sheepdog heard the whispered words, and as he knew the meaning of them already he did not pay very much attention. And as Joan, paper handed over and message delivered, walked back up the stairs again, he followed her with his luminous blinking eyes. Why didn't these humans take it more for granted? he thought sleepily, as he suddenly snapped lazily at a carelessly advancing fly.

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Mr. Kemp thought it was most infernal cheek and said so frankly; but Mrs. Kemp, touched to the core by Joan's look of rapture as she met her in the hall and confided the abrupt change of plans to her, had not the heart to do anything but applaud the scheme and say that both she and her husband would be only too delighted to do what they could for Mrs. Khan, and hand her over safely to her relatives when they all went up to town together.

"But mind that he pays her bill before he goes," she said, as she stabbed the long diamond brooch into the front of her frock.

"I like that!" grumbled Mr. Kemp. "You get tied up with all these queer people, and then expect me to say impossible things like has he paid his wife's bill? I tell you I'm not going to do it."

But there was no need for anyone to do it, for Mr. Khan, very conscious of his magnanimity, handed a blank cheque to Mr. Kemp, as that embarrassed gentleman stood reading the local evening paper in the smoking room before dinner:

"There will be the week's board and lodging and doubtless extras," he said grandly.

"Extras! what sort of extras?" said Mr. Kemp, feeling vaguely that Joan must be a paying guest under his own roof.

"Excursions, and such like." said Mr. Mohammed Khan blandly.

"Oh, I see." Mr. Kemp smiled. "No, there won't be any extras," he said," at least not of that kind. Only her fare up to town. So we'll get the office to make up her bill now and include that. Come along now, we have time before dinner." Mr. Kemp, very distastefully, stood by and heard a not very dignified wrangle about reduced terms. But he did it for his wife's sake because he knew she was fond of Joan, and because he also knew that her heart was very often desolate. But he disliked the job exceedingly, and he expressed himself forcibly that night as they stood together on their balcony overlooking the lake.

"The man's a bounder," he said decidedly; "and I take my Sam the greasy brute hasn't given her a pi for herself. I wish now I'd taken his damned blank cheque."

But Mr. Kemp was wrong when he took for granted that Mr. Mohammed Khan had not given Joan anything for herself. He had—a couple of very new one pound notes, and he gave them with a condescending smile on his olive face: "Do not squander them, my little Rose of Sharon," he said.

"But how long are they to last for?" asked Joan, getting very red. She felt that, although she hated it, she must get some money out of her husband before he left her for so long. After all, there were loads of things—washing—and things like stamps, and if she went for an excursion with the Kemps, it would be awful not to be able to offer to pay, even although she knew they wouldn't let her. Then there was all the time till she would be able to join him again—she couldn't absolutely plant herself down on her mother, and pay nothing. "Mohammed, I shall want more than two pounds for two months," she said with an effort. "I promise I will be awfully careful of it. But you see there will be things like washing, and then perhaps I shall go up to town on a tram. And then perhaps I shall want to wash my hair, I am sure to want to wash my hair twice if not more times, and that will mean that I shall want a shampoo powder. And then my hands may get rough, and I shall want some sort of creamy thing . . . and then toothpaste . . . Oh there will be lots of things," said Joan desperately, conscious that a very heavy cloud was gathering on her husband's brow.

"And will there be no allowance from your home for these little incidentals?" asked Mr. Mohammed Khan coldly.

Joan stared: "But doesn't your husband give you money for these things when you are married to him?" she said.

"It depends," said Mr. Mohammed Khan. "In our case, I should say 'No,' as we are to be so far away from one another."

Joan's heart gave a sudden dreadful twist. Then this was how it was—she had really forfeited the right to the hospitality of her old home, and the man to whom she belonged declined to give her anything unless he got something for it. What was she to do?

"What about my fare to London, and my passage out to India?" she said briefly.

"The former I have arranged: the latter I shall settle with your brother when I get to London," said Mr. Mohammed Khan.

Then Joan suddenly made up her mind. Rather than beg for money from her husband she would throw herself on the pity and love of her mother: she would not turn away from her. Joan's heart suddenly swelled—her mother, whom she had very often thought stupid. And there was now, and always had been, that heavenly precious love waiting for her. Not the sort of love that calculated or wanted something back, but just love that gave, and gave, and gave again, and very often in the giving lost its value in the eyes of the recipient, because it was given so easily. The tears suddenly flooded her eyes. "Two pounds will be plenty," she said.

But Mr. Mohammed Khan saw the tears, and thinking that they were because he was going away, he was pleased. And being pleased he suddenly became generous, and he pulled his pocket book out of his waistcoat pocket, and drew out two more notes. "Do not weep, my lamb," he said, holding them out.

Then Joan had one of the hardest fights that she had ever had with her conscience. He thought that she was crying because he was going away. It was as bad as pretending that you had a dying child when you were a beggar, to make people sorry for you so that they should give you more . . . what should she do?

But Mr. Mohammed Khan settled it, by suddenly seeing by the watch on his wrist that it was time he started. And as he drew Joan into his arms a passage from a delicious book she had once read flashed into her mind. She couldn't remember it exactly, but it was apropos of a girl who had run away from her husband with someone she thought she liked better, but had come tearing back before anything wrong had happened, and before her husband had really realised that she had gone. And it read like this. "Then something prevented Jane from making that most fatal of all mistakes, a clean breast." Those weren't exactly the words, but that was the idea. So Joan took the notes, and held up her face: "Thank you very much," she said.

CHAPTER IX.

The Kemps were delighted with Gerald Mansfield. He stood, very well knit and well groomed, on the platform at Euston as the long train slid in between the two platforms, and he kissed his little sister quite unaffectedly as she stood rather shyly between her two new friends. "Gerald, I don't know what I should have done without them," she said, and her eyes filled with tears. Gerald Mansfield wondered if there was more behind the words than appeared, but of course he did not say so, and he returned Mr. Kemp's cordial handshake with warmth, and said that he would be delighted to look both Mr. and Mrs. Kemp up at their hotel in Buckingham Palace Road.

"And then we can fix up a time for us all to meet," said Mr. Kemp, and there was a message in the keen eyes that met the younger man's.

Then Gerald knew that they wanted to see him alone, and he felt very uneasy, but he hid it and smiled, and said a cheerful word or two, and then he and Joan went off in search of the car that Mr. Brandon had sent to meet the bride, and the Kemps got into a taxi:

"Jim, I told you that child's people were sahibs," said Mrs. Kemp, as the car slid out of the crowded station yard into the traffic of the Euston Road.

"Well, and what about it?" said Mr. Kemp absently. He was staring out of the window with a look of rapture on his brown face. This was London again, London, the Mecca of the man who spends his life in the East. What did anything matter? He turned like a child: "Gad, Kitty, we'll go to the Empire tonight," he said rapturously.

"Baby!" But there was a tender look in Mrs. Kemp's eyes as they dwelt on her husband. Who knew it better than she, the joy . . . the inexpressible joy of feeling the earth of your native land under your feet again. A joy almost phy-

sical in its intensity. Hadn't she seen men cry when they first saw the white cliffs of Dover, after five or six years of exile. Nobody knew—nobody could understand it except those who sat day after day in an office with a thermometer that registered 110, fighting through their work because it had to be fought through and because nobody else could fight through it for them. Not wanted, very often grossly misjudged, but there because the Englishman is a fighter, and also because he generally has a conscience and he knows that without him the country will go to pot. But although Mrs. Kemp thought all these things, she did not say them; she only turned and smiled equally joyfully, as the taxi shot across Oxford Street:

"And what about dinner at the Berkeley first?" she beamed.

. . . . . .

Joan was almost equally excited as the luxurious car steered its way perilously between the big trams that make motoring between Westminster and Streatham a nightmare to the highly strung:

"Gerald, it all looks so absolutely heavenly," she cried. "Look, the Bon Marché, just the same, and St. Matthew's that always makes me think of Samson pulling down the pillars. Oh, and look! they have finished the cinema! Oh, and look! the prison! . . . do you remember when that man starved himself to death, you know the one I mean, the Lord Mayor person? How sweet of Mr. Brandon to have sent the car . . . I must go round and thank him at once," Joan was in the wildest state of excitement, and her eyes shone like stars. "And we had the loveliest journey, absolutely easy, and lunch and tea on the way, the Kemps would pay for me . . and oh, yes, of course . . . did you see Mohammed before he went?"

There was a little pause after this, and then Gerald smiled quite naturally:

"Yes, I did," he said, "and he asked me to give you his love."

"Oh, thank you." But somehow Joan's spontaneity left her abruptly, and the rest of the way to Fallowfield Road was passed in silence. Then the car left the High Road and turned down the well known turning, and there they were,

the same wobbly paths, the same mullioned windows, the same little front gardens. Then Joan's very soul surged up into her throat so that she could not speak, and she clutched her hands together, and she bit her lips so that she should not scream out the joy that was in her. Just a couple of steps more, and the big car slid quite close up to the granite curb, and the day girl who was sweeping down the wobbly path next door before going home, stared as the two figures got out, and the one, the shorter one, ran like a mad thing, as she told a compatriot on her way home that night. "Just put down 'er 'ead and ran—not a look to right nor left."

And then Joan was in the hall, and in her mother's arms . . . "Mother! Mother! Mother! Mother! Mother! MOTHER!" Joan was sobbing, choking, the tears streaming down her face. Mrs. Mansfield, not at all understanding, drew her daughter close to her, and Gerald, feeling, on the contrary, that he understood quite well and wished that he didn't, pushed his way past them and went into the little drawing-room and blew his nose angrily and stared out of the window. Then Miss Fortescue came down the little twisty stairs and Joan lifted a smudged blurred face and groped wildly for her handkerchief.

"Oh, it's awful of me . . . . but I don't know . . . I somehow can't help it. Aunt Belle, how awfully nice, I'd forgotten you were here. Hallo, Matilda! Mother, how grand; do you have Matilda all day?" Joan, trying not to, spoke with little sobs. It was home, home, HOME! How had she ever left it? The looking glass over the hat-stand, all turning silvery in one corner and browny in another, it was like the faintest glimmer of light in a fog, when men adrift in an open boat see hope of rescue. It was like a blaze on a tree when desperate travellers have lost their way . . . it was like . . . . Joan pulled her thoughts together.

"Pleased to see you back I'm sure, Ma'am," blurted out Matilda, blundering back into the kitchen and sniffing violently. As she confided to the recalcitrant Bert later, "It was more like a funeral than a comin' back after a nunnymoon. All the lot of 'em crying, Miss Joan the worst of the lot." But —as usual—Bert was not sympathetic, and he only shifted his Woodbine to the opposite corner of his mouth, and said he didn't wonder, "married to that bit of black sealing wax."

Miss Fortescue was the first to take the situation in hand; she patted her sister on the shoulder, kissed Joan, and told her that she was going to take her up and show her her new room. So Joan went up the little flight of stairs, and passed the open door on the half landing, her old room, next to her mother's. There were two attic rooms at the very top of the house, standing alone at the top of a flight of stairs; Joan had always coveted one of them, but she had never felt it was right to have one because it would have meant that her mother would be alone on the first floor below. But now, of course, it was all right because Aunt Belle was there—Joan had forgotten that, although her mother had mentioned it in her letters. So they went in together, Joan and her aunt, Miss Fortescue surreptitiously wiping a difficult tear away as Joan ran ahead to look out of the window. She had never cared very much for her rather taciturn niece, but her old heart was torn to see the child looking so terribly altered.

"Aunt Belle, you have made it too beautiful for me." Joan turned and walked slowly back to where her aunt stood playing rather nervously with the strings of her funny little alpaca apron. In the old days that apron had been a source of intense irritation to Joan: "People don't *wear* aprons," as she had said once to her mother when Aunt Belle had insisted on wearing it when other people were there. But now she loved to look at it, it was part of the old life . . . the old life that was still there, although she had forfeited the right to belong to it any more. But she could . . . she could belong a little . . . they would let her, thought Joan passionately, catching hold of one of her aunt's hands.

"Why, dear, I am so glad you like it," replied Aunt Belle, squeezing the small damp hand in one of her hard ones. "I thought you would like to be among your own things again, and you see I furnished my own room myself, so all your things were to spare. Now you will like just to wash your hands, won't you, and then we'll go down to supper. Matilda stays till nine o'clock now you see, so we live in style—no washing up, or horrors of that kind."

But Joan could only cling to the kind hand and sob. "Aunt Belle . . . it's home . . . it's home," she cried. "Don't think it funny of me to cry—you'll think I'm unhappy

or something. I'm not, really I'm not . . . I'm not a bit, only it's . . it's just that . . You see, I don't expect you've ever been away from home like I just have. Don't you know . . . when you come back, it all seems so . . . so . . . Aunt Belle, let me be *part* of it again, will you, don't you know, as if I *really* belonged to it ? " Joan's wide open eyes were streaming as they sought her aunt's.

Miss Fortescue cleared her throat gruffly. " Why, you are part of it, dear, and nothing can ever make you not be. Why, your dear mother's one thought has been for the time when you would be back with her again. Now don't cry any more, Joan, but wash your face and come downstairs. It's not good to be alone after a long journey." And Miss Fortescue stumped out of the room blowing her nose violently.

Joan left alone fell on her knees beside the narrow bed. Her mother's one thought while she was away had been for the moment when she should have her with her again ! And her own one thought when she had been within the shelter of that heavenly love, what had that been ? How soon with decency could she get away from it. Mother, Mother ! Joan got up again and walked to the wash-stand. No one must ever know what had made her feel so differently, but " God ! God ! let me be able to make it up to her a little," she prayed.

. . . . . .

Joan never saw her mother again after that brief stay in her old home. But all her life she looked back on it as one of the happiest and most peaceful times she had ever spent. Mrs. Mansfield seemed to expand and grow younger with the love that surrounded her ; her sister Belle had always been very fond of her in a rather pitying and contemptuous way and now Joan clutched at every opportunity to show how she did really love and value her mother. So the little community was a very happy one, and when, about six months later, she heard in a letter from her brother that her mother had just slipped out of life—as quietly as she had lived in it—an unexpected weakness of the heart after a rather too extensive day of shopping at the July Sales—there was very little bitterness in the tears that Joan shed from eyes bleached and grown weary in the shedding of tears doubly distilled from bitterness.

Everyone tried to make Joan's last two months in England happy ones; the Brandons frequently lent their car; and there were heavenly shopping expeditions to Kensington High Street, for Joan's outfit for India had to be considered; and although Mr. Mohammed Khan had not considered it necessary to make any provision for this, her mother and Aunt did.

"I have been calculating that I have about fifteen more pounds in my Post Office account," said Mrs. Mansfield one evening, when Joan had gone rather early to bed, and she and her sister were sitting over the dying embers in the dining-room grate.

"Don't be so stupid, Marion," said Miss Fortescue, briskly. "You never know when you may want it. No, by far the better plan is for me to lend you a little, you can easily pay me back in a lump sum if I need it."

"But, how can you afford it Belle?" said Mrs. Mansfield weakly.

"That's my affair," said Miss Fortescue; "and as accounts are not your strong point, Marion, if I may say so without being unkind, I should advise you to leave the financial side of Joan's outfit to me."

So it was left like this, and Mrs. Kemp, who paid one delightful and auspicious visit to the little house in Fallowfield Road, proved of the greatest help in advising Joan what to take and what to leave behind.

"And when do you start?" asked Mrs. Kemp. She was anxious to know this because she did not want to travel in the same ship as Joan. She would do all she could to help Joan if Joan were in need of help, but the idea of practically chaperoning her out to India under the circumstances was very repugnant to her. Feeling was so acute about mixed marriages, and the Kemps stood high in the official world.

"My brother went to the P. and O. offices the other day," said Joan, stammering a little—she also had been dreading this question—and he found that my husband had taken a berth in the *Norona* that is sailing on October the sixteenth."

Mrs. Kemp was a clever woman, but she had her work cut out to prevent herself from showing the annoyance that she felt. Mr. Mohammed Khan had done this on purpose, she felt sure; he was probably ambitious, and thought that

the arrival of his wife under the auspices of the Commissioner of his own province would be a good thing for him. However, she smiled quite naturally.

"Splendid!" she said. "Then we shall be able to look after one another."

But Joan knew that Mrs. Kemp was not speaking the truth, and she made an excuse to see her to the end of the road. And when they were outside the little house she burst it all out, her face flaming.

"Mrs. Kemp," she said, "I feel most frightful about my passage. I know—at least I sort of *feel*—how you feel about it. You don't want me about, at least you do, but not all the time—I mean not *with* you. I told Gerald so . . . he couldn't quite see why, but he did what I asked and tried to get a berth in another ship. But there aren't any, the man said that it was the full time of the year, and that it was quite hopeless to expect to get another."

Mrs. Kemp smiled: "Little goose!" she said. "Of course I like to have you with me. But perhaps . . . You are travelling first class I expect? There are two classes, you know, and many people go second in these dreadful days."

Then Joan knew for certain that Mrs. Kemp did not want her, and it stabbed through her soul like an excruciating pain. It was true then: she had made herself an outcast by her marriage.

"No, I am travelling first class," she said slowly.

. . . . . .

Several people stared at Mr. Kemp as he strolled down Water Lane that afternoon. He had the ingrained bronze of the Easterner, coupled with the keen legal appearance of the man who hurries through the gardens of the Inner Temple. The clerk who came forward spoke with deference—some eminent K.C., he thought, fresh from his summer holiday.

"Yes, Mr. Mansfield is disengaged, Sir. But I rather think he is expecting a visitor,"

"I expect I am his visitor," said Mr. Kemp smiling pleasantly. "Ah, how do, Mansfield?" for the polished door in front of him suddenly swung noiselessly open.

"Come in, Sir." Gerald Mansfield led the way into his room, and pushed forward a leather chair.

"Well, I've been to Treadweather Street and I can find

out nothing wrong there," said Mr. Kemp. "They were very obliging and let me have a look at the register. And I saw Hazel yesterday at the Yard again; he had nothing more to tell me really than what I told you before. Khan has been practising as a barrister now for three years, and apparently has always led a decent life—that is to say he has not been associated with any of these seditious affairs, that is, not in any actively aggressive way. He attends the meetings, of course, they nearly all do. As to his private life, that does not concern the police, and they have no reason to suspect that he is married to a woman of his own race. But of course, as to that," said Mr. Kemp, averting his eyes, and feeling terribly uncomfortable, "you can't possibly find it out unless you are in India yourself. And even if you were, you wouldn't be able to do it. These people keep their wife, or wives, as the case may be, penned up in a zenana, and probably Mr. Khan's home is in some remote village on the frontier."

"But I thought he came from Karnmore?"

"So he does. But his wife probably lives with his parents; that would be his home, you see, his father's house, and he visits it occasionally. Of course if he is a Christian it is a different matter. But I somehow don't think that he is."

"You don't think that he is!"

"No, I don't," said Mr. Kemp bluntly. "But all the same," he went on, mentally cursing the day that his wife ever set eyes on Joan Khan, "I don't think you have enough to go on to warrant your interference in the matter. Your sister has married the man, therefore she must go out and live with him. Khan would not hesitate to bring legal pressure to bear on the matter, if he got annoyed. And you know well enough—far better than I do in fact—what that would mean."

Gerald Mansfield got up and walked across to the window. Then he came back and sat down again. "It makes me feel absolutely desperate," he said. "I mean to say . . . it's so . . . so . . . appalling to think of one's own sister . . ." he broke off abruptly.

Mr. Kemp reached for his hat and got up too and walked over to the window. "You know, Mansfield," he said,

"it's incomprehensible to me how such a thing could ever have happened. Didn't you warn the child? Didn't you make any effort to stop the marriage? For that she did it with her eyes shut I am convinced. No girl could possibly have looked as she did when we first saw her, if she had known what she was doing."

"I did try to warn her, but she would not listen," said Gerald Mansfield, "and of course it is difficult for a man even if he is a brother . . . I mean to say—I thought that my mater . . . . ."

"Well, well," Mr. Kemp held out a hand; "well, we will look after the child as much as we can on the voyage, anyhow," he said; "and if at any time she needs our help, she can rely on having it—tell her that, will you, if you can do it without frightening her? And, oh—look here—if she has any money, however small an amount, tie it up with the tightest knot that the law can tie."

Gerald Mansfield let his eyes fall on to the blotting pad, and he picked up a penholder, and twisted it in his fingers. "I have done so," he said, "and that is what has frightened me most. Before, my sister flew into a passion at the very idea of such a thing. Now, she jumps at it."

CHAPTER X.

Joan never forgot the morning that she started for India. It was just beginning to get light when she waked, and for a moment or two she couldn't remember where she was. Always now she waked with the feeling of something horrid crouching in the background, undefined but there. Sometimes as the day went on it slunk back, especially if there was something special going on. But it generally was there, just waiting, waiting to get her by the throat again when she was alone. For Joan knew now that in her marriage she had made a mistake, a frightful and irrevocable mistake. But with the philosophy of which she had rather an unusually large share she was determined to make the best of it. After all, she argued, she had not yet seen her husband in his own country. Even English people went on funnily in other people's countries. For instance, they roared in their own language when people didn't understand them, thinking for some reason or other that the loudness made them more intelligible. Now in England no well bred person would roar, anyhow at anyone else. So you see, there it was, you couldn't legislate for a person unless you saw them in their own surroundings. In this way Joan became a little comforted, and Mr. Khan wrote quite nice letters by every mail, and spoke of a reception at Government House to which he had been asked, and of a dance to which he had not been asked but had slipped in through an oversight of one of the A.D.C.s. He spoke of the Governor by his surname only, which sounded very grand, and he spoke of his 'servants,' which to Joan sounded very lavish and regal too, accustomed as she was to the ministrations of one servant only, and sometimes not that. So altogether Joan felt a little happier about her future. But it was the thought of leaving home and her mother that hung over her so terribly, and on this last

morning when she got out of bed, and looked out of the window on to the little strip of garden, with the one black stocking which Matilda had forgotten to bring in the night before, hanging wispily on the line, the tears welled up into her eyes and ran despairingly down her face till they lodged in a little lake on her upper lip.

It was all so . . . so agonizing, this feeling that it could never be the same again. It all seemed so dear and familiar: the faint haze over the Common, the little spirals of smoke curling up from the hundreds of chimneys, the shrill scream of an engine as the seven thirty train from Victoria fled to Brighton along the wooded cutting. Joan knew it was the seven thirty, because she always used to get up by it when she was going to the High School. All so dear and familiar, and all going to be left behind her. And in their place—what was she going to get? A new life certainly—that she had always craved for. And possibilities of helping others . . . . Joan still had a certain amount of faith in Mr. Mohammed Khan. But for herself: none of the selfless love that had shielded her from her youth: none of the eager interest in the tiniest detail that concerned herself: none of the excusing self-effacing disregard of petty discourtesies that would never have been shown by anyone but a mother. "Mother, Mother!" Joan stared in front of her and cried aloud in anguish. It hurt her like a physical pain, this torment in her heart. But soon she wiped her eyes with her soaking handkerchief and began to move about her room. It had got to be gone through, this parting; and to steel herself for the last breakfast, the last words, she must try to pull herself together now. So she stole down to the bathroom and turned on the hot tap—hot being a courtesy title only. But oddly enough the water came out in a steaming bubble. Then Joan tied the cord of her dressing-gown round her again, and slipping her feet into her black velvet bedroom slippers, new for the voyage, she fled down the stairs. She found her in the kitchen, looking rather distracted in a boudoir cap that Joan had always mocked at because it tied under the chin:

"Mother. . . . mother!" Joan was suffocating with sobs as she clung to the thin figure. "Mother . . . I simply can't go . . . I cannot. If anything happens to you. . . Think of

all the times when I . . . . Mother! Forget them." Joan gripped her hands together and bowed herself, weeping.

Mrs. Mansfield rose to the occasion, as rather feeble people very often do when anything great is demanded of them.

"Joan," she said, "my own precious, precious child. Come, you and I have got to be brave now. Don't think of this as a long parting. We shall meet again. And we shall write to each other, think of the joy of that. And if things seem strange, and perhaps not altogether happy just now, remember this . . . often the first year of married life is not the happiest one. You and your husband will grow closer together as the years go on, I am sure of it. And now, darling, just trot up and turn off the bath, and you and I will have our tea cosily by the fire together."

So Joan wiped her eyes, and gave her mother a hug, and ran back up the twisty stairs. And as she ran she sent up a little prayer of thanksgiving. God had been good . . her mother had not the least idea of how she really felt about her marriage. That helped her more than she could have thought possible. And they drank their tea together, and chatted about the future, and when Joan, glowing with the glorious hot bath, got back to her room again, the whole thing seemed less much dreadful. After all it was only for a time . . . . she would be back again, and think of the bliss of that after the long parting!

. . . . . .

It was Miss Fortescue who eventually pushed Joan into Mr. Brandon's car and stood with the difficult tears raining down her face as her niece clung to her. But she detached herself as soon as she could and smiled and waved, and then ran hastily back into the little drawing-room where Mrs. Mansfield lay back in an easy chair with blue lips. "Did Joan know, Belle?" were the first words she said.

"Not an idea," said Miss Fortescue, gruffly. "I told her that you felt that the actual saying goodbye would be too sad for both of you. And she was relieved, and came straight down from her bedroom and out of the front door. She said breakfast had been so happy, she would like to remember that as the last time that you and she had had together."

Mrs. Mansfield made a dreadful sound between a groan and a sob:

"Belle, I shall never see the child again," she said. "And I might have stopped the marriage if I had had more strength. That time I came back from spending the day with you . . . I meant to. And then it was just like it always has been with me . . . I was weak when I ought to have been strong. And when I see Harold, as I am sure I shall soon . . . he will reproach me. Belle . . . Belle . . . how can I bear it?"

Miss Fortescue blew her nose like a trumpet:

"Don't be foolish, Marion!" she said briskly. But her heart gave a great twist. Harold was her sister's husband who had been dead for years. What did Marion mean? "Marion, what did Dr. Mason say when you saw him the other day?" she said.

"He said that I *might* live for years," replied Mrs. Mansfield with a funny smile.

. . . . . .

It was raining when they got to Tilbury, fine drifting rain that blotted out the ships anchored in the dock, and made them look like great crouching monsters. Like it had been one day on the fells in Borrowdale, thought Joan, when she and Mrs. Kemp had been out in a Scotch mist and had suddenly come on an animal that they affrightedly took for a cow. It had proved to be only a harmless sheep that was much more frightened than they were, but Joan had never forgotten how surprised she had been that mist could so magnify. And now the giant shapes of the ships loomed huge and menacing, and Joan looked at them with a feeling of intense awe in her heart. Think of where they had been, of what they had seen. And she herself was actually going to get on to one of them . . . it really was a great adventure. Somehow with the feeling that it was a great adventure her spirits rose. There was so much that was exciting in front of her. Crowds of people standing round all looking rather shabby and dejected, Joan thought. Porters, pushing big barrows loaded with luggage, shouting at people to get out of the way. Cook's man, very important, with a label on his peaked cap. Cox's and King's man the same, all intent on the same thing, the getting of the huddling people on to this

huge ship that Joan, a little less bewildered, could now see lying up alongside the long wharf on which she and Gerald were standing. It was wonderful to be part of such a great undertaking. And it was all so wonderfully arranged too: the train in which they had come from Fenchurch Street ran right on to the wharf, so there was no scrambling up steps to be done, or charging along echoing tunnels. Joan had done a good deal of charging along tunnels in her time, and she still remembered the terror she used to feel when she was a little girl being raced from Number Two platform at Clapham Junction to Number Eight at the same station. The anguish lest they should not be in time! But now she felt quite cool and collected, only inside she had that breathless feeling of excitement. And Gerald stood beside her very cool and collected too, outwardly, but inwardly very much the reverse; for he was terribly afraid of showing what he felt at parting from his sister. But Joan had got over the worst of her misery. The drive from Fallowfield Road with kind Mr. Brandon had been the very best thing for her; he sat solidly and sympathetically listening to her sobs, not trying to console her, only saying "There, there," from time to time. And when she had finally wiped her eyes and lifted a small face ravaged and swollen with tears to him, he had choked a little and had thrust a fat hand into his pocket and had drawn out two new and exceedingly crackly five pound notes and pushed them into her hand.

"But you've already given me a present!" Joan was gasping with surprised joy. "The nicest thing I have, a heavenly dressing case."

"Ah, well . . . these may come in useful for a little girl to buy some sweeties with," said kind Mr. Brandon, and he clenched his teeth so that his voice should not tremble. For he knew what his old friend would have thought of this marriage of Joan's. His only and beloved little daughter journeying to an alien land, and quite alone! Mr. Brandon was old fashioned, and he could not understand that to journey to India alone when you start at Tilbury is far easier than taking the journey from Streatham to Denmark Hill, either alone or with somebody else.

Presently Joan stood by her brother's side as her luggage was weighed and labelled, and then took her place in the

dingy train that after about half an hour screamed and decided to wend its way through surely the most miserable of all the outlying misery of London. She felt her heart grow lighter. The worst was over—now she could look forward. Firstly to the joy of coming home again . . . Ah the unutterable joy of that! And then to the beginning of a new life, because it was going to be new. All that terrible horror of the Lakes was over. That was something to be thrust out of remembrance for ever. Something like a dreadful thought that came and leered and grinned at you when you were in Church. Something like the feeling you would have if you were drowning in a well, clutching . . clutching at the slimy walls with slippery fingers. . . . . .

"Joanie, we've got to say goodbye here. They look at your passports, and then you have your medical examination."

Gerald was speaking and Joan looked up with a start. They had got to the end of one of the long sheds, and people were saying goodbye to their friends. No one could come any further, then. It was like Death, thought Joan, with a terrible twist of her heart, panic settling on her like a pall again. No one at the other end of her journey but the man she called her husband. No English person to whom she could fly if she wanted to . . . "Gerald!" It broke from her lips in a low cry.

But Gerald Mansfield was almost at breaking point himself. Joan looked so small in her grey woolly coat and skirt and big coat, and he stooped and kissed her almost abruptly; "Goodbye, old girl," he said. "Hang on to your passport, and don't get in a stew. It'll all pan out all right. Here's your porter. Goodbye old thing." . . .Gerald was gone, and Joan, sobbing out loud, was pushed through a little turnstile into another shed, where a woman with a kind face held her wrist for about three seconds and then smiled again and nodded her onwards. And then there was a scowling man at a table who whipped open Joan's passport, scowled at it and then at her, and then presumably having found some likeness between the sodden mass opposite him and the wan caricature pasted on the cardboard sheet in his hand, slapped it to again and scribbled something in a book, and Joan was hustled on again. Then she found herself stumbling upwards

along a gangway, people in front and behind all hurrying and stumbling, and then she nearly fell over a brass door rail and was only prevented from going headlong by a tall bronzed man in white uniform who caught hold of her and smiled at the uplifted and tear-smudged face.

"Number eighty two, Miss. To the right, then. Hurry up there please." Joan found herself in a narrow corridor, smelling of new paint, crowded with people all looking for their cabins. All shoving and jostling as hard as they could, totally regardless of anyone else, apologising vaguely from time to time, and then pushing harder than ever. All talking, and apparently most of them complaining. Joan was utterly bewildered. She clutched her despatch case and made herself as small as possible. How could she ever find her cabin, or luggage! Who would ever attend to her! No one apparently. She essayed a timid question as to the whereabouts of her cabin to a passing steward, at least she thought he was a steward, but he only looked at her vaguely and hurried on again looking very worried. She stepped over the brass door rail into the cabin in front of her and then darted out again, a man was there and he looked up and stared —she had thought she recognised her tin cabin trunk under the berth, but it was evidently not hers. The curtain of the cabin door was dragged across behind her with a rattle of brass rings . . . how awful!

"I say, you look rather at sea. Can I tell you anything?" It was a jolly feminine voice that spoke to Joan, and she looked up again with a gasp of relief. She felt as though a lifebelt had been suddenly thrown out to her as she struggled in deep waters.

"I can't find my cabin . . . at least I don't know how to begin looking for it . . . I have never been on a boat before." Joan coloured with pleasure at being spoken to, it was like the first person that took notice of you when you first went to school: you felt that you would adore her for ever.

"Oh, that's easy enough. What was the number on your trunks—you know, on the labels they sent you? That is the number of your berth. Eighty two, shabash! I'm eighty one."

"What, do you mean you're with me!" Joan's eyes were shining.

"Yes, apparently so and it's a stroke of luck for both of us, because we've got a Eurasian, very fat and muddly, and she's already entirely filled the place with her kit so that I can't get into the door!"

"What, do you mean there is someone else in the cabin as well as us?"

"Rather! Why it's a three berth cabin. Didn't you know?"

"Three people in those weeny little rooms?" Joan's face was a study in expression. Why, there had hardly been room for the one man in the cabin she had blundered into by mistake! Three people, all undressing and dressing and doing their hair at the same time!

"Yes, and worse luck we've all come round by sea: generally you have your cabin to yourself till Marseilles. But we shall settle down all right, only the Eurasian is rather a jar because she's sure to be frightfully untidy. And she's sure too to cover herself with scent. But with two of us we ought to be able to stop that. We'll start off by sniffing and saying what a frightful smell and what can it be."

"Oh, but can we?" Joan felt dreadfully uncomfortable as she followed her companion along the corridor. How awful this voyage was going to be! And what did eighty two shabash mean? She made a little running step and asked.

"Oh, how awfully funny!" The girl in the big fur coat was laughing. "Shabash is an exclamation, a Hindustani exclamation. It means 'Hooray.' How funny. Eighty two shabash," it sounds like an address as you said it!"

Joan laughed too. There was something very attractive about this girl. What was her name, she wondered. She asked.

"My name? Norah Lane. What's yours?"

"Joan Khan." Joan said it with a tightening of the throat.

"Carne . . . Carne? I know some Carnes. Awfully nice people, we were in the same hotel at Mussoorie once. Are they any relation to you?"

"No, I don't think so." The palms of Joan's hands were dripping.

"Oh well, we're sure to find mutual friends sooner or later. People who go to India always do. The number of

people I met at the Army and Navy Stores ! . . . Now here we are, hold on when you get the first blast of chypre."

To Joan's first sight the cabin seemed to be entirely filled by a stout middle-aged woman stooping over an open trunk. But her eyes only lingered on her vaguely, her whole soul was absorbed, ingulfed in contemplation of the thought that had seized on her after her companion's last words. Khan ! But it needn't be Khan. Carne . . . Carne. But the Kemps would give her away . . . no, not if she could let them know before the ship sailed. Oh ! There was hope, hope !

"Is there time to write a letter before we start," she stammered.

"Yes, rather, heaps." Norah Lane stared at Joan rather curiously. How white she had suddenly got. But Joan had gone, flying along the corridor as if Death were in pursuit.

"Where do I write a letter ? " she gasped the question at a passing steward.

"Straight along, Miss, in the saloon," he turned accommodatingly and pointed the way.

Joan fled on ; a good many people were writing letters, but there was one table vacant. She sat down and snatched up a pen. Oh, pray, pray that Mrs. Kemp would understand. "Lord, make her," she supplicated, her lips moving.

"My dear Mrs. Kemp "—she wrote,

"I have got an idea, you may think it a wicked one, but I beseech, I beseech you not to. Don't tell anyone whom I have married. That sounds awful and you won't understand but I have that feeling. It is all so small here—at least it isn't small really but you can't get away. Suppose people are angry with me because I haven't married an Englishman, it will be terrible. I can scratch out my labels, and none of my boxes are written on. I do pray you will do this for me. I know people must know some time, of course. I am writing this just before the ship starts. Oh, I have just come back from my cabin, I flew to get a stamp and to see . . . . Mrs. Kemp, I feel I must kneel down in front of you and implore you. The name on the label on my cabin door is spelt CARNE. Oh do help me not to let people know—at any rate not yet . . . . ."

Mrs. Kemp got this letter just as she was going out to

dinner that night. She read it in silence and then handed it over to her husband:

"What shall we do Jim?" she said.

"Do? Do what the child asks, of course. Poor little wretch! The iron's begun to enter into her soul all right! You see, her brother taking her passage has led to the mistake being made. And I daresay he didn't trouble to correct it, if he knew it. No, do as she asks. And I'll Marconi the poor little thing, she is probably in torment, and we shan't see her for a week."

"But would it be right?"

"Yes, perfectly right. After all, although we have undertaken to look after the child, it is not necessary to go round telling everyone whom she has married. And the voyage will be hell for her if it's found out. You know what the average sticky first class lot are. Just don't say anything about it. And if eventually it comes out, take it for granted that people knew. By then she will have made her own way."

Joan got the Marconigram as she leant over the rail straining her eyes towards the lights that gleamed far away to port. Eastbourne, somebody said it was. How wonderful to think of people walking about and going to bed in houses, and here they were, right out in the sea, water all round them. Pitch dark yet going straight ahead cutting their way through the blackness with a methodical throb throb of the engine. Someone at the helm—no, not at the helm, on the bridge. But someone there, guiding it all . . . . two people really, One much more powerful than the one on the bridge . . . only one could not see Him . . . . .

She walked to an electric light, and stood underneath it, reading the telegram which the steward had handed her. How methodical of them to put it in an envelope, she thought vaguely. It was like writing a letter to someone upstairs and putting that in an envelope, because the Marconigram place was quite near: Mrs. Lane had pointed it out to her as they had walked up and down the deck after tea. Yes, Nora Lane was married—it seemed very extraordinary because she talked so youngly, but she had told her that she was. And she had a baby that she had left at home, and when she had told her that, her face had all creased up and her mouth had twisted

grotesquely, and then she had laughed and said that the ship was going to heave, and that she knew she was going to be fearfully ill. And when the stout Eurasian lady had heard that she put her hand to her heart and said, "Oh, my God!" And then Nora Lane really had laughed, because, as she told Joan afterwards, the ship had not even got through the first dock. . . .

Then Joan became conscious that the deck steward was still standing there and looking at her, and she knew that he must be wondering why she didn't open the envelope. She wondered what he would say if she suddenly thrust it into his hand and said, "Tell me how the name outside is spelt, because I daren't look at it myself." Then she pulled herself together and dropped her eyes, and there it was on the envelope—C.A.R.N.E. O blessed relief!

CHAPTER XI.

The first three days out at sea are always uneventful ones. People are getting to know one another, talking excitedly and confidentially to total strangers and then wishing they hadn't. Finding out with great dexterity what people are by profession and then either avoiding or cultivating them, as the case may require. Complaining bitterly to the occupants of other cabins about the occupants of theirs, and trying to get them changed, an absolutely hopeless task, as there is nothing more inflexible than the rule that governs the allotting of cabins in a large liner. Rushing at stated intervals to the Purser to complain of this that and the other, and being received with the same impartial smiling courtesy by that equable gentleman who would long since have been removed to a lunatic asylum had he not been equable. In fact the first three days of a vayage are always occupied in the process of settling down, and people settle down as they do other things, according to their temperament. But Joan settled down in a condition of quiet rapture ; to her, accustomed to a very simple life, the space and luxury of a first class passage in a Peninsular and Oriental liner seemed almost too wonderful to be true, and she revelled in every detail of it. The long elaborate dinners, the perfection of waiting at meals, the deep hot bath with the funny little black man like a monkey to get it ready in the early morning, all were a source of intense joy to her. And apart from the gratification of the sense of luxury, the beauty of it all ! The sea stretching all round them grey and heaving, flecked with little ripples of foam. The wonderful nights when Joan hung out of her port-hole and watched the swift cleaving of the great hull through the coal black water, silent and unrelenting in its progress. The throb throb of the powerful engines never silent : all filled her with an ecstasy of enjoyment. Past and future were forgotten, lost sight of, in this

great and wonderful present. This was life as she had always imagined it could be, flaming with incident and interest, and Joan lived every instant of it to the full.

But Nora Lane was rather derisive of Joan's enthusiasm; she had made several voyages and they had lost their charm for her. also her heart was ravaged with a fierce craving for the baby she had left behind her. But in the effort to conceal this she became more than usually cynical:

"I think the whole thing is absolutely disgusting," she inveighed; "and as for that creature in our cabin, she is a positive outrage. It isn't the least rough, and she has simply collapsed into bed because she is bone lazy. Have you seen the huge plates of curry and rice that the stewardess brings her? She guzzles it up and then collapses again, and we can never have the cabin properly swept. I am sick of it, and if she doesn't soon pull herself together and make a little effort, I shall complain to the purser."

"But what could he do?" said Joan timidly. Surely, she thought, even that apotheosis of authority would have his work cut out to tackle that mountain of bedclothes. For Mrs. Fitzgerald up and dressed was colossal; prostrate and in bed she was vast. And however powerful you are, if you are a man you can't actually haul a woman out of bed against her will!

But Nora laughed: "He'd find a way if he wanted to," she said. "Get the doctor to cut her gram. That would get her up all right."

Joan also laughed but timidly. She was a little frightened of Mrs. Lane, although she admired her enormously, and she had a sneaking sympathy with Mrs. Fitzgerald. She had such a soft voice with such a pretty foreign accent; and her eyes were so dark and luminous, like a cow's eyes. And her voice was sweet, there was no getting away from it. But Nora Lane was more than ever derisive when Joan expatiated on the charm of her voice.

"Sweet! It makes me want to scream. It's chi-chi, my child, chi-chi, as flagrant and unashamed as you can hear it. And don't go about this ship saying that you think it's pretty, or you'll find yourself in the soup!"

Joan very meek, and not understanding at all promised that she wouldn't. But all the same when Nora was not there

she tried to make up in little ways for the brusqueness of her friend. After all, no one could stay in bed unless they were really unable to get up, she argued sweetly, not in the least grasping the unlimited capacity of the average Eurasian for unlimited repose.

"Will you just run along to the stewardess and ask her to let me have a little kungie and biscuits, dearee," said Mrs. Fitzgerald one day plaintively, as Joan popped her head in to the cabin to fetch her fountain pen on her way to the writing room.

"Kungi and biscuits? all right. But haven't you just had breakfast?" asked Joan, her eyes on the litter of plates on the camp stool beside the lower berth.

"Yes, I have," said Mrs. Fitzgerald. "But it's this sinking in my stomach that's so bad. Nothing seems to touch it but curry, and that the doctor says I mayn't have. He was along this morning when you and Mrs. Lane were at your baths—'sent by the stewardess,' so he said."

As Joan continued her way to the writing room—for after a little consultation she and Mrs. Fitzgerald had decided that perhaps as the doctor was in attendance it would be better not to ask for anything in between meals—her eyes laughed. Nora had complained, then, and the process of gram cutting had begun! But however had Nora dared! But Nora had obtained her desire, for the following morning Mrs. Fitzgerald, followed by the deck steward with an armful of rugs, stumbled up on deck and dropped her ample proportions into a deck chair. There, for the rest of the voyage, she was always to be found, flanked on both sides by people with soft voices and cow's eyes. And the topic of their conversation was nearly always the arrogance of the military and their wives. . .

After two never-to-be-forgotten days in the Bay, the *Nerona* settled down again, and began to plough her way onwards with a dogged regularity. People began to appear again and the empty chairs at meals began to fill up; little groups began to form themselves on deck; people began to make friends with other people, and dragged their chairs about so that they could sit next to one another. Games were mooted, and energetic people ran about the deck carrying rings of rope, and threw them over a stick stuck on a board. In fact the whole of the ship, first and second class alike, began

to wake up, and the weather did all that weather can under the circumstances to help in this process of resuscitation. The sun shone down on the gleaming white paint and seemed to glance off it with an added radiance, the sea heaved and tumbled with an opalescent greenness, the seagulls wheeled and screamed overhead with a darting beauty peculiarly their own, and to which Joan never got accustomed. Everyone was friendly, especially the Captain—he had noticed Joan almost at once, because she was very much like a little girl that he had left at home with her bobbed hair and short upper lip. So he always hailed her in the mornings, and laughed with her when he went his rounds—and one day he called her up and told her that her cabin was untidy. When Joan, scarlet and faltering with consternation, apologised with trembling lower lip, he smiled again and then cleared his throat, and that afternoon a beaming Quartermaster presented a parcel and note from the bridge. And Joan found a gorgeous box of sweets and a tiny scribbled message. "Only a joke about your Cabin, Mrs. Carne." All this was like champagne to Joan, it was something so entirely different from anything she had ever experienced before, and she throve, and grew younger, and flung off the memory of the horror of the past and the terror of the future; and, dimpling, became the care free child that she ought to have been at her age. This was going to be a perfect three weeks, she told herself, and she was going to drink to the dregs the joy of it. And she did, and Nora Lane, bored to death with what she considered the ghastly monotony of the whole thing, exclaimed at the change in her:

"You look about ten with your bobbed hair and stupid little nose, Joan. What do you *see* in the voyage to make you so pleased with yourself?"

Somehow Joan couldn't explain. Nora wouldn't understand if she tried to tell her how she had always longed to *live*, to get out and see things. How the very fact of having early tea brought to her in the mornings was in itself an excitement. The bath, always boiling, with its funny little tub of fresh water on the board at the end, the breakfast announced to the eager passengers by a bugler, the revolving chair in which you sat at meals and which wouldn't pull in to the table however much you tried to make it—everything

to Joan had the tang of a stimulant. And she gloated over it like a secret drinker and hugged the thought of the immediate days to come, and did not tarnish the gold of them, as she easily might have done, by the thought of the future, rather more distant, but nevertheless, there, waiting for her.

And now on this fourth day out from home, she stood a little in front of the smoking saloon and stared on the lower deck. She always loved doing that—there was always something going on. Sailors padded about barefooted doing extraordinary things with pieces of rope. Men begrimed to the eyes came out from dark hatchways and flung themselves down on the boards. Officers gave orders, and sailors ran to execute them. The prow of the ship (Joan remembered the word prow from a book she had read) rose and fell, and falling seemed to scoop up the green sea and scatter it in a drifting cloud all over everything. Joan snuffed it all in in a rapture. And then as she drew her handkerchief from the pocket of her jersey coat to wipe her face, her eyes fell on a heap lying very close to the side of the ship. It had moved ... had it, or hadn't it ? It was a heap she had noticed before, in fact now she remembered it had always been there. A heap of clothes, not exactly clothes, but things like a rug and a padded quilt, huddled very close to a coil of rope, now not moving at all, but lying still—still with a sort of significant stillness. Joan suddenly felt an extraordinary chill through her hair. She was not alone standing watching that bundle, something or someone was beside her—also watching—calculating. Without stopping to think she flew down the iron ladder that led to the lower deck and threading her way through the coils of rope that littered the deck, she flung herself down on her knees beside it. She fumbled with the fringe that covered the aperture through which she now saw a tuft of grey hair sticking, and fumbling she cried out loud :

" It's somebody dead . quick ! quick ! " she cried.

A native stoker was leaning against the iron door of the engine room. He glanced across to where Joan knelt, guessed at what she was saying, spat into the sea, and vanished.

" Somebody must do something." Joan got up desperately. Who would help ? Ah, she darted across the hatch-

way to where the Quartermaster, red haired and intent, bent whistling over a job of splicing.

"What's the matter, missy?" The jolly man pushed his cap a little further on to the back of his head. "Somebody dead, eh? Well, we'll 'ope not. Show me where." He dropped the rope with rather more celerity than his words, and jumped like a cat across the obstacles that lay between him and the silent heap that Joan pointed out with a trembling finger. "No, not dead, but pretty near it. Run, little Miss, will you, to the doctor, it'll save time if you'll excuse the liberty." The Quartermaster lifted his head and spoke to Joan who vanished like a streak of lightning.

"Quick, there's somebody dead, at least very nearly dead." Joan, breathless, flung herself through the curtain of the doctor's cabin. "Come at once, or you won't be in time."

"Dead! Where?" The ship's surgeon was a young man, and this was his first voyage. Visions of intricate quarantine regulations with which he was not familiar skimmed through his mind. "What sort of a person? Which deck?" He spoke as he groped in a corner cupboard.

"Down below, quick!" Joan was shivering with impatience. How long he took grovelling in cupboards and bags. Ah, he was ready. "Now," she led the way with a rush.

The doctor followed her with a certain amount of dignity. Although he was young, he took his profession very seriously. Doctors did not rush about when they were called to a patient, he told himself. But he found himself infected with Joan's eagerness in spite of himself and he quivered with relief when the old grey head stirred, and the heavy lids, so leaden in colour lifted themselves slowly from eyes sunken with exhaustion.

"Who is it, do you know?" He stood up and spoke to the first officer who had joined the little group.

"I think he must be Major Heriot's native servant. He came on at Tilbury, so the Purser says, I've just been along to him. Major Heriot gets on at Marseilles, and they nearly always send their servants on ahead because of the plague regulations at these foreign ports. But apparently the old

man has been lying ill here for days and has apparently nearly died from exhaustion, at least, is it exhaustion?" the first officer looked at the doctor uneasily. Plague, the bugbear of the crowded liner! It would be the limit if it was found to be that.

"No, he hasn't any fever," the doctor answered the unspoken question in the older man's eyes—"in fact the poor old boy is almost stone cold. I'll have him taken along to the galley and I'll stay with him myself till he's pulled round a bit. Yes, some sort of sloppy thing, please. Oh, yes, he'll be all right." This in answer to Joan who was pressing eagerly nearer.

"Can I just look at him—he looked so awful when I first saw him . . . I want to see." Joan's lower lip was trembling and the doctor, who was young and susceptible, had to crush down a mad longing to seize her violently in his arms.

"Yes, yes, of course you can,—he's looking quite chirpy, I've filled him up with the best brandy. Here, let the miss-sahib look"—this to two powerful Lascars, who were lifting the little body in a hammock lined with blankets.

And Joan, tiptoeing shyly closer, met the keen shrewd gaze of the old Mohammedan with tears in her own greeny grey eyes. Such a tiny little man, with such bushy eyebrows. And he had nearly died. Oh how many times Joan sobbed out her thankfulness to God that he had not died. But then that dreadful future was a closed book to her, and she only wiped her eyes boyishly with the back of her hand and smiled weakly.

"I am glad you are better," she said.

And Nazir Ali, bearer, understood faintly what the miss-sahib was saying. And with the almost uncanny intuition of the Oriental he recognised that it was to Joan that he owed his life. To that little white hand had been given by Allah the power to thrust back that gaunt figure that with shrouded face had been leaning over the railing of the upper deck watching him—for had not Nazir Ali seen it clearly? And drawing a trembling breath he raised his wizened hand to his forehead:

"Salaam Huzoor," he said.

. . . . . .

For the next two days Joan did not see Nazir Ali at all.

But she made daily pilgrimages to the doctor's cabin to ask how he was; somehow she felt that she must know, there had been something in those shrewd keen eyes that had gone straight to her heart. She knew that he was a native and that therefore—oh the ghastly pang the whole thought gave her!—that therefore she was not supposed to associate exactly on an equality with him. Not that he wasn't her equal really, but there was a something that just divided them, more of his making than hers. But she wanted to know how he was—that he was not going to die—and she asked the question with trembling lip, and the doctor having found out that she was married answered briskly and rather coldly.

"Die? No, rather not. He's going to get up today. He's mad to get to his sahib's cabin to get his clothes unpacked. But I shouldn't concern yourself about him, Mrs. Carne, they're an ungrateful lot these natives, and he'll only try to get something out of you if he sees that you're sorry for him."

"Oh, do you think he would?" Joan's eyes were very wide and trusting. "Would anyone as old as that be horrid like that, do you think?"

"Sure of it." The young doctor had been really upset at finding out that Joan was married, and he saw everything through a faint yellow haze. "Sure of it," he repeated.

"Well, *I'm* sure that he wouldn't," said Joan with soft but eager violence, and she walked out of the little surgery with her curly head held very high. He was a horrid young man: he had an aroma of Streatham about him: she would make a point of avoiding him for the rest of the voyage. And if by any awful chance she needed a doctor she would persuade the nice missionary lady doctor to attend her; she had got to know her quite well by meeting her going to her bath, and by sitting and waiting in the ladies' ante-room with her.

But the doctor was really a very nice young man, and a conscientious one too, or he would have tried to start a violent flirtation with Joan, married or not married, so he only shrugged his shoulders and smiled a little ruefully, and went off to help carry the old Mohammedan out into the sun. For Nazir Ali craved for the sun, accustomed all his life to a heaven of brass the grey skies of England were a terror to him, and it had only been his unswerving conviction that his sahib

would come to complete and permanent grief without him that had persuaded him to make the hated journey across the evil and heaving waters to the country where the skies were always grey, and where if it did not happen to be raining, a wind like a kukri cut you in twain. . .

"Bahut, bahut, kharab,"* Nazir Ali would declaim to an admiring circle, as he sunned himself on a string charpoy in the courtyard of the Fort where the sun beat down like a blast from an open furnace door.

"But, brother, even here are the nights cold," interpolated a tall bearded Sepoy who had stopped to listen as he passed to his quarter.

"Cold! Of a surety, cold, brother," replied the old man. "But there, cold with a cold terrible in its intensity. Ice-cold water day and night pouring from the heavens."

There was a chorus of concerned "Aies," from the circle of dark gleaming faces at this alarming description. How then had so old a man returned alive from such an ordeal, questioned one of the younger men who had travelled as far as Bombay and therefore felt himself in a position to argue the point. But Nazir Ali never argued. Either his word was law or it wasn't. So he uncurled his skinny legs from under him, drew his old hand down his white beard with a gesture of finality, and withdrew to the shadowed suffocation of his sahib's bedroom where he busied himself in tidying cupboards already scrupulously tidy. And ever and anon he cast a glance at the tall man who sat with a towel round his head at a far table, the man whom Nazir Ali worshipped more than life itself.

The next day Joan, hurrying along to her cabin, passed another that had always before been entirely empty, a cabin that she had always looked at and envied because it only had two berths in it. She thrust her head round the curtain, and there he was, the little old man, spotless in baggy white trousers and a huge flaunting turban that almost eclipsed his face, and a long brown serge coat that reached to his knees. He heard the rattle of the brass rings, and turning he saw it was Joan. Then, because he was still rather weak, the tears stood in his old eyes, and he raised both hands to his forehead,

* Very, very bad.

and then stooping laid his face on her brown shoes. Joan felt the tears rush to her own eyes, and she groped for his old hand, and dragged at it feverishly.

"Don't, don't kneel down," she cried. "Don't, it makes me feel most awful! Besides, I haven't done anything. Do stand up, you aren't well enough to kneel down either. Are you better? . . . at least, you can't understand English, of course, but do you feel . . . attcha?" Attcha! Of course that was the word, it was one of the first that the missionary had read out of the little book that she always studied as she waited for her bath and it meant 'all right.' "Are you attcha?" she said, all her little teeth showing in her delight at this feat of learning.

But Nazir Ali was one of nature's gentlemen, so he did not smile as he felt inclined to do. Nor did he reply in English as he also could have done, because he thought it might hurt Joan's feelings. So he only bent his old head again and raised his trembling hand to the rim of the white puggaree:

"Hain! Abhi attcha hai, ap ki mihrubani,"* he said quietly.

"Oh, I am glad And what are you doing here?" asked Joan sitting down on the lower berth.

"I getting ready for Sahib," said Nazir Ali.

"Oh, you can talk English then!" Joan burst out laughing. "What must you have thought of my Hindustani."

But Nazir Ali did not smile. He could see that Joan knew nothing about the country she was going to, or she would never talk and laugh with a servant, so he knew that because of this all the more respect was due to her. He only inclined his head very respectfully and remained silent.

But Joan wanted to know more: "Who is your sahib?" she asked.

A look of wonderful devotion shone for a moment or two in the opaque eyes. "Major Heriot sahib," he said.

"An old sahib or a young sahib?"

"Middle sahib."

Joan burst out laughing again, "Oh, how funny it sounds," she said. "'Middle sahib.' Do you mean sort of thirty eight or thirty nine?"

* Yes. Thanks to you, I am well.

Nazir Ali inclined his head again. But how much longer was the Huzoor going to sit there, he wondered, his old knees knocking against one another. And why had she laughed? He caught hold of the brass bar of the upper berth.

Joan saw and jumped up: "Sit down," she cried, "you are not fit to stand." She caught hold of his elbow. "Sit down here," she tried to force him down on the lower berth.

But Nazir Ali struggled, Very respectfully, but still, he struggled. "Not sitting with memsahib here," he said. "Not good that. Memsahib going, then my sitting."

"Why, does it matter?" asked Joan. "I never thought of it. Why of course I'll go, then. But in England I always sat with my servant. And once if not twice I had tea with her in the kitchen."

But Nazir Ali could not follow this, besides he could hardly see Joan for the film in front of his eyes. And directly she had left the cabin he stumbled forward and leant his old lined forehead against the cold brass bar. What was this cold breathless feeling that left him shivering? This feeling that had seized him as he stepped from the gangway at Tilbury—as if the heart in his breast was going to burst out of it? It must be something to do with the climate, thought the old man and he took one or two long trembling breaths and steadied himself against the top of the upper berth until he could stand firmly again.

"Here, don't you go mucking up my clean counterpanes!" It was the vibrant voice of the stewardess, recently promoted from second class, and feeling thereby rather above herself, that broke through the dreamy stillness that seemed to surround Nazir Ali as with a cloud.

But Nazir Ali did not answer, for he knew by the quality of the voice that the speaker was only of the menial class, and Nazir Ali had had enough of menials in England. They showed you no consideration and they wanted everything done for them. Consideration was only to be met with at the hand of the sahiblog, Nazir Ali had proved that many times over. So he only waited until he could draw his breath evenly, and then turned a dignified gaze on the be-starched female in front of him:

"Hence!" he said. "This cabin is the cabin of my sahib, and until the arrival of my sahib I remain in charge of it."

Jane Pigg flamed a vivid scarlet: "Hence indeed!" she interpolated, "I'll teach you to 'hence' me, you impertinent nigger! Here, Simon, you just fetch along the chief steward, I'll see to this myself. Hence, indeed! I'll settle you!" Jane Pigg took up a defensive attitude, hand on hips.

Joan strolling back from her cabin, heard the words and stopped, peeping in round the blowing curtain: "What has happened?" she asked.

"He's giving me some of his back-chat, Ma'am," said the Stewardess, "and I've sent for the chief steward to get him to forbid him the cabin. They don't know their place nowadays, these black fellows."

Nazir Ali heard the words and his old face turned a little grey. Forbid him the cabin! Then what about the shaving water at the exact temperature that his sahib desired it! And the sock turned at the precise angle at which it had been turned for the last eighteen years! And the tie slipped in under the tape ever since soft collars came into vogue! Nazir Ali's heart began to beat with dreadful vibrating strokes. He knew so well the discipline of board ship, it would only need one word from the chief steward to banish him for ever from the upper deck.

But Joan did not care for the stewardess. She and Mrs. Lane had already had a little breeze with her because she had once or twice sent the Goanese steward with their chota hazri instead of bringing it herself. So she stayed where she was and waited for the chief steward to arrive, which he very soon did, a couple of Goanese stewards close on his heels.

"Here, what's all this about! Come out of there!" The chief steward stepped over the brass door rail and took hold of Nazir Ali by the collar. Nazir Ali shrunk. He was old, besides he knew that he hadn't a fighting chance with the stewardess against him. But he lifted his old hands as if in prayer. "Marf karo!" he breathed.

Joan stepped forward: "Mr. Hazel," she said—Joan knew that the chief steward liked to be addressed by his proper name, having done it before, and thereby won his allegiance for ever—"Mr. Hazel, this old man wasn't rude at all. I heard it. The stewardess called him a nigger, and told him that he was untidying the berths. He wasn't: he

is only unpacking his master's things, and if he was touching the berth at all it was only that he must have been leaning against it because he is weak. You know, he was the one who nearly died."

"Oh, is that so?" Mr. Hazel smiled at Joan. "Thank you, Mrs. Carne." He turned to the stewardess. "You get along to your work, Miss Pigg, and leave the old man alone," he said. "And what's more . . . ." he took a few steps along by her side, as she started to flounce down the corridor, and spoke in her ear, "what's more, if we have any more of this sort of thing on this side, you'll go back to the second class where you belong, Miss. And don't you forget it! And you remember this too! We're refined on this side, do you 'ear? We're refined! None of your 'niggers,' or such like. It isn't done. Do you quite understand me?"

Nazir Ali, left alone with Joan, fell on his knees, and laid his old face on her shoe. "Again thou deliverest me, O Protector of the Poor," he breathed.

CHAPTER XII.

Joan first saw Peter Heriot through a blaze of early morning sunshine. All her life she associated him with that, with the radiance of the dawn after blackest night. For the getting into Marseilles had been really very unpleasant: the weather off the coast of Portugal had been as diabolical as the weather off the coast of Portugal can possibly be, and that is saying a good deal. Her cabin companions had been prostrate—Nora Lane resentfully and furiously, because she detested being laid low with Mrs. Fitzgerald near at hand—Mrs. Fitzgerald despairingly and completely, adding to the general misery by howling at intervals that she knew the ship was going down:

"Oh, my God! What will become of my poor children. Oh, why did I ever go to the England! Oh, save me! Save me!" This last as the noise of a hurricane of falling plates rang out from the pantry

"But it isn't really going down, you know!" Joan, pitying, slipped from the upper berth and bent over the heaving mass of bedclothes below her. It must be awful to be afraid like that! "The stewardess told me that we should very likely have it rough tonight," she said, speaking in a whisper for fear Nora Lane should hear her. But only groans came from under the bedclothes. So Joan, feeling that sleep was out of the question, for although she felt quite well herself, the noise of creaking timber and labouring engines prohibited it, suddenly got the idea of going up on deck to see what it all looked like. She couldn't do anything to help Mrs. Fitzgerald, and Nora did not like being spoken to when she felt ill. But it would be heavenly to get out in the air a bit. So she tied the cord of her woolly dressing gown securely round her, and slipped her feet into the black velvet slippers and crept out into the corridor.

It was all so still: still, that is, from the noise of human beings. But it was as if the elements had taken possession of the ship and everything in it. To begin with everything swung. Out of every door in the corridor came a serge curtain at regular intervals, as the ship rolled and wallowed. Then after one terrific lurch the whole mass of steel trembled from end to end, Joan found out afterwards that it was the screw half out of the water revolving frantically in space. Stumbling and clutching at the white painted walls she groped her way to the companion stairs, through the dining saloon where through the open hatch of the pantry she could see the steward on night duty bending absorbed over what looked like *Answers*—(it had a strangely reassuring effect!)—up the stairs, and out on to the wind-swept spray-soaked deck. Joan hung on to the seat that stood just outside the companion door and gasped with the joy of it. Right in the midst of black tumbling water, down at an angle of nearly forty five degrees at one moment, flung sky high the next. She felt inclined to scream and shout with the joy of it. She was just making up her mind to let go of the seat and make a dive for the rail so that she could see better, when a cheery whistle sounded close beside her, and the burly figure of someone in oilskins whom she recognised as the quartermaster came round the corner of the smoking saloon.

"I say . . I *say*, this won't do!" He drew up short with a start as he nearly ran in to Joan. "Down below, Madam *please*!" He spoke with a note of authority.

"No, no don't send me downstairs." Joan lifted her small face. "It's Mrs. Carne, you know, and I tell you this makes me feel absolutely mad with joy. Don't send me down, it all somehow gets into my *soul!* Oh isn't it all simply *glorious*!" there was a great sob in Joan's voice.

"Glorious, you think it, eh?" The quartermaster smiled and flung out a steadying hand. "Well, and I should think you are the only lady in this old ship that thinks so, Ma'am. But if you really want to see it you come up forrard with me, but only for a minute now,"

So they went together and stood in front of the music saloon, in the little narrow alleyway so convenient for a couple of deck chairs, and Joan stumbled backwards and gasped as the salt spray whipped her face. She stared out with strain-

ing eyes into the blackness, nothing but a mass of heaving breaking churning waters in front of them. Down, down down—would they ever come up again ? Yes they were up, and with them a cataract of water that flung itself high in the air and then fell with the rattle of artillery on the streaming lower deck. Joan gasped and clutched the oilskin sleeve beside her. Somehow she felt that she must join in with the elements, and shout and scream with them—' Oh ye Seas and Floods, bless ye the Lord.'

" It's gorgeous, it makes me feel frantic," she shouted through the uproar to the man beside her.

" You're getting very wet, Ma'am," said the quartermaster reprovingly, shouting the admonishment through his cupped hands.

" Yes, I know, but I don't care. I'll go straight back to bed when I've seen a little more. Oh, look, look, a light there, straight in front of us. Do you see—there,"—Joan pointed excitedly.

" Marseilles," shouted the quartermaster through the scream of the wind. " We shall make her by dawn. Lighthouse—outside the harbour."

" Marseilles ! And dawn . . . Was it something prophetic that quivered through Joan's soul like the wing of a darting bird ? And Light—light when everything seemed at its blackest.

" Oh ! " she turned to the man at her side, not knowing what she said, " Oh, I can't tell you what I feel," she cried ; " it's like it was at the very beginning, don't you know,—when God breathed on the face of the waters, and said ' Let there be light,' and there was light . . . Why do we mind ? Everything turns out all right—even when we think it can't possibly," Joan broke into the wildest crying, covering her face with her hands.

But the quartermaster could not hear a word, nor could he see very much, except a small crouching figure at his side, that he knew must be soaked through and through. And he became suddenly conscious that he was doing a very wrong and risky thing in encouraging a lady passenger to wander about the deck in a dressing-gown in the small hours of the morning. So he suddenly shouted with all the quarter-deck authority in his voice :

"You get along back to your cabin, Madam, or there'll be trouble for both of us," he bellowed.

And Joan fled. Very small and wet and breathless, she stumbled through the lurching darkness of the big liner.

. . . . . .

So Joan first saw Marseilles through the 'clear shining after rain,' and she and Nora Lane hung over the rail of the first class deck, and examined with enormous interest the jostling crowds on the quay. It was so frightfully important who came on at Marseilles, so Nora said, it made all the difference to the rest of the voyage. "Because everything sort of starts at Marseilles," she said. "Up to now we have only muddled about. Now we shall begin to have dances—and sports and things. Awful fun it can be, too, if you get the right lot of people."

"What sort of people?"

"Not too many High Court Judges, and Generals. They generally want to be quiet, and object if the band goes on too late at night. At least their wives do. What we want are a good many military people, although I says it as shouldn't, with a fair sprinkling of civilians to prevent it becoming too cliquey. And I pray there aren't any natives."

"Why?"

"Because their manners are so frightful," said Nora briefly.

"What sort of manners?" asked Joan feeling that she must know although it killed her to hear.

"Oh well . . . it's rather disgusting . . . but they s.p.i.t. Into the sea as a rule, but sometimes they forget."

"Oh." But it took Joan a minute or two to come back. She had gone—into the terror world that for the last week had got fainter.

"But we'll hope there won't be any. I don't see any anyhow, and we should have done by now, they are always seen off by stacks of people. Oh, do look at that fat person flying to the telegraph office. See her ayah bundling along behind her. She'll be first class if she can afford an ayah."

The film over Joan's eyes cleared, she clenched and unclenched her hands. Not yet!—another fortnight yet! . . .

"Yes, isn't she fat?" she said, "and the ayah is fatter. She and Nazir Ali will be able to make friends with each other."

"My dear, Nazir Ali wouldn't look at her. She's only a sweeper caste. Why, probably if her shadow fell on the food he was eating he would throw it all away."

"Would he?"

"Yes, of course he would. You've no idea of the feeling between natives. We don't understand it in the least."

"But that lady has her for her servant," said Joan, crinkling up her eyes in the vivid sunlight.

"Yes, of course she does. But to the native, we are just as unclean as a sweeper," said Nora laughing.

"Are we?" Joan tried to grasp it. "But they like us," she said.

"Oh, yes, of course they do—at least some do. But in anything that touches their caste, like eating, they are most frightfully particular. For instance, they wouldn't dream of cooking in our cooking pots—saucepans, I expect you call them."

"Wouldn't they?" But Joan fell stupidly silent after this last brief question. Why had they started this sort of conversation? she thought frantically.

But Nora did not want to continue it. The native did not interest her, and she loathed ayahs, after one awful incident that had befallen her first baby, an incident that she could never even now recall without a scream of despair in her soul. So she smiled, and pointed again, laughing:

"There's your old friend," she said, "do look at him, he's gone right down on his face on the stones. He's rather a dear really."

Joan strained her eyes through the glare. Two men in big coats stood on the wharf, one of them laughing; and in front of the one who was laughing, Nazir Ali lay, practically at full length, a vivid smudge of white against the dark stones.

"It must be Major Heriot," she said quietly, but as she said it her heart gave a mad leap. Why did it matter so that it should be Major Heriot?

"Oh, is that whom Nazir Ali belongs to? I wondered who it was." Nora was still staring. "Is that the Heriot who writes books about the frontier? I rather think it must be. If it is he's desperately good-looking; I've heard about him. Yes, it must be, he's taken off his cap. My dear, what an adorably shaped head."

But Joan's heart was thundering so that she could not answer. He had taken off his cap to a lady who had just come out of the Custom's office, and the lady was Mrs. Kemp, Mrs. Kemp who knew everything. Oh, terror! terror again grinning. Supposing Mrs. Kemp told—supposing Mrs. Kemp told! She wouldn't—she couldn't be so cruel. But what was there cruel about it really? It was true. Yes, but on board ship where you couldn't get away . . . where *you couldn't get away*. . . .

But Joan need not have been afraid, for as Mrs. Kemp had looked round the dining car in the P. and O. express, carrying in its be-plushed embrace a good deal of the official world of Northern India, she realised again the torment of a voyage for Joan where people knew that she had married a native. So a little later, when she met Joan in the corridor of the hurricane deck—Joan had been desperately hanging about there, dreading unspeakably the first meeting yet feeling that she must get it over—she took her very kindly and affectionately by the hand:

"Why, here you are, dear, I have been hoping I should see you. And it's quite all right about that little matter you wrote to me about, you know. . . You got our Marconi, I hope? My husband quite agrees with me, far better to leave it—you know—later it will not matter so much. At least . . ." Mrs. Kemp flushed a little, she had not meant to convey quite what she was now afraid she had conveyed.

But Joan's grip was convulsive and trembling in its intensity.

"I should like to lie down on the ground in front of you like Nazir Ali did in front of Major Heriot," she said, her voice shaking. And she turned and fled along to her cabin.

But as Mrs. Kemp in her own cabin stooped over the despatch case that she was daintily unpacking—Mrs. Kemp, did most things daintily—her kind grey eyes were rather troubled. "Already she knows that it was Peter Heriot," she said to herself. "How can that be, I wonder?"

In another cabin on the deck below, a small starched figure with tears streaming from its eyes wept over a brown hand that it held pressed tightly against its lined forehead: "Again I see thee, O Sahib and Light of my eyes," it sobbed.

Peter Heriot smiled, though very kindly: "Here, what's

it all about ? " he said. " Dry up, Nazir Ali ! What did you think was going to happen to me ? Die ? No, I never felt fitter in my life. Here, hurry up, because Robertson Sahib will be along with all his kit in a minute."

So Nazir Ali made one gigantic sniff, and bent to his task. Not now the moment to relate his near escape from death only averted by the intervention of little white mem-sahib. That would come presently, when all the little strings for ties and other devices for securing the comfort of the beloved were in force. And Robertson Sahib not possessing a servant of his own, the field was his—Nazir Ali's. He gave up his mind to the task in hand—namely that of appropriating every available drawer and peg for his own sahib.

. . . . . .

" Who's your little friend with the snub nose and the adorable dimple ? "

Peter Heriot, very brown and lean and smooth as to the head, stretched his long length in a deck chair and glanced round at Mrs. Kemp who was sitting beside him working.

Mrs. Kemp did not answer for a minute or two. But her heart gave a great leap. It was Joan's death sentence that she heard. If Peter Heriot once set his eyes on a woman, he never took them off again until he had got what he wanted. And, eternal shame to her own sex, he got it so dreadfully, dreadfully easily.

" Oh, that's a Mrs. Carne," she said, " just lately married and on her way out to join her husband."

" Really ? " But Peter Heriot chuckled in his throat. That was a gentle hint and no mistake ! " Who's Carne ? " he asked.

" Well—I think he's something in the law," prevaricated Mrs. Kemp, feeling terribly ashamed of herself.

" Oh, really. Where does he practise—do you know ? Do you mind a pipe ? " Peter Heriot's eyes were mischievous as he groped in his pocket.

" No, I don't a bit. Do smoke it. No, I don't really know where Mr. Carne practises, Karnmore, I believe my husband said."

" Oh ! " Peter Heriot shaded a match with a very well kept hand, drew heavily on the pipe between his teeth, put his foot on the still smouldering match, and blew out a cloud.

Then he laughed out loud. "You dear! Don't look so frightened," he said.

Mrs. Kemp got scarlet: "I'm not in the least frightened," she said indignantly.

"Then why do you look it?"

"I don't! At least. . ." Mrs. Kemp's eyes softened. "Peter, do leave Mrs. Carne alone," she said.

"Now, I like that!" Peter Heriot spoke with mock resentment. "I simply ask who your little friend with the snub nose is, and you ask me to leave her alone. What have I done to deserve it? I ask you!"

"Well—you know what you are! At least—that sounds unkind. I don't mean it unkindly, Peter. You can't help it but you are awful where women are concerned. I know they are the stupid ones really for being taken in by you. But you do lay yourself out when you needn't. Don't take any notice of Mrs. Carne. She's very young, and I expect dreadfully impressionable."

"And you're afraid she'll succumb to my charms, eh?" Major Heriot's smile was very pleasant as he took his pipe from between his teeth.

"Yes, to be quite frank I am." Mrs. Kemp laid her work down in her lap, and laughed. "I know it's very bad for you to be told so, Peter," she said, "but you are dreadfully attractive and you must know it."

"Not at all." But Major Heriot's eyes laughed. There was nobody quite like Mrs. Kemp, he thought. "You're very solicitous for me all of a sudden," he said.

Mrs. Kemp took up her work again: "Not for you but for the girl whose welfare I have at heart," she said, and there was a note in her voice that had not been there before.

Peter Heriot looked up: "You're really worried," he said quickly.

"Yes I am. You see, it's like this. I can't explain it exactly, but Joan Carne's circumstances are rather different from other people's. She has lived a very secluded life. And I don't know that she is particularly happy in her marriage—don't breathe it, but I have that impression. So if anyone like you comes across her path she might succumb easily."

"You are very flattering." But although Peter Heriot spoke mockingly his eyes went suddenly grave. His old

friend was really upset—how odd of her! And why was it that his own mind had concerned itself so persistently with Joan Carne since he had first noticed her the day before? He had been coming back from his bath and she had passed him on the stairs; and as he had brushed by her, purposely not taking any notice of her, in case she might feel shy, although as he could see out of the tail of his eyes she looked uncommonly sweet in a blue dressing gown and cap to match, she had made a little gasp and turning had bolted down the stairs again. Like a little terrified rabbit, thought Major Heriot turning and looking after her. And now there was all this about her from his oldest friend—odd, to say the least of it. "Well, I promise you I won't bring up my reserves of fascination without giving you due notice, will that do?" he said, and he smiled with a flash of white teeth.

"Yes, that will do," said Mrs. Kemp. Then she gave a little sound of impatience. Joan was approaching, coming straight for them. How utterly unfortunate—now she would have to introduce them.

"I'm so sorry," Joan was stammering and very red. "I'm interrupting you but it's your old servant—he isn't very well"—she spoke to Major Heriot. "Oh, how do you do," as Mrs. Kemp murmured something, "I forgot I didn't know you, I feel as if I did quite well, though, because of Nazir Ali. No, it's like this, he gets these funny attacks and goes quite cold and I happened to be passing your cabin and I felt sure you would want to know. I could see him leaning against the top berth, I saw him do it once before, so I knew it was that."

All the time that Joan was speaking Major Heriot was looking at her. What an exquisite mouth! "I'll come along at once," he said, and turned to go with her. "It's most awfully nice of you to concern yourself with my servant," he said as they walked down the deck together. "He raves about you,—says you saved his life, and I don't know what else. And I really am very grateful to you, because I don't know what I should do without the old man."

"But I simply love him," said Joan, and there was a soft mistiness in her eyes. "I don't know what it is about him but I have a sort of feeling that I have known him before in

another world. Do you know? And do you know that I rather have the same feeling about you?"

"Have you?" Peter Heriot turned his eyes, blue as lapis lazuli, on the girl at his side.

"Yes, it's very odd." They had reached the companion door and Joan halted and looked up at the man beside her. "Now, for instance, as I am standing beside you I feel that it is only a continuation of heaps of times that I have stood beside you before. Do you know the feeling? No I expect you don't . . ." Joan suddenly got scarlet. What was she saying to this man who was a total stranger? He would think she was mad.

"Don't stop," said Peter Heriot.

"I've finished what I was saying," said Joan shivering.

"You're cold."

"No, I'm not." Joan gripped her hands together. When would this man stop looking at her? She suddenly felt that she was looking in at a furnace door and that one of the blue flames from its white hot heart had leaped out and seared her. She shivered again.

"Well, we'll get along, shall we?" Major Heriot removed his eyes from the quivering face at his side, and began to descend the stairs that led to the hurricane deck cabin. Joan walked along beside him. What was the matter with her, that she suddenly felt like this? It was like being flung into ice cold water when you were burning hot. You had to grip your teeth together to prevent them from chattering. . .

"Hullo, Nazir Ali—what's all this about?" they had reached the cabin at the far end of the corridor, and Major Heriot stepped over the brass door rail, leaving Joan outside.

"Bimar? Kya?"* He spoke in the vernacular.

"Nahin, Sahib!" Nazir Ali salaamed rather reproachfully. Bimar when he had his sahib's work to attend to! "Kubbi nahin!"† he said.

"Oh . . . he says he's all right." Major Heriot levelled his keen eyes on Joan. Was it an excuse to get to know him, he wondered? He hated himself for the suspicion as he saw the sensitive face flame.

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* ill—what. † never.

"Why . . . you must have thought that I did it on purpose," she stammered.

"Not at all: why should you? No, —what has probably happened is that he was seedy for a minute or two, and he won't say. But I'll get the doctor to overhaul him again before we get to the Red Sea. I'm afraid that that is what is amiss with the old man—his heart is groggy. I rather suspected it was once at home, and then as it didn't recur I thought I was mistaken. But I hope it isn't so—he's such a topping old chap."

"Are you fond of him?" asked Joan. She had again forgotten where she was, and stood in the corridor leaning against the wall.

"Yes, very," said Major Heriot, his eyes again on Joan's face.

"Oh." Joan fell silent again. Then she looked up. "Don't stare so," she said, and her lower lip began to tremble.

"Why not?"

"Because it makes me feel most frightful," said Joan.

"But why should it?" Peter Heriot had thrown all his scruples to the wind. He wanted this girl and he was going to have her. She was delicious with her baby's face and bobbed hair. And after all, it was only for a fortnight, no real harm could be done. As for the stupid, stodgy, probably middle-aged, husband fuddling about in the middle of a lot of stupid briefs, it was up to him to look after his wife if he valued her. No wife of his should ever make a voyage alone, resolved Major Heriot, remembering many voyages of his own, and firmly determined, partly because of them, never to marry. "Why should it?" he asked again.

"I don't know," said Joan, and her eyes were riveted on the blue ones as if they had been fastened there. They swayed a little forward and there were deep shadows under her eyes: "You're holding me," she said, "it's cruel of you . . . let me go."

Major Heriot smiled a little and straightened his back. He looked over her head. "Yes, I value him very much indeed," he said, "there is nothing in this world like the devotion of an old servant."

Joan's eyes slowly detached themselves, and lost their sleepy look. Then she laughed a little, falteringly.

"How very odd," she said. "I feel exactly like you feel when you have had gas. Do you know? All muddly and yet as if you had been somewhere else. What did you say? I didn't quite hear."

"Nothing important," Major Heriot laughed. "Only something about Nazir Ali. Come, let's go upstairs again as the old man's all right."

They walked together along the deck to where Mrs. Kemp still sat knitting. Joan waited, lingering, rather uncomfortably. Wouldn't Mrs. Kemp ask her to sit down, she thought? She always made rather a point of not forcing herself upon what she gathered was rather an officially important little clique, but now she had a mad feeling that she must become one of it. Everybody else seemed suddenly stale and useless: Nora with her good-tempered chatter about her husband and the station in the Central Provinces to which she was going: the missionary doctor lady with her kind colourless talk about the Mission Field. It was all so flavourless. Joan suddenly felt that she must set her teeth into something that would burn and scorch and sear....

But Mrs. Kemp spoke—very kindly, but none the less determinedly: "Your friend Mrs. Lane has just been asking for you, dear," she said. "Over there." She made a little gesture with her beautifully dressed head.

So Joan had to go. But she went with a set face, and thumping heart. Mrs. Kemp had been kind to her in the past—she had, and of course she was not going to forget it. But why shouldn't she have stayed and talked to Major Heriot?—he would have liked her to—she knew he would. There was something about them that was the same—as if they had been joined by a live wire. Joan's heart was bitter and resentful as she sat down again by Nora Lane: "Why did you send for me—or rather, tell Mrs. Kemp you wanted me?" she asked.

Nora Lane went straight to the point. "Because I am fond of you and I don't want you to make a fool of yourself over Peter Heriot," she said. "Heaps of women do—he is sort of magnetic, I don't know what it is about him, but even I can feel it and he isn't a bit my type. But you're just the sort of person that he would like to play about with—

small and trusting, and all that. And he's just the sort of man you would go on your knees to, strong and silent and Ethel Delly to the life. Keep out of his way—he'll let you if he sees you are determined to, but if he doesn't he'll play you like the stupid gullible little fish that you are. And then you'll get to Bombay and he'll tear the hook out of your throat and not care an atom, and you'll die with the misery of it."

Joan tried to be dignified: "You seem to forget that I am married," she said.

"Married!" Nora Lane laughed scornfully. "Being married doesn't prevent you from falling in love with someone else, you hopeless little goose! Besides, Peter Heriot doesn't care for unmarried women, he says they are insipid."

"How do you know?" asked Joan furiously.

"Everyone knows about Peter Heriot," returned Nora Lane calmly. "He writes beautifully and he is a magnificent soldier, but he is a devil where women are concerned. Mrs. Kemp knows it too, I saw her look after you both when you went down the deck together and she was frightfully fed up at it. You'll annoy her awfully if you let him hang round you."

Joan tried to keep the fury she felt out of her voice: "Do leave my affairs alone," she said.

"All right." But Nora Lane flushed in spite of herself. "Only don't expect me to be sorry for you when it's all over and you are trying to put an end to yourself," she said.

CHAPTER XIII.

By the time the *Nerona* steamed into the shelter of the long breakwater at Port Said, Joan Khan had got thinner. Her small face was smaller, and her big eyes were bigger. Both Mrs. Kemp and Nora Lane saw it, and both raged inwardly. But both were utterly powerless to do anything, for the troublesome part was that there was nothing to take hold of. After one day of taking a good deal of notice of Joan Carne, Major Heriot had suddenly become entirely taciturn and had left her rigorously to herself. As a matter of fact his feelings had undergone a violent revulsion. There was something about this trusting pathetic little figure that attracted him very seriously. There was no longer any desire in him to make violent love to her—get all he could out of her, and then fling her aside. No ; to his acute annoyance he felt that he wanted to take care of her, to do little things like help her choose books out of the ship's library, carry her soup to her at eleven o'clock, fish her chair out of a stack of others, always a very bothering job—and carry it round the deck until he had found just the very spot where she would get all the sun when she wanted it, and all the breeze when she wanted that. And as Major Heriot recognised these desires as symptomatic of a state into which, up to the present, he had never had the folly to drift, he withdrew entirely to himself, and even sat a little way away from the Kemps, giving as an excuse the fact that he wanted to make notes for his new book. Major Heriot's books on Frontier life were rapidly becoming famous, so his desire for solitude was respected, and he spent his mornings, and most of his afternoons, entirely alone.

But Joan was in despair. This man had swum on to her horizon like a wonderful new star suddenly swims into the little silver circle of the telescope at which a patient and expectant astronomer has spent many weary years, waiting.

This was what she had been waiting for—this was what it all meant, the sort of feeling she had had after tea in Streatham when she had gone out on the Common, and watched the trains tearing by; when she had been to the cinema and the orchestra had played something sad; when she had waked in the early morning and had heard the birds calling to one another in the virginia creeper. And she thought that the feeling would have been stilled by marriage. Marriage! Joan rolled over on to her face and bit her pillow. Marriage! in her case a horrible chaining of herself to a person that she loathed. There, it was out! She hated him. She despised him. He had taken her, all innocent as she was, and had rolled her in the mud. He had pretended that he loved her. He didn't—he didn't know what love was, he had only loved himself and had got hold of her because he felt that she just happened to be the person who would satisfy him at the moment. And now she belonged to him for ever. All this glory, all this unspeakable rapture of feeling yourself small and dependent, like a baby just able to walk who clings to the hem of its mother's dress and drags itself on to its feet and stares upwards into the beloved face—so beloved, and yet so infinitely far—all this was of no avail. Not only of no avail, it was sin: sin, because she was the wife of another man. And if she had waited—waited for God's good time, because God arranged these things—it was only when you did them yourself that they went wrong—she might have been the wife of Major Heriot. For Joan knew—knew as surely as if it had been shouted in her ear—that Major Heriot had some sort of feeling for her. Not in the least the same sort of feeling as she had for him—but a feeling. And now—now what? Joan sat up in the berth to which she had flown in a mad craving for solitude, and stared out at the Mediterranean. It was blue—blue and like glass—and the big hull cut through it very swiftly and very silently—they were putting on speed so as to get into Port Said before nightfall. And Port Said meant one stage nearer India and India meant the man that she loathed and feared—probably there would be a letter from him there, as well as letters from home. What was she to do? *What was she to do?* She got down from her berth and began to move about the cabin. Somehow she felt that if she did not move about she would go mad.

"Hullo! Sorry! I didn't know you were in the cabin." Nora Lane with an armful of books pushed through the curtain, and then backed half out again. "Some well-meaning person has lent me all these," she said ruefully, "and I wanted to get rid of them. But I'll come back again."

"No, don't go." Joan held out a trembling and detaining hand. "If you go away and leave me alone, I shall throw myself out of the porthole," she said.

Nora laid down the books: "Don't be a little fool," she said, brusquely. "Tell me about it—although I expect I know it already. Here, I'll come up beside you: give me a hand. Mother Fitzgerald is snoring in a deckchair, so we're safe for a time."

The two girls sat facing one another on the long white berth: Nora curled her legs up underneath her. "Carry on," she said, and she spoke very kindly—Joan looked ghastly.

Joan choked, then caught her breath: "I won't tell you that I have fallen in love with Major Heriot," she said, "because you know it already, and you were the first person to tell me not to. But I want to tell you that my husband is a native."

"What!"

"Yes, I know. But don't kill me, Nora!" Joan broke into the most awful sobbing.

"But" .... Nora Lane had whitened.

"Yes, I know. But Nora, how could I tell? How can any girl tell who has been brought up like I was? We hadn't any connection with India, I mean to say all our people were lawyers and things like that. And we were awfully poor—we didn't mix with people who come from abroad—there were heaps of them in Streatham, but we never met them. And so I just did it not knowing."

"But didn't your people mind?"

"My brother did, but I wouldn't listen to him."

"Good heavens!" Nora fell silent. How perfectly appalling! In spite of her violent efforts to control it she felt a shuddering abhorrence for Joan. "Does anyone know?" she asked.

"Only Mrs. Kemp, and she promised not to tell anyone."

"But what about your name? It's spelt like an English one."

"It ought to be K.H.A.N.," said Joan, shivering.

"Well!" Nora Lane stared rather absently about the cabin. Why had Joan told her?—she thought angrily. It seemed so brutal to drop her like a hot coal. And yet what else was there to do? Supposing, for instance, they should ever happen to be in the same station? "What is your husband?" she asked.

"A barrister."

"Oh." Probably a third rate pleader, thought Mrs. Lane, whose uncle had been a High Court Judge.

Joan felt the chill in the cabin and she flung out shaking hands: "Nora, you're not going not to have anything more to do with me?" she cried, and there was horror in her voice.

"Well," Nora Lane uncurled her legs from under her and prepared to get off the berth; "well, it sounds most frightfully brutal, but I think I am," she said. "You see, I liked you awfully, and it's sort of turned me up. We can't ever be real friends after this, and I don't care to have someone who's only half a friend. It would always be coming up between us—something that we couldn't discuss. You don't understand it, but then you've never been in India. It's full of it—things Indians do, and think and feel. And English people almost invariably do and think and feel the opposite things exactly. So how could we be friends? We couldn't. It's impossible."

"But then, what is to become of me?" said Joan, livid.

Nora dropped lightly on to the little square of carpet: "You'll have to try and make friends with someone who doesn't feel quite about the Indian as I do," she said. "You see, my husband is in the Army—in the Indian Army, and he knows the enormous gulf that is between us. They prefer it so—the fine ones. They resent one of their own sort marrying one of us, as much as we resent one of our sort marrying one of them. And you've done the unforgivable thing from both points of view. I know this sounds brutal, but I never can put things mildly when I feel them badly, and I feel this frightfully, I don't mind telling you so." Nora turned and walked out of the cabin.

Joan saw her go with a numb stupid feeling in her brain. Her first friend made in this gorgeous wonderful new life of hers! That hadn't lasted long! And this was only the

beginning. She had got to go through life like this, like a person stricken with an awful disease, not an ordinary disease that you would die from and that people would pity you for and rally round you until the end; no, a disease like leprosy, where you lived on and on and on all the time people were trying to get out of your way. A pariah—a diseased pariah—skulking round corners, hiding when decent people came into sight, choosing the night to emerge rather than the day. Outcast!

Nora came back into the cabin just in time. It was such an awfully easy way to go, Joan had thought. Heaps of room if you squeezed, and by the time they found out that you had gone you would really have gone—

"Joan!" Nora screamed in spite of herself, and flung herself on the crushed skirt. Joan was half way through, and fighting to get right through. "Help!" She turned her head and screamed into the corridor.

Major Heriot, strolling down to wash for lunch, heard the scream and flung himself through the blowing curtain. With one foot on the lower berth he thrust his lean hands through the small brass bound circle and fastened his fingers on Joan's shoulders. He drew her back into safety.

"Nearly gone that time," he said. "And it's an odd thing, but it's the second time I've had to do that. A kiddy on the last voyage dropped its teddy bear out of the window while it was supposed to be having its nap, and I came by just in time to see a pair of fat legs waving. Gad, my heart absolutely stopped beating. And the only thing the little beggar could do when I'd got him in again, was to batter my face with his fists." Major Heriot laughed a little breathlessly.

The two girls hid their faces in their hands. Joan began to sob out loud.

"Well, I'll get along to lunch," he said, and he thrust his hands into his pockets. There was some frightful mystery here, he thought, and he would find it out later, but at present the only thing was to keep quiet. The girl with the sensible face would do that without being told. Mrs. Carne would do so also for her own sake. He stepped over the brass footrail into the corridor.

Left alone, Nora stood on the lower berth and dragged

at the trembling hands that Joan held rigid over streaming eyes: "Joan, I'm sorry I was such a brute," she cried; "I came back to tell you. Oh thank God! thank God that I did!"

But Joan lay passive in the penitent arms. As a matter of fact she felt only half conscious of what had just taken place. She knew that she had suddenly felt a mad feeling in her head and that unless she did something to stop it she would go really mad. And then she felt something like claws in her shoulders, and Major Heriot's face was in front of her. And then—oh then, there was this mad overmastering desire for sleep! night after night she had lain awake, and now it was coming over her in a glorious drowsy cloud . . . . "Oh Nora, do let me go to sleep," she said. "Shut the door, there's an angel, and tell them that I don't want any lunch."

So Nora covered her tenderly over with the folded blanket that always lay at the foot of the white berth, and she reached up and very carefully unhooked the little brass chain that held up the thick slab of glass. Then she turned the electric fan round so that it should blow straight on Joan, and she went out and shut the door quietly behind her.

. . . . . .

Major Heriot was waiting for Nora when she came up from lunch. He was standing leaning over the rail, his elbows on it, his head resting in his hands. When he saw her coming he straightened himself and knocked out his pipe on the rail, and put it into his pocket.

"I want to have a little talk with you," he said. "Do you mind? We'll go round here, it's quiet, and the people who belong to these chairs have settled in to play bridge. so they won't be back for a bit. By the way, we've never been introduced, but I know who you are. And I expect you know my name, do you? People on these old tubs always find out who everyone else is."

"Yes, I know you quite well," said Nora smiling.

"Oh, well then, that's all right. Well, it's about Mrs. Carne—look, here we are, well out of everyone else's way. It's about Mrs. Carne. Tell me, will you, as much as you can about her." Major Heriot was leaning back, his head resting on his linked fingers.

Nora hesitated:

"I think I'm entitled to know, you know," he said, his eyes, very blue, on her face.

"Well." Nora spoke, flushing deeply. "I don't really know very much more than you do," she said, "except that she is married to a native. That was what caused that awful scene before lunch. She told me, and I was a fiend and turned on her."

"She is married to a native!"

"Yes."

"But . . . how unspeakably ghastly!" Major Heriot unclasped his hands from behind his head and got up.

"Yes I know. And I think she is beginning to know it too. And that's what made her suddenly feel that she couldn't live any longer," said Nora simply.

Heriot sat down again. "Does anyone else in this ship know it?"

"No, I don't think so. You see, her name has been entered as Carne, and that has given rise to the mistake," said Nora.

"I see . . . . Who is he, do you know?"

"A barrister, I believe."

"And where are they going to? Or rather, where is she going to join him?"

"I don't know for certain. But at the very beginning of the voyage, before I knew that she hadn't married an Englishman, she said something about Karnmore," said Nora.

"Oh!" Major Heriot got up. "Good God!" he said.

"Yes, I know." Nora clasped her hands round her knees. Then she glanced up quietly: "Why is it so awful?" she said. "I feel it just like you do. But why should we feel it like that? Heaps of them are quite nice. And my husband thinks the world of his native officers. And one's servants! Look at that dear old man of yours, for instance. He worships you, and you are probably devoted to him. Why is it that one has this awful feeling of horror when one hears of anything like this marriage of Mrs. Carne's? If they are the same as we are, which everyone is always telling us they are, why does it matter if we marry them?"

"Because they are not the same as we are really." Heriot pushed his chair a little further away from the rail and put one well shod foot on the first rung of it. "They want to

be, and perhaps one day they will be; that remains to be seen. But at present they are not. And why we get that feeling of horror when we hear of the marriage of a white girl to one of them is that we know their idea of womanhood. You don't probably, no woman does, and if you did you wouldn't understand it. It will take years—centuries of civilization—to beat into their brains the true idea of woman; something precious to be taken care of, cherished, loved." He dragged a penknife out of the pocket of his blazer and began fiercely to scrape out his still smouldering pipe.

Nora looked up and stared, then she dropped her eyes into her lap. Major Heriot had met her amazed glance.

"Yes, I know," he said; "you're thinking, I expect, that this comes rather oddly from me. I know of course that I haven't always been what I ought to have been. But perhaps," he said, and he smiled a little whimsically, as he said it—"perhaps there's a certain amount of truth in the old adage, 'Give a dog a bad name . . . .' Anyhow, that's not the point now; the point now is, what are we going to do to try and make Mrs. Khan happy?" There was a boyish, almost pleading look on the clear cut mouth under the short moustache.

Nora still stared at her lap. Her brain was in a whirl. Was this the tall, cynical, almost alarmingly good-looking man who walked about the ship as if it belonged to him, who sat for hours at a time in deepest colloquy with the only General that the voyage could boast, who chose his friends from High Court Judges and Commissioners and their wives—Nora had a very wholesome respect for Indian officialdom—to whose credit it was mooted abroad that he had had more women in love with him than he could count on both hands? No, not possible!

Major Heriot sat down again, and clasped his hands loosely between his knees. He could guess what was going on in Mrs. Lane's mind. "I've knocked you all of a heap," he said smiling quietly, "and that's the result of having an unsavoury reputation. But do believe me, I only mean now what's fair and square. If any harm came to Mrs. Khan through me, I should never have a happy moment again."

But Nora still stared on, for all her being was one chant of joy. It was suddenly clear to her. Major Heriot had

fallen in love with Joan. He didn't know it nor, of course, did Joan. But he had . . . and this was how it would end: Joan would marry him eventually. Something would happen to Mr. Mohammed Khan . . he would die, or fall out of a train or something . . . anyhow he would be cleared off the scene. And then Joan would find the happiness she had so terribly missed. Nora's morality suddenly lost itself in a whirl of romance.

"I believe you absolutely," she cried, "and I think that if you take Mrs. Khan under your wing for the rest of the voyage it will be the best thing that can possibly happen to her. Take her on shore at Port Said to begin with," (Nora stared excitedly out to where the faint yellow gleam of the sandy promontory began to make itself seen through the haze, and the wavering outline of roofs and minarets showed against the blue sky), "she will love that because it's something quite new—I always remember what I felt like the first time I saw it. And then there'll be the Canal, and we're sure to have a dance. And Suez . . . perhaps we shall be allowed on shore there: and then Aden. , ."

Major Heriot's smile showed in a brief flash of white teeth. What strange creatures women were, he thought, as he looked at the glowing face of the girl opposite him, all aglow as he knew perfectly well, with the idea that he might, given sufficient opportunity, fall permanently in love with Mrs. Khan. No thought of the present husband, no, he was undesirable, therefore he must die, or somehow be cleared off the scene when the right moment arrived! And yet if he were to make any assault on the virtue of the girl opposite to him, how would it be received? With fury, undisguised! How did they reconcile it he wondered, as he wandered back to his cabin and to the typewriter that he had seriously neglected for the last three days! Somehow it all sounded so tame—the book he was writing. Anything justified so long as it ended in marriage, he supposed, as he took off his coat and hung it up carefully on the end of his berth. But how could this end in marriage, even if he wanted it to? Besides, did he want it to? Joan Khan certainly stirred his heart as it had not been stirred for a very long time. But there is a vast difference between the stirring of your heart at the sight of something small and defenceless, and the picking up and

shouldering of that small and defenceless thing for the rest of its life, he thought, dragging the carpet stool towards him and sitting down on it rather heavily. Besides, Joan Khan already had a husband; and that in a society where polygamy is not allowed settled things once and for all. But it was brutally hard on the poor little thing, all the same, he thought, as he gnawed the stem of the pipe in his mouth.

And then the curtain of his cabin door was suddenly agitated, and Joan herself stood in front of him.

"I want to speak to you," she said.

"Certainly." Major Heriot got up, and unhooked his coat from the end of the berth. "I always work without a coat," he smiled, but he kept his eyes turned from Joan. What a pathetically ravaged face!

"Can I say it here, and then go away again?"

"Say anything you want to here, by all means but don't go away again," said Major Heriot turning round and facing Joan.

"I am the wife of a native," said Joan with bursting throat, "and just now when you dragged me back I was trying to throw myself out of the porthole. I don't think I really meant to but I was doing it. And my name is spelt a different way from what I pretend it is. I pretend it's spelt C.A.R.N.E. It isn't, it's K.H.A.N." Joan broke into wild sobbing.

"What makes you tell me?" said Peter Heriot.

"I don't know . . . that's just what I don't know—because it kills me to do it. But I feel that I have to because afterwards, if you . . . ."

"Yes? . . . ."

"If you ever got so that I should be your friend, and then found out by yourself, you would loathe me for ever," said Joan with wide open streaming eyes.

"And what makes you think that I should ever be your friend?" said Peter Heriot, taking the two small clutching hands in his.

"I feel it here . . ." said Joan, and because she could not free her hands, she carried one of his brown ones, and laid it on her bursting heart.

There was a little silence. Peter Heriot looked out over Joan's head to where the coast line of the foulest city in the world stretched and lost herself in a hazy distance.

"It was brave of you to tell me," he said. "And I thank you very much for doing it. Although as a matter of fact I already knew, because Mrs. Lane told me. No, I made her," as Joan flung up her head; "it was only right after what happened just before lunch. And that reminds me; have you had any lunch?"

Joan had dropped her head again; she shook it without speaking.

"Well then, you go and have some at once," said Peter Heriot, his eyelids quivering as they rested on the little white parting that ran so neatly through the brown curls. Another pair of eyes had once rested on that white parting: but with a very different expression in their depths.

"I couldn't eat it," choked Joan beginning to cry again.

"Yes, you could. Especially if I came and sat by you. Couldn't you now?" There was a twinkle in the blue eyes.

"Oh, yes, I could then," said Joan, smiling like a child through her tears.

But when they arrived in the dining saloon Joan bent her head and ate her lunch in silence. Her heart had suddenly begun to ache intolerably. What was the good of all this? she thought bitterly. This man unlike any other man she had ever met, in his entire perfection. His hands, his voice, utterly different from anything that Joan had ever seen before, except perhaps coming out of a Club in Piccadilly, on one of her rare expeditions up to town. A type unknown to Streatham anyhow; Joan remembered the few men she had known there, with their high valuation of themselves.

"'Shun." Major Heriot was watching her.

'What? . . . why?" Joan laughed shyly, stammering.

"'Shun' means 'Attention!' It's a word of command to troops when they need to be called to order. And when you let your thoughts get hold of you you need to be called to order too. Now you've finished, and you feel better, don't you?" His eyes were on the small face.

"Yes, I do, thank you *very* much for sitting with me," said Joan, faintly flushing.

"And now—what are you going to do with yourself for the rest of the afternoon?"

Joan twisted herself round in the revolving chair, and put a cold hand on one of the white pillars that ran tapering

from the dining saloon to the lounge above it. "I don't really quite know," she said. "But I shall be quite all right. I couldn't bear you to feel that because of what has happened today you have to bother about me. I expect I shall go to sleep again," she said suddenly, and her soft mouth suddenly lost itself in a yawn.

"The very best possible thing." Peter Heriot laughed aloud. "After tea we shall probably be in Port Said. And then if you would care for it I will take you on shore."

"On shore! With you?"

"Yes, why not?" But although Peter Heriot laughed and nodded and took the little hands held passionately out to him and squeezed them cheerfully, he felt a little uneasy as Joan vanished radiantly down the long corridor. Was it wise, this? He wondered as he stretched himself at full length in his deck chair. He had begun it out of kindness of heart really, touched to the quick by the abandonment of despair that had made Joan Khan try to put an end to herself. Also for some other reason, an odd quickening of his own heart to which he was not accustomed. Also he had been terribly upset by hearing that she was the wife of a native. But now the same thought that had fastened tormentingly on Joan fastened equally tormentingly on him: what was the good of it all? Even if he had his feelings entirely under control, had she? And supposing she hadn't, what utter misery it would mean for both of them; for it wouldn't be at all the usual boardship flirtation, both parties knowing the rule of the game to a nicety, and timing the whole thing to end with a flourish the night before getting into Bombay. But then again, how could he leave her to her own thoughts for the rest of the voyage? She would probably try to put an end to herself again, and he would feel directly responsible. Peter Heriot moved uneasily in his chair. He must talk it over with somebody—Mrs. Kemp—no, she would be certain to be resting. Major Heriot glanced over to where she sat beside a heavily sleeping husband, her hands moving wakefully over her knitting. Some unspoken message passed between them and she glanced across, and smiled faintly. Then she got up dropping the mass of beautifully coloured silk into the bagging canvas of her chair.

"You wanted to speak to me?"

"Yes I did, badly, but I didn't like to come across because of the Commissioner." Peter Heriot got up. "Sit down here, it won't be wanted until after tea anyhow."

Mrs. Kemp sat down: "We haven't seen much of you lately, Peter!" she remarked whimsically.

"No, well, the fact of the matter is this; I feel your disapproving eyes on me and it makes me nervous," said Peter Heriot.

"You! Nervous!" Mrs. Kemp laughed musically.

"No, really. You see it's like this." Peter Heriot groped in his pocket. "Do you mind a pipe? Thanks! Well, it's like this. You know you asked me not to have anything to do with Mrs. Carne. Well, I did honestly try not to, at least after one day of talking to her I did. I admit I let myself go for one day as you probably saw, and I am very sorry I did now. However, that's neither here nor there. This morning she tried to throw herself out of her porthole. Mercifully Mrs. Lane got there in time and gave tongue, and as I happened to be passing it was all right. Well, then Mrs. Lane and I had a little buck and she told me about her marriage. Then Mrs. Carne came herself to my cabin and told me herself, (don't look so horrified, I was quite properly dressed—I was working, as a matter of fact). Well, of course she was fearfully upset and all that, and I hustled her off to have some lunch. And then she went off to go to sleep, the best possible thing, and I came up to do the same. But somehow it doesn't come off," he ended with a twist of his lip.

"No, of course it doesn't," Mrs. Kemp laughed rather shortly. "Your conscience is awake, Peter, and it is a pity that it didn't wake up before. Why should Mrs. Carne suddenly try to throw herself out of her porthole? It is nothing new for her to realise that she is married to a native."

Peter Heriot shifted a little uneasily in his chair. Mrs. Kemp was going to give him a lecture, and somehow he felt singularly disinclined for it. However—he stretched out his long legs and waited.

"You see, the fact of the matter is this, Peter. If you see a good looking woman about you cannot leave her alone. It's happened thousands and thousands of times before. How many voyages have you made without carrying on a desperate flirtation with someone? Not one, I am convinced.

And now, you see, you have come across something rather different in Mrs. Khan. She is young, and impressionable, and has of course fallen desperately in love with you, and I don't blame her for that." Mrs. Kemp burst out laughing as Heriot bowed neatly. "But the fact remains you are morally responsible for Joan Khan as long as she remains in this ship, and I hope you realise it, that's all."

Peter Heriot got up and leant a straight back against the rail, and looked down at the woman in the deck chair beside him: "How did you first come across Joan Carne?" he asked.

Mrs. Kemp hesitated, then she clasped her hands loosely in her lap, and stared straight in front of her. "It was in the Lakes, when she was on her honeymoon," she said. "And it wasn't possible for me not to take some notice of anyone who looked so—so—so—profoundly wretched," said Mrs. Kemp suddenly flushing scarlet. "Jim said afterwards that I oughtn't to have done it. But I had to. But now I wish I hadn't. And all the time I knew that it was a deadly mistake for her to travel out to India in the same ship as you."

"And why?"

"Because she is just the type of girl that a man of your age almost invariably makes a fool of himself over."

"But wouldn't you rather like to see me make a fool of myself over someone?" asked Peter Heriot quietly.

"Not over anyone like Joan Khan, because she would suffer so frightfully too," returned Mrs. Kemp. "I don't mind a bit about you—it would do you good. But that sweet little soft thing—I can't bear to think of it."

"You're very hard on me all of a sudden."

"No, I'm not. But somehow this worries me fearfully. I feel all embroiled in it somehow. It's tragedy—there's nothing funny about it. Joan Khan is the wife of a man she loathes, she has got to go and live with him. Can you imagine what that means—the sordidness of it? the horror of loneliness of it? . . ." Mrs. Kemp broke off.

"I can imagine it all a good deal better than you can," said Peter Heriot, and he levelled his eyes on the stretch of sunlit sea through which they were cutting their way with only the faintest whisper of a splash of the tiny waves against the hull.

Mrs. Kemp flushed again: "Yes, I know," she said, and

then she stopped abruptly. "But all I mean is this, Peter: don't go out of your way to attract that poor unhappy child. Be nice to her, of course; we all will. But don't lay yourself out as you know you can; it will only make it the more cruelly hard for her afterwards. She has got to live this dreadful life that she has chosen for herself, and the more she sees of men like you, the more intolerable it will be to her."

Peter Heriot was silent for a second or two. Then he stooped and rapped out his pipe on one of the lower rungs of the rail. "I should have thought you would be rather relieved to see me well tied up with someone I couldn't marry," he said. "It would make me thoroughly wretched, and surely that would rather amuse you? You seem to think that's about all I'm capable of, the harrowing up of the female heart for my own gratification."

Mrs. Kemp laughed as she laid a beautifully manicured hand on the blue sleeve: "No, I don't want you to be wretched, Peter; I should be a fiend if I did, I am much too fond of you. But I must confess in this case I am thinking far more of Joan Carne than of you You can take care of yourself, she can't. Look at her marriage, for instance, surely that shows that plainly enough. I do think that there is heaps more in you than the ordinary flirtatious side that you usually display on a voyage, but the point is this: are you going to show it? If you are I can trust Joan Carne to you with perfect confidence, but if you aren't I shall warn her against you, I shall indeed."

"And then what?"

"She will avoid you, I hope."

"And supposing she doesn't?"

"Well, then it is her own fault," said Mrs. Kemp.

"Well, is she trusted to me or is she not?" asked Peter Heriot after a little pause during which his blue eyes dwelt on the faintly flushing face in front of him. He loved Mrs. Kemp, she was the best and truest friend he had ever had.

"Yes, I think she is," said Mrs. Kemp and she let her hand slip down on to the brown one that lay on the rail. "But, oh, Peter, if she withstands you, she has a heart of stone."

"Well, we'll hope that she has," returned Peter Heriot cheerfully. But although his voice was cheerful his eyes were not.

CHAPTER XIV.

The dying sun was stabbing the evening sky with a thousand blades of crimson as the *Nerona* finally came to anchor behind the long breakwater. Port Said looks at her best in the evening—the fading light is kind to the tawdry houses and to the dirty unkempt Egyptians that plaster the quay and swarm over the little bobbing flat bottomed boats that cluster round the big liners.

"Sahib, sahib!" the cry came from fifty hoarse throats as the weird figures in their flowing djibbahs stared with black glancing eyes up at the unromantic, typically English faces that stared back, some with curiosity, some with boredom, over the rail of the *Nerona*. Joan's was one of the faces that stared with curiosity. This was something really new and exciting—the East—the East as she had imagined it to be—full of romance and wonder. Suddenly it all seemed as if it was going to be better, this new life of hers. If the people and the surroundings all looked so different here, at Port Said, only the Gateway of the East, how much more different would they be in the East itself. So she beamed, and chuckled, and shouted out with excitement when a couple of little boys with bodies gleaming like bronze suddenly clapped their hands and dived, reappearing in a moment or two with coppers held between their flashing teeth.

"Oh, how wonderfully they do it! Do let's throw them some more No, don't you bother—I've got some." Joan was grabbling in her coat pocket.

"No, I've got some. Look!—Gad, they are quick." Peter Heriot's brown face was all alight as the brown figure came up to the top again like a cork blown out of a bottle. The glistening face grinned and blew the water from between the teeth that held the silver coin. But suddenly it ducked and dived again, a couple of bigger boys were swimming towards it.

"Oh, will they take it away from him?" Joan was hanging over the side greatly perturbed.

"Not they! You wait and see where he comes up." Peter shaded his eyes with his hands. "There, you see?" he pointed.

"Do you mean that little boy running down the road?" Joan gasped with astonishment. For a tiny figure like a brown monkey had hoisted itself out of the sea, clambered up the side of the wooden shed where the waiting boats lay bumping against one another, gathered to itself from somewhere an unspeakably filthy garment, and was tearing down the dusty road that skirts the harbour looking neither to right nor left. "How much was it?" asked Joan with awe.

"A shilling. Worth hanging on to, to a child like that. Now then, what do you think? Shall we go on shore?"

"Do you really want to?" Joan's eyes were suddenly doubtful again. After all, what *was* the good of it all? And there would be letters to come back to: wouldn't it be better to stay on board and get the horror of the letters over? She wanted to hear from home, of course. But from India? That would help to make it all so real, and so near. And her name would be on the letters, written properly. Joan suddenly went cold all over. Everyone would know who she really was. She had forgotten that her appeal to Mrs. Kemp would only ensure it being kept secret for half the voyage, and it would be for much the worst half of the voyage, because by now she had made several quite nice friends. The Missionary lady doctor was quite friendly, two other women always stopped and chatted to her if she was standing about alone; they were I.C.S., and had been encouraged to this act of condescension by the notice that Mrs. Kemp and her party took of her. The Forsythes always spoke to her of course, as they were in the Kemps' party, and so did Mr. Robertson. Then there was Nora, nothing would change her now, but the others . . . Joan was suddenly agonizedly certain that they would take no more notice of her at all, and the thought was like the blade of a knife in her soul.

"What *is* the matter?" Peter Heriot, rather jaded an a man always is by anything in the nature of a scene, suddenly felt that he could stand no more of it. He had already taken part that day in what might quite fairly be called 'scenes'

three times, and he felt that he had had enough. His voice betrayed him, and Joan pulled herself up as if she had been struck from behind.

"Nothing is the matter," she said.

"Oh, good! well then, let's get off at once, otherwise we shan't have any time. It's after six now. Hullo Forsythe!" A tall clean-shaven man had come to a standstill beside them.

"Hullo." Captain Forsythe lifted his hat to Joan. "I say, complimentary to you, isn't it, Cox's man will have it that these are yours. I took the lot away from him and told him that I would ask you myself." Captain Forsythe beamed cheerfully at Joan. He and his wife rather admired her, she was such a neat pretty little thing. He held out a packet of letters.

Joan's lips trembled. "They are mine," she said, and she took them.

"Oh." But over Captain Forsythe's usually rather cheery manner a wave of something glacial had passed. Peter felt it, and he cursed inwardly. But Joan did not feel it. She was past feeling anything, the palms of her hands were dripping.

"Oh, sorry." Captain Forsythe lifted his hat again, and moved away with a nod to the man who stood beside Joan. But he went straight back to his wife, who was sitting in the music room making himself very agreeable to a missionary who was going to look after her baby while she went on shore herself. "I say," he said. "What do you think, those letters are for Mrs. Carne after all." Captain Forsythe had rather a loud voice.

"What letters?" Mrs. Forsythe spoke absently. She was trying to scoop a large glass bead out of her son's mouth.

"Why, those letters addressed K.H.A.N.; you know I had them here, took them from Cox's man; you saw me take them, Betty." Captain Forsythe's voice was rather peevish, he had wanted to create a sensation.

"Well, what about them?"

"Why, they are for her after all."

"And did you say that her name was spelt K.H.A.N.?"

"Well, I think I did," returned Captain Forsythe feebly.

"But that means that she must have married an Indian," said the missionary lady.

"Does it?" said Captain Forsythe weakly. He could see that he had put his foot in it—his wife's face showed him that plainly enough.

"Of course it does," said the missionary lady, "and I consider that it is most wrong of her to have deceived us for so long."

"But why wrong?" suddenly chipped in Mrs. Forsythe who had gathered her baby firmly on to her knee so that it would not pick up anything else that was going; "and why deceived? We never asked Mrs. Carne how her name was spelt. And supposing she has married an Indian, why wrong? I thought you thought that they are just as good as we are?" she said, suddenly relinquishing all idea of going on shore, and conscious of a throb of relief as she did so. Something would have been certain to have happened to Baby if she had gone.

The missionary lady peered through her glasses with an odd expression on her face: "We are all equal in the sight of God," she said. "But whether we are meant to marry one another is another thing."

"*She* would have been thankful if her cook had asked her to marry him," burst out Mrs. Forsythe as the missionary lady sailed off down the deck without renewing her offer to take care of the Forsythe Baby. "But Walter, she will tell everyone. What possessed you to come and blurt it all out like that? It will be ghastly for Joan Khan. She is such a nice girl, too. Oh, Walter, how awful, a native; and he must be a Mohammedan to have that name."

"Yes, it's pretty thick, isn't it?" said Captain Forsythe, feeling profoundly depressed.

"Well, of course the only thing we can possibly do now is to rally round her, just we few who really know how nice she is," said Mrs. Forsythe. "You and I, and the Kemps. And Mr. Robertson will if we tell him too. And Major Heriot will, of course."

"Why, of course?" asked Captain Forsythe.

"Why, because he is in love with her, of course," said Batty Forsythe, who although she fraternized with Members of Council and High Court Judges and their wives (her hus-

band's position ensured her that rapture) had an extraordinary passion for scenting out romances, illicit or otherwise.

"Betty, you really are the limit. Mrs. Khan is a married woman," said Captain Forsythe who was genuinely shocked.

"Yes, well I know she is; isn't that what we are all so worried about?" exclaimed Betty Forsythe, ducking her face into the baby's neck.

"Be *quiet*, Betty," said her husband. Really his wife's tongue ran away with her to an extent that was almost criminal.

"Well, I feel awfully worked up about this," returned his wife and she half buried her face in the baby's soft hair. "It's such cruel bad luck, and she's in for such a ghastly time. And that wretched woman with a face like a horse has gone off to spread it all over the ship, I know she has. And half the ship will cut Joan Khan and the other half will gossip about her. Harry, why couldn't you have waited till we were by ourselves to tell me?"

"I don't know," replied Captain Forsythe with exasperation. "How did I know that you'd take it like this? I thought you'd probably be disgusted too.

"*I*, disgusted! With that sweet little thing with a mouth like a flower, and eyes like a spaniel's under that brown fringe of hers? Harry! I feel now that I want to be with her all the time to make it easier for her!"

. . . . . .

Speech came first to Joan: manlike, Peter could think of heaps of things to say, but dismissed them all as either futile or unsuitable.

"I wish you would go away and leave me quite alone," she said, and there was a kind of heavy terror in her voice.

"And why?"

"Because, don't you see what it's going to be like. Everyone is going to avoid me, to sheer off gradually. Even that nice Captain Forsythe. Didn't you see his face?"

"Don't be a little fool!" Peter spoke roughly, but there was something in his voice that made Joan feel that if she could fall down and kneel in front of this man it would not express what was in her heart. He was going to stand by her, to do what no one even did for the King of Kings, stand by her in her hour of extremity.

"God sent you on to this ship," she said, hoarsely.

Major Heriot was very much astonished, but he did not show it. "Well, if He did, then don't you try to push me off it," he said lightly. "Now then, let's get a move on, or we shan't have any time to see anything."

The tiny space of water between the ship and the landing stage was crossed in a few seconds. But during that little crossing Peter Heriot absorbed a new conception of Joan. She sat, her gloved hand on her chin, staring into the water that slapped against the black side of the flat bottomed boat, her eyes full of what Major Heriot could only sum up as despair. It was useless to try to drag this child in this condition round Port Said, he thought; it would be no pleasure to either of them. He would get her away somewhere and let her get it all off her chest. Then he would know where he was. Either he could help the poor little wretch or he couldn't. And if he couldn't he was not going to hang round her giving food to wagging tongues. For Major Heriot knew how tongues could wag on board ship better than most people did.

"Look here, how would it be if we gave up the idea of seeing the ordinary sights?" he said. "As a matter of fact Port Said is a terribly over-rated place, and there really isn't anything decent to see except the Casino Palace Hotel. Let's just get into a gharry and drive out a bit and sit down on the beach. And then when we've had enough of that, we'll come back and have a quiet dinner at the hotel, and then go back to the ship. How do you like the idea of that?"

Joan lifted heavy eyes: "Yes, I should like that better than anything," she said.

"Very well then. Hi!" Major Heriot lifted a couple of fingers and whistled through them. "A low trick, but a handy one on occasion," he laughed, as the large pair horse lumbered up, a cloud of dust behind it.

They got in together. Joan sank back in a corner and clasped her hands loosely on her lap. Peter Heriot, after a glance at the girl beside him, took off his hat and put it down on the seat in front of them, and then also leant back, and folding his arms gave himself up to staring out into the sunlight. The driver, seeing that this was going to be a leisurely business, stuck his well-used whip back in its socket, and gave

himself up to wondering how much he could charge this sahib, who oddly enough had the opulent look of the globe-trotter coupled with the experienced look of the man who knew his way about.

The evening light made Port Said look very beautiful. The funny tall houses, stuck about in wastes of sand as if they had been left there by mistake, took on a romance of their own. The sky, translucent in shades of turquoise, rose and gold, flamed over a perfectly calm sea, only far out, where the water met the glory of it, a ridge of white-topped breakers showed that the moody Mediterranean had a vicious side to her moodiness were she provoked to it. For a little captious breeze raised the lying sand in dust devils from time to time, and a wheeling sea gull beat up against the wind uttering hoarse cries. Joan heard and shuddered. It sounded ominous somehow, like a lost soul wailing.

"Yes, don't they make a weird noise?" Major Heriot, acutely conscious of Joan, although he pretended not to be, turned and smiled at her.

"I don't like it very much," Joan smiled back, only rather pitifully. Fancy, she thought, her mind beginning to race, fancy if he knew what she was thinking. How she would give her soul, her life, her very existence to fling herself into his arms and sob, and sob and sob herself into oblivion. Die, then and there, no hideous going on of the voyage, no hideous stalking dread of the future padding along behind her, making her think that it wasn't there, when anything new turned up, like a voyage or new people, or long exciting meals. Die then, and for ever, blotted out—not living on somewhere else with always the chance of making another mistake, like the one she had already made.

They had not gone far when the turbaned Jehu hoisted himself off the box and fumbled with the tattered straps that secured the hood to the back of the carriage.

"Hullo, it's going to rain," said Peter. "See that big cloud?" He smoothed his hair impatiently as the unwieldy mass of fusty leather lurched over their heads. And as it settled down into creaking and unaccustomed grooves, one big drop fell on the leather top of it and splashed there. "He's done it just in time. But it won't last. These tropical storms blow over as quickly as they come up." The

carriage began to move with a grinding of rusty joints, the driver was leading it into shelter of a battered brick wall that lay between them and the sea.

"Gad!—that was a flash." Major Heriot laughed as a jagged streak of light tore the sky across.

"Oh, I can't bear thunderstorms." Joan put her trembling hands up to her neck.

"Why? it won't hurt you, we're perfectly safe in here. It won't last."

"Yes, but I tell you I don't *like* it!" Another streak of light cut the sky and showed Joan's face white and trembling with wide eyes.

"It's perfectly all right—there now, it's raining, now nothing can hurt us," Major Heriot shouted cheerfully as he struggled with the ill-fitting glass window trying to hoist it into place as the rain flung itself against it with the rattle of artillery. "Let me do yours," he leant across her, and adjusted it skilfully. "There now!" he leant back again tossing his hat on to the opposite seat.

But Joan was gripping her hands together: "I'm afraid," she said. "I can't help it, I am. Oh! don't let it do it!" she shrank back into her corner crying out.

"But how can I help it?" Major Heriot laughed as he turned a little on the seat. But his eyes were very kind as he put out a brown hand.

Joan felt it near her, and she caught hold of it as a drowning man catches at a plank as it floats by him: "Oh! —Oh!" she cried, and she held it to her throat.

"But there's nothing to be afraid of." Yet although Peter Heriot spoke reassuringly he knew that there was. Joan was very small and sweet in her terror—and he was only human. And they were very much alone. He slipped an arm along the shabby cushion. "You darling little thing —don't be afraid with me here," he said, and he pulled her close to him.

He could feel Joan draw back, and he knew that she was staring at him through the darkness.

"But I am the wife of somebody else," she said, and her voice shook.

"Of course—thanks for reminding me," said Peter Heriot. And he sat back suddenly in his corner.

There was a short silence as Joan shrank back into hers. There, she had done it! He had said the words that she had longed, agonized and craved to hear him say, that she had imagined him saying, lying sleepless in her berth. And now she had struck them off his lips, so to speak, listened to them and flung them back down his throat. What had she done it for, what had she done it for? From an insane feeling of pride, conscience, what was it? Something that was killing her to remember because it meant that he would take no more notice of her. That he would avoid her, thinking her a silly prudish little fool, when perhaps if she had just listened quietly he would have taken her in his arms and just comforted her quietly, making it possible then for her to go into the terror of the future having had one short hour of heaven. It wasn't wrong, it wasn't wrong, it couldn't be wrong to hear a glorious clean splendid man like this say things. If that was wrong, what was the terror of her honeymoon? Blackest, most hideous wrong, not to be spoken of.... "Oh," she cowered back again as another stab of flame cut the sky across.

"I expect that will be the last." But there was a tinge of frigidity in Major Heriot's voice and Joan heard it and even in the midst of her terror she shrank under it.

Then there was a sound like the crackling of a maxim gun, and the near horse suddenly reared and plunged and the carriage lurched wildly and began to drag crazily across the road. Heriot dragged at the strap that held up the dilapidated window, and thrust his head out.

"Go to their heads, you blithering old fool! Half a second. It's all perfectly all right." He dragged up his collar and wrenched open the door...

"Don't get *out*!" Joan had flown at his arm and was clutching it. "You'll be run over. I tell you, don't get *out*," she screamed out like a child.

"Be quiet, you little goose," Peter Heriot began to laugh. "I shall be perfectly all right only I want to see what the old fool is doing." He shook himself clear of her and stepped back out of the door, keeping his hand on it and running with the moving carriage. "Here, you," he sent out a flow of Hindustani.

"Attcha Sahib!" With unusual intelligence the Jehu

had gone to the horses' heads, and was soothing them with weird guttural chirpings. They stopped snorting and tossing their heads in the middle of the road.

"All clear!" Peter Heriot put a foot on the iron step and swung himself back into the carriage. "He's not such an old fool as he looks. There you see, still alive!" He laughed, the little excitement had banished his feeling of annoyance. "Now we'll wait just a minute to let them calm down a bit and then we'll go back to the hotel and have some dinner. Ah, that's right," as the creaking and groaning of the carriage showed that they were being drawn under the shelter of the wall again.

"You're wet . . . frightfully wet," Joan was feeling the soaking coat tremulously. "Take it off, you'll catch cold."

"Catch cold! My Aunt!" Major Heriot threw back his head with a shout of laughter. "If I do, it'll be the first time I've caught it this way!"

"No, do, do, to please me. I'll shake it, and scrub at it with my handkerchief," Joan was tugging frantically at his sleeve.

"Very well." Joan could see the white smudge of a shirt as Major Heriot dragged out one arm and then followed it with the other. "Happy now?" He laid the coat on the opposite seat.

But Joan was down on her knees on the floor scrubbing for dear life. It was, as he said, only wet on the outside. In the darkness she worked, her soul in her eyes, and then suddenly she laid her face down on it and broke into the bitterest tears.

"I say, where are you?" Peter Heriot, perplexed by the silence, groped on the seat beside him. "Good heavens, what are you doing on the floor?" In the darkness, his hand rested on her hair.

"Don't touch me—let me die—let me *die!* . . ." Joan was strangling with tears. "Leave me alone, I tell you. Why didn't you let what fell down kill us? I tell you I don't want to live any more."

Peter put his arms round the soft struggling heap and lifted it resolutely on to his knee. "I haven't the faintest wish to die," he said, "and nor have you really. Now tell me what is wrong. Yes, you are to," as Joan shook her head

violently, still struggling. "And don't try to get away from me because you can't . . ."

"I'm too heavy for you," escaped from Joan with a wild sob.

Heriot laughed in his throat. "I think I can just manage it," he said. "And," he felt with fumbling fingers, "Take off your hat. What a funny hat, it hasn't any pins in it"—he was feeling round the soft crown.

"No, it fastens with elastic under the hair." Joan sat up and dragged quickly at it. "There," she dropped it on the seat.

"Now then," Peter leant back, and stretching out one long leg he wedged his foot against the opposite seat. "Now that's all right." With a brown hand he pressed Joan's cropped head back into his shoulder. "Now, tell me all about it from the very beginning," he said.

"Is it wrong to be in your arms like this?" whispered Joan tremulously.

"Not very." But there was a guilty look in Peter Heriot's eyes notwithstanding, although in the darkness of the carriage his teeth shone white. "Not desperately wrong," he said. "It isn't quite right, . . . if I am to be strictly truthful I must say that. But it isn't so wrong that you need mind doing it."

"Anything so heavenly must be wrong," said Joan, and she began to cry again.

"Not if I say it isn't," said Peter Heriot, and he pressed Joan's curly head a little closer to him. "Desperate diseases need desperate remedies, and I want to get at the bottom of what is troubling you. Now, out with it, and you needn't mind what you say, because it's dark."

And then out it came. For about half an hour they sat, Peter Heriot with his blue eyes fixed on the tiny ray of light that flickered on the wall from one of the lamps that moved from time to time as the horses heaved in the creaking harness. And as Joan's childish voice went on and on, sometimes broken with sobbing, the blue eyes got very stern, and once he caught his lower lip between his teeth. And at last it was over, and Joan moved her head from under his hand and sat up:

"And I have to go back to it again," she said, "and I feel that I can't, I can't."

Peter Heriot was silent. Silent, because there was nothing to say. It was just one of those malignant ghastly strokes of fate that sometimes befall the most innocent people. Joan was suffering for the tolerance of others. And suffering, she had got to bear it alone.

"Look here," he said. "Thank you more than I can say for telling me. But let's try and forget it, at any rate for the present. You've got ten more days at least before you get to India Make the best of them. Don't think about the future at all." Peter Heriot's eyes tried to pierce the darkness and see Joan's face. "Let me be your friend," he said.

Joan stirred on his knee. "I know," she said, "but the only thing about that is, that when I haven't got you for my friend any more, I don't think I shall be able to go on living," and so saying, she dropped her face into her hands.

Heriot was silent again, for once again there was nothing to say. It was perfectly true, he could tell by many little things that Joan was not indifferent to him. And what about himself? Was he proof against constant and intimate association with this girl? Was it wise to lay themselves open, so to speak, to the chance of being hopelessly and eternally wretched? Board ship with its unparalleled opportunities for meeting, untrammelled by convention, not answerable to anyone else for anything that they chose to do . . . Was it worth it?

The instant leap of his heart gave answer: "I think we'll risk it," he said. "After all, ten days is quite a long time. And by the time you get to Bombay you may feel differently about things. Anyhow, don't let's think about Bombay now, it's a long way off."

But Joan was a woman: she hadn't the priceless and inestimable gift that a man has, of banishing the future and living in the present:

"But Bombay is sure to come," she said. "And how can I ever think differently about things . . . all I can ever do is to dread them more."

"Not with me there," said Peter Heriot with his eyes on Joan's profile. He could see it faintly outlined against the dim light from the carriage lamp. The little nose, ever so slightly turned up—the short upper lip. And the lower lip was trembling . . ."Not with me there," he said again.

"But you won't *be* there," said poor Joan.

"But I'm here now," said Peter Heriot, and he sat up a little and the arm that held Joan tightened.

"Yes, I know you are." But Joan suddenly trembled. "I think if you don't mind I should like to get off your knee now," she said.

"Very well," said Peter, and he let her go. For he still had the remnant of a conscience left, and Joan was small and she trusted him. "Put on your hat," he said, "and we'll get along."

"You're not angry with me?" asked Joan, almost weeping again.

"Not the least atom." But Peter Heriot's face was grim as he groped for his own hat.

. . . . . .

Nowhere in the world is the setting for a dance so perfect as on the deck of an East bound steamer as she throbs her way through the Suez Canal. The desert, stretching away on either side, a limitless mystery of sand; the soft caressing splash of the following wave as it slips up the yielding banks of the narrow water-way and then loses itself again in the mother stream; the solitary light at the masthead, like one great beautiful star, still and brilliant, all tend to make the Suez Canal the most romantic place in the world. The racket of the engine room is stilled, the furnaces are lower, and there is only one incessant drumming throb to let you know that the great heart of the liner still beats. Joan felt her soul all aglow with the wonder of it, and on the afternoon of the day after they left Port Said—they had not been able to leave as early as they expected owing to some port regulation—she hung over the side and drank in the heavenly beauty with an ecstasy of enjoyment. The day that was now half over had been a very happy one; instead of the knowledge of her marriage having alienated people, in some mysterious way it had seemed to make them nicer. One or two people looked oddly at her—Mrs. Fitzgerald was one of them, but Nora had confided to her that at Suez Mrs. Fitzgerald was going off, so it really did not matter at all. Also the Kemps and the Forsythes all seemed in some mysterious way to have drawn nearer to her—like a bodyguard, thought Joan, laughing at the folly of such a thought. And the letters had

not been disturbing; her husband wrote very briefly, stating that he would not be able to come down to Bombay to meet her, he could not leave his work, but that Cox's Agency would do everything. And her aunt wrote fully, telling her all the little details of home news that she loved to hear, and her mother also wrote, only not quite so fully, saying how she had already begun to look forward to the time when she would have her home again. So Joan felt that the Terror had drawn back a little, and she forgot that your adversary only draws back when he either knows that his case is hopeless or when he knows that his next thrust is going to bring you to your knees.

The ending of the evening on shore had been happy. They were sitting in the lounge of the Casino Palace Hotel, when the echoing bray of a siren had rung out over the town, making the windows of the hotel rattle in their wooden frames.

"Oh, whatever is it?" exclaimed Joan with a start.

"The *Nerona* on her way again," said Peter Heriot with a laugh at the back of his eyes.

"What, do you mean going away?" Joan suddenly turned quite white and stood up.

"No, no, what a shame to tease you. No, it's only a ship going into the Canal, they always hoot like that when they start off."

"I thought you really meant it." Joan sat down again. Then after a little pause—"What should we have done if the ship really had been going?" she said.

"Stayed here together," said Peter Heriot. And as Joan looked at him searchingly—she never quite knew whether he was in fun or not—his mind suddenly fastened on the possibilities of such a situation. This sweet little thing—his, utterly, for a week. And that greasy brute kicking hid heels in a fury on the steps of the Ballard Pier—it would have its points certainly. And then he met Joan's eyes, clear, and speculative, and he was ashamed of himself. "No, we couldn't have done that really," he said. "And as you never know what these ships will do, perhaps we had better get along."

But Joan was not listening; she was staring straight in front of her:

"In a way," she said, "in a way . . . although perhaps

you won't feel like I do about it—in a way I should like to be left with you somewhere. I don't mean on and on, because you would get tired of it. But just so that there was nobody else there. For a little while would you like it ? " asked Joan desperately, feeling suddenly that she must know whether he would, or perish.

Peter Heriot thrust his hands into his pockets, and swallowed once or twice before he replied. " Yes, I should like it very much indeed," he said, but his voice was quite impersonal.

Yet although his voice had been impersonal there was something about him that was not impersonal. It was like . . . . it was like . . . . several times that morning Joan had found herself wondering about it. It was like when you poke a fire that looks quite black and it suddenly falls in in the middle and bursts into flame. Or when you cut into a pie and a surge of juice cascades out over everything, when you don't expect it to—it gave the impression that there was something underneath trying to get out. Yes, that was what Joan was trying to get at—a volcano, of course, that was what she wanted—a volcano.

. . . . . .

The whole of the upper first class deck space was hung with flags. The jolly quarter-master and a couple of apprentices had been hard at work decorating since about four o'clock in the afternoon. And it certainly all looked delightful. The bright white lights had been veiled in deepest pink—this was a touch introduced by the third officer, who had a romantic soul. A couple of bronzed sailors had superintended the polishing of the floor, which had been done by Lascars, who in their blue jumpers and the vivid scarlet handkerchiefs tied round their heads looked like nothing more than overgrown monkeys, Joan thought, watching them scrambling about the deck grinning. It was a gay scene and as the transformed people streamed down to dinner, Joan sat in her place and enjoyed it to the full. She lost the little feeling of breathlessness that Major Heriot always gave her when she was near him—her place was some way away from his, at another table altogether, next to some rather dull people who seemed to keep entirely to themselves. So she could sit and enjoy it all, and she caught the appreciative glance of the Captain

once or twice, as he stared round the room, well pleased. He thought Mrs. Khan looked perfectly delicious in her fancy dress, and as the Purser had confided to him earlier that day her pathetic history, he looked at her with a new interest. Twice during his command he had carried out to Bombay a white girl engaged to marry an Indian, and both times he had conveyed that same girl back again, still unwed, passage paid for by the passengers who had travelled outwards with her, and who had persuaded her, after a good deal of difficulty, that she was doing a suicidal thing in throwing in her lot with an Oriental. But this was a different matter altogether; Mrs. Khan had already thrown in her lot with an Oriental, so there was nothing to do now but to shrug your shoulders and hope for the best. But Captain Newland felt a twinge of sadness as he mentally shrugged his own shoulders. Mrs. Khan was so deliciously pretty, and such a child with it all . . . However . . . perhaps . . . Captain Newland's wind-swept eyes focussed themselves suddenly on a more distant table. He certainly was a magnificent looking fellow . . . no doubt about it. . . .

"Well, are you prepared to dance for four hours on end?" Peter Heriot met Joan at the top of the brilliantly lighted stairs that led from the saloon. He took a cigarette from between his lips. "Can't manage it with this beastly thing on," he said, and he dragged the mask off suddenly.

"Oh—how much nicer you look!" Joan gasped with relief. There had been something sinister in the upstanding blackness of the disguise on the face. Now in the scarlet dress of Mephistopheles Major Heriot looked only like a flame—nothing awful about him. Compelling and overwhelming of course; he was always that, but not horrible. Only perfect . . . Joan suddenly closed her eyes.

"Well, what about it? Or will you wait till I've finished this—I shan't be a minute," Peter scrubbed suddenly at his own close cropped moustache. "That filthy gum has got all over it," he said; "do you mind if I go and wash."

"Not a bit." But as he took the stairs two at a time, Joan watched him with fear in her eyes. Why hadn't she been sensible enough to say straight out that she could not give all her dances, she thought? She let him walk over her . . . do what he liked. . . .

"Why! what a sweet little Apache!" Mrs. Kemp

passing laid a gentle hand on the black satin shoulder. "Jim, look at Mrs. Khan, doesn't she look a dear?"

"She does!" Mr. Kemp diverted from the manipulation of a rather unwieldy disguise stared with sudden unfeigned admiration at Joan. "Gad, I don't blame Heriot if he comes a cropper over her," he confided to his wife later. "Those legs! she ought to live in trousers."

And although Mrs. Kemp laughed reprovingly, she echoed in her heart what her husband expressed openly. Joan Khan had looked exquisite, like a little streak of something vivid. And she laid her own fancy dress away with a sigh.

"Now then let's get going." Peter Heriot came blithely up the stairs again. "I suppose you know all these new gyms," he said, and he spoke rather breathlessly. Joan went to his head.

"Yes, most of them. You see, I went out very little, but I used to watch what people did when I did go. And then I used to practise with our servant, she danced awfully well." Joan suddenly blushed and felt ashamed. What would Peter think of her saying that! But Peter looked away from her for a minute. "Lucky servant!" he said, turning back again.

Joan laughed, a delightful chuckle, and settled the velvet cap again on her cropped head. "It's sure to get crooked," she said confidingly. "Tell me when it does." But her eyes laughed, and were alive. "He does like me . . . . a very little," she thought.

They danced twice, Joan's curly head just reached Heriot's shoulder, and a good many people watched them as they danced, especially a lady like a horse who expressed herself forcibly to a compatriot.

"It's sin," she said firmly.

"Is it?" The companion of the Horse, who was in the same profession, only she lived what she professed, smiled rather mischievously. "It's very beautiful sin anyhow," she said. "Look at that little head against that scarlet shoulder. And the look in the child's eyes . . . it's indescribable."

The Horse did not think it was, and she used an ugly word to describe it.

The little lady flushed: "I don't think you have any

right to say so," she said indignantly. "I am sure the friendship is an entirely innocent one."

"And I am sure it is not," replied the Horse. And she got up and walked away, her heart screaming out in passionate envy of Joan. For even women with faces like horses have feelings. And there is not a woman in the world, unless there is something very seriously wrong with her, who does not crave for the savagery of a man's arms.

"Shall we rest a little now?" Joan's breath came in little gasps, and she was white. The band was so beautiful, the stringed instruments wailed, and there was something in the wailing that struck straight into Joan's heart, and lay and struggled there. She would scream or cry, she thought desperately, if she did not stop for a minute or two. And Peter's arms—they were possessive. "Let me go," she panted.

"Sorry! Have I gone at it too hard for you?" Heriot slid into a corner, his arms still round her. "You dance so awfully well I couldn't help it. I say, . . . I have," he spoke repentantly, there were little painted shadows at the root of Joan's nose.

"No, it's all right . . . only give me a minute." Joan breathed heavily and leant her slim weight against a coil of rope. "Get somebody else if you want to go on directly."

"Not a bit of it—we'll go away somewhere, and I'll have a cigarette if I may." Heriot stared out over the desert. They were just passing one of the little leafy settlements that cluster close to the Canal banks—what a life, nothing to do but to watch other people passing by! . . . He suddenly felt profoundly sorry for Joan too—the sort of sorrow a humane sportsman feels when he hears a wounded hare scream. Put it out of its misery if you can—if you can't, clear off so that you can't hear it . . . Major Heriot suddenly wished from the bottom of his heart that he had never met Joan Khan. "I say, I will get somebody else if you'd very much rather," he said and he spoke without looking at her.

Joan's heart suddenly stopped. "Yes, I would like you to," she said. She heard the words from a long way away—she wasn't saying them.

"All right then—you cut off to bed—you certainly do look done to the world." Peter tried to avoid the grey eyes that looked as if they had suddenly been struck blind; he cleared his throat.

"All right I will. How shall I go, so that I don't meet everyone?"

"Come along this way, then you can go down the stairs at the end, there's never anyone there."

He led the way silently, Joan followed stumbling a little. Her feet felt suddenly as if she could not lift them. They reached the top of the stairs.

"Good night," she said vaguely, lifting a face in which the eyes lay like black wells.

"Good night." Major Heriot spoke abruptly and turned swiftly on his heel. He felt a fiend but it was far the kindest really . . .

Joan reached blindly out in front of her, and began to grope her way down the steep stairs. Why . . . why, why had she tried to throw herself out of her porthole before? she wondered—why, she was happy then . . . this was something quite different. This was torment—hell! She swung a little against the white painted wall. In a book he would come after her—but things didn't happen like books in real life—you had to go on by yourself, even though you felt that you only had a gaping wound for a heart. Besides, he didn't care either, he wanted to dance with somebody else, so she was degraded as well as in torment . . . .

"I'm just coming down to get a cheroot," the scarlet figure was suddenly beside her again. Peter Heriot cursed himself for a fool but he couldn't help it. And he had seen the little lurching figure, and it stabbed his heart.

"Oh!" Joan was capable of no more, she lifted her hands to her neck.

There was a little dark-alley way at the foot of the stairs, Peter Heriot turned swiftly to it, and picked Joan up in his arms. He lifted her over the step on to the little planked way that ran round the steel hull, and he held her there under the stars,

"I am going to kiss you," he said, "I must."

"No, no!" Joan had strength for so much, though her spirit lay at his feet.

"Yes, I must." He stooped a dark head. "I don't care a damn if it's wrong," he said, "don't tell me it is because it won't make an atom of difference. I love you, and I want you. And you needn't be afraid, because I'm not altogether a cad . . . But your little soft face I'm going to have on mine if I die for it," he said, and he stooped again and kissed her savagely.

CHAPTER XV.

The sun blazed down out of an absolutely cloudless sky. The double awnings heaved and flapped with entire apathy, and then settled into complete stillness. The sea lay immobile like a sheet of blue glass under the brassy heavens, and only parted noiselessly and closed again with the same noiselessness as the great steel hull cut through it.

"Oh, I say, it's hot!" Joan coming out through the open companion door pushed all her short hair off her forehead.

"Yes it is; where have you been since breakfast?" Peter Heriot heaved his straight back from against the rail, and flicked a little of his cigarette ash into the sea. He had been watching that door for the last hour.

"Oh . . . just muddling about," Joan's eyes moved restlessly under the steady gaze that held them. "I can't always be with you," she said, and her voice trembled a little.

"And why not?"

"Because—because—"

Peter Heriot tossed the still burning end of the cigarette into the tub of water, "All right, don't start analysing," he said, "we agreed the other day we wouldn't. Come along round to the chairs, I've got a perfect place for them, bang in the only bit of breeze there is."

"However did you manage to get it?" Joan looked round in amazement. Both deck chairs, with their own footrests lay close together in a shadowed corner. A small table, with a brown hide despatch case stood beside them.

"I told the chief officer that I must have peace and quiet to do some work," said Peter laughing openly. "And he was a trump, so he set one of them to do a bit of painting, and they've stuck up a Wet Paint notice, and there you are!" He put both his hands into the pocket of his silk suit and looked at Joan, his head a little on one side.

"But are you really going to work?"

Heriot suddenly looked a little grave: "Yes, I simply must," he said, "I got a stack of proofs at Port Said, and I haven't touched them. I must post at Aden, and we shall be there tomorrow."

"Then you don't want me. . ."

"Yes I do . . . don't be a little goose. Look here. Peter Heriot glanced swiftly round, "Good morning," he said.

Joan caught one brown hand as it left her face: "Peter!" She pressed her mouth suddenly against it.

"Now then . . . that's enough!" the look of something akin to despair in Heriot's eyes was instantly quenched in a laugh. "'Stern daughter of the Voice of God,' don't you know it? Sure to be horrible if it's anything about duty, but I must say the old boy made out quite a good case for it. Shun!" He stopped laughing and caught his lower lip between his teeth. "Joan," he said, "for God's sake don't start that, unless you want me to put an end to myself."

Joan dragged at her handkerchief, and then stuffed it back into her sleeve. "All right," she said, "I'm sorry. Show me proofs, I like to see them. And what about 'Stern daughter of the Voice of God?' I like the sound of it." Joan sat down in her deck chair, and slung her work bag over the end of it. She leant her chin on her hand to stop the trembling of it.

"Well, it was Mr. William Wordsworth. He always put my back up when I was a kid by some piffle about a very anaemic girl called Lucy. But when I came to years of discretion I got to appreciate it better. A person who quotes poetry is a public nuisance, but when you get the chance, read his 'Ode to Immortality.' Divine!" Major Heriot's eyes suddenly fired as he unclipped his despatch case.

"Say me a bit of it."

"Can't be done," Peter twinkled mischievously as he turned back again.

"Oh, well . . ." Joan twisted round to unhook her work bag. "Will you some day?" she asked wistfully.

"We'll see . . . perhaps sometime when it is dark. Now then, don't speak unless I do—do you mind?"

"Not a bit . . . I like you to say." Joan leant back in

her chair, and closed the eye-lids that suddenly felt as if they had been starched. She gave up trying to get anything out of her workbag; she couldn't work. She only wanted just to lie there doing nothing "Doing nothing!" she cried inwardly, and her spirit suddenly leapt and grappled with the Terror that peered grinning round the corner. "Counting the days?" grinned the Terror and slunk back again. Joan sat up feeling weak and shaken. It was almost as if someone had really spoken. She passed her handkerchief over her mouth and then bent resolutely to her sewing. She would work; just lying and thinking drove her absolutely frantic. . .

"Good!" Major Heriot spoke with satisfaction and sat back. "Now for a pipe," he stretched out a long leg and groped for the matches.

"What are the squigs?" Joan was leaning forward, scanning the long galley-strips with curiosity.

"The squigs, as you so disrespectfully term them, are corrections," said Peter, and he smiled at Joan, his still unlighted pipe between his white teeth.

"May I see?" Joan held out a timid hand.

"Yes, of course," Peter detached the first slip from its nickel fastener, and handed it across. Then he unrolled his oil-skin tobacco pouch, and began to fill his pipe, pressing down the tobacco with a very deliberate thumb. He suddenly felt shy: supposing Joan didn't like it?

"May I have another?" Joan's eyes were still on the strip she held, she took the second one without raising them. "I've done these," it came again in a short space of time.

"Take them all." Peter Heriot handed over the whole roll and lay back in his chair. It was the greatest tribute he had ever had: Joan was utterly unconscious of him. He watched her as she read: a little pulse beat in her neck—under her soft muslin blouse a narrow strip of blue ran across her shoulder, she was dear—inexpressibly dear—the whole of her.

"I must go there." Joan suddenly laid the bundle down in her lap, and spoke, forgetting where she was. Then she remembered him: "I forgot you were there," she said.

Peter Heriot lay back in his chair, and blew a great cloud of smoke upwards, "Yes, I know you did," he said, "and it

is the greatest compliment I have ever had paid me in my life."

Joan was silent for a minute or two, watching him, then she spoke; "*Tell* me something about it," she urged, "what it is like and everything, where you live in India. You see, I don't know anything about it at all. Is it really like this?" She picked up the paper roll and held it to her breast.

"Yes, fairly like that." Peter crossed one long leg over the other. "Not quite so nice, of course, but the British Public likes to have its information jammier than it really should have it. As a matter of fact it's pretty average hell," he suddenly said quietly, and uncrossed his feet again.

"Tell me how it is." Joan's eyes hung on his.

"Well, to begin with, it's infernally lonely. You see, I belong to a regiment that's always on the frontier. And there we are, just a handful of officers and a couple of hundred men stuck away in a fort. If I didn't write, I should go absolutely dotty, I must say that does help enormously. But there we are, and nothing happens, unless one of these old johnnies gets a religious fit on, and then he comes and dances round the Fort with a lot of others, and we pot at him, and he pots back, and there you are."

"It doesn't sound dull!" Joan's eyes were wide.

"No... well, it has its lively side," said Major Heriot, and he laughed.

"But how do you get there?"

"Oh, we go under escort, men on horses, you know, beside us with rifles. And we have overhead railways, a sort of car thing slung on wire cables. And to the nearer forts you can sometimes get in a car, but I am right away at a place called Wai which can only be reached on horseback. You can get as far as Fatwar in an ekka, but then you have to take to your feet."

"But how do your wives get there, then?" asked Joan, wondering.

"Wives?" Peter Heriot threw back his head and laughed tumultuously. "Good heavens, Joan, you don't think women are allowed there, do you? Of course not! Women aren't allowed further North than Palghai. Wives! Englishmen are only allowed one each, you know," he said, and he twinkled across the small space that separated them.

And then the twinkle suddenly died in horror. For out of Joan's eyes leapt a terror greater than any terror that Major Heriot had ever seen in any man's eyes—and that was saying a good deal because once he had come across a wounded Sepoy, lying out under the stars, left there after the flurry of a surprise attack. Round him stood a ring of shuffling vultures, hopping nearer, and then sulkily retreating, cackling to one another from their pouching throats. Afterwards his brother officers had derided him—he was younger then—telling him that the man would have died anyhow, and that he was a fool to have risked his own life. But Peter always remembered the first sight of that wheeling black speck against the moon, and the following glance below it that had shown him the little amphitheatre of death. And even though the dying man had struggled to move so that the shadow of the Englishman should not lie across him as he died, he was glad he had done it. To die with that thought before you—you couldn't let a dog do it.

"Joan . . ." he said, and then his tongue was so stiff that he could not say any more.

"But could it be like that?" Joan was crouching lower in her chair.

"No no . . . of course it couldn't." Peter caught the hands that were held out as if to ward off a blow. "No, no, Joan . . . don't." He stood up and tried to draw her out of her chair.

But Joan shrank away from him.

"There's a horrid name in the Bible that you call them when there are more than one," she said, shivering.

. . . . . .

Mrs. Forsythe was really the one amongst Joan's more immediate circle who took the whole thing most to heart. With the wholesome sanity of the perfectly happy married woman she was able to look at it all impartially. Mrs. Kemp was not; to begin with she had feared that it would come to pass from the very beginning, and when that is the case there is always a certain element of 'I told you so' to mar the mental outlook. Also, she was Peter Heriot's greatest woman friend, and there is not a woman in the world who likes to see her greatest man friend become a lover to somebody else. Also, she frankly thought that it was wrong.

"Wrong? of course it's wrong." Mr. Kemp was fussing about the cabin collecting his shaving tackle, preparatory to taking it along to the bathroom. "And I'm glad to hear you say so. Heriot's a damned fool, and I should like to tell him so, too." Mr. Kemp went out, dragging the curtain along the brass rod behind him with a rattle of brass rings.

But Mrs. Kemp moved more softly about the cabin in the dainty process of 'getting up.' She knew that there was nothing wrong about it in the sense that the world means wrong. If Peter Heriot wanted a woman for his own he would take her openly: not in an ugly furtive sense, shiftily, with sordid subterfuge. But the wrong was in the thought. Joan was the wife of another man, and in thought her spirit lay in the arms of her lover. Mrs. Kemp knew it did: there was the faintest flush on her face as she drew the comb through her still luxuriant hair.

Nora Lane thought it was wrong too. She had never quite been able to shake off the feeling of repulsion that she had had when Joan told her that she was the wife of a native, and it prejudiced her against the whole thing. To fall in love first of all—fall in love—presumably—with a native, and then to go down like a stook of corn in front of the best looking man on your first voyage—well, there was something extravagant about it, and Nora could never really understand extravagances. She liked a thing to be, so to speak, cut and dried, not a nebulous affair of imaginings and feelings. So Nora left Joan rather more to herself than she had done at first, and it was easy, because now that there was not a third to consider in the tiny cabin, Nora and Joan were able to arrange times and seasons so that they hardly ever occupied it at the same time except at night. And as Joan now very rarely came to bed until Nora was asleep that did not matter.

But Betty Forsythe saw with the truest and most complete sympathy: "Yes, I know it's wrong," she said, in answer to her husband's rather lengthy diatribe—they were stretched side by side in deck chairs close to the rail, trying to catch the furtive puffs of wind that picked up the blue water and fluffed it into little frills of white—"at least it's wrong according to our stupid ideas of wrong. But when you look at it like this it isn't wrong. There's Joan Khan,

the sweetest dearest and most innocent little thing that ever breathed, eighteen years old. She lives the dullest, stodgiest life imaginable. She has all the possibilities of an intense passion for a man—look at her, you can see she has them. Well, she never sees a man at all. Then she suddenly does—a black one—and to people at home very often that is attractive, especially when it is coupled with a very nice figure, which in this case I daresay it was. Well, she falls in love with him, —she doesn't really, as a matter of fact, but she feels she does *because*—" here Betty Forsythe turned impressively to her husband—" because she suddenly finds a place to anchor all those gropey, desperate, unfinished feelings that a girl always has when she is growing up, without knowing what to do with them. Then—yes, wait a minute—*then* she marries him. And *then*—" Betty Forsythe flushed—" then she finds out that he is a beast and she promptly hates him. And all this time all the gropey, desperate feelings have grown and grown because they have been twined round something, and now they are loose and floundering," went on Betty Forsythe, getting excited and mixing metaphors. " And then Major Heriot comes along with a face and body like a god and she flings them all round him like a lassoo, and then she gets frightened and tries to get away and can't, and I don't wonder," ended Mrs. Forsythe abruptly.

So Betty Forsythe completely understood, and she was always looking out for a chance to say so. At last it came, as things always do come when you know how to look out for them properly. And she bent over Joan as she leant over the rail staring out at Aden where Peter had gone in a military launch to register his proofs himself at the General Post Office, and she squeezed her hand when Joan suddenly turned a wan face to her :

" I wish you'd look upon me as a *real* friend of yours," she said. " Not the sort of person who tells things, but the sort of person who really understands and craves to know, and who will keep everything sacredly locked in her heart for ever. And who won't tell her husband—*really* won't," she added, knowing the one real bar to post-marriage confidence.

Joan trembled, and gripped the little ringed hand and began to cry in dreadful suppressed racking sobs. So Betty Forsythe took her to a quiet unfrequented corner and the

girls sat together, and Joan unburdened her soul with the first real sense of safety and freedom that she had had since she was married. Peter understood to a certain extent, and his tender understanding was always at her service; but there were some things that you couldn't tell a man, however dear and understanding he might be, and those things she told to Betty Forsythe.

Mrs. Forsythe lay back in her chair and stared at the big black rock that reared its head protectingly over the stripped bareness of Aden. So these things did really happen in real life, then—that, then, was what made some women walk about with a sick dead look on their faces. And marriage made them right? Never! And this gentle flower of a girl had to go back to it . . . and a native too . . . It didn't bear thinking of . . . Betty Forsythe groped in the pocket of her white tweed skirt for her cigarette case, lighted one with a hand that trembled a little, shook out the match, and then sat forward.

"Look here, Joan," she said. "I can't tell you how I thank you for telling me everything like that—and I can't tell you either what I feel about it. It's no use saying—it won't help at all—either of us. But all I can say to comfort you is this, I am perfectly convinced that in the end you will marry Major Heriot. He's desperately in love with you—really in love—not the usual sort of thing at all—the sort of thing that makes a man lose his head for a time. He's got that way of looking at you that means real love—a sort of tender protecting look—I don't know if I can make you understand. You're his most precious thing—do you know what I mean? He doesn't think about himself at all now, and he would never dream of hurting you or anything like that. You're there to be loved and cherished, and upheld—because one day you're going to be his—he daren't think about it because he doesn't know how it's going to happen—in fact he may not even think about it—but something inside tells him, although he doesn't know it—like it tells me."

Joan flung her hands out over her knees and dropped her head on them. "Betty," she cried, and her eyes were tortured, "Betty, but I have got to go back to it first. Think what that means! Even if in the end I do marry him, *I've got to go back to it first.* I'm somebody's *wife!* And it may be *years!* And people don't wait on and on for people—I mean

to say Major Heriot may love me now . . . Oh, he does, he does." Joan's wide open eyes streamed. "But he can't always be lonely just because he can't have me, can he? . . can he? Why should he after all? He's frightfully well known, and famous, and he sees thousands of people. And then, when he thinks it all over he may feel that I'm sort of horrible, revolting, because I have been the wife of a native. Betty, Betty, I can't bear it, I can't bear it. God is too cruel to make me, I *can't*."

The tears were running down Betty Forsythe's face too, and she was not in the least ashamed of them. But she flung out a protecting hand and took the clenched one in hers: "Look here," she said, "you've just got to set your teeth and go through with it, Joan. It's ghastly, it's hell for you, but you're going to get your hell over all at once. And it isn't God's arrangement at all, He doesn't do that sort of thing. He is sorrier far for you than I am. And in the end He is going to make everything come right. But you see He doesn't interfere like people think He does; He does when He is asked, but perhaps you didn't," said Betty Forsythe rather shyly. "And"—

"But perhaps He is angry because we have kissed each other," burst in Joan, and she looked at Betty with a new terror.

Betty Forsythe flushed a little, and then looked out to sea again. "That depends so frightfully on the kiss," she said; "somehow I don't feel that with you He would be. And He knows exactly what is going on in Major Heriot's mind too, so that's all right. Don't let's worry about God any more," she said naively. "But there is something that I want to tell you if you don't know it already, and somehow I feel that you don't. Do you?" Betty Forsythe looked narrowly at the girl beside her.

"What sort of a thing?" Joan turned, and put her drenched handkerchief back into her sleeve.

"Well, it's rather difficult to explain, I'm not good at that sort of thing. But I feel I must . . . Look here, Joan"— Betty Forsythe turned a little more on her chair.

. . . . . .

The last night of the voyage came at last, as things always do come however we may hold out feeble, protesting pushing

hands to try to stop them. Joan had spent a good deal of the day in packing, it had to be done, and there was going to be a dance to celebrate the end of things that evening, so she knew that there would be an opportunity to say goodbye then. For Major Heriot was to start off by the Postal Express the next day, and Joan was to travel by the ordinary Punjaub Mail a few hours later. Peter Heriot felt that there was a limit to his endurance—to see Joan claimed by a native would have been more than he could have borne without instantly committing murder. So he did away with any chance of it by choosing another route. But he hung about the deck in the hope of having a word with her, and when he saw that it was hopeless, he made up his mind to do a thing he meant to do before leaving the ship anyhow, that was to have a word with Mr. Kemp. There were one or two things that he must know, and Mr. Kemp was the only man who could tell him, in fact he was the only man that he could possibly ask, and he loathed asking him more than he could express. But it had to be done.

"I say, may I have a word or two with you?" Wandering he met Mr. Kemp coming out of the smoking room.

"Certainly. Where shall we anchor ourselves?" Mr. Kemp spoke without looking at him. Heriot had made a damned fool of himself, he considered, but the man looked ghastly, so there was no point in rubbing it in.

"Oh, anywhere where we can be to ourselves. Look here," Major Heriot sat down vaguely on the end of a long chair that belonged to somebody else, "I want to know if you can tell me anything about Mohammedan law. Don't waste time—in telling me what a damned fool I am, or cur, or anything else that you and Kitty think—I know I'm all of them, but I'm in hell as well, so perhaps it washes them out. Can Joan Khan be got away from her husband or can she not?"

"No, she can't." Mr. Kemp spoke abruptly: he thought it was kinder. "I went into it all at home with her brother. She was married at home by English law and it stands good out here. Of course questions of matrimonial law are always difficult and obscure especially when a conflict of law is brought into it. Khan is allowed by his religion four wives as you know—it's horrible but it's a fact so it's no use shirking it. Of course as a matter of fact in this country each case—"

"But is Khan not a Christian, then?" Heriot raised a livid face from his hands.

"I should say certainly not—she thinks he is but I very much doubt it. He stipulated for marriage at a Registry office, and that to my mind is convincing. However," Mr. Kemp cleared his throat, "as I was going to say, in this country each case is judged on its own merits. Supposing, for instance, the facts that led up to the appeal of the English wife for nullity were particularly revolting, the Court might exercise its jurisdiction, and declare the marriage void, but that of course depends entirely on the circumstances surrounding the case. And of course, as you can imagine, the publicity and squalor of the whole thing would be unspeakable. Heriot," Mr. Kemp laid a very kind hand on the serge shoulder, "get a pull on yourself and shake yourself free from the whole thing. Don't think me a brute, but you have been in love before. You'll get over it."

Peter Heriot stood up: "I say, don't, if you don't mind," he said, and his lips were a little drawn back from his teeth. "It's kind of you, but I don't feel inclined for it. Now, you say you saw Mrs. Khan's brother. Was there any mention of settlements, or anything of the kind?"

"Mansfield has arranged that at his mother's death any money that shall come to Mrs. Khan shall be placed in the hands of English trustees, with instructions that the interest accruing therefrom shall be paid direct to wife only," said Mr. Kemp stiffly. He was angry with Peter Heriot, he was more of a damned fool than he thought he was—taking the whole thing seriously.

"Oh, thanks . . . Then at present Mrs. Khan is entirely dependent on her husband?"

"I believe so." Mr. Kemp got up also and looked round. Thank God the voyage was nearly over, he thought irritably; he couldn't do with this sort of thing. His wife in such a state of mind the whole time, and Heriot looking like a man who has received his death sentence; it made the whole thing so damned unpleasant.

But Peter Heriot had seen Joan come out of the companion door: "Thanks very much, Kemp," he said, and swung away down the deck, long and lean.

There is a limit to the capacity for suffering, and when at about midnight Joan and Peter Heriot stood under the stars on the alley-way—the upper deck was still dotted about with groups of people talking and laughing—they had reached it.

"Peter, I can't, can't say goodbye to you." Joan's voice was odd and stifled. She had her tiny lace handkerchief forced against her mouth.

"Darling, you must." Under the bright starlight Heriot's bronzed face showed drawn and grey. He breathed as if he had been running. "Keep a stiff upper lip, Joan, it's the only thing." He swallowed, his self control was going, he knew it was, and it would make it harder for her. "I shall be off before you are up in the morning, Joan, I must, and Cox's man will look after you. If you want me, you know where I am—Wai, N.W.F.,* is enough, you remember, I told you. And for anything else, King's will have my instructions. Now—Joan—goodbye—Beloved," he held her strained against his heart.

"Peter . . . I love you so . . . how can I ?" Joan lifted a ravaged face. "Sometimes I haven't been kind . . ." she clung to him desperately, rent with awful sobs.

"You have always been perfect. Joan, don't, you're killing me." Peter put a finger inside his collar. "Go now, darling, or I can't . . ."

Joan broke from him with a last moan and vanished through the dark doorway. Peter, left alone, walked to the edge of the little alley-way and leant his head against the steel hull. Surely he couldn't go *on* feeling like this, he thought stupidly. Ah ! . . he stooped and picked up something small and white : her handkerchief, still wet. He held it against his mouth and the difficult tears forced themselves through his shut eyelids and ran down into the tiny folds of it.

But Fate has an odd way of keeping you on the rack if she thinks it will be good for you, especially if she has something very nice tucked up her sleeve to bestow at some distant date ; she wants to see if you really deserve it. So the next morning, when Joan, very late, came up on deck she saw a lean figure standing by the notice board, and she promptly dropped

* North West Frontier.

quietly into a chair and forced her head down between her knees—someone had told her once that that was the thing to do.

"Good morning." Peter had seen her drop, and he came up quietly. "All right again? Yes, I got a Marconi to report at the Brigade office this morning, and that knocked the Postal Express on the head." He spoke almost coldly. It was a piece of fiendish cruelty on the part of Fate, this, he thought. Now they would have to travel together—that is unless he deliberately chose another route—which it would not be really easy to do, at the last minute. Not in the same carriage, of course, but within touch of each other, so to speak. And he would have to see that dirty swine claim Joan! No, *no*, *no*, his whole soul rose up in protest.

"I am sorry, because I know how you must feel about it." Joan too spoke coldly.

Suddenly they seemed like strangers. It was too much for him, this. He felt resentful of her because she made him suffer so.

"Don't be with me this morning," she said timidly. "Cox's man will do everything for me, and I shall be perfectly all right."

"I can't be with you even if I want to," said Major Heriot. "Those thrice accursed fools at the Brigade Office want me. But I will see you at the station: and I'll have a word with Cox's man when he comes on board. Now, come along and have your first look at the East," he said, and he led the way to the rail.

Even in the midst of her newly awakened despair Joan saw the beauty of it. Bombay, looming out of her early morning shroud of mist, amethyst and palest, palest rose. The Taj Mahal Hotel, shadowy and vague, the Yacht Club long and squat in her shrouding of trees. The harbour, alive with every type of craft, from long lean gun-boat, to tiniest native skiff. "I like the look of it," she said.

"Yes, it's not so bad." Heriot spoke shortly, avoiding her eyes. His little, little love, how small and pale she looked with eyelids swollen with crying. And Joan, knowing that he was avoiding her eyes, looked away too, lest she should falter and sob out her despair at leaving all the dear

perfection of him—the smooth well-shaped head with the hair turning a little grey above his ears, the strong brown hands with the gold signet ring on the little finger.

"Well, I'll see you at the station." Peter suddenly swung a little on his heels. He had work to do that morning, and he must keep himself fit for it. "I'll see Cox's man, so all you'll have to do is to present yourself at the Customs with your keys, and get to the Station. And as a matter of fact he'll really do all that for you only—you will just have to be there. Goodbye, Joan," he held her eyes suddenly with his 'Goodbye.'

Joan watched him go, swinging down the companion stairs. Out of her sight . . . but not for ever—yet!

Victoria Terminus was a dark humming abyss of human beings; eight long platforms lying grey and loaded with human freight below whirling electric fans; engines blowing off steam, or snorting deliberately backwards with dignified mien, or uttering a long-drawn-out scream and then sliding out of the darkness into the sunlight, bearing behind them a caterpillar-like trail of brown coaches.

Joan arrived bewildered and breathless, and very late. She had been held up at the Customs, she told Peter, who left the side of an official in white uniform and came up to her side, lifting a white Hawkes topi as he did so. "And I had to say goodbye to the Kemps, and the Forsythes, and Nora Lane, and it all took so much longer than I thought it would. And oh, I don't think I have been so hot in my life—Look!" Joan displayed a coal black handkerchief.

"Where are the Kemps, and the Forsythes and Mrs. Lane?" Peter looked over Joan's head down the platform and paid no attention to her last remark. "Good God, I thought you were going to miss the train."

"Well, I did rather, too, but at the last it all got over quicker than I thought it would. He took my ticket for me, here it is." Joan held it out.

"I'll look after it for you." Peter put it in his pocket. "Have you got everything with you that you want in the carriage?" he asked.

"Yes, I think I have; my holdall and a suitcase, and another hat to wear when the sun goes down, that is what Mrs. Kemp told me."

"Yes, all right; but where *are* the Kemps?" Peter was still staring down the platform.

"Why, they're going the other way, you know there is another railway to Delhi, at least they said there was."

"Are the Forsythes and Mrs. Lane going that way too?" Peter's voice was rather sharp.

"Yes, they are." Joan flushed painfully. For some reason—oh, what could it be? he was angry that she was alone.

Peter Heriot turned round and walked back to the man in white uniform. "Are you perfectly certain that there's absolutely nothing else?" he said urgently.

"Absolutely nothing, Sir." The man in white uniform had a nice face—he looked like an old soldier. "As a matter of fact it's only just this minute that this coupé here has fallen vacant," he said. "If it hadn't been for that, you and your young lady would have had to wait for the next train, and that won't fetch up anywhere near Karnmore, nor Palghai neither. But you'll find it quite comfortable, Sir, a bit cramped like, but you're sure to have it to yourselves."

Peter Heriot could have laughed out loud. "Can't you put on another carriage?" he said. He had to ask it, for her sake.

"Not, just for you two, Sir, I'm afraid. That's why I asked you if you might be by any chance expecting friends."

"Oh! Well, then we shall have to put up with the cramp, shan't we?" Peter Heriot nodded pleasantly, and walked back to Joan. "It's nearly time to start," he said. "Get in. Here, put the memsahib's things in here;" he spoke to Cox's Agent, who stood with a couple of suitcases beside him, waiting to be told what to do.

"There are somebody's things in there already," said Joan timidly. It was such a small compartment, only one long wide leather seat, with another slung up to the roof on chains. Not in the least like a railway compartment at home. And as the journey went on for twenty hours, it would be awkward if the person whose luggage she could see was a man—there was a case of golf clubs, and a guncase, as well as a holdall, and a hide suitcase.

"Yes, I know there are." Peter Heriot spoke shortly, his eyes on the clock. There was still another five minutes. "Get in, Joan," he said.

So Joan got in. But her heart swelled: this was a new Peter, distant and dreadful. She had somehow terribly offended him: she sat down and tried not to choke. If a man did get in, she could perhaps get out again before it was time to go to bed, because you had to go to bed in trains—Mrs. Kemp had told her. But she would not worry *him* about it.

"Thank you very much, Sir," the nice station master was touching his peaked cap as the sound of a whistle shrilled along the train. There was the flick of a green flag and Peter Heriot took hold of the brass rail, and swung himself slowly on to the footboard. He held the door of the compartment half open and stood there until the train had drawn out clear of the platform, and then he stepped slowly in, shut the door behind him, and held out his arms . . .

CHAPTER XVI.

Night comes down swiftly in the East. No sooner has the sun sunk in a flaming glory, than everything settles in to rest. There is no gradual coming in of night, it drops, a dark enveloping shroud, over trees and hills and water, all in the space of about half an hour. So by six o'clock the Punjaub Mail that had left Bombay in the blare of a noon day sun was tearing along under a dark inverted bowl of blue stabbed with stars. They had travelled a long way since they left the humming terminus; first through the outskirts of Bombay, rivalling in squalor the wretched dinginess of the surroundings of Liverpool Street; then through green watered country, creeks on which queer lopsided boats sailed; and little patches of vivid green which Peter pointed out to Joan as rice: then a long gradual ascent to the foot of the Ghauts. And there Nazir Ali appeared outside the carriage and told them with a look of adoring proprietorship that tiffin was ready.

"Where?" Joan had smoothed out the smutty look that she had had when she had arrived at the station, and with a good deal of hunting in suitcases had managed to abstract a clean cotton frock, with which she vanished into the little bathroom, giving Peter the sweetest of shy looks as she did so.

But he saw her go: "I say, don't wash in the basin," he said, "have mine," and he reached up and took a leather covered bowl from the rack. "It's not safe in this filthy country," he said, and unfastened it.

"Have you washed in it?" asked Joan watching the strong hand busy with the straps.

"Loads of times . . . why, do you mind?"

"Mind!" Joan's fugitive smile was a caress in itself. She caught it to her heart and vanished.

But left alone Peter Heriot dropped his head in his hands and drew a breath perilously like a sob. This was a stiff bit of road that lay in front of him. Fate had stuck him on a gridiron with a vengeance. However, now it was lunch time —something to do, which, when your heart is beating like an automatic riveter, is a mercy, and he stepped out on to the platform and helped Joan out after him, gripping her little round elbow.

"You stay here, Nazir Ali, and look after the kit," he said. "And look here, if they come to check the tickets, here they are." Heriot took out his leather letter case.

"Attcha Sahib!" Nazir Ali took the case with a profound salaam. And as he raised his old head again his eyes brightened: the sahib had lost the grey look that he had had lately. For Nazir Ali was troubled about the master he adored during the voyage they had just finished. Such confusion in the cabin every morning. Generally the berth of the sahib was smooth and unruffled, now blanket and sheet tossed everywhere, betokening that the sahib had not slept. And the Goanese steward making insinuations that Robertson Sahib had carried a forcible complaint to the Purser that unless Heriot Sahib refrained from switching on the electric light and reading till the small hours of the morning, he would be obliged to change his cabin. All this had caused the old Mohammedan much inward anxiety, for it was not like the sahib he knew and loved. The sahib he knew and loved pursued his way with calmness, lying down to rest, and rising up to work with serenity. So he salaamed again in his relief of spirit, and watched the two figures, one so small, the other so tall, wend their way along the blazing platform to the dining car that lay at the back of the train.

"I call it fun, don't you?" The novelty of it all had laid the Terror again in Joan's spirit, and she smiled across the table.

"Yes, rather, tremendous fun!" Peter reached up and put his white Hawkes topi in the rack. He picked up the menu: "What will you drink?" he asked.

"Water, please."

"No, you won't, not in this country. Anything else but that . . . Whisky and soda?"

"Oh, *so*!" Joan laughed deprecatingly.

"You won't say it like that in a couple of years' time! No, seriously, you mustn't have water, anything else but that."

"All right then, a lime squash," she said.

So lunch went off cheerfully, and to Joan it was all tremendously interesting. They were groaning their way to the Ghauts, one in 37 the gradient, so Peter explained, and they had an engine behind as well as in front. The hills sloped down on either side of them green and wooded, and in several places the road ran near to the line, and Joan saw little scattered groups of natives, women gaily dressed in vivid colourings, many of them carrying big brass pots on their heads: "Not carrying them, only just balancing them," as she cried excitedly, trying to put her head out to see better, and being sternly forbidden to do so by her lover who said that she would instantly go down with sunstroke if she did.

And the lunch over, the train stopped at the station at the top of the Ghauts, and they went back to their compartment and Nazir Ali rose up quietly from the floor and stepped out on to the sunflooded platform and said a quiet word to Major Heriot, who glanced at the man in white uniform standing by the carriage door, and then at Joan and told her to get in out of the sun.

"What's the matter?" he said, and frowned under the pith helmet.

"I'm very sorry, Sir, that I must excess you on one of the tickets," said the Eurasian guard. "You are travelling first class and one of the tickets is for second class."

"Oh, I see." Major Heriot moved a little further away from the door. "Excess it as far as Karnmore, will you please," he said, and he put his hand into his breast pocket.

"What is the matter, do we have to pay as we go along?" said Joan anxiously. She had seen the roll of notes pass hands, and she knew that each one was probably for ten rupees. And she had so little money left: the tips on board had been very heavy.

"No, it's all right, there has been a mistake about my ticket," said Peter, lying quickly. And yet, as he thought afterwards, had it been a lie? Was she not his? every atom of her? What is the body after all when the spirit is yours? "No, it's quite all right," he said. But his heart burned

within him Oh to get the swine round the neck and beat his brains out for his parsimony! Second class, when she was coming to his arms! . . .

"You don't look very well," said Joan timidly. They were on their way again, the little affair of the ticket settled —Nazir Ali safely installed in the servants' compartment next door. It was a good deal cooler, the damp heat of Bombay had given place to a dry crispness.

"I'm perfectly all right." Peter Heriot was wiping his forehead with a gay silk handkerchief, and he put it away again. "Now, this is the time that all sensible people go to sleep," he said, "and I'm going to tuck you up on your berth, and let down mine, and then we'll snooze until tea time."

"Oh, what a waste of time," Joan's lower lip quivered.

"No, it's not really. You'll be dead tired by tomorrow, you have no conception what travelling on and on in this country means. Now, do what you're told." Peter Heriot was busying himself with his holdall; he dragged out a couple of pillows and settled them on the wide leather seat. "Now," he said.

Joan lay down. "For so long I shan't see you," she said, and her lip trembled again.

"Only an hour and a half, and I'll hang my hand down over the edge so that you know I'm there!" He suddenly knelt down on the floor, and brought his face close to hers. "For my sake, Beloved," he said, "try to sleep."

"All right, I will." Joan turned her face into the pillow. Then she lifted it again: "Peter, isn't it rather funny our travelling alone like this?" she asked.

"Well, it isn't what people at home would approve of," he said, and he held one small hand against his heart. "But of course out here things are rather different. And in our case if we hadn't done this, one of us would have to have been left behind. I couldn't have been or I should have been court martialled for over-staying my leave, and I couldn't possibly have left you in Bombay alone, so you see there was nothing else to be done."

"Oh, I see." Joan pondered. "I'm glad it had to be like this," she said.

"Yes . . . well, for some things I am too," said Major

Heriot, but he got up from his knees, "Now, sleep!" he said, "until I tell you that you may wake up."

So Joan turned her face from the window and closed her eyes obediently. She had him with her for the next twenty hours at least, for he had told her that they did not get to Karnmore until twelve o'clock the next day. So for the moment she was happy. But Peter Heriot, as he climbed up to the top berth, first letting it down very carefully for fear any dust might fall on Joan, lay and stared up at the Lincrusta ceiling with a look of haggard despair in his eyes. It was damned cruel, this, he thought resentfully . . . a deliberate torturing of him by Fate who meant to get her own back for the past. And he lay on his back, one long leg crossed over the other, his arms folded under his head for pillow, and would not look down when he heard her little movements to try and make him. For he knew if he were to look down and see her rather round grey eyes pleading with him to be more loving because the time was so short, he would give way. So he lay, and watched the brown landscape flying by, fields of tall green bargeri—clusters of mud huts, generally surrounded with a scattering of goats, or a buffalo tied up to the fence—odd squat hills bare of the faintest vestige of vegetation—until the long train drew up with a squealing of brakes at a large junction. And then he looked over the edge of the leather seat, and met Joan's eyes, as he knew he would, round and beseeching.

"You never hung your hand over," she said, and her lip trembled.

"No, well, I thought it might keep you awake," said Peter Heriot, and he settled his soft collar with a hand that was not quite steady, and slid down on to the floor beside her. "Tea! See old Nazir Ali with it? Up you get! you'll be glad of it."

So they had tea, sitting side by side on the lower berth, and then Peter pushed the tray under the seat, and got out his pipe, and filled it slowly, trying not to see how Joan was watching him like a cat watches a mouse—wasn't he going to kiss her at all? Her heart throbbed out the question despairingly. But Peter Heriot knew that he was very nearly at breaking point, and he sat a little way away from her, and as the soft twilight drew its filmy curtain over the

fields and hills and patches of cultivation, and from almost every little mud hut a spiral of soft grey smoke curled up and lost itself in the vague evening light, he drew heavily at his pipe, and only spoke to draw her attention to some little thing that might interest her—a flight of geese spread out fanlike against the darkening sky—a troup of monkeys slinging themselves from one spreading banyan tree to the other. And Joan sat, her hands gripped damply in her lap, wondering if this could be the same man that she had known on the *Nerona* with the stern hard profile seen faintly against the grey square of the window.

Then came dinner, in the brightly lighted dining car, everyone in ordinary hats and the men in dark suits; Peter had also changed, emerging from the little bathroom spick and span in a grey flannel suit that Joan loved—he had worn it on board. And she slipped in and put on a silk coat and skirt, tussore, with a soft blouse, open at the neck and a little felt hat that came down low over her eyes. The lady like a horse watched them from a distant table, and in the intervals of trying to persuade the courteous dining-car manager to let her have most of the courses at half the scheduled price, she made remarks in an undertone to her neighbour, not the other nice missionary who had gone to Poona, but a woman as jaundiced as herself who was going to be matron at a school in a hill station.

"I can say without any hesitation that I have never seen more flagrant behaviour on any voyage that I have made," said the lady like a horse. "And when I say that I say a good deal."

And the other lady nodded and gloated, and made a mental note of Joan's face in case she ever met her again. For of course it would be a useful thing to know about, a journey of twenty-four hours in a coupé with a man who had made systematic love to you for the whole of a voyage...

Then dinner was over, and Peter sat down with his brown hand curled round the little glass of liqueur brandy, and stared at the glowing liquid; as the train gave a long warning scream, he drank it off slowly, and got up; "Come along," he said. Nazir Ali met them at the door of the carriage and salaamed profoundly, and Peter stood outside and finished his cigarette. "Bring chota hazri at Walrai," he said, "if we're punctual

Nazir Ali." And Joan got in and looked round the little compartment, it was just like a cabin, she thought, the two berths arranged so neatly, with the blankets folded over at the foot. Then the big bell clanged, and Peter Heriot raised his brown hand to his forehead, returning his servant's salute, and pitched his still smouldering cigarette on to the permanent way, and swung himself slowly into the carriage, shutting the door behind him with a shove of his straight back. "Off," he said, quietly.

Joan was down on the ground, grovelling in her suitcase. "Do I undress?" she said, and she flushed up to the roots of her short hair.

"Well, no, not entirely," said Peter Heriot, and he looked over her head up on to the rack above his berth, in which Nazir Ali had carefully propped a bottle of soda water and a glass. "Put on a dressing-gown or something like that. And if you don't mind I'll shed a collar—no hurry—just whenever you've finished. . . ."

As Joan moved quietly about the little bathroom, so funny, much bigger than one on an English train, she tried not to see the things that belonged to him. The hair-brushes with their ivory backs, the safety razor with its funny flannelly case, very old, the strop, hooked up by its little cord loop to a jutting out bit of the pipe of the shower bath. Those were the things that it tore her in sunder to see—the little intimacies of life in which she had no share. She could read his proofs, could have meals with him, even be in his arms. But no one but the woman whom he loved, and whom he chose to share his life, could know the little stupid things like what toothpaste he used—or the sort of soap he liked to shave with . . . Joan suddenly held her throat and leant against the tiled wall. It was licking its lips at her, the Terror. "Can't you be content to know the name of the shaving soap that your husband uses?" she could almost hear the words as if they had been said aloud.

"Well, you've been very quick." Peter tried not to see how white Joan was as she came out into the compartment again. In her pale blue crêpe kimono, and bare feet thrust into heelless slippers, she did not nearly reach his shoulder. "You settle in and I'll put the shade thing over the light," he said, "then I won't disturb you again." Joan

suddenly felt round her mouth with a funny stiff tongue. That was what it was then, *he was tired of her.* He resented this enforced intimacy, and he was disgusted with her because she did not feel the awkwardness of it more ; that was why he did not take any notice of her, any loving notice, that was. Of course he would always be courteous whatever he felt. . . .

"Yes, all right." Joan stood looking up like a child. "Goodnight, Peter," she said.

"Goodnight." Peter Heriot closed his eyes suddenly as the blood rushed in a drumming flood to his head and back again. "Good night, sleep well," and he took the little face between his hands, bent it down a little and kissed the white parting.

"Not any more kiss than that ? " Joan's soft mouth was working uncontrollably, as she lifted her face to his.

"No, not now, darling." Peter Heriot thrust his hands suddenly into his pockets. Brutal, senseless words, when he could have swept her to his heart and never let her go. "No, I want you to go to sleep, and you won't if I kiss you ; don't you remember on board how you used to tell me that it kept you awake ? "

"Yes, but . . ." Joan gripped her hands together. No, it was not for her to remind him that this was almost the last time that he would be able to kiss her. She gathered the kimono round her ankles, and stooped her head to climb on to the wide seat.

Peter Heriot watched her with his soul in his eyes. Such a little cropped head with the hair tumbling over the small ears. A brief flash of white feet as she dropped her heeless slippers on the floor behind her. But when Joan turned again he was crinkling his eyes at the light as he drew the green felt shade over it.

"Now you'll be all right. Sleep well, and we shall have chota hazri at about seven, but don't you bother to get up until I tell you. I'll shave and that sort of thing, first, and then leave you a clear field."

Left alone, Joan rolled over on to her side and dragged the sheet over her face. This was misery beyond anything that she had ever imagined, because now the torment to come would be trebly enhanced by the thought of the barrenness of

the parting. He had already begun to think less of her! his real life was beginning now, in which she had no part. On the ship it was different, there he had had nothing to do . . . now he was a man with a career and a profession and they had already begun to grip him again. And she . . . she had to go and begin a new life. A life of unspeakable horror now that she knew what love really was. Before, it had been terrible enough with its dragging down into depths . . . but now! . . . she stifled a little scream as the bright light shot aslant the compartment again. Peter Heriot came very quietly out of the bathroom, closing the door very carefully behind him. He tiptoed about, stooping down beside the suitcase, and Joan in the darkness of the lower berth watched him. His brown neck rose out of the collarless white shirt, she recognised the grey flannels with the belt round the waist that he had been used to wear on board when he played games. He thought she was asleep, asleep, when her very soul was praying, supplicating that he would take her in his arms . . . But Peter Heriot knew that the breaking point was not very far off with him, so he did not even glance into the darkness of the lower berth, and Joan soon felt the gentle yielding of the leather seat as he put a careful foot on it and hoisted himself on to his own bunk. And then after a little soft creaking there was silence, only the spurt of a match and the fragrant stealing of the smell of tobacco showed that he was smoking.

One of the wooden shutters of the windows had fallen a little, and above it Joan lay and watched the landscape as they fled by it. It was a starlight night, thousands of stars that really twinkled, hung in a sky of darkest blue. Every now and then the sky line would be broken by a desolate peak of hill that seemed to stand alone in a desert of flat country. From time to time they slid with a grinding of brakes into stations, and then there would be the dazzling blur of lights on the shutters, and the hoarse cries of sweetmeat vendors as they patrolled the trains. Not the hollow echoing of an English station, but strident screaming—apparently when natives travelled they screamed all the time, thought Joan, lifting herself a little on her elbow to see. And there they were, tearing up and down the platform, most of them carrying large bundles, and all shouting, and amid the shouts were mingled the yapping of pariah dogs and the wailing of children.

It was all so uncontrolled, thought Joan, marvelling as she remembered her own country. And then, on their way again, slowly at first, and then gradually gathering speed, till they fled through little wayside stations with a sound like the swish of a rapier drawn hastily from a scabbard. Then it began to get colder, and from the black rim of the horizon a tiny crescent moon crept up, and Joan half unconsciously drew up the blanket a little from the foot of her berth and slept uneasily.

But as Death always chooses the earliest dawn to carry away the faltering spirit that knows not at that hour whether it wants to go or stay, so Despair, nearest kinsman of Death, always chooses the dawn for her fiercest onslaughts, and Joan started up bolt awake at about three. For a couple of seconds she did not know where she was, then it all came back to her. The compartment showed faintly in the subdued green light, on one of the hooks Peter's topi bag swung gently outwards with the movements of the train. The shutter had worked its way down a little further, Joan could feel the grit of sand on her pillow. It was very much colder, the night air blew in through the aperture, and the blanket had come untucked a little at the foot of the berth and her feet were cold. She sat up to tuck it in, and as she did so she remembered one night on her honeymoon, when it had rained all day, and blown all the evening, and the night had come in chill and dark. And in the early dawn of the next day she had waked from her nightmare haunted sleep to find herself lying shivering only in her nightdress; Mr. Mohammed Khan had also felt cold and had therefore tucked all the blankets more thoroughly into his side and then rolled over in them. Joan had lain and wondered what she should do, and had come to the conclusion that anything would be better than waking him by trying to pull them back, and so had only slipped out and got her dressing gown and had managed to get comparatively warm in that. Now as she lay back again it all began to come before her with the clarity of the cinema—it was exactly like a cinema the way each scene was thrown on her blank mind, for with sleep her senses were dulled a little. And she saw it all—there was surely a malignant hand at work on the machine, for some scenes seemed to be prolonged a little. Joan with damp hands, and heart beating all over, watched, lying with

eyes tightly shut, knowing that it was coming, the climax of horror. And then there it was, sprawled all over her throbbing consciousness: "*Where will you be this time tomorrow?*" "No, No! *No!*" Without knowing that she did it she struggled up on to her knees. "No, No." She tried to whisper it quietly, as if she was reasoning with somebody. Nobody could expect her to do that—"You see I love someone else," she whispered that too, very low. But the Terror, knowing that he held the field, enjoyed a little rapier play, "Ah, but you see, unfortunately that has nothing to do with it. You are the lawful wife of somebody else." And now Joan was crouching with her hands over her ears, "Yes, but you see I don't love him"—her teeth were beginning to chatter. "Nothing to do with it at all": the Terror flung away his rapier, it was waste of energy when he had her so completely in his power, "You belong legally to another man and he will see that you remember it." And then the train slowed up with grinding of brakes and a shriek of a warning whistle, and they began to crawl slowly over a huge suspension bridge; and as they crawled Joan still knelt, and her brain repeated the same words over and over again, stupidly: "You see nobody could expect me to bear that, and so when we get to the other side I will say it, and God will understand why I did."

And so, a little later, Peter Heriot, flung on his face, heavily asleep after hours of agonized wakefulness, felt Joan touch him and waked instantly.

"Yes, what is it?" he said, and sat up.

"I want to say something to you." Joan's cropped head was just on the level of his eyes; almost without knowing he did it, he put out his hand and laid it on her hair.

"Yes, well, what is it?" He kicked himself clear of the blanket and swung his feet over the edge. "Don't stand there, you'll get cold. I'll come down. Gad, no wonder it's cold, the shutter's half down;" he dragged it up quickly.

"I'd rather stand," said Joan, and wondered whose voice it was.

Peter Heriot steadied himself with a lean hand on the upper berth, as the train lurched round a curve. "Well, what is it you have to say?" he said, and Joan could see even through the shrouded light the arresting blue of his eyes.

They were a sort of steely blue as if he were fortifying himself with some inward strength. And as a matter of fact he was, because he suddenly knew what Joan was going to say, and he knew that alone his strength would not be sufficient.

"I have suddenly come to the conclusion that I can't go back to my husband," she said, and there was an odd formality in her voice. "I don't love him, you see, and so I know that it would kill me. So, I want, I want . . . ." her voice tailed off suddenly.

"Yes?" Peter Heriot was looking at her closely.

Joan gripped her hands together. "I want you to . . ." she stopped and brushed the hair out of her eyes, "It's more hard than I thought it would be," she said, in a voice faintly surprised, like a child's.

"Well, come into my arms and say it," said Peter Heriot, and he sat down on the lower berth, and lifted her on to his knee.

"When I feel you, I have the most awful feeling as if my heart was going to break," said Joan, and she suddenly flung her hands over her mouth to stop a cry.

Peter Heriot pressed her head back into his shoulder with a hand that shook. "Don't," he said; "tell me what you want to say. I want to hear it."

"I want you to . . . I want you to . . ." Joan suddenly broke into the most awful sobs that came strangling up from the depths of her. "Don't you see I must belong to you altogether," she cried. "And there isn't any other way. Then you could take me away with you, hide me somewhere —I don't care where it would be. Peter, I can't go back, I tell you I can't go back. Don't make me—don't make me . . ." Joan suddenly drew back from him and stared up into his face with eyes devastated with horror. "You're going to refuse," she said.

"And if I am, it's because you have no conception how I love you," said Peter Heriot, and he put his hand over his mouth so that she should not see how it was trembling.

"Joan, don't," he said, as she tried to wrench herself out of his arms, "besides, you can't, so it's quite useless."

"I'm degraded . . . hideously . . . for ever . . . let me go," she said, and fought to be free.

There was a gleam of a laugh in Peter Heriot's tortured eyes, as he held her pinioned.

"There is no degradation in love," he said; "besides, you have done nothing to degrade yourself. You have only offered yourself to a man who is not fit to touch you in any event. Joan . . . don't . . . you have done nothing . . . nothing that doesn't make you doubly dear to me. Stop crying . . . Beloved, listen to me," he pleaded. "Don't you know that it has been torture—hell—to me to lie here all night knowing that you were so near? And that if I didn't love you in a way of which you have no conception it wouldn't have been possible. It is just because I do love you like that that it is. You see, to me you are just that—the girl whose honour is to me more sacred than my own life."

"Not now—not now!" Joan was crying tumultuously.

"Yes, more than ever now"; one slow tear was making its way out of the dark blue eyes. "Just because I know how much you really do love me. And Joan, if you do love me, try to stop crying: it kills me to hear you." Heriot's face showed grey under the dim shrouded light.

Joan caught hold of her throat. "I will, I will;" she turned her tear-soaked face into the brown neck.

"And now, while we're talking I want to say this." Peter Heriot's voice came rather muffled as he buried his mouth in the cropped hair. "I have a feeling that in God's good time we are to meet again. I don't know how, or when, but I feel that we shall. And I want you to remember that, when things seem too hard for you, and I shall try to do it too. And if at any time you want any money you know how to get it. And you will . . ." And then it all came over Peter Heriot; the despair, the hideousness of it, the hideousness of what lay immediately before her, and he let her slide gently from his knee on to the berth on which they sat, and dropped his head into the pillow that she had lately left, and gave way to the awful difficult tears of a man, tears that always seem as if they were being dragged up from the very depths of despair. And the sight of that dear head bowed did more for Joan than anything else could have done, and all that was

maternal in her surged up to the surface, and she caught it to her breast.

"I shall be all right;" it came out with a rush in a frantic longing to comfort. "I know I shall, I feel it here. Peter . . . dearest, most precious, don't. It *is* my fault, it *is* all my fault. I had no right to say what I did—it was unspeakable, hideous of me. I love you . . . Oh, I do love you . . . and we shall meet again, I feel we shall too, somehow. Peter! be happy!"

Peter Heriot lifted a haggard face. "Yes, all right," he said, and he brushed a trembling hand across his eyes. "Where's my handkerchief? I'm as bad as you;" he gave a little shaky laugh, and got up, walking to the window. The cold night air whistled through the shutters, the train plunged and roared its way through deepest jungle; only overhead the stars still twinkled coldly. He stood there for a moment or two, and then he turned round. "Look here," he said, "I have been thinking. Much more of this will kill me. I'm going to change at Galtar. We ought to get there in about a couple of hours' time, and I can pick up the Northern Express there that will get me up to Palghai, only a few hours late: I shall be able to square that all right. Then you will arrive without me—you won't have to change, it is all perfectly straightforward—and I would rather it was like that. And so would you really. I'll begin to get my things stowed away, and at the next stop I'll tell Nazir Ali."

"Peter! . . . ."

"Yes, I know, but when it's once over it will be better. But there is only one thing," he came and sat down beside her, "I want you to promise me faithfully that when I have gone you will not try to do anything foolish like you once did on board. If you will not promise me that I shall have to stay, but I do not want to . . ."

"Peter!" the tears rained against the brown neck.

"Yes, I know, but it's going to come out all right in the end. And if things ever seem more than you can bear just think how I love you . . . Joan, give me your mouth . . . Oh, my Beloved, my Beloved . . ."

There was a little silence as they clung together, then Peter lifted his head and moved the pillow a little. "Just for an hour," he said, "till I must start to pack. Put your

dearest head on my heart, Joan, and try to go to sleep. Then I can remember it afterwards, how you trusted me enough to do that . . ."

Joan laid her cropped head on the white shirt, and flung one hand across him, and lay with her eyes obediently shut, as a mother would do to a child that she wanted to pacify. Peter Heriot lay, one foot kicked out and resting on the suitcase, thinking with a sort of dumb resentful despair that perhaps this was going to be accounted to him for a certain amount of righteousness. And yet, why should it be ? It was surely only a negative virtue to behave decently when you had an opportunity to do otherwise.

Then rather later, when the steely twinkling stars were beginning to lose their steeliness in a flood of amber light, Major Heriot stood on a chill deserted platform, Nazir Ali, his funny little bent figure heavily muffled in a chuddah, feverishly counting the different pieces of luggage. But the blue eyes that were watching the red tail-light swiftly vanishing round a curve were the eyes of a man stricken to his soul. And the torpid refreshment room attendant roused himself with unusual alacrity to fetch the brandy and soda that the tall lean sahib with the scarf round his neck asked for in a voice of such unusual ferocity. An unusual request from a sahib at five o'clock in the morning, he thought . . . .

And in the dim compartment, Joan stood still for a minute, and then fell stumbling on to her knees.

CHAPTER XVII.

Bazaar 'gup' always filters through to the civil community of an Indian station sooner or later, and so about a month after Mr. Mohammed Khan had returned to Karnmore it became common property that he had married an English wife, and that she was going to follow him out to India in the autumn. But the news only seriously affected two people. One was the Commissioner of Karnmore, who, being the senior official in the station felt that everything that concerned the welfare of it was his business, and the other was the Civil surgeon who had once had to attend the English wife of a Mohammedan who had had her first baby in purdah. He would never have been called in had the usual processes of putting a charcoal brazier under the bed and the deafening beating of tom toms outside the door been quickly effectual, but in this case the girl had been possessed of a very tough constitution and she fought for her life. Yet unlimited absence of hygiene at a time like that will down the toughest, and when it became evident that death was inevitable, the filthy crone crouching by the string bed went in search of the master of the house.

"Fetch English doctor Sahib," she said.

The Mohammedan was annoyed: he had just had his midday meal and was preparing for his afternoon sleep. Besides, the child had been a girl and it was still faintly alive.

"Wah!" he said. "English doctor much money asking."

The crone drew her skinny finger across her throat with a crackling noise that came from a pan stained mouth.

"Hanging more dearer," she said.

So the Mohammedan, who knew the ridiculous way that the British regarded the quite natural process of dying in childbirth, twisted one foot from under him, and rolled himself out of the grateful shade of his room, and grumbled his way to the blazing bazaar street where he hailed a tonga and drove

angrily to the Civil Surgeon's bungalow, a big whitewashed house standing in the middle of a beautiful compound. The Civil Surgeon was a young man, and still retained some of the illusions with which he had come out to the country, so he did not, as a more senior man would have done, send the stout Mohammedan to the dispensary for the Native Assistant Surgeon. "But where is it?" he asked. "Can I get there in my car?"

The Mohammedan visualised the narrow gully that led to his house, a gully that very effectually supplied the need of a main drain, and he shook his head. "Nearly getting in motor," he replied.

So the doctor followed the tonga, that certainly could cover the ground at a very excellent speed, and when he saw the Mohammedan get out, he got out too, and when he saw where he was expected to follow, he lit a Trichinopoly cheroot. But when he, stooping and peering, saw below the hovering cloud of flies the white face, his own face got whiter, and he kicked the filthy crone, and cursed her in her own language, and he wrenched open the brown leather case, and rolled up his sleeves. But it was too late, and when he saw that it was, he shouted for the old crone back again, and forced a palm leaf into her hand, and told her to fan until he told her to stop, or every relation that she had ever had would die in everlasting torment, and then he knelt down on the floor and took the wasted hand in his. And the blue eyes in their dark sockets fastened themselves gratefully in his: "Tell—anyone—you—can—not—to," was all she said, and that was only said because the dying will forced it out, a last message to a world that really didn't know.

So the Civil Surgeon heard with a good deal of distaste that Mr. Mohammed Khan was expecting out an English wife, and he made an opportunity to approach the Commissioner on the subject,—they had been playing a hard single of tennis together at the Club.

"Yes, I know." The Commissioner was watching the gassy bubbles of the soda in his glass wriggling upwards—"Yes, fill it up, 'boy'—yes, I know, and I feel very much as you do about it. But in this case it may not be so bad because this Mohammed Khan has been Home, — to Cambridge, I believe. And therefore he must have absorbed a certain

amount of English ideas. He's not a pukka Mohammedan in his tastes, I mean to say he affects European habits, and style of dressing."

"Yes, but of course he is a Mohammedan by faith, Sir."

"Yes, I know, but still, a great many Mohammedans are very enlightened. Although, mind you, I don't want to stand up for the man. To begin with he's damned seditious, I happen to know that very well."

"But his faith allows him more than one wife, Sir." The doctor was engaged to a girl at home, and he had ideals.

The Commissioner shrugged his shoulders; "Yes, I know, but Mr. Mohammed Khan has strivings and he is getting together a very excellent practice here. He would not therefore be likely to obtrude before an English community any particular tenet of his religion that would prejudice them against him. If he has other wives, he won't keep them here. Mind you, Hazeltine, I don't want to stand up for the man, I dislike the whole thing as much as you do. But the only thing to hope for is this, that he has done what so many of them do, married his landlady's daughter. Then she won't find the social ostracism, that she will have to contend with here, so awful. Because it's not an atom of use trying to make the women of the station call, and all that sort of thing, they simply won't do it. But she'll call probably on my memsahib, he'll make her, he's an awful pusher, and then we can have her to something, just to make her feel that she's not altogether outside the pale."

So two people awaited Joan's arrival in the little up country station of Karnmore with misgiving, the others either did not know, or if they did know they did not care. Life in an Indian up country station is very much like life in one large goodhumoured family, interests are common to all. The common meeting ground is the Club, where over the 'peg' or the short drink, the most intimate details of everybody else's business is discussed, sometimes ill-naturedly, but generally with the most broad minded good humour. For you are all members of one community, and your eyes are all on the same goal, Home, with enough to retire on! But there is no room for an alien—you have got to be of the pack, or the pack will have none of you.

But Joan did not know this, and as she stood in the full glare of the midday sun on the platform of Karnmore, for there is no place that can dazzle like an Indian railway station at midday, she did not feel the stupefaction of misery that she expected to. To begin with her emotions were dulled, you cannot live at fever heat for three weeks without feeling it. And also when you have a tooth out you do not really begin to feel the pain of the cavity until some time afterwards. Also, the sight of Mr. Mohammed Khan was like the sight of something from another world; he did not come in to the focus of life as she now knew it, he was like a speck of dust on the lens of a field glass, something that must be hurriedly brushed off so that you could really see properly. . . . .

But Mr. Mohammed Khan did not feel in the least like a speck of dust on the lens of a field glass, he felt that he was the most important figure in a very affecting picture, and he hoped that Joan would at last realise it. "My little Rose of Sharon," he said, and stooped and kissed her.

That did stir something somewhere—but nothing that really mattered. Joan lifted the small pale face under the white topi and returned the salute vaguely.

"And have you had a pleasant journey?" Mr. Mohammed Khan looked up a little uneasily at the door of the first class carriage outside which they stood. An error, and a very expensive one, unless Joan had had the necessary foresight to barricade herself in the bathroom when the tickets were checked. However, Mr. Mohammed Khan felt magnanimous at getting back his wife. He could afford to be generous, and would therefore, for the moment, say nothing about it.

"Oh, yes, very, thank you," said Joan still vaguely. "I have some things in the van, and my holdall is still in the carriage."

"I will see that they are obtained." Mr. Mohammed Khan jerked his chin at a coolie, who was staring vacantly. He did not care for handling the baggage of Indians, although he was an Indian himself. "Fetch the things from the van," he jabbered in Hindustani as he shifted his cheroot from one corner of his mouth to the other; "we will come outside and wait in the gharry, Joan. It will be cooler than this."

They went out together. One or two people stared at them, especially a collection of English Tommies, who were standing loitering about in the middle of a stack of kit-bags, and piled rifles.

Joan's eyes were hot and wavering as the fierce sun beat down on them. She had never imagined such sun, it seemed almost to shine upwards from the ground. And there was such a noise. They were passing the third class waiting-room enclosure. Little groups of natives sat together, all talking. Children climbed in and out of their mother's arms and lay kicking, stark naked on the ground, fat little shining brown bodies, delicious to look at, thought Joan. Hungry emaciated pariah dogs prowled round each group, famine eyed, and in many cases horribly diseased. Strange wild looking men with flaming chuddahs and henna dyed beards sat hunched up with their arms round their knees. And all had luggage beside them ; little gaily painted steel trunks ; huge bundles from which knobby excrescences bulged ; kerosine oil tins full of odd articles like saucepans and palm leaf fans.

"Oh, do let us stop and look!" Joan's eyes shone excitedly. This really was the East. But Mr. Mohammed Khan swept her on.

"It is not seemly to stop and stare at such people," he said. "They are not of our class."

"No, I know they aren't, but they are so awfully picturesque," said Joan. But Mr. Mohammed Khan was not of the same opinion, so he proceeded resolutely ahead. And they came to the barrier, where a Eurasian ticket collector stood yawning, his peaked cap pushed to the back of his head. But as he was busily occupied in talking to a friend he only jerked his head as Joan and her husband passed through, and did not even put out his hand for the ticket which Joan held damply in her hand. For when earlier in that day she had at last gone blindly into the bathroom feeling that perhaps if she put her face in cold water it would lessen the feeling of a steel band round her temples, she had found it there, on the shelf of the looking glass, done up in a little packet, with the excess ticket check with it, and also two hundred rupee notes, and two rupees twelve annas in silver. With it a little pencilled note : "In case you are ever short of cash, darling. And have a good breakfast and don't forget to tip the 'boy.'

And don't be hard on me for not telling you about the ticket, I couldn't, because I knew you would try to pay me back. And now, God bless and keep you for ever." So Joan had taken the little packet and put it in her soft leather bag, and had only kept out the ticket and the excess check. But she was glad that it had not to be examined and commented on. If it had, it might have dug up the thing that now lay quiet staring up with sightless eyes. Not a thing at all, at least not a thing that you could feel alive, but you knew it was alive because it moved. Like something with the earth stamped down all over it, only not enough earth.

"This is our gharry." Mr. Mohammed Khan made a self-satisfied gesture of his hand, and Joan followed it with her eyes. How very odd; evidently an Indian gharry was different from anything that you had at home. This was like nothing so much as an old sedan chair, only much bigger, and instead of people holding the shafts, they were stuck on to wheels with a man on the box, and a very thin horse. And the man on the box had on a very old khaki puggaree, and a coat like a Tommie's coat with brass buttons. But the horse!

"Oh, does it have enough to eat?" Joan was staring at it with pitiful eyes.

"Does what have enough to eat?" Mr. Mohammed Khan made a clacking noise of intensest irritation with his tongue.

"The horse."

"I am sure I don't know." Mr. Mohammed Khan was venting his irritation on one of the station coolies who was hoisting the luggage on to the roof of the gharry, by poking him with his stick.

"But if it is ours oughtn't we to find out?" Joan looked at her husband doubtfully. He looked so funny in a topi, not a bit the same as he had done at home. And if he belonged to the country did he need to wear a topi? None of the natives on board had done so. But the horse; it was lolling its tongue out. "I believe it is thirsty," she exclaimed. "Let us wait and let it have a drink before we start."

"Get *in*." It burst from Mr. Khan in a frenzy. So much about the horse, and so few words of welcome, for him, the husband! Joan had better mind what she was about; this was not in England with its lax morality and the free and

easy equality of the sexes. Here he was master, of the body as well as of the soul, and Joan was going to be made remember it too, if she seemed in danger of forgetting it. But here his anger cooled a little. She looked very sweet, his little wife, such a small foot, and a gently curved little breast. And she was new to it all—she would soon get accustomed to the sight of overdriven tortured horses—also to the idea that he was master, if he began the way that he meant to go on.

Karnmore shared in common with most up-country Indian stations the look of having been built by mistake. Houses stood about anyhow, in big compounds. There was no scheme of roads with houses on either side of them, they just appeared. All were one storied and nearly all colour-washed the same colour, a deep creamy yellow. Joan looked out of the side of the gharry with much interest.

"We are now passing through the Civil Lines," said Mr. Mohammed Khan with the air of the showman. "Beyond are the cantonments. Karnmore now possesses two regiments, an Indian and an English. Both are entirely unnecessary but owing to the partiality of the British Government for squandering, they are maintained here at a heavy cost."

"But would it be all right without them if there was a rising, then?" asked Joan. Her school days were not so very far behind her, and she remembered the Indian Mutiny, with its history of hideous treachery and undying gallantry.

"A people who are justly ruled do not rise," said Mr. Mohammed Khan succinctly.

"Don't they ever?" asked Joan, crinkling her brows and trying to remember.

"Never," said Mr. Mohammed Khan, settling it once and for all.

"Oh?" but although not convinced Joan did not carry on the discussion. Something told her suddenly that they would never agree on this point. Besides, the gharry swayed a little like a railway carriage, and it had been like that before when a khaki topi bag had swung gently out from the wall and the light had come out very faintly from under the green shade.

"You are not feeling well?" Mr. Khan turned abruptly as Joan leant quietly back against the cushions.

"Quite well." But Joan spoke stupidly. What was it that made her feel as if she was not there at all, as if all this was only a dream, unreal?

"Well, sit up and look about you," said Mr. Mohammed Khan, his dark, rather polished-looking face alert. "We are now approaching your future home; just one more turning, and we shall be there."

Joan leaned forward. They had now left the white road along which they had been crawling, for mercifully the coachman knew the capacity of the horse, and left it at that, and were traversing a sort of cart track. It cut across a bit of waste land, part of which was evidently used as a dumping ground, for it was strewn with odd things like broken galvanised iron tubs, and battered kerosine oil tins; Joan wondered vaguely at the number of kerosine oil tins she had seen already, for she had yet to learn that they are a thing much beloved by the native, and that he often lives in a house built entirely of them.

"There is the gate of our house;" Mr. Mohammed Khan pointed it out excitedly.

Joan followed the direction of his wavering finger. Across the bit of land, right in the corner, she saw a couple of bright blue gateposts. Beyond, on the other side of posts were trees, close together, green and shadowy.

"Oh, I am so glad there are trees," she exclaimed. "It all seems so fearfully, fearfully dazzling, so far."

Mr. Mohammed Khan was pleased, and justified too, because only the morning before, he had had words with the Civil surgeon whom he had met out for his morning ride. He had waved his riding whip in the direction of Mr. Mohammed Khan's house, and had said objectionable words about the trees: "Better have them thinned a bit before your wife arrives, Khan. It's not healthy in this country to be so shut in." And Mr. Khan had frowned and had said stiffly that he preferred the trees, and that he was sure his wife would too, and the Civil surgeon had galloped away impatiently. And now, you see, he had been right, because Joan did prefer them. So he entered the gate in the highest good humour and he moved a little closer to Joan in the gharry like a coffin set up on end: "My little wife returns to the arms of her husband," he said.

But Joan did not hear : it was odd, she thought stupidly, how everything sounded as if it belonged to another world and was being said across a wide chasm. Besides, they had trundled through the blue gate posts, and were bowling up a rather narrow drive. The drive was lined thickly with trees, so thickly that it gave the impression of being a green tunnel—something like one of the tanks that she had once seen at the Aquarium at Brighton, with odd fish swimming in it, thought Joan smiling at the odd thought, and in the tank weird greenish light struck down from above like it did here. Only in the tank there was more light than there was here. Perhaps her eyes would go like a fish's did ; she began to laugh out loud.

"What amuses you ? " Mr. Mohammed Khan spoke rather sharply as he turned. There was something odd about his wife, he thought, and he felt irritated again. She had the stunned stupid look that she had had during the first week of their honeymoon. And it was not a good beginning because he did not feel at all in the humour for that sort of thing now. " What amuses you ? " he asked again.

But Joan had heard herself laugh, and it had frightened her. You didn't laugh when you were in a tank either, it was a serious business. " I laughed by mistake," she said.

" Oh." Mr. Mohammed Khan was still ruffled and they drove the rest of the way in silence. And then the carriage drew up at the foot of a little flight of stone steps with a great deal of sliding and slipping of the decrepit horse, and Joan saw her new home.

The first thing that struck her was its blueness. It was bluer than even the gate posts. Blue all over, picked out with white. It was a single storied bungalow, with a long dark verandah running the whole length of the front. The verandah was very dark, it could not help being so, as it was so completely closed in with trees. Four pillars held up the thatched roof, each bluer than the other. And the verandah was so dark that coming in from the glare of the sun you could not see if any rooms led off it. They did, as Joan found out later, but at present she could see nothing but a long black oblong.

" Welcome home, my little wife," said Mr. Mohammed Khan, B.A., LL.B. The blue gatepost bore this inspiring

inscription in large white letters, but to Mr. Khan's disappointment, Joan had not noticed it. He handed her out with empressement.

They walked up the little flight of steps together, Mr. Khan's india-rubber-glove hand holding hers. The whole house was absolutely silent. Even their footsteps made no sound on the coarse grass matting, over which Joan tripped her foot in a big rent in it.

"Carefully! Where is the butler?" Mr. Khan spoke with exasperation. "Koi hai!" it went rolling and echoing through the house.

"Hai, sahib!" an incredibly dirty native servant, puggaree hanging in a long wisp down his back, precipitated himself through one of the dim doorways. "Salaam!" he saluted Joan.

"You son of a pig!" Mr. Khan was evidently put out: he pointed with his stick towards the gharry. "Bring it all in," he commanded.

But the butler was not going to do that. He waited until Joan and Mr. Khan had gone inside and then clapped his hands quietly. Another figure, dirtier than his own, appeared round a corner.

The butler spat. "Bring in the baggage," he said in the vernacular, "and be quick about it."

The sweeper, most menial of all servants in an Indian household, stooped to shoulder the trunks littered about the gravel at the foot of the steps. With the help of the coachman they were borne laboriously into the echoing bedroom where Joan was standing, staring as they came in. It was a very large, almost unfurnished room. In the middle stood two wooden beds close together. On the poles that reared their gaunt lengths from each corner hung a very large mosquito curtain. It was not quite clean and there were one or two holes in it, but it was large enough to cover both beds at once. The walls were whitewashed and very lofty, and at the top were two ventilators. A funny flat animal ran across one of them as Joan stared.

"Oh, whatever is it?" she exclaimed.

Mr. Khan laughed indulgently as he looked up and caught the flick of the little tail. "Only a lizard, my darling," he said.

And at that beloved word the dead thing did half sit up, but thinking better of it it lay down again. Not quite time yet, thought the Terror, grinning.

"They don't bite, do they?" asked Joan timidly. Somehow it all helped to carry out the illusion of a tank that an animal like a fish should suddenly appear from nowhere.

"No, they do not," said Mr. Mohammed Khan, and he moved suddenly nearer to Joan. The servants had gone, and she had taken off her hat, and her small face looked very fresh and young under the short curly hair.

"Oh, I'm glad." But Joan had turned and was continuing her scrutiny of the room. Against one wall stood a very lean cupboard lurching out a little into the room. Beyond it was a curtained doorway. The curtain was not on rings; it hung on a string and sagged. She pulled it aside and walked through the doorway. Here was another smaller room with a dressing-table in it. And beyond yet another room, rather an odd one with a stone floor, part of which was intersected by a tiny division of cement and on the stone floor stood a galvanized iron tub, and beside it was a huge earthenware basin of water. "Oh, what a lovely thing!" Joan was staring at it with intensest admiration. It was like the big bowls with brown insides that you kept bread in at home, only nicer.

"To what do you refer?" Mohammed Khan had joined her. He liked to be close to her, his little wife.

"That thing," Joan pointed out the gurrah.

"Why, that is only a water gurrah!" Mr. Khan laughed contemptuously. "And now we will go and have a little breakfast," he said, and he encircled her waist with his arm.

"Breakfast!" Joan closed her eyes suddenly. But she had had it . . . in another life.

"Yes, it is fully time." Mr. Khan glanced at the gold watch on his wrist. "We will call it tiffin as it is now two o'clock," he said.

The dining room led out of the bedroom, separated by a door, also with a sagging curtain. The table cloth was of some funny coarse stuff that looked like towelling, thought Joan, feeling it surreptitiously. The table napkins were quite limp, and a bluey colour. And in the middle of the

table was a blue vase with a bunch of flowers in it, flowers of all different colours with their heads very squashed together. There were no ordinary table appointments, like salt cellars and pepper pots, only three glass things with 'Cerebos' written on them, and containing salt that stuck in the neck of it and wasn't Cerebos at all, and pepper that also tried to stick, and some other sort of pepper, red.

The butler waited. He had put on a rather better coat, long and quite tolerably clean. He brought things in from the back, where they seemed to be brought from somewhere at the clapping of his hands. There was tea to drink, in a Britannia metal teapot, with a lion for a lid, and there was milk in a Britannia metal jug, and it too seemed to have absorbed the azure tint that pervaded everything, and came out bluely. Joan drank some tea and felt better. It was a very pale straw colour, and tasted of smoke. But it was hot, and that was something, although it was not cold in the bungalow. At dawn, in the life that lay centuries behind her, it had been cold, and she had crouched in a big coat. Now, her thin woollen jumper was enough.

"It is a matter for much regret that I must return to the Courts," said Mr. Mohammed Khan, splashing energetically in a brass finger bowl. "But I shall return at about six. Ahmed will bring you your tea at whatever time you require it."

"Half past four," said Joan, dully.

"Very well then." Mr. Mohammed Khan repeated the order in Hindustani. "Good bye, my lamb," he said, and getting up he walked up to her and began to hunt round her face with his mouth.

"Oh, no, not now," gasped Joan, pushing him away hurriedly.

Mr. Mohammed Khan smiled meaningly. "Presently, then," he said, and picking up his hat he ran down the steps.

. . . . . .

Twilight came even earlier in the blue house shrouded in trees than it did to the outside world because it was so dreadfully dark there anyhow. So by the time Joan had had tea, brought by Ahmed in his dirty shirt, on a carved wood tray covered by a dingy traycloth, she had almost to grope her way round the sparsely furnished room. She had slept

a little after the late breakfast, and had waked feeling less stupefied, and with the lessening of the dulling of her feeling had begun an odd little pain in the region of her heart. Joan tried to analyse it, it was like the growling of a nerve when you know it is there and will jump if you bite on it, or the sort of half consciousness that there is a nail beginning to stick through your shoe, and that if you are not careful it will bore through the sole of your foot and become a torture. So with a sort of instinct to keep this feeling at bay for as long as she could, she dressed hurriedly and started out on a tour of inspection.

Behind the bungalow a wide verandah ran the whole length of the house, like it did in front, and there was a table there, and a basin of quite thick dirty water, with bits of food sticking to the side of it, and a couple of dish cloths, also quite black. Beyond the verandah, a little way from the house, was a tiny brick shed, and as Joan saw smoke issuing from a hole in the side of it, she concluded that that must be the kitchen. Round the whole of the ground behind the house ran a row of brick sheds all joined together, and built in a square, with a space in the middle, and outside the houses native women lolled and chatted to other native women, and a couple of naked babies rolled and sprawled in the dust. In the distance someone was screaming with vigour, and talking at the same time, for Joan could distinguish words. It was all very odd, she thought, turning back into the house. It was like nothing she had ever imagined about India. She seemed so extraordinarily by herself. Supposing, for instance, that someone walked out of the trees and murdered her, no one would ever hear, or know, for that matter, until someone chose to come and look for her. At Home you looked out of a window and saw someone, here you hardly saw anything except trees, and certainly nobody else except native people who didn't somehow seem to be people at all. She walked out on to the front verandah, after peeping under a sagging curtain that hung over a door leading out of the dining room, opposite to hers. This must be her husband's dressing-room, because there was a safety razor on the dressing table, and at the sight of the safety razor Joan held her heart, and walked on. Now she was out on the verandah ; it was darker than ever, and on the heavy trees that overshadowed it were gathered numbers of crows. They were all cawing, and

fluttering their wings, and staring curiously with black eyes like boot buttons at the little figure that had appeared on the verandah. They were preparing to settle in for the night, and Joan got rather to like the hoarse sounds they made, though in after life she could never hear the cawing of a rook without catching her breath and paling a little. But now it was all new to her, and for the first time she smiled, showing her little white teeth. And then she walked down into the garden: it was an odd garden, so many things in pots, and the water ran along funny little channels intersecting the beds. Where was it running from? she wondered. So she walked on further, and then suddenly she came on a well, with a long ramp of beaten earth, and two bullocks with mild eyes swaying their way down it; they stopped swishing their tails, as the leather mussack came up out of the echoing abyss with a bubbling splash. As it came up, the man at the head of the bullocks gave vent to a funny musical howl, and the water dashed and cascaded down the channel and ran away through the little gutters that had been made for it. Then the bullocks backed away up the ramp again and the whole process was repeated.

As Joan stood still there watching, a funny little wizened man like a monkey stopped grubbing in the earth, and salaamed very low in front of her.

"Oh, whoever are you?" Joan jumped at this sudden apparition.

"Ham mali hai."* The little shrewd eyes took Joan in with one sweeping glance. This was a real memsahib who stood in front of him, for Bunoo mali had always taken service with English people until this last attack of rheumatism that had prostrated him. He had been the head mali of the Collector at the next large station to Karnmore and had been very highly thought of. And then his sahib had had to go on sick leave, and alas for Bunoo! his successor had been an Indian, and the Indian had once come on the little old man standing groaning, holding his back, and had asked him roughly what was the matter with him. Now in the old days the Collector had often come strolling down into the compound, pipe in mouth, and had condoled with Bunoo

* I am the mali (gardener).

about his rheumatism, saying that he thought he must be getting old because he often had twinges of it too. And he had given Bunoo a bottle of something thick and white with the smell of the pine in its breath, and had told him to get his son to malish his back with it. Bunoo had done so, and had got better, and the Collector had been pleased and had smiled. Then one day there had been great mourning in the compound, for the bad sickness had gripped the Collector suddenly; and when he had groped his way back to life again, it had been Home, at the very instant. And in the flurry of sudden departure there was no chit given to Bunoo, no written record and appreciation of many years of faithful service, so when the Indian Collector had settled in to the house, he remembered the bent, groaning figure, and he called up his head butler, and told him to kick him out.

"I shall be largely entertaining," he said, in rather pronounced chi-chi, "and the compound is full of foolish flowers that have nothing but their scent to recommend them, such as violets. I wish zinnias, and sunflowers, and bright flowers in large masses to stimulate. See to it."

Bunoo had raised a dignified plea: "For many years I have supervised the work of the younger malis," he had said, "and I can still do so. It is not required now that I take so active a part."

But the butler knew a much better mali who would go half shares with him in the flowers and vegetables that he sold. So Bunoo was kicked out. And as the population of Walrai was more or less a floating one, and in any event he was of not much value without a chit, he drifted sadly into the next large station. And there he heard that an Indian wanted a mali, and that the compound was large and shady, and that he left the servants to do almost exactly what they liked. So that night be applied for and got the job, and with much groaning and wiping of the forehead he dictated a letter to the musalchi at the Collector's bungalow, and a couple of days afterwards arrived a large sack of something that was left mysteriously at his little quarter in Mohammed Khan's compound.

But in Walrai the Indian Collector was raving: "To hell with you!" (the Collector had been to Oxford) "everee violet has gone from the place."

The butler only salaamed. There was nothing else to be done as the violets had gone.

"And where are the earthenware saucers, specially prepared, for which I paid a good price?"

And the butler salaamed again. He knew where they were—he had sold the lot for eight annas to the musalchi, who seemed for some reason to want them. But as it was more difficult to get these to Walrai, Bunoo had to wait for them and it worried him a great deal. But at last they had come, and with his old face gleaming with joy, and his heart throbbing, he spent every hour of daylight planting and dividing and gently tending. Now they lay like a blue carpet under a big banyan tree, sending out a scent like a bottle of violet essence, broken.

His shrewd eyes swept over Joan, Bunoo suddenly knew that she would understand, and appreciate. He beckoned with one claw like finger. "Come," he said.

Joan followed. And when she came to the big tree and saw, very dimly, because it was nearly dark, the blue carpet, and when the heavenly scent rose and enveloped her, something within her seemed to break. She fell on her knees and stretched out her hands and began to cry, at first quietly, and then more loudly, crying with dreadful tearing sobs. Bunoo crouched down on his haunches and watched her: he had seen an English lady do that once before; it had been at a garden party, and she had come into a very secluded part of the compound with a sahib, and they had talked, at first quietly and then more violently, and at last she had laid her hands on his arm and seemed to plead with him, and he had pushed her angrily aside and turned away. And as he had gone, forcing the bushes aside with his hands, Bunoo had seen that he also wept as he went. "Strange!" thought the old man amusedly, wondering what it was all about. But this was something more serious, and she was crying out loud: "God, I want him," she was saying, "I can't, I can't live without him. Peter, Peter." Something within the little wrinkled old man told him that he was not meant to hear, and he got up and stepped quickly away. But when he had got just out of earshot he squatted down again. There was only one entrance to the violet bower and he would guard it. Bunoo was shrewd, and he had seen a good deal of the world, and he

knew that when memsahibs fall on their knees and stretch out their hands calling another sahib's name, it is as well that the sahib whose name it is not, should not be within hearing. So when the grinding of wheels and the sliding of iron feet gave warning that Mr. Mohammed Khan was again within his own precincts, he stepped softly back again, and spoke very quietly.

"Sahibs came, memsahib," he said.

Joan struggled up on to her feet and dragged at her handkerchief. She was suddenly terribly, horribly alive, and she knew now that nothing would ever induce her to live again with Mohammed Khan as his wife. It might be wrong, it might be cruel to him, but the fact was there: she could not and would not do it. It would be the most horrible sort of sin—a hideous giving of herself for what she got out of it. But what did she get out of it? She had left a home where she was loved and cherished simply because she was dull. Dull! What was dullness? Dullness was heaven when you belonged to yourself. And if she had waited, if she had waited—Joan stifled a scream as the torturing thought rent her—she might have met Major Heriot, because they were meant for one another, she knew they were, she knew they were; just being together made them happy, they hadn't got to talk, or to make love to one another all the time, it was enough just to catch the beloved glance and to know that the thought was the same, or to feel the lingering squeeze of the dear hand as some little thing was passed across, and to know that it meant that the wealth of understanding was at your service.

"Sahib calling memsahib," said Bunoo quietly.

The evening was one long drawn out nightmare. Dinner was very much like lunch had been, horribly served, and tasting in some obscure way of kerosene oil and a dirty dish cloth. A lamp that smoked a little replaced the vase of flowers with squashed heads, and Ahmed waited, with the same mysterious clappings of hands at the back. Mr. Mohammed Khan, his day's work well over, began to spread himself a little; not the luxurious spreading of himself of an English gentleman who has a bath, and perhaps shaves again, and emerges from his dressing-room immaculate in dinner clothes, and sits down at the table and eats with a sort

of reticent enjoyment; but the spreading of himself of a man who likes to get down to his food and doesn't care how he swallows it. So Mr. Mohammed Khan's dark face began to shine, and he opened his red mouth wider than was necessary, and drank before his mouth was empty, and from time to time made odd choking sounds that Joan had always associated with a too full baby that has not yet learnt manners. At first she ignored them, then at last she turned and frankly stared.

"My little Rose of Sharon," responded Mr. Mohammed Khan lusciously, thinking that she stared because she was feeling fond of him.

Joan returned her gaze to her plate: then he didn't know that it mattered. That was a thought that took some tackling; for Joan had yet to learn that in Indian circles unless you show unmistakably that you have eaten until you can eat no more, your host takes it as a slight. So dinner came to an end, and Mr. Mohammed Khan, who had excellent teeth, and meant to keep them so, proceeded to take steps to do so—noisily. And at that Joan rose, with a sort of young dignity that looked odd on the little face under the cropped hair, and said that she was going outside.

"Do so, dearest, and I will come with you," said Mr. Mohammed Khan affectionately, and he got up and came round the table and put his arm round her waist.

The verandah was rather dark, and round the hanging lamp a couple of huge moths with fat bodies blundered and whirred. The compound was pitchy dark, and in the distance a frog croaked monotonously. Mr. Khan sank into a wicker chair and held out his arms. Joan held the arm of the chair near which she stood. So had *he* held out his arms, with the white smudge of the dress-shirt showing faintly, and sometimes too she had seen the flash of white teeth, when he smiled, because he knew she was so sure to come. But she used to pretend sometimes that she wouldn't come, and then he used to take her, fiercely, possessively, and when she used to feel that savage kiss, she knew that heaven was this—to be in the arms of a man who had got you down. Not he at your feet, but you at his; and being there, and he in his man's strength knowing it, who swifter to lift you to his heart? But as all this sped through her mind, Mr. Mohammed Khan

became tired of waiting and he got up and came towards her: "Come to my heart, little dove," he said.

It leapt out of Joan's mouth like the fang of a cobra: "Never," she said.

There was a palpitating silence, then Mr. Mohammed Khan drew a long breath. "Aha!" he said quietly. For somehow, although he had not confessed it even to himself, he had been expecting this; there was something in the set of Joan's small head that had recalled his honeymoon to him, and there was something not altogether unpleasant in the recollection. It had not been gratifying to one's self esteem, but there had been a certain amount of sport about it all the same. . .

"Aha!" he said again with his eyes on Joan's.

"If ever you come near me I shall kill you," said Joan.

"What with?" enquired Mr. Mohammed Khan suavely.

"My soul," said Joan, and terror flared all over her. He was so big, and she was so alone. Only a little blue house buried in trees with croaking frogs round it, and moths that blundered and died torturing deaths. In the distance the shrill whistle of an engine cut through the air. There was still a world then, but not for her . . . "You had no right to marry me, knowing what you do about it," she said. "You must have guessed that I didn't know."

"You were very glad to get me at the time," said Mr. Mohammed Khan evilly. "And I gather that you took no steps to seek enlightenment beforehand. Besides, we have discussed that in all its bearings already; it does not affect the situation at all; any further discussion would be tedious. You are my wife, and I shall take steps to make you remember it. And in fact I am very sick of all this."

But Joan was past caring for anything but her own immunity from the caresses of the man she loathed, and desperately she fell on her knees in front of him. "Mohammed, if I tell you that I don't love you in that *way*," she gasped, "I will love you in any other way—the sort of way that will make me try to have the house nice . . . and pretty things on the table . . . and nice things to eat," she said, remembering the meal that had just passed.

"There is only one way for a wife to love her husband," replied Mr. Mohammed Khan with finality.

"But I tell you that I can't do it like that," said Joan, beginning to cry piteously. "It isn't as if you could make that sort of feeling come . . . I would have it if I could, because it would be much happier for me. It's awful for me to feel like this . . . a sort of creeping terror all the time . . . it's awful, I tell you." Joan began to wring her hands. "Mohammed, if you are kind to me I shall get fonder of you, I know I shall. Leave me alone just at first . . . and I will try, I will try. You see it's all so new . . ." Joan began to cry with great gasping sobs: "It's all so new, and I am so frightfully tired."

"If you felt, as you so insultingly express it, a creeping terror for me," said Mr. Mohammed Khan, "why did you come out to India?"

Joan had lost her head; she was bewildered with terror and fatigue. "I didn't feel it then," she said.

"Aha!" Mr. Mohammed Khan came nearer, getting up out of his chair like a cat prepared for business. "So this feeling has come on since you left England, has it? Then you have met another man. *Who is it?*" he shot out a black hand and took Joan by the throat.

"Mohammed!" Joan stumbled backwards. She clutched at the sinewy wrist with her small hands.

"Who is it?" Mr. Mohammed Khan was shaking Joan like a cat shakes a mouse before it finally despatches it.

"Mohammed, let me *go*!" Joan's breath was coming in gasps. Was it real, this? Was it she who was being held in a damp strangling grasp with a black face close to hers? She was small, and she was a woman, and you didn't do these things to women. But perhaps you did in India. "Mohammed" . . . she sagged a little sideways.

Mr. Mohammed Khan relaxed his grasp a little. He was a barrister, accustomed to cross-examine. And if you killed your victim first information died with her. He shoved her backwards into a chair.

"Tell me his name," he said.

"Whose name?" Joan's face was grey, and her breath came in great labouring sobs.

"The name of the man with whom you travelled from Bombay," said Mr. Mohammed Khan. It did not need a man of Mr. Khan's astuteness to pick out that little bit of incriminating evidence. That the man was not still in the

compartment on the arrival of the train at Karnmore meant nothing at all. No man, unless he was a hopeless fool, would have been.

"It was a man I met on board," said Joan painfully, and she put her hand up to her throat where he had hurt her. "And he was very kind to me, . . . and there was no room in the train at all except just that one compartment. So he paid extra for me to travel in it. But it isn't like what you think it is," ended Joan, and her head fell a little forward. It was surely very dark, and the frogs' croak was getting louder and louder . . .

"Tell me his name." Mr. Mohammed Khan sat down in his chair, and drew it close so that his knees touched Joan's.

"No, I don't want to." Joan spoke falteringly, like a child. But although she spoke like that, her mind was beginning to clear, though it still went round and round like a mouse in one of those wire spinning cages. If she told Major Heriot's name it might get him into trouble: people like her husband might try to make money out of it. Joan was too innocent to realise that it might prove the way to freedom. Besides, there was something incredibly hideous in the idea of having it all dragged out and probed into. "I am not going to tell you his name," she said.

Mr. Mohammed Khan sat back and put the tips of his fingers together. Inwardly he was relieved to hear Joan say this. For what would be the good of knowing his name? If he got, as he now suddenly felt quite sure he would, deadly sick of Joan in a couple of months, it would be perfectly simple to get rid of her. The Faith to which he belonged mercifully had not the same hysterical idea of the sanctity of marriage as the Christian Faith. But of course a refusal to reveal a name was a very serious thing, and would be made into very valuable capital.

"Tell me the name," he repeated.

"No." Joan gripped the arms of her chair with damp hands and wondered dully what he could do. Someone had told her once, or she had read it in a missionary magazine, that a jealous husband often cut off his wife's nose, to make her hideous in the eyes of her lover. If he did that Major Heriot would never care for her again, nobody could care for her, she would be an outcast. But then she could kill herself.

But it was getting late and the best of his fun was yet to come; besides, Mr. Mohammed Khan did not really believe that there had been anything irregular in the relationship between his wife and some fool of a lanky subaltern, whoever he was. He knew Englishmen; with a few exceptions they spent their silly lives walking miles with their guns, or hitting an entirely ineffectual ball through miles of spear grass. Also, he knew Joan, or thought he did. A girl who went on in the ridiculous way that she had done on her honeymoon would take some getting—and three weeks wasn't long enough. He held out two limp hands.

"For the sake of the life that we are now to begin to live together," he said, silkily, "I will overlook any little strayings from the path of strict integrity that you may have committed during the past three weeks."

"But don't you mind?" Joan's eyes were wells of horror.

"Not in the least." Mr. Mohammed Khan got up and came closer. "Come, sweet little flower of my heart," he said. "You are weary and it is time to retire."

"But what about you?" Joan had both hands at her throat.

Mr. Mohammed Khan smiled, and just raised the palms of his hands.

"But I told you that I would kill you, if you" . . . a writhing moth fell whirring on to Joan's bare neck: she brushed it off shuddering.

"And again I enquire, what with?" said Mr. Mohammed Khan smoothly.

"My soul." Joan's eyes were wells of terrified supplication.

"Damn your soul, a woman hasn't got one." All Mr. Mohammed Khan's Oriental brutality surged up in an overmastering tide. This pale, shrinking slip of a girl to set her puny insignificant will against his! And he had forgiven her stupid futile little flirtation. Now she should have it, have it with every tiny little bit of ingenuity and refinement of torture he could devise. What would drag down her fool pride most?—behind the rather low dark forehead the keen brain worked swiftly. Ah, to be hounded to submission, chased round and round until her befogged brain ceased to

act, and she fell a whimpering nothing at his triumphant feet.

He made a dash at her; and as he knew she would, she dodged and fled. Then began the cruel chase. The bungalow was all locked up at the back, and the wire doors in the bedrooms also latched, and Mr. Mohammed Khan took the precaution to fasten the dining room door securely behind him as he went in. And as he felt more at home without his shoes —he had kept them on this evening, because he knew that Joan would resent seeing him barefooted—he kicked them off. Then he stalked like a cat into the dressing room where he guessed Joan would have gone, because it was the furthest away. She was there, and she broke out from round the curtain with a scream and fled into the dining room. Round and round the table they went, Mr. Mohammed Khan showing his excellent teeth in a wide grin, and Joan with labouring breath. Then back into the bedroom, round and round the horrible looming white-curtained thing like a meat-safe standing gauntly in the middle of the room, till Joan began with her failing breath to scream out with terror and agony of mind. For she knew that Mr. Khan could catch her at any moment if he liked, this was being done deliberately to torture. And then at last her girl's strength gave out, and she tripped on the coarse matting and fell headlong, and he saw it coming and dodged back again towards her and caught her in his arms.

"Let me go," laboured Joan, struggling with her puny strength to force away his dark face.

Mr. Mohammed Khan was also out of breath, and he took a second or two to recover it, but when he did speak he spoke reflectively. And as he spoke he felt for the little white ear, and held it gently between his very excellent teeth.

"But surely you owe me something for declining to answer an entirely simple question?" he said.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Betty Forsythe often thought about Joan, and that with an odd feeling of disquiet. So did Mrs. Kemp. And Peter Heriot got a little greyer above the temples. There were two or three new lines round his mouth, and in the old fort that stood like a great drab sentinel with vacant eyesockets, staring sightlessly over that barren, broken country that surrounded it, scored here with gaping ravines, thrown up there with treeless peaks of rock, he sat and tried to work, or paced up and down his long echoing room, hands behind him clenched, wondering how long it would last, this ceaseless torment of mind and spirit. For he could get no news of Joan, he had written once, and had an answer: and then in reply to his second letter had come a hurried scrawl asking him not to write again, because she could not rely on getting her letters safely. For one day, Joan, pacing about the compound, knowing that today would be the day on which she would hear from him, had seen the postman go into the servant's portion of the compound, instead of coming, as usual, to the front verandah. When she called to Ahmed the butler, to ask if there was a letter for her, he had replied curtly that there was not, and he spoke insolently, as he nearly always did now. Then, later that evening, after her husband's return from office, she had found it, quite by chance, lying on the dining room table. And with a dry mouth she had turned it hurriedly over; would she find the seal intact? She did—the neat hard pool of scarlet, with the clear impress of the lion rampant was unbroken—but it very easily might not have been. So Joan wrote quickly to say that the writing to one another must stop, she would manage somehow to do without it. But the unbroken silence turned Major Heriot's hair greyer, and his brother officers wondered at the sudden transformation of a man who had always been the best of good company, to a man who really said very little, and who spent most of his time sitting at a beastly typewriter. It was

hardly fair, they grumbled, when there were only three of them, the least the Commanding officer could do was to be cheery, however filthy a business it might be to be stuck at the end of nowhere as they were at Wai, desolate outpost as it was, between lawlessness and civilization. For the sightless eyesockets stared towards Afghanistan, and sometimes they were not sightless, but held little steely points of light that winked and shot out stabs of flame. Those were the moments that the three men with bronzed English faces lived for. And so did the couple of hundred dark turbaned men who passed their lives also in the Fort, for they were fighting men, every one of them. So they spent their days in ceaseless preparation for what many would think the worst, but what they with their countless generations of fighting ancestry considered the only thing that made life worth living, the chance to get at an enemy with shot and cold steel. But Major Heriot now held a little aloof from his two junior British officers, only seeing with his genius for detail that the lives of his men were one ceaseless round of activity from morning to night. For he knew that idleness breeds discontent, and with discontent comes inefficiency. He conferred at length daily with his Subedar, a magnificent bearded Sikh officer, and as Subedar Wazir Singh worshipped the ground he trod on, the life in the Fort went on with entire placidity.

But the doctor, who was the senior of the other two officers, and who had never cared for Major Heriot, grumbled a good deal: "What's the matter with the man?" he said irritably to his companion, a chubby boy of about twenty five, as they stood in the sun-flooded enclosed square at the back of the mud-coloured Fort, watching a regimental team at hockey.

"Perhaps he's keen on some girl," replied the boy reverently. For although he dared not say so to the doctor —because they were so dependent on one another's society that if he got his back up it would be very unpleasant—he worshipped Peter Heriot.

The Regimental doctor burst out laughing. "Keen on some girl! my dear boy, Heriot's had almost every good looking woman in the Punjaub after him. No, it's far more likely that he's got into some scrape with a married woman and doesn't know how to get out of it."

But Bobby Darrell somehow didn't think so. To his young eyes his Commanding Officer did not look like the sort of man who would not know how to get out of a thing if he had once got into it. No, to him he looked like a man who had been badly hurt and could not forget it. However, he kept his own counsel, largely because he did not at all care for the doctor, and also because he did not think it was cricket to discuss your C.O.'s private affairs.

"By Gad, they can run!" he exclaimed as a trail of dark grinning faces streamed by them.

"Yes, they're damned good at it," replied the doctor with a certain amount of complacency. For he was a very keen man at his job, and a first class surgeon, and although he did not want anybody to be hurt, the zeal with which the great dark men flung themselves into the game provided him with some excellent jobs of repairing. He looked with pride at one huge bearded fellow who in the last frontier skirmish had sustained a badly fractured knee cap. And there he ran as swift as any of them. Fine fellows, and excellent subjects for surgery with their lack of nerves.

So life in the Fort went on uneventfully. The postal runners under their armed escort brought bundle after bundle of proofs, and Peter Heriot corrected, and made little signs in the margin, and tried to forget that Joan had called them squigs, because it was those little stupid rememberings that tore his heart in half. And he began a new book, but somehow the old spirit seemed to be gone, and it stuck and read flat and stupidly, so he flung it aside.

In Karnmore, Joan just lived. She lived principally for mail day, because it brought a breath from the outside world. In reply to the letters from her mother and aunt, she wrote carefully worded ones back. They must never know, she was quite resolved on that point. And in reply to the letters from Mrs. Kemp and Betty she wrote to say that she was getting on quite all right, and that no one need worry about her because it was all much better than she had thought it would be. And she spoke of a dinner at the Commissioner's, at the Residency, and she did not say that she had sat in a damp terror the whole time lest her husband should disgrace himself with his lack of manners. But she did sit so, and the terror made her stupid and monosyllabic, and the people who

were there looked at her askance when they had connected her with a native husband; but not finding anything particularly interesting about her, left her severely alone when they withdrew in a feminine crowd to the drawing room. So Joan sat and stared round with a burning tormented heart, at the crowd of easy laughing well-dressed women with their jolly acceptance of a common ground of interest in which an outsider had no part, and she wondered grimly what would happen if she suddenly stood up and began to scream "Be kind to me, can't you? I'm dying with the horror and loneliness of it all." But instead of that she sat very still and white, with rather a sullen look on her small face, and anyone who did happen to remark on her afterwards said how bad-tempered she looked, and that they did not envy Mr. Khan although he was certainly an unutterable bounder. And Mr. Mohammed Khan, who had had rather a good time in the dining room, as he considered—the port was good, the cigars excellent, and he had sprawled a good deal, and talked more, and had finished by clapping the Civil Surgeon on the shoulder and hailing him as Hazeltine, to that worthy's frigid distaste—had come into the drawing room to find Joan sitting palely more or less alone, with a feeling of maddened annoyance. For he was an ambitious man and he counted on his English wife to bring him more into the public eye. But evidently he was going to be disappointed, she was sitting mum and still, with none of the sparkling childish vivacity that had so attracted him at first, and he felt for a minute as if he hated her. Moreover, although he had tried to think it was not so, his presence in the dining room had undoubtedly acted as a check on the conversation. He had wanted to hear, to find out; for there had been a very considerable ebullition of disquiet in one of the larger native cities, a couple of English policemen foully done to death, and Karnmore had been reinforced with police, and it was important for Mr. Khan to know exactly what the reinforcements had been. He looked at the new police officer who, oddly enough, happened to be there that night, with a scornful certainty that directly the port had circulated a little freely he would find out what he wanted to know; for the new police officer had a pink and white face and a moustache that looked as if it wouldn't grow because its owner was too young. But the new police

officer was not quite as young as he looked, and though he drank quite a lot he said nothing at all, only from time to time when Mr. Mohammed Khan was not looking, he cast a bland childish look over the dark face opposite to him. So although Mr. Khan had been quite kindly received he had not got what he wanted in any sense of the word, and he vented his rage on his wife, as they drove home in the pale moonlight in the coffin set up on end.

"Can't you speak when you go out, you little fool?" he snarled, as the muffled figure on the box made odd chirruping sounds to the skeleton ambling along in front of him.

"I did speak, Mohammed." Joan had got to the cringing stage. It had become a sort of monomania with her that her husband would cut off her nose. She thought about it in the night. It was the sort of thing that he could so easily do, with one of those sharp pointed table knives that they used at meals. He would tell people that she had done it herself; "You see my wife is very careless, and she was running and tripped on the matting; she was going to cut some flowers, and she cut off her nose instead." And even if people did not believe it—"No, my man that is not good enough, we don't allow that sort of thing, you must go to prison for three months"—her nose would be gone, she would be disfigured for life. The little trembling rapturous thought that one day if God was good she would belong to *him*, was beginning to grow a little weakly, was beginning to lose that stab of certain joy with which it used to come to her when she allowed herself to think about it. Still, she did not want to be a thing of horror for ever. In the compound there was a thing of horror like that—the dhobie's wife. She had brought the clothes one day, and Joan had seen her, and had only just not cried out with terror. She had asked her husband afterwards why she looked like that: was she a leper or anything? Mr. Khan had smiled and said that was what wives were made to look like when they let their eyes stray from their own husbands. Somehow his opaque eyes had seemed to linger on her, or Joan imagined that they did, and she had slunk away trembling to her dressing-room, and had leant against the wall, and had had a sudden feeling as if she was going to be sick. So she had become servile, and

Mr. Mohammed Khan traded on it, and Joan's life was one long hopeless degradation. She refused to go out at all, and when the Commissioner's wife returned her call, she found her, as she thought, ridiculously stand-offish for a girl in her anomalous position, and took no more notice of her. And as what the Commissioner's wife does in a station everyone else does too, Joan might just as well not have been alive, so far as any social existence was concerned. Mr. Mohammed Khan resented it, and when he spoke, as he did now angrily, Joan was terrified and abject: "I had quite a lovely time," she quavered, and she felt out for the black hand that lay on the knee beside her.

But Mr. Mohammed Khan was beginning to get tired of Joan. She was getting so frightfully thin, and she had developed a silly way of lying and crying out, "I shall die, I shall die!" So her pitiful attempt to divert his anger by rousing his feelings failed, and he shoved her hand off his knee, and wished he could shove her out of the gharry and have done with her for ever. If she had shown any sign of bearing him a child he would not have felt quite so violently about her. But there was no sign of such a thing—of course there would not be, he thought; Joan was hopelessly devoid of any of the natural instincts with which the women of his own race were so amply and blessedly endowed. Mr. Mohammed Khan leant back on the fusty cushions and began to think and to calculate, and when at last they had bowled up the green tunnel, and stumbled up on to the verandah which was only faintly lighted by one lamp that was on the eve of going out (for Ahmed thought Joan a hopeless fool and stole all the oil that he could lay hands on), he went straight to his dressing room, and fumbled under the lid of his roll top desk. He always kept the desk carefully locked; there were many things of importance under its crumply lid, and the last letter from his determined old mother was one of them. It had been actually written by his father—strictly purdah, his mother could neither read nor write, but she ruled the household in the little tumble-down mud house in the far distant frontier village, and she dictated the letter that Mr. Mohammed Khan now held in his hand. It was a short letter, but it told him news that he had been hoping to hear for some time, and after he had read it he lay back in the swinging

chair, and thought of the big brown lash-shaded eyes, that he had now not seen for more than five years. But she was yet too young, not quite yet thirteen—and although Mr. Mohammed Khan was a brute, he had a certain amount of feeling of what was due to the exquisite little olive coloured creature who had looked at him with worshipping langorous eyes, and who had fallen so rightly at his feet when he had happened to enter the room in which she was sitting and doing her embroidery. Now, he wished with all his heart that he had never met Joan ; she was nothing but an incubus and an expense. He had only been attracted by her sort of puckish charm, and since that had so entirely disappeared—in fact he wondered if it had ever been—she was nothing but a sort of necessary evil that had to be fed, and therefore cost money.

Joan, as she moved drearily about the great dark bedroom, wondered if she was beginning to go mad. In the mirror her eyes seemed to stare so vacantly out of their sockets : They were like shrivelled nuts in shells that were too large for them, she thought, holding back her hair from her forehead and staring harder. And as she stared Mr. Mohammed Khan came in.

" I have been thinking," he said, " it is strange that after so many months, you bear me no child."

Joan still stared into the glass, but into the now distended eyes a veil of extraordinary caution had suddenly crept.

" Is it ? " she said. " Do people generally have babies so soon after they are married ? "

" It is not soon," said Mr. Mohammed Khan, " we have now been married altogether six months.

" Yes, but some of that time I was at home," said Joan, a funny distant part of her mind beginning to work all by itself.

" Only two months," said Mr. Mohammed Khan.

" Well, it does seem odd, doesn't it ? " said Joan, and she stooped to pick up a brooch that had fallen from her evening dress.

" Very odd indeed," said Mr. Mohammed Khan, and he came a little closer.

" Well ? " said Joan, beginning to experience that terrible feeling of an inner shivering that always turned her

lips a little blue. And as she shivered she prayed wildly: "God, if you have any pity left, don't let him guess . . ."

"Well, it seems to me that there must be a reason for it," replied Mr. Mohammed Khan.

A dreadful cunning came to Joan, sunk as she was in a slough of hopeless misery. "Well, Mohammed, I have been thinking the same thing," she said, and she came nearer, and twisted one of the blue enamel buttons on the white waistcoat, for the Commissioner's dinner party had been a good opportunity to show them off. "And if you wouldn't mind I should like to go and see the Civil surgeon about it myself. He did call, you know, and we have taken no notice of it. Don't you think if I just ran over tomorrow morning and consulted him? . . . perhaps I want a tonic or something."

But Mr. Mohammed Khan was as cunning as Joan, and his suspicions were aroused: "It would not be seemly at all," he said. "It is for me to go. Tomorrow morning will be impossible, I have a case that will occupy the whole morning, but I will make a point of going in the evening."

"I would rather go myself," said Joan dryly, her throat felt as if it was closing up.

"And I would rather you did not," said Mr. Mohammed Khan with finality.

But the Civil Surgeon had never forgotten that wasted damp white face under the cloud of hovering flies, so he hedged the next evening when Mr. Mohammed Khan tried to pump him, and said that he would far prefer to see Mrs. Khan himself before giving an opinion on the matter. "And I'll run in this evening," he said, "I shall be round that way."

"Unfortunately this evening will not be convenient for me," said Mr. Khan grandiloquently, "I have a meeting of our Lodge which I must attend."

The Civil Surgeon laughed pleasantly. "But that doesn't matter a bit," he said. "A doctor is a privileged person, you know. And Mrs. Khan will be more likely to be frank if I see her alone. Just tell her that I am coming along—or—no, don't if you don't mind, it will be better if she is unprepared, she will be more likely to be natural." For the Civil Surgeon suddenly thought that here was a chance to find out how things really were in the blue house smothered in trees.

Mr. Khan agreed with alacrity. A chance for Joan to be caught out, he thought venomously, for the more he thought about it, the more sure he was that his suspicions were correct. So that evening, Joan, standing looking down on the sea of blue, the torturing tears rolling down her face, for Bunoo's violet bower was the only place where she felt secure to let herself go, lifted her drowned eyes to a concerned kindly face under a soft felt hat that was instantly lifted.

"Who told you that I was here?" It flamed out of Joan's trembling mouth.

"Your funny little mali. I know him quite well—he used to be at the next station to this when I was quite a chokra* there."

"He had no right to do it."

"Well, he and I are old pals; perhaps he thought I could be of help to you," said the Civil surgeon, aching with pity for the broken figure in front of him, and knowing to the innermost detail at once how things were in the blue house smothered in trees. For the Doctor had seen a good deal of life, and knew despair when he saw it.

"What have you come for?" said Joan, holding her handkerchief in front of her trembling mouth.

"To try and see if I can buck you up a bit," said the Civil Surgeon boyishly, "Your husband came across to see me about you last night, and I promised I would come across."

"I know why he came," said Joan, and the same look of cunning crept back into her swollen eyes.

"Yes, well, I expect you do," replied the Civil Surgeon and he switched his brown canvas gaiters with his riding whip. "But as I should like to hear a little from you first about things, I thought I would come over myself. Can't we sit down here, and have a talk? By Jove, how divine the violets smell," he stooped to a fragrant earthenware saucerful.

Joan still remained standing, and as she stood, she stared at the broad back turned to her. Could she trust him? Doctors had odd ideas about things. He might turn on her and tell her that she was unnatural. And as she stood and thought all this, he also turned and met her gaze.

"Mrs. Khan," he said earnestly, "I am here as your

* Young man.

friend, not as an enemy. And you know the seal of the confessional is on anything you may be able to tell me. A doctor and a priest,—you know, . . . they often work together."

Joan put her handkerchief again up to her mouth. It had been a doctor who had come to her rescue before. She made a little stumbling step backwards.

The Civil Surgeon saw, and looking round found an old Tate sugar box that Bunoo used to put over his choicest blossoms to retard their growth. He dragged it towards them—first looking carefully underneath to see that no snake or scorpion lurked there—then he took firm hold of Joan's elbow and sat down on it. "Now," he said, "I'm going to hear it all. And do you mind if I smoke while you're talking?"

Joan only cast one more trembling glance at the keen profile turned to hers, and then burst into low impassioned speech. The Civil Surgeon heard her to the end, biting the stem of his pipe rather more fiercely than he need have done perhaps, but otherwise not showing in the least anything that he might have been feeling. When she had quite done, and had drawn a long trembling breath, and had let her white face fall into her hands, the Civil Surgeon began to knock out his pipe on the edge of the wooden box, and he took quite a long time about it. When he spoke, he spoke very kindly.

"Look here, I can't thank you enough for being so frank with me about everything," he said, and his nice honest face flushed. "But it'll make it easier for you in the end. I'll see your husband tonight—I ought to be at that Lodge meeting myself, as a matter of fact, and I'll ride round that way now and have a talk with him. I think you are perfectly right . . . perhaps I ought not to say so, but under the circumstances I do, so don't worry yourself about that. And remember that I am always there if you want me, see? Keep a brave heart, Mrs. Khan—it isn't easy I know, but still, it helps if you take it standing up, doesn't it? And now, goodbye for the present." The Civil Surgeon held out a warm comforting hand.

Joan took it in both of hers: "Thank you," she said.

"Not a bit!" The Civil Surgeon smiled mischievously, "Both aliens in an alien land, you see," he said, "and that

makes a bond between us that nothing can break. Now I'll get along and interview your husband, I'll take him in and give him a drink."

So a little later, Mr. Mohammed Khan, who was rather a big bug at the local Masonic Lodge, felt himself shrinking rather rapidly, as he sat in front of the keen-eyed doctor and answered a few quietly put questions. But his opaque eyes flamed with wrath—she had been giving him away, the little devil—he would make her suffer for it. But the Civil Surgeon was more astute than that—he knew what Mr. Khan would think, and with a few well-chosen words he dismissed that idea from the Indian's mind, and Mr. Mohammed Khan was left with the impression that he was really rather a martyr.

"You see, Khan," said the Doctor, and he stared thoughtfully at the tumbler in his hand, "unfortunately we're dealing with a type that has its limitations. But I see no reason at all why in the future your very natural hopes should not be realised, if you do exactly what I tell you."

And cursing inwardly Mr. Mohammed Khan had to be content with this. Soon after the coffin had made its stumbling way back through the green tunnel up to the blue house in the trees, Joan, writing a mail letter in the dining room, was disturbed and astonished to see a gaunt wobbling edifice with a trailing mosquito curtain being carried from her bedroom into her husband's dressing room.

"What is happening?" she exclaimed, feeling her heart surge up into her throat with a wild hope.

"What is happening is this," said Mr. Mohammed Khan, and his dark face was heavy with rage. "Not content with making my life a burden to me with your whims and fancies and your perfectly unreasonable objection to a perfectly normal state of existence, you must needs become ill with it. So for the present we shall live entirely separate lives. But I warn you that it will not continue beyond the limit of two months, and that if at the end of a reasonable interval I find that you are still in your present, to me, quite inexplicable condition, I shall take steps to get rid of you."

"How?" asked Joan, beginning to tremble. A sudden vision of herself disfigured and tortured, came over her. Wandering . . . wandering, not daring to die, and yet un-

wanted by everybody. A hideous thing, that a child would scream at.

"Yckkkk," said Mr. Mohammed Khan, reading Joan's thoughts, and drawing his long black forefinger straight down from his lowering forehead to his upper lip.

. . . . . .

You cannot always be thinking of possible horrors, and the relief from a bondage worse than death was so overwhelming to Joan that in a sort of negative way she was happy. She still lived the life of a complete recluse, but somehow she did not mind it. She spent hours in the garden, and under Bunoo's tuition became quite an excellent gardener. The oddly assorted couple crouched together side by side under the great banyan tree, Joan in her cotton frock, for it was beginning to warm up, and Bunoo in his little short coat of coarse linen material and flapping dhotie and little woollen mali's cap with its red line and blue tassel. And together they were happy, for Bunoo could speak a little English and he told long rambling almost incoherent stories of the Collecter's beautiful compound, and the different sahibs and mem-sahibs that he had seen there. One had been the son of the Badshah, that had been a great day indeed, beautiful son of the great king beyond the water deigning to place his sacred feet upon a lawn that he, Bunoo, poorest of the poor, had watered. And the King's Son had smiled, smiled like a streak of sunlight, said Bunoo, showing his old toothless gums in rapture.

Joan listened, entertained beyond measure, and so her life had its brighter side, and her mother, in the little house in Fallowfield Road, read her letters over and over again, finding in them something that had not been there before, a glimmer of content. For she knew that her child was unhappy, knew it as surely as she knew that her own days were numbered. But she said no word of it to her sister Belle, nor to Gerald, who now came over much more often than he used to do before, although they knew it almost better than she did herself, but they kept it hidden from one another, for what was the good of admitting it? So there was a certain amount of content everywhere, that is to say, except in the mud coloured Fort that blinked towards Afghanistan, and in the heart of Mr. Mohammed Khan, who got to detest Joan

more and more every day. He now spent hours at the roll-topped desk—he went there immediately on his return from Court, and he sat there the whole time when he was in the bungalow, sometimes having his meals carried in there. He filled the bungalow with other natives, who came in loose coats made of stuff like coarse linen, and wore white caps shaped like a convict's. They sat in the curtained bedroom talking in low suppressed voices, only emerging at intervals to spit vivid scarlet stuff from their stained mouths on to the compound path. But it made very little impression on Joan if she happened to be there, because she was now so accustomed to happenings of the kind. For almost after a week elapsed Mr. Mohammed Khan had gone back to the habits of the people to which he belonged. That is to say immediately on his return from Court he would shed his European clothes, and emerge from his room barefooted in a soft loin cloth, and white shirt, collarless, and hanging outside. Then he would spend two if not three hours of the evening in chanting his prayers, a low monotonous howling chant, that at first intrigued Joan enormously, and then got to terrify her with its weird monotony. She would sometimes look at him from a distance and wonder if it could be the same man who in the morning started out to work, excellently dressed in a well-fitting English suit, with smart brogued shoes. But it was, only it was a man whose instincts were to let things go. It was more comfortable to flop in a collarless shirt, and to paddle about barefoot, and to scoop up food and fling it down your throat with a snort, than to wear a collar, and keep on socks and suspenders, and to sit up straight and be careful how you hold your knife and fork. Also of course he was a Mohammedan through and through —Joan wondered how she could ever have thought that he wasn't. He went always on Fridays to the Mosque, and he observed, for him, wonderful abstinence on the different fast days. But somehow it all ceased to worry Joan. She was free, for a time, from what had made life a hell to her and she snatched thankfully at the sort of negative happiness that she was experiencing now.

Mr. Mohammed Khan was not at all happy, and he began literally to hate Joan. She was a clog on his freedom. She was always there, so to speak, and he could not fill the house

quite as lavishly as he would have liked with his friends and the people with whom he was working. So he began to plan how he could get rid of her, and underneath his low forehead his mind worked evilly. He knew that if he tried to put an end to her in any aggressive way he would have the Civil Surgeon immediately on his track. In his own little frontier village it would be a different thing altogether, there a little consistently administered powdered glass in the daily allowance of food would soon settle things. But you have to have a reason for banishing your wife and getting her slowly murdered. So he began to think what he could do, and after a little while Joan provided him with a reason. For to be told by your wife that she hates you, is surely enough reason for banishment and death.

One day Joan was sitting out in the compound in the cool of the evening, just staring quietly in front of her, and thinking with a sort of hopeless despair of the man she had once loved, and who was now probably married to someone else or very soon going to be, when a little trail of animals ran across the path in front of her—a string of them, little soft furry things. First came a big one, and just behind it one a little smaller, holding the tail of the first one in its mouth, and then four more, all with the tail of the one in front of it held securely between its tiny jaws. Joan screamed excitedly to Bunoo, who was, as he always was when anywhere about, close to her side. He got up laboriously, and smiled, as the hindmost disappeared into the bushes.

"Mongoose," he said, "my bringing one for memsahib."

And sure enough the next evening Bunoo, very twitching about the lower lip, for he knew Joan would be pleased, deposited in her lap, as she sat working under the big banyan tree, a little bundle of fur, that shot out a pointed rubbery nose, and scrambled in her palm with an odd black foot that somehow looked as if it ought to be webbed. And with the coming of Munjee—for so Joan for some reason nicknamed him, it sounded somehow soft and cuddly—began a new era for Joan. Here was something on which she could vent the tearing torturing pain that she always had at her heart. The little animal very soon got to know her and it would patter after her all over the compound, and spring up into her lap, and lay its little flat head with the beautiful close-set ears like

brown suede, between her breasts and stare up into her eyes, with its own wonderful hazel ones. Joan would hold the little face close to hers, and talk to it in baby language, and press hot squashing kisses into its yielding body. At night it would sleep in a little box close to her bed, and if by any chance it got shut out of her room, Munjee would scratch outside and make a funny little quacking noise like a duckling. Joan loved it, loved it with a fierce possessive love, it was hers, and it loved her back and needed her, because she saw that it was regularly fed with meat and fish and things that it liked.

But Mr. Mohammed Khan did not like Munjee. Perhaps he had reason for his dislike, because it was a destructive little thing, and twice it had upset his ink. It had a passion for upsetting things, and also it did not like Mr. Mohammed Khan for some reason or other. So it always did all the damage it could in his room while he was out, and at last Joan found this out, and she made frantic efforts to keep it away, because she knew her husband's vindictive temperament. Munjee would never allow itself to be caught by Mr. Mohammed Khan, only once had the dark clammy hand held it, and Mr. Khan had dropped it like a hot potato. But one evening, when Joan had gone, as she sometimes did, to post her English mail in the little post office that stood at the corner of the road that led to cantonments, Munjee created more havoc than usual on Mr. Mohammed Khan's writing table, and was so intent in nosing the empty inkpot round the soaked blotting pad that it did not hear the soft bare foot on the matting behind it. A little later, Joan, having whistled in vain for about half an hour, came into the lamplight of Mr. Mohammed Khan's office room, and asked timidly if her husband had seen her mongoose.

"Not for about three quarters of an hour," said Mr. Mohammed Khan brutally. "It was here, on my writing table, and I handed it over to the sweeper to despatch as soon as possible. Drown it in boiling water—those were my orders and I have no reason to doubt that they have been carried out."

"What!" Joan's voice came in a shriek.

"Drown it in boiling water," repeated Khan, jerking his fountain pen impatiently.

"But I loved it." Joan's eyes were wide and fixed.

"I can well believe it," said Mr. Mohammed Khan, "it is the sort of folly of which you would be quite capable."

"If you have had it drowned, I will kill you," said Joan edging nearer, and staring at her husband with eyes in which insanity seemed to be suddenly born.

"Get out of my room, you damned fool," returned Mr. Mohammed Khan, who was both anxious and harassed about affairs concerning which Joan knew nothing, and in comparison with which the death, however painful, of a mongoose seemed to be a very small affair indeed.

But Joan was nearly mad with despair and horror, and she suddenly stooped, and peered up under the hand with which Mr. Mohammed Khan was trying to write.

"You are a devil," she said "you have killed the only thing I loved. And when you die, which I pray God could be now, it will come and torture you. I can see it nibbling your feet. Brute! fiend!" Joan began to scream hysterically. "It must have cried for me—it must have wondered why I didn't come and save it . . ." Joan broke out of the echoing matted room, and fled screaming into the compound. She had not the least idea what she was doing. Holding her hands up to her mouth she rushed up and down the paths. It was gone, the only thing she loved—it had died a hideous death; Joan knew a little of the methods of the native in despatching unwanted animals. It had suffered, the little animal that had lain close to her heart, and watched for her coming. She stumbled up against a tree and laid her soaking face on the trunk of it. This was madness that was turning everything red and black in front of her eyes—oh, if only it was death—if only it was death!

Within the badly lighted bungalow Mr. Mohammed Khan had quite made up his mind. A wife who told you that she wished you were dead, and that she hoped when you were dead the ghost of an unclean animal would come and nibble your feet, was more than any man could put up with. He put away the file that lay under his hand, and drew his writing pad towards him.

Bunoo, outside, got tired of waiting. So he crept out of his little quarter, and padded his old way to the violet bower. She would be there, perhaps, his beloved mem-sahib. He dared not go to the bungalow for fear of the

servants, for there had been an uproar when Bunoo had set upon the sweeper, and old man that he was, he would have been killed had it not been for the excellent pruning knife that he always carried—a relic of departed glories in the Collector's household.

"Take, memsahib," he said, pressing the furry body against Joan's heaving side, for the blessed tears had come when Joan had smelt the heavenly scent of violets again. Also Bunoo wanted to get rid of Munjee, he was a bother, with his ceaseless fighting to get away.

Joan lifted up her voice again and made a dreadful groaning sound. Somehow it was too much to have him back again, the torture of imagination seemed to have seared her brain. She held it tightly to her breast, but when the wet twitching nose touched her neck, then the stupid cloud moved a little. She seized the old gnarled hand.

"Bunoo, Bunoo!" There were no words to express what she felt. "I will give you anything," she stammered, her voice stifled.

Bunoo salaamed in the twilight. He hated the sweeper, and it had been a chance to wipe off old scores.

But Joan had begun to think—her pet would never be safe now. She must put him where he would be out of danger for ever, and only death would mean real safety. A happy peaceful death,—her friend, the Civil Surgeon.

The Civil Surgeon sat on his verandah, his feet upon the long arms of his long chair. A blurred figure suddenly stumbled into the range of light that fringed the little bungalow. "What is it, Mrs. Khan?" he said, getting up.

Joan, bursting with sobs, told him. The Civil Surgeon listened, and prayed passionately in the depths of his soul that Mr. Khan would soon so implicate himself in the net that he was trying to spin for others, that he would overbalance himself, and go headlong to the gallows. But he was afraid that it would take some time, and to his experienced eyes Joan did not look as if she would last much longer. So he took hold of her hand consolingly.

"If you really think it is best," he said, "I can put the little animal quite painlessly to sleep. But think it over well first, because you see, when he is once gone, he is gone for ever."

But Joan was quite sure that she wanted Munjee to die. Life would only be a terror to her with the thought of an ugly death hanging over him. Her husband, with the servants at his back, would be sure to get him sooner or later. So she only nodded speechlessly and the Civil Surgeon took the little animal in his hand, and went away to his surgery. When he came back she had gone, he could hear footsteps as she tore down the narrow compound path and flung herself out of the gate. And as he walked quickly to the edge of the verandah to try to call her back, he saw her far off, under the pale moonlight, running for her life, wringing her hands that she held high over her head, and wailing out loud.

CHAPTER XIX.

The mud coloured fort with the sightless eyes lay quivering under a brassy sky. In the big courtyard at the back of it only one figure showed, the figure of a postal runner who had handed in his precious burden and was now wending his way to his quarters to enjoy his well earned rest. Inside the Fort the British officers lay in their rooms in various stages of déshabille—Bobby Darrell was already fast asleep in vest and shorts, his young mouth turned up open to the punkah that swung monotonously above his head, the Regimental doctor had tried to go to sleep and failed, and was now deep in the *Lancet* that had come by the morning's dak, also under a punkah, and Major Heriot had made no effort to go to sleep because he knew it was not of the faintest use, and was lying at full length in a long chair reading a copy of the weekly edition of the *Times*, a lime squash wedged in the arm of the chair. In spite of the long regular sweep of the matting frill above his head, the large echoing room was suffocatingly hot. For it was April, and the sun really begins to get to work in April on the frontier. Major Heriot' did not mind the heat any more than any healthy normal Englishman ever does mind it, but it certainly was more difficult to bear in a place like Wai, where you were, so to speak, confined to barracks all the time. There was a beaten tennis court at the back, within the thick walls of the Fort, and when the sun had sunk a little from its vertical flaming, the three Englishmen, with the Indian Subedar-Major to make a rather inadequate fourth, would adjourn there to dash about for three quarters of an hour in the rapidly fading light, and would then sink into long chairs to enjoy the first whisky and soda of the long day. Subedar-Major Wazir Singh would decline the whisky and soda with the same radiant flash of teeth that he always gave, and

sometimes Peter Heriot would smile too and say, "Well, I don't know that you're not right, Subedar-Major, I'll join you in a nimbu soda," and the two men, both so different, but both soldiers to the very fibre of them, would smile at one another over the edge of the clouded glasses, and drink to the continued health and prosperity of the other one. Somehow in these days of inward ache and ceaseless anxiety, Peter Heriot turned mentally far more to his Indian officer than to his two British officers. Subedar-Major Wazir Singh had the silent imperturbability of his race brought to a pitch of perfection. He could sit for hours simply staring in front of him. He knew the temper of his men to the faintest shadowy gradation of feeling. And he could, in some mysterious way, sense the temper of the wild tribes that crouched all around them in the shaggy hills that bound them round on the North and on the South. It was almost as if he could hear them speaking, thought Peter Heriot, as he listened to to the Indian officer one day as they sat together in the shadowy suffocation of the big echoing room.

"Sahib, there is trouble coming," said Subedar-Major Wazir Singh, and he laid his great hand on the arm of his commanding officer's chair.

"What sort of trouble, Subedar-Major?" asked Peter Heriot, with a smile on his clear cut mouth.

"Bad trouble. It filters through, from the South, the unrest and dissatisfaction. They consult together, these men. Here we stand, a living reminder to them of the power that they detest. To exterminate us—it is their prayer. It is to them indeed of the nature of a prayer—a holy mission."

"You think, then, that we're on the eve of one of these religious affairs again, do you?" asked Major Heriot, drawing heavily on his pipe.

"I do, most assuredly," replied Subedar-Major Wazir Singh earnestly. "And I would welcome it, were it not for the fact that the hot weather is advancing very rapidly, and it might unsettle our men. That would indeed be a disaster."

"Well, well, we'll hope for the best, although as you know, Wazir Singh, I have enormous faith in your—what shall we call it?—clairvoyance. But as for a scrap, Gad, I'd give my head for it!" Major Heriot got up abruptly out of his long chair, and began to walk about the room.