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They turned another corner, into an old street, and under an arch. Peter walked forward to the hotel entrance, and entered. There was a woman in the office, who glanced up, and looked, first at Peter, then at Julie. On seeing her behind him, she came forward. "What can I do for monsieur?" she asked.

"Good-evening, madame," said Peter. "I was here the other day. Give us a bottle of wine in that little room at the back, will you?"

"Why, certainly, monsieur," said she. "Will madame follow me? It is this way."

She opened, the door, and switched on the light, "Shall I light the fire, madame?" she demanded.

Julie beamed on her. "Ah, yes; that would be jolly," she said. "And the wine, madame--Beaune."

The woman smiled and bowed. "Let madame but seat herself and it shall come," she said, and went out.

Julie took off her hat, and walked to the glass, patting her hair. "Give me a cigarette, my dear," she said. "It was jolly hard only to smoke one to-night."

Peter opened and handed her his case in silence, then pulled up a big chair. There was a knock at the door, and a girl came in with the wine and glasses, which she set on the table, and, then knelt down to light the fire. She withdrew and shut the door. They were alone.

Peter was still standing. Julie glanced at him, and pointed to a chair opposite. "Give me a drink, and then go and sit there," she said.

He obeyed. She pulled her skirts up high to the blaze and pushed one foot out to the logs, and sat there, provocative, sipping her wine and puffing little puffs of smoke from her cigarette. "Now, then," she said, "what did I do wrong to-night?"

Peter was horribly uncomfortable. He felt how little he knew this girl, and he felt also how much he loved her.

"Nothing, dear," he said; "I was a beast."

"Well," she said, "if you won't tell me, I'll tell you. I was quite proper to-night, immensely and intensely proper, and you didn't like it. You had never seen me so. You thought, too, that I was making up to your friend. Isn't that so?"

Peter nodded. He marvelled that she should know so well, and he wondered what was coming.

"I wonder what you really think of me, Peter," she went on. "I suppose you think I never can be serious--no, I won't say serious--conventional. But you're very stupid; we all of us can be, and must be sometimes. You asked me just now what I thought of your friend--well, I'll tell you. He is as different from you as possible. He has his thoughts, no doubt, but he prefers to be very tidy. He takes refuge in the things you throw overboard. He's not at all my sort, and he's not yours either, in a way. Goodness knows what will happen to either of us, but he'll be Captain Langton to the end of his days. I envy that sort of person intensely, and when I meet him I put on armour. See?"

Peter stared at her. "How is he different from Donovan?" he asked.









"I will tell you what I make of it, mother. Peter's gone beyond me, I think, now, that I have always feared a little that he might. Of course, he's impetuous and headstrong, but it is more than that. He feels differently from me, from all of us. I can see that, though I don't understand him a bit. I thought" (her voice faltered) "he loved me more. He knows how I wanted him to get on in the Church, and how I would have helped him. But that's nothing to him, or next to nothing. I think he doesn't love me at all, mother, and never really did."

Mrs. Lessing threw her head back. "Then he's a fool, my dear," she said emphatically. "You're worth loving; you know it. I should think no more about him, Hilda."

Hilda's hands tightened round her knees. "I can't do that," she said.

Mrs. Lessing was impatient again. "Do you mean, Hilda, that if he persists in this--this madness, if he gives up the Church, for example, you will not break off the engagement? Mind you, that is the point. Every young man must have a bit of a fling, possibly even clergymen, I suppose, and they get over it. A sensible girl knows that. But if he ruins his prospects--surely, Hilda, you are not going to be a fool?"

The word had been spoken again. Peter had had something to say on it, and now the gods gave Hilda her chance. She stretched her fine hands out to the fire, and a new note came into her voice.

"A fool, mother? Oh no, I shan't be a fool. A fool would follow him to the end of the world. A fool of a woman would give him all he wants for the sake of giving, and be content with nothing in return. I see that. But I'm not made for that sort of foolery.... No, I shan't be a fool."

Mrs. Lessing could not conceal her satisfaction. "Well, I am sure I am very glad to hear you say it, and so would your father be. We have not brought you up carefully for nothing, Hilda. You are a woman now, and I don't believe in trying to force a woman against her will, but I am heartily glad, my dear, that you are so sensible. When you are as old as I am and have a daughter of your own, you will be glad that you have behaved so to-night."

Hilda got up, and put her hands behind her head, which was a favourite posture of hers. She stood looking down at her mother with a curious expression on her face. Mrs. Lessing could make nothing of it; she merely thought Hilda "queer"; she had travelled farther than she knew from youth.

"Shall I, mother?" said Hilda. "Yes, I expect I shall. I have been carefully brought up, as you say, so carefully that even now I can only just see what a fool might do, and I know quite well that I can't do it. After a while I shall no more see it than you do. I shall even probably forget that I ever did. So that is all. And because I love him, really, I don't think I can even say 'poor Peter!' That's curious, isn't it, mother?... Well, I think I'll go to my room for a little. I won't come in again. Good-night."

She bent and kissed Mrs. Lessing. Her mother held her arms a moment more. "Then, what are you going to do?" she demanded.

Hilda freed herself, "Write and try to persuade him not to be a fool either, I think. Not that it's any good. And then--wait and see." She walked to the floor, "Of course, this is just between us two, isn't it, dear?" she said, playing with the handle.

"Of course," said her mother. "But do be sensible, dear, and don't wait too long. It is much better not to play with these things--much better. And do tell me how things go, darling, won't you?"

"Oh yes," said Hilda slowly, "Oh yes I'll tell you.... Good-night."

She passed out and closed the door gently "I wonder why I can't cry to-night?" she asked herself as she went

to her room, and quite honestly she did not know.

Across the water Peter's affairs were speeding up. If Hilda could have seen him that night she would probably have wept without difficulty, but for a much more superficial reason than the reason why she could not weep in London. And it came about in this way.

On the morning after the dinner Peter was moody, and declared lie would not go down to the office, but would take a novel out to the canal. He was in half a mind to go up and call at the hospital, but something held him back. Reflection showed him how near he had been to the fatal kiss the night before, and he did not wish, or, with the morning, he thought he did not wish, to see Julie so soon again. So he got his novel and went out to the canal, finding a place where last year's leaves still lay thick, and one could lie at ease and read. We do these things all our days, and never learn the lesson.

Half-way through the morning he looked up to see Langton striding along towards him. He was walking quickly, with the air of one who brings news, and he delivered his message as soon as they were within earshot of each other. "Good news, Graham," he called out. "This tomfoolery is over. They've heard from H.Q. that the whole stunt is postponed, and we've all to go back to our bases. Isn't it like 'em?" he demanded, as he came up. "Old Jackson in the office is swearing like blazes. He's had all his maps made and plans drawn up, etcetera and etcetera, and now they're so much waste-paper. Jolly fortunate, any road." He sat down and got out a pipe.

Peter shut his book. "I'm glad," he said. "I'm sick of foolin' round here. Not but what it isn't a decent enough place, but I prefer the other. There's more doing. When do we go?"

"To-morrow. They're getting our movement orders, yours to Havre, mine to Rouen. I put in a spoke for you, to get one via Rouen, but I don't know if you will. It's a vile journey otherwise."

"By Jove!" cried Peter. "I've an idea! Miss Gamelyn's troop of motor-buses goes back to Havre to-morrow empty. Why shouldn't I travel on them? Think I could work it?"

Langton puffed solemnly. "Sure, I should think," he said, "being a padre, anyway."

"What had I best do?"

"Oh, I should go and see Jackson and get him to 'phone the hospital for you--that is, if you really want to go that way."

"It's far better than that vile train," said Peter. "Besides, one can see the country, which I love. And I've never been in Dieppe, and they're to go through there and pick up some casualties."

"Just so," said Langton, still smoking.

"Well," said Peter, "reckon I'll go and see about it. Jackson's a decent old stick, but I'd best do it before he tackles the R.T.O. Coming?"

"No," said Langton. "Leave that novel, and come back for me. You won't be long."

"Right-o," said Peter, and set off.

It was easily done. Jackson had no objections, and rang up the hospital while Peter waited. Oh yes, certainly they could do it. What was the name? Captain. Graham, C.F. certainly. He must be at the hospital early--eight-thirty the next morning. That all right? Thank you.

"Thank you," said Peter. "Motoring's a long sight better than the train these days, and I'll get in quicker, too, as a matter of fact, or at any rate just as quickly." He turned to go, but a thought struck him. "Have you an orderly to spare?" he asked.

"Any quantity," said the other bitterly. "They've been detailed for weeks, and done nothing. You can have one with pleasure. It'll give the perisher something to do."

"Thanks," said Peter; "I want to send a note, that's all. May I write it here?"

He was given pen and paper, and scribbled a little note to Julie. He did not know who else might be on the lorry, or if she would want to appear to know him. The orderly was called and despatched and he left the place for the last time.

Langton and he walked out to St. Riquier in the afternoon, had tea there, and got back to dinner. A note was waiting for Peter, a characteristic one.

"DEAREST SOLOMON (it ran),

"You are really waking up! There will be three of us nurses in one lorry, and they're sure to start you off in another. We lunch at Eu, and I'll be delighted to see you. Then you can go on in our car. Dieppe's on the knees of the gods, as you say, but probably we can pull off something.

"JULIE."

He smiled and put it in his pocket. Langton said nothing till the coffee and liqueurs came in. Then he lit a cigarette and held the match out to Peter. "Wonder if we shall meet again?" he said.

"Oh, I expect so," said Peter. "Write, anyway, won't you? I'll likely get a chance to come to Rouen."

"And I likely won't be there. I'm putting in again for another job. They're short of men now, and want equipment officers for the R.A.F. It's a stunt for which engineering's useful, and I may get in. I don't suppose I'll see much of the fun, but it's better than bossing up a labour company, any road."

"Sportsman," said Peter. "I envy you. Why didn't you tell me? I've half a mind to put in too. Do you think I'd have a chance?"

"No," said Langton brutally. "Besides, it's not your line. You know what yours is; stick to it."

"And you know that I'm not so sure that I can," said Peter.

"Rot!" said the other. "You can if you like. You won't gain by running away. Only I give you this bit of advice, old son: go slow. You're so damned hot-headed! You can't remake the world to order in five minutes; and if you could, I bet it wouldn't be a much better old world. We've worried along for some time moderately well. Don't be too ready to turn down the things that have worked with some success, at any rate, for the things that have never been tried."

Peter smoked in silence. Then he said: "Langton you're a bit different from what you were. In a way, it's you who have set me out on this racket, and it's you who encouraged me to try and get down to rock-bottom. You've always been a cautious old rotter, but you're more than cautious now. Why?"

Langton leaned over and touched the other's tunic pocket in which lay Julie's note. Then he leaned back and went on with his cigarette.

Peter flushed. "It's too late," he said judicially, flicking off his ash.

"So? Well, I'm sorry, frankly--sorry for her and sorry for you. But if it is, I'll remember my own wisdom: it's no use meddling with such things. For all that, you're a fool, Peter, as I told you last night."

"Just so. And I asked what was a fool."

"And I didn't answer. I reckon fools can be of many sorts. Your sort of fool chucks the world over for the quest of an ideal."

"Thank you," said Peter quietly.

"You needn't. That fool is a real fool, and bigger than most. Ideals are ideals, and one can't realise them. It's waste of time to try."

"Is it?" said Peter. "Well, at any rate, I don't know that I'm out after them much. I don't see any. All I know is that I've looked in the likely places, and now I'll look in the unlikely."

Langton ground his cigarette-end in his coffee-cup. "You will," he said, "whatever I say.... Have another drink? After all, there's no need to 'turn down the empty glass' yet."

They did not see each other in the morning, and Peter made his way early to the hospital as arranged. The P.M.O. met him, and he was put in nominal charge of the three Red-Cross ambulance-cars. While he was talking to the doctor the three nurses came out and got in, Julie not looking in his direction; then he climbed up next the driver of the first car. "Cheerio," said the P.M.O., and they were off.

It was a dull day, and mists hung over the water-meadows by the Somme. For all that Peter enjoyed himself immensely. They ran swiftly through the little villages, under the sweeping trees all new-budded into green, and soon had vistas of the distant sea. The driver of Peter's car was an observant fellow, and he knew something of gardening. It was he who pointed out that the fruit-trees had been indifferently pruned or not pruned at all, and that there were fields no longer under the plough that had been plainly so not long before. In a word, the country bore its war scars, although it needed a clever eye to see them.

But Peter had little thought for this. Now and again, at a corner, he would glance back, his mind on Julie in the following car, while every church tower gave him pause for thought. He tried to draw the man beside him on religion, but without any success, though he talked freely enough of other things. He was for the Colonies after the war, he said. He'd knocked about a good deal in France, and the taste for travel had come to him. Canada appeared a land of promise; one could get a farm easily, and his motor knowledge would be useful on a farm these days. Yes, he had a pal out there, a Canadian who had done his bit and been invalided out of it. They corresponded, and he expected to get in with him, the one's local knowledge eking out the other's technical. No, he wasn't for marrying yet awhile; he'd wait till he'd got a place for the wife and kiddies. Then he would. The thought made him expand a bit, and Peter smiled to himself as he thought of his conversation with Langton over the family group. It struck him to test the man, and as they passed a wayside Calvary, rudely painted, he drew his attention to it. "What do you think of that?" he asked.

The man glanced at it, and then away. "It's all right for them as like it," he said. "Religion's best in a church, it seems to me. I've seen chaps mock at them crucifixes, sir, same as they wouldn't if they'd only been in church."

"Yes," said Peter; "but I suppose some men have been helped by them who never would have been if they had only been in church. But don't you think they're rather gaudy?"

"Gaudy, sir? Meanin' 'ighly painted? No, not as I knows on. They're more like what happened, I reckon, than them brass crosses we have in our churches."

They ran into Eu for lunch, and drew up in the market-square. Peter went round to the girls' car, greeted Julie, and was introduced. He led them to an old inn in the square, and they sat down to luncheon in very good humour. The other girls were ordinary enough, and Julie rather subdued for her. Afterwards they spent an hour in the church and a picture-postcard shop, and it was there that Julie whispered: "Go on in your own car. At Dieppe, go to the Hôtel Trois Poissons and wait for me. I found out yesterday that a woman I know is a doctor in Dieppe, and she lives there. I'll get leave easily to call. Then I can see you. If we travel together these girls'll talk; they're just the sort."

Peter nodded understanding, and they drifted apart. He went out to see if the cars were ready and returned to call the nurses, and in a few minutes they were off again.

The road now ran through forests nearly all the way, except where villages had cleared a space around them, as was plain to see. They crossed little streams, and finally came downhill through the forest into the river valley that leads to Dieppe. It was still early, and Peter stopped the cars to suggest that they might have a look at the castle of Arques-le-Bataille. The grand old pile kept them nearly an hour, and they wandered about the ruins to their hearts' content. Julie would climb a buttress of the ancient keep when their guide had gone on with the others, and Peter went up after her. She was as lissom as a boy and seemingly as strong, swinging up by roots of ivy and the branches of a near tree, in no wise impeded by her short skirts. From the top one had, indeed, a glorious view. The weather had cleared somewhat, and one could see every bit of the old castle below, the village at its feet, and the forest across the little stream out of which the Duke of Mayenne's infantry had debouched that day of battle from which the village took its name.

"They had some of the first guns in the castle, which was held for Henry of Navarre," explained Peter, "and they did great execution. I suppose they fired one stone shot in about every five minutes, and killed a man about every half-hour. The enemy were more frightened than hurt, I should think. Anyway, Henry won."

"Wasn't he the King who thought Paris worth more than a Mass?" she demanded.

"Yes," said Peter, watching her brown eyes as she stared out over the plain.

"I wonder what he thinks now," she said.

He laughed. "You're likely to wonder," he said.

"Funny old days," said Julie. "I suppose there were girls in this castle watching the fight. I expect they cared more for the one man each half-hour the cannon hit than for either Paris or the Mass. That's the way of women, Peter, and a damned silly way it is! Come on, let's go. I'll get down first, if you please."

On the short road remaining Peter asked his chauffeur if he knew the Trois Poissons, and, finding that he did, had the direction pointed out. They ran through the town to the hospital, and Peter handed his cars over. "I'll sleep in town," he said. "What time ought we to start in the morning?" He was told, and walked away. Julie had disappeared.

He found the Trois Poissons without difficulty, and made his way to the sitting-room, a queer room opening from the pavement direct on the one side, and from the hall of the hotel on the other. It had a table down the middle, a weird selection of chairs, and a piano. A small woman was sitting in a chair reading the *Tatler* and smoking. An empty glass stood beside her.

She looked up as he came in, and he noticed R.A.M.C. badges. "Good-evening," he said cheerily.

"Good-evening, padre," she replied, plainly willing to talk. "Where have you sprung from?"

"Abbeville via Eu in a convoy of Red Cross cars," he said, "and I feel like a sun-downer. Won't you have another with me?"

"Sure thing," she said, and he ordered a couple from the French maid who came in answer to his ring. "Do you live here?" he asked.

"For my sins I do," she said. "I doctor Waac's, and I don't think much of it. A finer, heartier lot of women I never saw. Epsom salts is all they want. A child could do it."

Peter laughed. "Well, I don't see why you should grumble," he said.

"Don't you? Where's the practice? This business out here is the best chance for doctors in a lifetime, and I have to strip strapping girls hopelessly and endlessly."

"You do, do you?" said a voice in the doorway, and there stood Julie. "Well, at any rate you oughtn't to talk about it like that to my gentleman friends, especially padres. How do you do, my dear?"

"Julie, by all that's holy! Where have you sprung from?"

She glanced from one to the other. "From Abbeville via Eu in a convoy of Red Cross cars, I dare bet," she said.

"Julie, you're beyond me. If you weren't so strong I'd smack you, but as it is, give me another kiss. *And* introduce us. There may as well be propriety somewhere."

They sorted themselves out and sat down. "What do you think of my rig?" demanded Dr. Melville (as Julie had introduced her).

"Toppin'," said Julie critically. "But what in the world is it? Chiefly Waac, with three pukka stars and an R.A.M.C. badge. Teanie, how dare you do it?"

"I dare do all that doth become a woman," she answered complacently. "And it doth, doth it not? Skirt's a trifle short, perhaps," she added, sticking out a leg and examining the effect critically, "but upper's eminently satisfactory."

Julie leaned over and prodded her. "No corsets?" she inquired innocently.

"Julie, you're positively indecent. You must have tamed your padre completely. You're not married by any chance?" she added suddenly.

Julie screamed with laughter. "Oh, Teanie, you'll be the death of me," she said at last. "Solomon, are we married? I don't think so, Teanie. There's never no telling these days, but I can't recollect it."

"Well, it strikes me you ought to be if you're jogging round the country together," said the other, her eyes twinkling. "But if you're not, take warning, padre. A girl that talks about corsets in public isn't respectable, especially as she doesn't wear them herself, except in the evening, for the sake of other things. Or she used not to. But perhaps you know?"

Peter tried to look comfortable, but he was completely out of his depth. He finished his drink with a happy inspiration, and ordered another. That down, he began to feel more capable of entering into the spirit of these

two. They were the sort he wanted to know, both of them, women about as different from those he had met as they could possibly be.

Another man dropped in after a while, so the talk became general. The atmosphere was very free and easy, bantering, careless, jolly, and Peter expanded in it. Julie led them all. She was never at a loss, and apparently had no care in the world.

The two girls and Peter went together to dinner and sat at the same table. They talked a good deal together, and Peter gathered they had come to know each other at a hospital in England. They were full of reminiscences.

"Do you remember ducking Pockett?" Teanie asked Julie.

"Lor', I should think I do! Tell Peter. He won't be horrified unless you go into details. If I cough, Solomon, you're to change the subject. Carry on, Teanie."

"Well, Pockett was a nurse of about the last limit. She was fearfully snobby, which nobody of that name ought to be, and she ruled her pros. with a rod of iron. I expect that was good for them, and I say nothing as to that, but she was a beast to the boys. We had some poor chaps in who were damnably knocked about, and one could do a lot for them in roundabout ways. Regulations are made to be broken in some cases, I think. But she was a holy terror. Sooner than call her, the boys would endure anything, but some of us knew, and once she caught Julie here..."

"It wasn't--it was you, Teanie."

"Oh, well, one of us, anyway, in her ward when she was on night duty, sitting with a poor chap who pegged out a few days after. It soothed him to sit and hold her hand. Well, anyway, she was furious and reported it. There was a bit of a row--had to be, I suppose, as it was against regulations--but thank God the P.M.O. knew his job, so there was only a strafe with the tongue in the cheek. However, we swore revenge, and we had it--eh, Julie?"

"We did. Go on. It was you who thought of it."

"Well, we filled a bath with tepid water and then went to her room one night. She was asleep, and never heard us. We had a towel round her head in two twinks, and carried her by the legs and arms to the bathroom. Julie had her legs, and held 'em well up, so that down went her head under water. She couldn't yell then. When we let her up, I douched her with cold water, and then we bolted. We saw to it that there wasn't a towel in the bathroom, and we locked her bedroom door. Oh, lor', poor soul, but it was funny! She met an orderly in the corridor, and he nearly had a fit, and I don't wonder, for her wet nightie clung to her figure like a skin. She had to try half a dozen rooms before she got anyone to help her, and then, when she got back, we'd ragged her room to blazes. She never said a word, and left soon after. Ever hear of her again, Julie?"

"No," said she, looking more innocent than ever, Peter thought; "but I expect she's made good somewhere. She must have had something in her or she'd have kicked up a row."

Miss Melville was laughing silently. "You innocent babe unborn," she said; "never shall I forget how you held..."

"Come on, Captain Graham," said Julie, getting up; "you've got to see me home, and I want a nice walk by the sea-front."

They went out together, and stood at the hotel door in the little street. There was a bit of a moon, with clouds

scurrying by, and when it shone the road was damp and glistening in the moonlight. "What a heavenly night!" said Julie. "Come on with us along the sea-front, Teanie--do!"

Miss Melville smiled up at them. "I reckon you'd prefer to be alone," she said.

Peter glanced at Julie, and then protested. "No," he said; "do come on," and Julie rewarded him with a smile.

So they set out together. On the front the wind was higher, lashing the waves, and the moonlight shone fitfully on the distant cliffs, the harbour mouth, and the sea. The two girls clung together, and as Peter walked by Julie she took his arm. Conversation was difficult as they battled their way along the promenade. There was hardly a soul about, and Peter felt the night to fit his mood.

They went up once and down again, and at the Casino grounds Teanie stopped them. "'Nough," she said; "I'm for home and bed. You two dears can finish up without me."

"Oh, we must see you home," said Peter.

The doctor laughed. "Think I shall get stolen?" she demanded. "Someone would have to get up pretty early for that. No, padre, I'm past the need of being escorted, thanks. Good-night. Be good, Julie. We'll meet again sometime, I hope. If not, keep smiling. Cheerio."

She waved her hand and was gone in the night. "If there was ever a plucky, unselfish, rattling good woman, there she goes," said Julie. "I've known her sit up night after night with wounded men when she was working like a horse all day. I've known her to help a drunken Tommy into a cab and get him home, and quiet his wife into the bargain. I saw her once walk off out of the Monico with a boy of a subaltern, who didn't know what he was doing, and take him to her own flat, and put him to bed, and get him on to the leave-train in time in the morning. She'd give away her last penny, and you wouldn't know she'd done it. And yet she's not the sort of woman you'd choose to run a mother's meeting, would you, Solomon?"

"Sure thing I wouldn't," said Peter, "not in my old parish, but I'm not so sure I wouldn't in my new one."

"What's your new one?" asked Julie curiously.

"Oh, it hasn't a name," said Peter, "but it's pretty big. Something after the style of John Wesley's parish, I reckon. And I'm gradually getting it sized up."

"Where do I come in, Solomon?" demanded Julie.

They were passing by the big Calvary at the harbour gates, and there was a light there. He stopped and turned so that the light fell on her. She looked up at him, and so they stood a minute. He could hear the lash of the waves, and the wind drumming in the rigging of the flagstaff near them. Then, deliberately, he bent down, and kissed her on the lips. "I don't know, Julie," he said, "but I believe you have the biggest part, somehow."

## CHAPTER III

All that it is necessary to know of Hilda's return letter to Peter ran as follows:

"My Dear Boy,

"Your letter from Abbeville reached me the day before yesterday, and I have thought about nothing else since. It is plain to me that it is no use arguing with you and no good reproaching you, for once you get an idea into your head nothing but bitter experience will drive it out. But, Peter, you must see that so far as I am concerned you are asking me to choose between you and your strange ideas and all that is familiar and dear in my life. You can't honestly expect me to believe that my Church and my parents and my teachers are all wrong, and that, to put it mildly, the very strange people you appear to be meeting in France are all right. My dear Peter, do try and look at it sensibly. The story you told me of the death of Lieutenant Jenks was terrible--terrible; it brings the war home in all its ghastly reality; but really, you know, it was his fault and not yours, and still less the fault of the Church of England, that he did not want you when he came to die. If a man lives without God, he can hardly expect to find Him at the point of sudden death. What you say about Christ, too, utterly bewilders me. Surely our Church's teachings in the Catechism and the Prayer-Book is Christian teaching, isn't it? Nothing is perfect on earth, and the Church is human, but our Church is certainly the best I know of. It is liberal, active, moderate, and--I don't like the word, but after all it is a good one--respectable. I don't know much about these things, but surely you of all people don't want to go shouting in the street like a Salvation Army Captain. I can't see that that is more 'in touch with reality.' Peter, what do you mean? Are not St. John's, and the Canon, and my people, and myself, real? Surely, Peter, our love is real, isn't it? Oh, how can you doubt that?

"Darling boy, don't you think you are over-strained and over-worried? You are in a strange country, among strange people, at a very peculiar time. War always upsets everything and makes things abnormal. London, even, isn't normal, but, as the Canon said the other day, a great many of the things people do just now are due to reaction against strain and anxiety. Can't you see this? Isn't there any clergyman you can go and talk to? Your Presbyterian and other new friends and your visits to Roman Catholic churches can't be any real help.

"Peter, dear, for my sake, do, *do* try to see things like this. I *hate* that bit in your letter about publicans and sinners. How can a clergyman expect *them* to help *him*? Surely you ought to avoid such people, not seek their company. It is so like you to get hold of a text or two and run it to death. It's not that I don't *trust* you, but you are so easily influenced, and you may equally easily go and do something that will separate us and ruin your life. Peter, I hate to write like this, but I can't help it...."

Peter let the sheets fall from his hands and stared out of the little window. The gulls were screaming and fighting over some refuse in the harbour, and he watched the beat of their wings, fascinated. If only he, too, could catch the wind and be up and away like that!

He jumped up and paced up and down the floor restlessly, and he told himself that Hilda was right and he was a cad and worse. Julie's kiss on his lips burned there yet. That at any rate was wrong; by any standards he had no right to behave so. How could he kiss her when he was pledged to Hilda--Hilda to whom everyone had looked up, the capable, lady-like, irreproachable Hilda, the Hilda to whom Park Lane and St. John's were such admirable setting. And who was he, after all, to set aside all that for which both those things stood?

And yet.... He sat down by the little table and groaned.

"What the dickens is the matter with you, padre?"

Peter started and looked round. In the doorway stood Pennell, regarding him with amusement. "Here am I trying to read, and you pacing up and down like a wild beast. What the devil's up?"

"The devil himself, that's what's up," said Peter savagely. "Look here, Pen, come on down town and let's have a spree. I hate this place and this infernal camp. It gets on my nerves. I must have a change. Will you come? It's my do."

"I'm with you, old thing. I know what you feel like; I get like that myself sometimes. It's a pleasure to see that you're so human. We'll go down town and razzle-dazzle for once. I'm off duty till to-night. I ought to sleep, I suppose, but I can't, so come away with you. I won't be a second."

He disappeared. Peter stood for a moment, then slipped his tunic off and put on another less distinctive of his office. He crossed to the desk, unlocked it, and reached for a roll of notes, shoving them into his pocket. Then he put on his cap, took a stick from the corner, and went out into the passage. But there he remembered, and came quickly back. He folded Hilda's letter and put it away in a drawer; then he went out again. "Are you ready, Pennell?" he called.

The two of them left camp and set out across the docks. As they crossed a bridge a one-horse cab came into the road from a side-street and turned in their direction. "Come on," said Peter. "Anything is better than this infernal walk over this *pavé* always. Let's hop in."

They stopped the man, who asked where to drive to.

"Let's go to the Bretagne first and get a drink," said Pennell.

"Right," said Peter--"any old thing. Hôtel de la Bretagne," he called to the driver.

They set off at some sort of a pace, and Pennell leaned back with a laugh. "It's a funny old world, Graham," he said. "One does get fed-up at times. Why sitting in a funeral show like this cab and having a drink in a second-rate pub should be any amusement, I don't know. But it is. You're infectious, my boy. I begin to feel like a rag myself. What shall we do?"

"The great thing," said Peter judiciously, "is not to know what one is going to do, but just to take anything that comes along. I remember at the 'Varsity one never set out to rag anything definitely. You went out and you saw a bobby and you took his hat, let us say. You cleared, and he after you. Anything might happen then."

"I should think so," said Pennell.

"I remember once walking home with a couple of men, and one of them suggested dousing all the street lamps in the road, which was a residential one leading into town. There wasn't anything in it, but we did it. One man put his back against a post, while the second went on to the next post. Then the third man mounted the first man's back, shoved out the light, jumped clear, and ran on past the next lamp-post to the third. The first man jumped on No. 2's back and doused his lamp, and so on. We did the street in a few minutes, and then a constable came into it at the top. He probably thought he was drunk, then he spotted lights going out, and like an ass he blew his whistle. We were round a corner in no time, and then turned and ran back to see if we could offer assistance!"

"Some gag!" chuckled Pennell; "but I hope you won't go on that sort of racket to-night. It would be a little more serious if we were caught.... Also, these blighted gendarmes would probably start firing, or some other damned thing."

"They would," said Peter; "besides, that doesn't appeal to me now. I'm getting too old, or else my tastes have become depraved."

The one-horse cab stopped with a jerk. "Hop out," said Peter. He settled the score, and the two of them

entered the hotel and passed through into the private bar.

"What is it to be?" demanded Pennell.

"Cocktails to-day, old son," said Peter; "I want bucking up. What do you say to martinis?"

The other agreed, and they moved over to the bar. A monstrously fat woman stood behind it, like some bloated spider, and a thin, weedy-looking girl assisted her. A couple of men were already there. It was too early for official drinks, but the Bretagne knew no law.

They ordered their drinks, and stood there while madame compounded them and put in the cherries. Another man came in, and Peter recognised the Australian Ferrars, whom he had met before. He introduced Pennell and called for another martini.

"So you frequent this poison-shop, do you?" said Ferrars.

"Not much," laughed Peter, "but it's convenient."

"It is, and it's a good sign when a man like you wants a drink. I'd sooner listen to your sermons any day than some chaps' I know."

"Subject barred here," said Pennell. "But here's the very best to you, Graham, for all that."

"Same here," said Ferrars, and put down his empty glass.

The talk became general. There was nothing whatever in it--mild chaffing, a yarn or two, a guarded description by Peter of his motor drive from Abbeville, and then more drinks. And so on. The atmosphere was warm and genial, but Peter wondered inwardly why he liked it, and he did not like it so much that Pennell's "Well, what about it? Let's go on, Graham, shall we?" found him unready. The two said a general good-bye, promised madame to look in again, and sauntered out.

They crossed the square in front of Travalini's, lingered at the flower-stalls, refused the girls' pressure to buy, and strolled on. "I'm sick of Travalini's," said Pennell. "Don't let's go in there."

"So am I," said Peter. "Let's stroll down towards the sea."

They turned down a side-street, and stood for a few minutes looking into a picture and book shop. At that moment quick footsteps sounded on the pavement, and Pennell glanced round.

Two girls passed them, obviously sisters. They were not flashily dressed exactly, but there was something in their furs and their high-heeled, high-laced boots that told its own story. "By Jove, that's a pretty girl!" exclaimed Pennell; "let's follow them."

Peter laughed; he was reckless, but not utterly so. "If you like," he said. "I'm on for any rag. We'll take them for a drink, but I stop at that, mind, Pen."

"Sure thing," said Pennell. "But come on; we'll miss them."

They set out after the girls, who, after one glance back, walked on as if they did not know they were being followed. But they walked slowly, and it was easy for the two men to catch them up.

Peter slackened a few paces behind. "Look here, Pen," he said, "what the deuce are we going to do? They'll

expect more than a drink, you know."

"Oh no, they won't, not so early as this. It's all in the way of business to them, too. Let's pass them first," he suggested, "and then slacken down and wait for them to speak."

Peter acquiesced, feeling rather more than an ass, but the drinks had gone slightly to his head. They executed their share of the maneuver, Pennell looking at the girls and smiling as he did so. But the two quickened their pace and passed the officers without a word.

"If you ask me, this is damned silly," said Peter. "Let's chuck it."

"No, no; wait a bit," said Pennell excitedly. "You'll see what they'll do. It's really an amusing study in human nature. Look! I told you so. They live there."

The girls had crossed the street, and were entering a house. One of them unlocked the door, and they both disappeared. "There," said Peter, "that finishes it. We've lost them."

"Have we?" said his companion. "Come on over."

They crossed the street and walked up to the door. It was open and perhaps a foot ajar. Pennell pushed it wide and walked in. "Come on," he said again. Peter followed reluctantly, but curious. He was seeing a new side of life, he thought grimly.

Before them a flight of stairs led straight up to a landing, but there was no sign of the girls. "What's next?" demanded Peter. "We'll be fired out in two twos if nothing worse happens. Suppose they're decent girls after all; what would you say?"

"I'd ask if Mlle. Lucienne lived here," said Pennell, "and apologise profusely when I found she didn't. But you can't make a mistake in this street, Graham. I'm going up. It's the obvious thing, and probably what they wanted. Coming?"

He set off to mount the stairs, and Peter, reassured, followed him, at a few paces. When he reached the top, Pennell was already entering an open door.

"How do you do, ma chérie?" said one of the girls, smiling, and holding out a hand.

Peter looked round curiously. The room was fairly decently furnished in a foreign middle-class fashion, half bedroom, half sitting-room. One of the girls sat on the arm of a big chair, the other was greeting his friend. She was the one he had fancied, but a quick glance attracted Peter to the other and elder. He was in for it now, and he was determined to play up. He crossed the floor, and smiled down at the girl on the arm of the chair.

"So you 'ave come," she said in broken English. "I told Lucienne that you would not."

"Lucienne!" exclaimed Peter, and looked back at Pennell.

That traitor laughed, and seated himself on the edge of the bed, drawing the other girl to him. "I'm awfully sorry, Graham," he said; "but I couldn't help it. You wanted to see life, and you'd have shied off if I hadn't played a game. I do just know this little girl, and jolly nice she is too. Give me a kiss, Lulu."

The girl obeyed, her eyes sparkling. "It's not proper before monsieur," she said. "'E is--how do you say?--shocked?"

She seated herself on Pennell's knee, and, putting an arm round his neck, kissed him again, looking across at Peter mischievously. "We show 'im French kiss," she added to Pennell, and pouted out her lips to his.

"Well, now you 'ave come, what do you want?" demanded the girl on the arm of Peter's chair. "Sit down," she said imperiously, patting the seat, "and talk to me."

Peter laughed more lightly than he felt. "Well, I want a drink," he said, at random. "Pen," he called across the room, "what about that drink?" The girl by him reached over and touched a bell. As she did so, Peter saw the curls that clustered on her neck and caught the perfume of her hair. It was penetrating and peculiar, but not distasteful, and it did all that it was meant to do. He bent, and kissed the back of her neck, still marvelling at himself.

She straightened herself, smiling. "That is better. You aren't so cold as you pretended, *chérie*. Now kiss me properly," and she held up her face.

Peter kissed her lips. Before he knew it, a pair of arms were thrown about his neck, and he was being half-suffocated with kisses. He tore himself away, disgusted and ashamed.

"No!" he cried sharply, but knowing that it was too late.

The girl threw herself back, laughing merrily, "Oh, you are funny!" she said. "Lucienne, take your boy away; I want to talk to mine."

Before he could think of a remonstrance, it was done. Pennell and the other girl got up from the bed where they had been whispering together, and left the room. "Pennell!" called Peter, too late again, jumping up. The girl ran round him, pushed the door to, locked it, and dropped the key down the neck of her dress. "Voilà!" she said gaily.

There came a knock on the door. "Non, non!" she cried in French. "Take the wine to Mlle. Lucienne; I am busy."

Peter walked across the room to her. "Give me the key," he said, holding out his hand, and changing his tactics. "Please do. I won't go till my friend comes back. I promise."

The girl looked at him. "You promise? But you will 'ave to find it."

He smiled and nodded, and she walked deliberately to the bed, undid the front of her costume, and slipped it off. Bare necked and armed, she turned to him, holding open the front of her chemise. "Down there," she said.

It was a strange moment and a strange thing, but a curious courage came back to Peter in that second. Without hesitation, he put his hand down and sought for the key against her warm body. He found it, and help it up, smiling. Then he moved to the door, pushed the key in the keyhole, and turned again to the girl. "There!" he said simply.

With a gesture of abandon, she threw herself on the bed, propping her cheek on her hand and staring at him. He sat down where Pennell had sat, but made no attempt to touch her, leaning, instead, back and away against the iron bed-post. She pulled up her knees, flung her arms back, and laughed. "And now, *monsieur*?" she said.

Peter had never felt so cool in his life. His thoughts raced, but steadily, as if he had dived into cold, clear water. He smiled again, unhesitatingly, but sadly. "Dear," he said deliberately, "listen to me. I have cheated you by coming here to-day, though you shan't suffer for it. I did not want anything, and I don't now. But I'm glad I've come, even though you do not understand. I don't want to do a bit what my friend is doing. I don't

know why, but I don't. I'm engaged to a girl in England, but it's not because of that. I'm a chaplain too--a curé, you know--in the English Army; but it's not because of that."

"Protestant?" demanded the girl on the bed.

He nodded. "Ah, well," she said, "the Protestant ministers have wives. They are men; it is different with priests. If your fiancée is wise, she wouldn't mind if you love me a little. She is in England; I am here--is it not so? You love me now; again, perhaps, once or twice. Then it is finished. You do not tell your fiancée and she does not know. It is no matter. Come on, chérie!"

She held out her hands and threw her head back on the pillow.

Peter smiled again. "You do not understand," he said. "And nor do I, but I must be different from some men. I do not want to."

"Ah, well," she exclaimed brightly, sitting up, "another time! Give me my dress, monsieur le curé."

He got up and handed it to her. "Tell me," he said, "do you like this sort of life?"

She shrugged her white shoulders indifferently. "Sometimes," she said--"sometimes not. There are good boys and bad boys. Some are rough, cruel, mean; some are kind, and remember that it costs much to live these days, and one must dress nicely. See," she said deliberately, showing him, "it is lace, fine lace; I pay fifty francs in Paris!"

"I will give you that," said Peter, and he placed the note on the bed.

She stared at it and at him. "Oh, I love you!" she cried. "You are kind! Ah, now, if I could but love you always!"

"Always?" he demanded.

"Yes, always, always, while you are here, in Le Havre. I would have no other boy but you. Ah, if you would! You do not know how one tires of the music-hall, the drinks, the smiles! I would do just all you please--be gay, be solemn, talk, be silent, just as you please! Oh, if you would!"

Half in and half out of her dress, she stood there, pleading. Peter looked closely at the little face with its rouge and powder.

"You hate that!" she exclaimed, with quick intuition. "See, it is gone. I use it no more, only a leetle, leetle, for the night." And she ran across to the basin, dipped a little sponge in water, passed it over her face, and turned to him triumphantly.

Peter sighed. "Little girl," he said sadly, hardly knowing that he spoke. "I cannot save myself: how can I save you?"

"Pouf!" she cried. "Save! What do you mean?" She drew herself up with an absurd gesture. "You think me a bad girl? No, I am not bad; I go to church. Le bon Dieu made us as we are; it is nécessaire."

They stood before each other, a strange pair, the product of a strange age. God knows what the angels made of it. But at any rate Peter was honest. He thought of Julie, and he would not cast a stone.

There came a light knock at the door. The girl disregarded it, and ran to him. "You will come again?" she said

in low tones. "Promise me that you will! I will not ask you for anything; you can do as you please; but come again! Do come again!"

Peter passed his hand over her hair. "I will come if I can," he said; "but the Lord knows why."

The knock came again, a little louder. The girl smiled and held her face up. "Kiss me," she demanded.

He complied, and she darted away, fumbling with her dress. "I come," she called, and opened the door. Lucienne and Pennell came in, and the two men exchanged glances. Then Pennell looked away. Lucienne glanced at them and shrugged her shoulders. "Come, Graham," said Pennell; "let's get out! Good-bye, you two."

The pair of them went down and out in silence. No one had seen them come, and there was no one to see them go. Peter glanced at the number and made a mental note of it, and they set off down the street.

Presently Pennell laughed, "I played you a dirty trick, Graham," he said, "I'm sorry."

"You needn't be," said Peter; "I'm very glad I went."

"Why?" said Pennell curiously, glancing sideways at him. "You *are* a queer fellow, Graham." But there was a note of relief in his tone.

Peter said nothing, but walked on. "Where next?" demanded Pennell.

"It looks as if you are directing this outfit," said Peter; "I'm in your hands."

"All right," said Pennell; "I know."

They took a street running parallel to the docks, and entered an American bar. Peter glanced round curiously. "I've never been here before," he said.

"Probably not," said Pennell. "It's not much at this time of the year, but jolly cool in the summer. And you can get first-class cocktails. I want something now; what's yours?"

"I'll leave it to you," said Peter.

He sat down at a little table rather in the corner and lit a cigarette. The place was well lighted, and by means of mirrors, coloured-glass ornaments, paper decorations, and a few palms, it looked in its own way smart. Two or three officers were drinking at the bar, sitting on high stools, and Pennell went up to give his order. He brought two glasses to Peter's table and sat down. "What fools we are, padre!" he said. "I sometimes think that the man who gets simply and definitely tight when he feels he wants a breather is wiser than most of us. We drink till we're excited, and then we drink to get over it. And I suppose the devil sits and grins. Well, it's a weary world, and there isn't any good road out of it. I sometimes wish I'd stopped a bullet earlier on in the day. And yet I don't know. We do get some excitement. Let's go to a music-hall to-night."

"What about dinner?"

"Oh, get a quiet one in a decent hotel. I'll have to clear out at half-time if you don't mind."

"Not a bit," said Peter. "Half will be enough for me, I think. But let's have dinner before we've had more of these things."

The bar was filling up. A few girls came and went. Pennell nodded to a man or two, and finished his glass. And they went off to dinner.

The music-hall was not much of a show, but it glittered, and people obviously enjoyed it. Peter watched the audience as much as the stage. Quite respectable French families were there, and there was nothing done that might not have been done on an English stage--perhaps less, but the words were different. The women as well as the men screamed with laughter, flushed of face, but an old fellow, with his wife and daughter, obviously from the country, sat as stiffly as an English farmer through it all. The daughter glanced once at the two officers, but then looked away; she was well brought up. A half-caste Algerian, probably, came on and danced really extraordinarily well, and a negro from the States, equally ready in French and English, sang songs which the audience demanded. He was entirely master, however, and, conscious of his power, used it. No one in the place seemed to have heard of the colour-bar, except a couple of Americans, who got up and walked out when the comedian clasped a white girl round the waist in one of his songs. The negro made some remark that Peter couldn't catch, and the place shook with laughter.

At half-time everyone flocked into a queer kind of semi-underground hall whose walls were painted to represent a cave, dingy cork festoons and "rocks" adding to the illusion. Here, at long tables, everyone drank innocuous French beer, that was really quite cool and good. It was rather like part of an English bank holiday. Everybody spoke to everybody else, and there were no classes and distinctions. You could only get one glass of beer, for the simple reason that there were too many drinking and too few supplying the drinks for more in the time.

"I must go," said Pennell, "but don't you bother to come."

"Oh yes, I will," said Peter, and they got up together.

In the entrance-hall, however, a girl was apparently waiting for someone, and as they passed Peter recognised her. "Louise!" he exclaimed.

She smiled and held out her hand. Peter took it, and Pennell after him.

"Do you go now?" she asked them. "The concert is not half finished."

"I've got to get back to work," said Pennell, "worse luck. It is la guerre, you know!"

"Poor boy!" said she gaily. "And you?" turning to Peter.

Moved by an impulse, he shook his head. "No," he said, "I was only seeing him home."

"Bien! See me home instead, then," said Louise.

"Nothing doing," said Peter, using a familiar phrase.

She laughed. "Bah! cannot a girl have friends without that, eh? You have a fiancée, 'ave you not? Oh yes, I remember--I remember very well. Come! I have done for to-day; I am tired. I will make you some coffee, and we shall talk. Is it not so?"

Peter looked at Pennell. "Do you mind, Pen?" he asked. "I'd rather like to."

"Not a scrap," said the other cheerfully; "wish I could come too. Ask me another day, Louise, will you?"

She regarded him with her head a little on one side. "I do not know," she said. "I do not think you would talk

with me as he will. You like what you can get from the girls of France now; but after, no more. Monsieur, 'e is different. He want not quite the same. Oh, I know! Allons."

Pennell shrugged his shoulders. "One for me," he said. "Well, good-night. I hope you both enjoy yourselves."

In five minutes Peter and Louise were walking together down the street. A few passers-by glanced at them, or especially at her, but she took no notice, and Peter, in a little, felt the strangeness of it all much less. He deliberately crossed once or twice to get between her and the road, as he would have done with a lady, and moved slightly in front of her when they encountered two drunken men. She chatted about nothing in particular, and Peter thought to himself that he might almost have been escorting Hilda home. But if Hilda had seen him!

She ushered him into her flat. It was cosy and nicely furnished, very different from that of the afternoon. A photograph or two stood about in silver frames, a few easy-chairs, a little table, a bookshelf, and a cupboard. A fire was alight in the grate; Louise knelt down and poked it into a flame.

"You shall have French coffee," she said. "And I have even lait for you." She put a copper kettle on the fire, and busied herself with cups and saucers. These she arranged on the little table, and drew it near the fire. Then she offered him a cigarette from a gold case, and took one herself. "Ah!" she said, sinking back into a chair. "Now we are, as you say, comfy, is it not so? We can talk. Tell me how you like la France, and what you do."

Peter tried, but failed rather miserably, and the shrewd French girl noticed it easily enough. She all but interrupted him as he talked of Abbeville and the raid. "Mon ami," she said, "you have something on your mind. You do not want to talk of these things. Tell me."

Peter looked into the kindly keen eyes. "You are right, Louise," he said. "This is a day of trouble for me."

She nodded. "Tell me," she said again. "But first, what is your name, mon ami? It is hard to talk if one does not know even the name."

He hardly hesitated. It seemed natural to say it. "Peter," he said.

She smiled, rolling the "r." "Peterr. Well, Peterr, go on."

"I'll tell you about to-day first," he said, and, once launched, did so easily. He told the little story well, and presently forgot the strange surroundings. It was all but a confession, and surely one was never more strangely made. And from the story he spoke of Julie, but concealed her identity, and then he spoke of God. Louise hardly said a word. She poured out coffee in the middle, but that was all. At last he finished.

"Louise," he said, "it comes to this: I've nothing left but Julie. It was she restrained me this afternoon, I think. I'm mad for her; I want her and nothing else. But with her, somehow, I lose everything else I possess or ever thought I possessed." And he stopped abruptly, for she did not know his business in life, and he had almost given it away.

When he had finished she slipped a hand into his, and said no word. Suddenly she looked up. "Peterr, mon ami," she said, "listen to me. I will tell you the story of Louise, of me. My father, he lived--oh, it matters not; but he had some money, he was not poor. I went to a good school, and I came home for the holidays. I had one sister older than me. Presently I grew up; I learnt much; I noticed. I saw there were terrible things, chez nous. My mother did not care, but I--I cared. I was mad. I spoke to my sister: it was no good. I spoke to my father, and, truly, I thought he would kill me. He beat me--ah, terrible--and I ran from the house. I wept under the hedges: I said I would no more go 'ome. I come to a big city. I found work in a big shop--much work, little money--ah, how little! Then I met a friend: he persuade me, at last he keep me--two months, three, or more;

then comes the war. He is an officer, and he goes. We kiss, we part--oui, he love me, that officer. I pray for him: I think I nevair leave the church; but it is no good. He is dead. Then I curse le bon Dieu. They know me in that place: I can do nothing unless I will go to an 'otel--to be for the officers, you understand? I say, Non. I sell my things and I come here. Here I do well--you understand? I am careful; I have now my home. But this is what I tell you, Peterr: one does wrong to curse le bon Dieu. He is wise--ah, how wise!--it is not for me to say. And good--ah, Jesu! how good! You think I do not know; I, how should I know? But I know. I do not understand. For me, I am caught; I am like the bird in the cage. I cannot get out. So I smile, I laugh--and I wait."

She ceased. Peter was strangely moved, and he pressed the hand he held almost fiercely. The tragedy of her life seemed so great that he hardly dare speak of his own. But: "What has it to do with me?" he demanded.

She gave a little laugh. "Ow should I say?" she said. "But you think God not remember you, and, Peterr, He remember all the time."

"And Julie?" quizzed Peter after a moment.

Louise shrugged her shoulders. "This love," she said, "it is one great thing. For us women it is perhaps the only great thing, though your English women are blind, are dead, they do not see. Julie, she is as us, I think. She is French inside. La pauvre petite, she is French in the heart."

"Well?" demanded Peter again.

"C'est tout, mon ami. But I am sorry for Julie."

"Louise," said Peter impulsively, "you're better than I--a thousand times. I don't know how to thank you." And he lifted her hand to his lips.

He hardly touched it. She sprang up, withdrawing it. "Ah, non, non," she cried. "You must not. You forget. It is easy for you, for you are good--yes, so good. You think I did not notice in the street, but I see. You treat me like a lady, and now you kiss my hand, the hand of the girl of the street.... Non, non!" she protested vehemently, her eyes alight. "I would kiss your feet!"

Outside, in the darkened street, Peter walked slowly home. At the gate of the camp he met Arnold, returning from a visit to another mess. "Hullo!" he called to Peter, "and where have you been?"

Peter looked at him for a moment without replying. "I'm not sure, but seeing for the first time a little of what Christ saw, Arnold, I think," he said at last, with a catch in his voice.

## CHAPTER IV

Looking back on them afterwards, Peter saw the months that followed as a time of waiting between two periods of stress. Not, of course, that anyone can ever stand still, for even if one does but sit by a fire and warm one's hands, things happen, and one is imperceptibly led forward. It was so in this case, but, not unnaturally, Graham hardly noticed in what way his mind was moving. He had been through a period of storm, and he had to a certain extent emerged from it. The men he had met, and above all Julie, had been responsible for the opening of his eyes to facts that he had before passed over, and it was entirely to his credit that he would not refuse to accept them and act upon them. But once he had resolved to do so things, as it were, slowed down. He went about his work in a new spirit, the spirit not of the teacher, but of the learner, and ever since his talk with Louise he thought--or tried to think--more of what love might mean to Julie than to himself. The result was a curious change in their relations, of which the girl was more immediately and continually conscious than Peter. She puzzled over it, but could not get the clue, and her quest irritated her. Peter had always been the least little bit nervous in her presence. She had known that he never knew what she would do or say next, and her knowledge had amused and carried her away. But now he was so self-possessed. Very friendly they were, and they met often--in the ward for a few sentences that meant much to each of them; down town by arrangement in a cafe, or once or twice for dinner; and once for a day in the country, though not alone; and he was always the same. Sometimes, on night duty, she would grope for an adjective to fit him, and could only think of "tender." He was that. And she hated it, or all but hated it. She did not want tenderness from him, for it seemed to her that tenderness meant that he was, as it were, standing aloof from her, considering, helping when he could. She demanded the fierce rush of passion with which he would seize and shrine her in the centre of his heart, deaf to her entreaties, careless of her pain. She would love then, she thought, and sometimes, going to the window of the ward and staring out over the harbour at the twinkling lights, she would bite her lip with the pain of it. He had thought she dismissed love lightly when she called it animal passion. Good God, if he only knew!...

Peter, for his part, did not realise so completely the change that had come over him. For one thing, he saw himself all the time, and she did not. She did not see him when he lay on his bed in a tense agony of desire for her. She did not see him when life looked like a tumbled heap of ruins to him and she smiled beyond. She all but only saw him when he was staring at the images that had been presented to him during the past months, or hearing in imagination Louise's quaintly accepted English and her quick and vivid "La pauvre petite!"

For it was Louise, curiously enough, who affected him most in these days. A friendship sprang up between them of which no one knew. Pennell and Donovan, with whom he went everywhere, did not speak of it either to him or to one another, with that real chivalry that is in most men, but if they had they would have blundered, misunderstanding. Arnold, of whom Peter saw a good deal, did not know, or, if he knew, Peter never knew that he knew. Julie, who was well aware of his friendship with the two first men, knew that he saw French girls, and, indeed, openly chaffed him about it. But under her chaff was an anxiety, typical of her. She did not know how far he went in their company, and she would have given anything to know. She guessed that, despite everything, he had had no physical relationship with any one of them, and she almost wished it might be otherwise. She knew well that if he fell to them, he would the more readily turn to her. There was a strength about him now that she dreaded.

Whatever Louise thought she kept wonderfully hidden. He took her out to dinner in quiet places, and she would take him home to coffee, and they would chat, and there was an end. She was seemingly well content. She did her business, and they would even speak of it. "I cannot come to-night, mon ami," she would say; "I am busy." She would nod to him as she passed out of the restaurant with someone else, and he would smile back at her. Nor did he ever remonstrate or urge her to change her ways. And she knew why. He had no key with which to open her cage.

Once, truly, he attempted it, and it was she who refused the glittering thing. He rarely came uninvited to her flat, for obvious reasons; but one night she heard him on the stairs as she got ready for bed. He was walking

unsteadily, and she thought at first that he had been drinking. She opened to him with the carelessness her life had taught her, her costume off, and her black hair all about her shoulders. "Go in and wait, Peter," she said; "I come."

She had slipped on a coloured silk wrap, and gone in to the sitting-room to find him pacing up and down. She smiled. "Sit down, mon ami," she said; "I will make the coffee. See, it is ready. Mais vraiment, you shall drink café noir to-night. And one little glass of this--is it not so?" and she took a green bottle of peppermint liqueur from the cupboard.

"Coffee, Louise," he said, "but not the other. I don't want it."

She turned and looked more closely at him then. "Non," she said, "pardon. But sit you down. Am I to have the wild beast prowling up and down in my place?"

"That's just it, Louise," he cried; "I am a wild beast to-night. I can't stand it any longer. Kiss me."

He put his arms round her, and bent her head back, studying her French and rather inscrutable eyes, her dark lashes, her mobile mouth, her long white throat. He put his hand caressingly upon it, and slid his fingers beneath the loose lace that the open wrap exposed. "Dear," he said, "I want you to-night."

"To-night, chérie?" she questioned.

"Yes, now," he said hotly. "And why not? You give to other men--why not to me, Louise?"

She freed herself with a quick gesture, and, brave heart, she laughed merrily. The devil must have started at that laugh, and the angels of God sung for joy. "Ah, non," she cried, "It is the mistake you make. I *sell* myself to other men. But you--you are my friend; I cannot sell myself to you."

He did not understand altogether why she quibbled; how should he have done? But he was ashamed. He slid into the familiar chair and ran his fingers through his hair. "Forgive me, dear," he muttered. "I think I am mad to-night, but I am not drunk, as you thought, except with worrying. I feel lost, unclean, body and soul, and I thought you would help me to forget--no, more than that, help me to feel a man. Can't you, won't you?" he demanded, looking up. "I am tired of play-acting. I've a body, like other men. Let me plunge down deep to-night, Louise. It will do me good, and it doesn't matter. That girl was right after all. Oh, what a fool I am!"

Then did the girl of the streets set out to play her chosen part. She did not preach at all--how could she? Besides, neither had she any use for the Ten Commandments. But if ever Magdalene broke an alabaster-box of very precious ointment, Louise did so that night. She was worldly wise, and she did not disdain to use her wisdom. And when he had gone she got calmly into bed, and slept--not all at once, it is true, but as resolutely as she had laughed and talked. It was only when she woke in the morning that she found her pillow wet with tears.

It was a few days later that Louise took Peter to church. His ignorance of her religion greatly amused her, or so at least she pretended, and when he asked her to come out of town to lunch one morning, and she refused because it was Corpus Christi, and she wanted to go to the sung Mass, it was he who suggested that he should go with her. She looked at him queerly a moment, and then agreed. They met outside the church and went in together, as strange a pair as ever the meshes of that ancient net which gathers of all kinds had ever drawn towards the shore.

Louise led him to a central seat, and found the place for him in her Prayer-Book. The building was full, and Peter glanced about him curiously. The detachment of the worshippers impressed him immensely. There did not appear to be any proscribed procedure among them, and even when the Mass began he was one of the few

who stood and knelt as the rubrics of the service directed. Louise made no attempt to do so. For the most part she knelt, and her beads trickled ceaselessly through her fingers.

Peter was, if anything, bored by the Mass, though he would not admit it to himself. It struck him as being a ratherly poorly played performance. True, the officiating ministers moved and spoke with a calm regularity which impressed him, familiar as he was with clergymen who gave out hymns and notices, and with his own solicitude at home that the singing should go well or that the choirboys should not fidget. But there was a terrible confusion with chairs, and a hideous kind of clapper that was used, apparently, to warn the boys to sit and rise. The service, moreover, as a reverential congregational act of worship such as he was used to hope for, was marred by innumerable collections, and especially by the old woman who came round even during the *Sanctus* to collect the rent of the chairs they occupied, and changed money or announced prices with all the zest of the market-place.

But at the close there was a procession which is worth considerable description. Six men with censers of silver lined up before the high altar, and stood there, slowly swinging the fragrant bowls at the end of their long chains. The music died down. One could hear the rhythmical, faint clangour of the metal. And then, intensely sudden, away in the west gallery, but almost as if from the battlements of heaven, pealed out silver trumpets in a fanfare. The censers flew high in time with it, and the sweet clouds of smoke, caught by the coloured sunlight of the rich painted windows, unfolded in the air of the sanctuary. Lights moved and danced, and the space before the altar filled with the white of the men and boys who should move in the procession. Again and again those trumpets rang out, and hardly had the last echoes died away than the organ thundered the *Pange Lingua*, as a priest in cloth of gold turned from the altar with the glittering monstrance in his hand. Even from where he stood Peter could see the white centre of the Host for Whom all this was enacted. Then the canopy, borne by four French laymen in frock-coats and white gloves, hid It from his sight; and the high gold cross, and its attendant tapers, swung round a great buttress into view.

Peter had never heard a hymn sung so before. First the organ would peal alone; then the men's voices unaided would take up the refrain; then the organ again; then the clear treble of the boys; then, like waves breaking on immemorial cliffs, organ, trumpets, boys, men, and congregation would thunder out together till the blood raced in his veins and his eyes were too dim to see.

Down the central aisle at last they came, and Peter knelt with the rest. He saw how the boys went before throwing flowers; how in pairs, as the censers were recharged, the thurifers walked backward before the three beneath the canopy, of whom one, white-haired and old, bore That in the monstrance which all adored. In music and light and colour and scent the Host went by, as It had gone for centuries in that ancient place, and Peter knew, all bewildered as he was, there, by the side of the girl, that a new vista was opening before his eyes.

It was not that he understood as yet, or scarcely so. In a few minutes all had passed them, and he rose and turned to see the end. He watched while, amid the splendour of that court, with singers and ministers and thurifers arranged before, the priest ascended to enthrone the Sacrament in the place prepared for It. With banks of flowers behind, and the glitter of electric as well as of candle light, the jewelled rays of the monstrance gleaming and the organ pealing note on note in a triumphant ecstasy, the old, bent priest placed That he carried there, and sank down before It. Then all sound of singing and of movement died away, and from that kneeling crowd one lone, thin voice, but all unshaken, cried to Heaven of the need of men. It was a short prayer and he could not understand it, but it seemed to Peter to voice his every need, and to go on and on till it reached the Throne. The "Amen" beat gently about him, and he sank his face in his hands.

But only for a second. The next he was lifted to his feet. All that had gone before was as nothing to this volume of praise that shook, it seemed to him, the very carven roof above and swept the ancient walls in waves of sound.

*Adoremus in aeternum Sanctissimum Sacramentum*, cried men on earth, and, as it seemed to him, the very angels of God.

But outside he collected his thoughts. "Well," he said. "I'm glad I've been, but I shan't go again."

"Why not?" demanded Louise. "It was most beautiful. I have never 'eard it better."

"Oh yes, it was," said Peter; "the music and singing were wonderful, but--forgive me if I hurt you, but I can't help saying it--I see now what our people mean when they say it is nothing less than idolatry."

"Idolatry?" queried Louise, stumblingly and bewildered. "But what do you mean?"

"Well," said Peter, "the Sacrament is, of course, a holy thing, a very holy thing, the sign and symbol of Christ Himself, but in that church sign and symbol were forgotten; the Sacrament was worshipped as if it were very God."

"Oui, oui," protested Louise vehemently, "It is. It is le bon Jesu. It is He who is there. He passed by us among them all, as we read He went through the crowds of Jerusalem in the holy Gospel. And there was not one He did not see, either," she added, with a little break in her voice.

Peter all but stopped in the road. It was absurd that so simple a thing should have seemed to him new, but it is so with us all. We know in a way, but we do not understand, and then there comes the moment of illumination--sometimes.

"Jesus Himself!" he exclaimed, and broke off abruptly. He recalled a fragment of speech: "Not a dead man, not a man on the right hand of the throne of God." But "He can't be found," Langton had said. Was it so? He walked on in silence. What if Louise, with her pitiful story and her caged, earthy life, had after all found what the other had missed? He pulled himself together; it was too good to be true.

One day Louise asked him abruptly if he had been to see the girl in the house which he had visited with Pennell. He told her no, and she said--they had met by chance in the town--"Well, go you immediately, then, or you will not see her."

"What do you mean?" he asked. "Is she ill--dying?"

"Ah, non, not dying, but she is ill. They will take her to a 'ospital to-morrow. But this afternoon she will be in bed. She like to see you, I think."

Peter left her and made for the house. On his way he thought of something, and took a turning which led to the market-place of flowers. There, at a stall, he bought a big bunch of roses and some sprays of asparagus fern, and set off again. Arriving, he found the door shut. It was a dilemma, for he did not even know the girl's name, but he knocked.

A grim-faced woman opened the door and stared at him and his flowers. "I think there is a girl sick here," said Peter. "May I see her?"

The woman stared still harder, and he thought she was going to refuse him admission, but at length she gave way. "Entrez," she said. "Je pense que vous savez le chambre. Mais, le bouquet--c'est incroyable."

Peter went up the stairs and knocked at the door. A voice asked who was there, and he smiled because he could not say. The girl did not know his name, either. "A friend," he said: "May I come in?"

A note of curiosity sounded in her voice. "Oui, certainement. Entrez," she called. Peter turned the handle and entered the remembered room.

The girl was sitting up in bed in her nightdress, her hair in disorder, and the room felt hot and stuffy and looked more tawdry than ever. She exclaimed at the sight of his flowers. He deposited the big bunch by the side of her, and seated himself on the edge of the bed. She had been reading a book, and he noticed it was the sort of book that Langton and he had seen so prominently in the book-shop at Abbeville.

If he had expected to find her depressed or ashamed, he was entirely mistaken. "Oh, you darling," she cried in clipped English. "Kiss me, quick, or I will forget the orders of the doctor and jump out of bed and catch you. Oh, that you should bring me the rose so beautiful! Hélas! I may not wear one this night in the café! See, are they not beautiful here?"

She pulled her nightdress open considerably more than the average evening dress is cut away and put two or three of the blooms on her white bosom, putting her head on one side to see the result. "Oui," she exclaimed, "je suis exquise! To-night I 'ave so many boys I do not know what to do! But I forget: I cannot go. Je suis malade, très malade. You knew? You are angry with me--is it not so?"

He laughed; there was nothing else to do. "No," he said; "why should I be? But I am very sorry."

She shrugged her shoulders. "It is nothing," she said. "C'est la guerre for me. I shall not be long, and when I come out you will come to see me again, will you not? And bring me more flowers? And you shall not let me 'ave the danger any more, and if I do wrong you shall smack me 'ard. Per'aps you will like that. In the books men like it much. Would you like to whip me?" she demanded, her eyes sparkling as she threw herself over in the bed and looked up at him.

Peter got up and moved away to the window. "No," he said shortly, staring out. He had a sensation of physical nausea, and it was as much as he could do to restrain himself. He realised, suddenly, that he was in the presence of the world, the flesh, and the devil's final handiwork. Only his new knowledge kept him quiet. Even she might be little to blame. He remembered all that she had said to him before, and suddenly his disgust was turned into overwhelming pity. This child before him--for she was little more than a child--had bottomed degradation. For the temporary protection and favour of a man that she guessed to be kind there was nothing in earth or in hell that she would not do. And in her already were the seeds of the disease that was all but certain to slay her.

He turned again to the bed, and knelt beside it. "Poor little girl," he said, and lightly brushed her hair. He certainly never expected the result.

She pushed him from her. "Oh, go, go!" she cried. "Quick go! You pretend, but you do not love me. Why you give me money, the flowers, if you do not want me? Go quick. Come never to see me again!"

Peter did the only thing he could do; he went. "Good-bye," he said cheerfully at the door. "I hope you will be better soon. I didn't mean to be a beast to you. Give the flowers to Lucienne if you don't want them; she will be able to wear them to-night. Cheerio. Good-bye-ee!"

"Good-bye-ee!" she echoed after him. And he closed the door on her life.

In front of the Hôtel de Ville he met Arnold, returning from the club, and the two men walked off together. In a moment of impulse he related the whole story to him. "Now," he said, "what do you make of all that?"

Arnold was very moved. It was not his way to say much, but he walked on silently for a long time. Then he said: "The Potter makes many vessels, but never one needlessly. I hold on to that. And He can remake the

broken clay."

"Are you sure?" asked Peter.

"I am," said Arnold. "It's not in the Westminster Confession, nor in the Book of Common Prayer, nor, for all I know, in the Penny Catechism, but I believe it. God Almighty must be stronger than the devil, Graham."

Peter considered this. Then he shook his head. "That won't wash, Arnold," he said. "If God is stronger than the devil, so that the devil is never ultimately going to succeed, I can see no use in letting him have his fling at all. And I've more respect for the devil than to think he'd take it. It's childish to suppose the existence of two such forces at a perpetual game of cheat. Either there is no devil and there is no hell--in which case I reckon that there is no heaven either, for a heaven would not be a heaven if it were not attained, and there would be no true attainment if there were no possibility of failure--or else there are all three. And if there are all three, the devil wins out, sometimes, in the end."

"Then, God is not almighty?"

Peter shrugged his shoulders. "If I breed white mice, I don't lessen my potential power if I choose to let some loose in the garden to see if the cat will get them. Besides, in the end I could annihilate the cat if I wanted to."

"You can't think of God so," cried Arnold sharply.

"Can't I?" demanded Peter. "Well, maybe not, Arnold; I don't know that I can think of Him at all. But I can face the facts of life, and if I'm not a coward, I shan't run away from them. That's what I've been doing these days, and that's what I do not think even a man like yourself does fairly. You think, I take it, that a girl like that is damned utterly by all the canons of theology, and then, forced on by pity and tenderness, you cry out against them all that she is God's making and He will not throw her away. Is that it?"

Arnold slightly evaded an answer. "How can you save her, Graham?" he asked.

"I can't. I don't pretend I can. I've nothing to say or do. I see only one flicker of hope, and that lies in the fact that she doesn't understand what love is. No shadow of the truth has ever come her way. If now, by any chance, she could see for one instant--in *fact*, mind you--the face of God... If God is Love," he added. They walked a dozen paces. "And even then she might refuse," he said.

"Whose fault would that be?" demanded the older man.

Peter answered quickly, "Whose fault? Why, all our faults--yours and mine, and the fault of men like Pennell and Donovan, as well as her own, too, as like as not. We've all helped build up the scheme of things as they are, and we are all responsible. We curse the Germans for making this damned war, and it is the war that has done most to make that girl; but they didn't make it. No Kaiser made it, and no Nietzsche. The only person who had no hand in it that I know of was Jesus Christ."

"And those who have left all and followed Him," said Arnold softly.

"Precious few," retorted Peter.

The other had nothing to say.

\* \* \* \* \*

During these months Peter wrote often to Hilda, and with increasing frankness. Her replies grew shorter as his

letters grew longer. It was strange, perhaps, that he should continue to write, but the explanation was not far to seek. It was by her that he gauged the extent of his separation from the old outlook, and in her that he still clung, desperately, as it were, to the past. Against reason he elevated her into a kind of test position, and if her replies gave him no encouragement, they at least served to make him feel the inevitableness and the reality of his present position. It would have been easy to get into the swim and let it carry him carelessly on--moderately easy, at any rate. But with Hilda to refer to he was forced to take notice, and it was she, therefore, that hastened the end. Just after Christmas, in a fit of temporary boldness, he told her about Louise, so that it was Louise again who was the responsible person during these months. Hilda's reply was delayed, nor had she written immediately. When he got it, it was brief but to the point. She did not doubt, she said, but that what he had written was strictly true, and she did not doubt his honour. But he must see that their relationship was impossible. She couldn't marry the man who appeared actually to like the company of such a woman, nor could she do other than feel that the end would seem to him as plain as it did to her, and that he would leave the Church, or at any rate such a ministry in it as she could share. She had told her people that she was no longer engaged in order that he should feel free, but she would ever remember the man as she had known him, whom she had loved, and whom she loved still.

It was in the afternoon that Peter got the letter, and he was just setting off for the hospital. When he had read it, he put on his cap and set off in the opposite direction. There was a walk along the sea-wall a few feet wide, where the wind blew strongly laden with the Channel breezes, and on the other side was a waste of sand and stone. In some places water was on both sides of the wall, and here one could feel more alone than anywhere else in the town.

Peter set off, his head in a mad whirl. He had felt that such a letter would come for weeks, but that did not, in a way, lessen the blow when it came. He had known, too, that Hilda was not to him what she had been, but he had not altogether felt that she never could be so again. Now he knew that he had gone too far to turn back. He felt, he could not help it, released in a sense, with almost a sense of exhilaration behind it, for the unknown lay before. And yet, since we are all so human, he was intensely unhappy below all this. He called to mind little scenes and bits of scenes: their first meeting; the sight of her in church as he preached; how she had looked at the dining-table in Park Lane; her walk as she came to meet him in the park. And he knew well enough how he had hurt her, and the thought maddened him. He told himself that God was a devil to treat him so; that he had tried to follow the right; and that the way had led him down towards nothing but despair. He was no nearer answering the problems that beset him. He might have been in a fool's paradise before, but what was the use of coming out to see the devil as he was and men and women as they were if he could see no more than that? The throne of his heart was empty, and there was none to fill it.

Julie?

## CHAPTER V

The sea-wall ended not far from Donovan's camp of mud and cinders, and having got there, Peter thought he would go on and get a cup of tea. He crossed the railway-lines, steered through a great American rest camp, crossed the canal, and entered the camp. It was a cheerless place in winter, and the day was drawing in early with a damp fog. A great French airship was cruising around overhead and dropping down towards her resting-place in the great hangar near by. She looked cold and ghostly up aloft, the more so when her engines were shut off, and Peter thought how chilly her crew must be. He had a hankering after Donovan's cheery humour, especially as he had not seen him for some time. He crossed the camp and made for the mess-room.

It was lit and the curtains were drawn, and, at the door, he stopped dead at the sound of laughter. Then he walked quickly in. "Caught out, by Jove!" said Donovan's voice. "You're for it, Julie."

A merry party sat round the stove, taking tea. Julie and Miss Raynard were both there, with Pennell and another man from Donovan's camp. Julie wore furs and had plainly just come in, for her cheeks were glowing with exercise. Pennell was sitting next Miss Raynard, but Donovan, on a wooden camp-seat, just beyond where Julie sat in a big cushioned chair, looked out at him from almost under Julie's arm, as he bent forward. The other man was standing by the table, teapot in hand.

One thinks quickly at such a time, and Peter's mind raced. Something of the old envy and almost fear of Donovan that he had had first that day in the hospital came back to him. He had not seen the two together for so long that it struck him like a blow to hear Donovan call her by her Christian name. It flashed across his mind also that she knew that it was his day at the hospital, and that she had deliberately gone out; but it dawned on him equally quickly that he must hide all that.

"I should jolly well think so," he said, laughing. "How do you do, Miss Raynard? Donovan, can you give me some tea? I've come along the sea-wall, and picked up a regular appetite. Are you in the habit of taking tea here, Julie? I thought nurses were not allowed in camps."

She looked at him quickly, but he missed the meaning of her glance. "Rather," she said; "I come here for tea about once a week, don't I, Jack? No, nurses are not allowed in camps, but I always do what's not allowed as far as possible. And this is so snug and out of the way. Mr. Pennell, you can give me a cigarette now."

The other man offered Peter tea, which he took. "And how did the festivities go off at Christmas?" he asked.

"Oh, topping," said Julie. "Let me see, you were at the play, so I needn't talk about that; but you thought it good, didn't you?"

"Rippin'" said Peter.

"Well," said Julie, "then there was the dance on Boxing Night. We had glorious fun. Jack, here, behaved perfectly abominably. He sat out about half the dances, and I should think he kissed every pretty girl in the room. Then we went down to the nurses' quarters of the officers' hospital and made cocoa of all things, and had a few more dances on our own. They made me dance a skirt dance on the table, and as I had enough laces on this time, I did. After that--but I don't think I'll tell you what we did after that. Why didn't you come?"

Peter had been at a big Boxing Night entertainment for the troops in the Y.M.C.A. Central Hall, but he did not say so. "Oh," he said, "I had to go to another stunt, but I must say I wish I'd been at yours. May I have another cup of tea?"

The third man gave it to him again, and then, apologizing, left the room. Donovan exchanged glances with Julie, and she nodded.

"I say, Graham," said Donovan, "I'll tell you what we've really met here for to-day. We were going to fix it up and then ask you; but as you've dropped in, we'll take it as a dispensation of Providence and let you into the know. What do you say to a really sporting dinner at the New Year?"

"Who's to be asked?" queried Peter, looking round. "Fives into a dinner won't go."

"I should think not," cried Julie gaily. "Jack, here, is taking me, aren't you?" Donovan said "I am" with great emphasis, and made as if he would kiss her, and she pushed him off, laughing, holding her muff to his face. Then she went on: "You're to take Tommy. It is Tommy's own particular desire, and you ought to feel flattered. She says your auras blend, whatever that may be; and as to Mr. Pennell, he's got a girl elsewhere whom he will ask. Three and three make six; what do you think of that?"

"Julie," said Tommy Raynard composedly, "you're the most fearful liar I've ever met. But I trust Captain Graham knows you well enough by now."

"I do," said Peter, but a trifle grimly, though he tried not to show it--"I do. I must say I'm jolly glad Donovan will be responsible for you. It's going to be 'some' evening, I can see, and what you'll do if you get excited I don't know. Flirt with the proprietor and have his wife down on us, as like as not. In which event it's Donovan who'll have to make the explanations. But come on, what are the details?"

"Tell him, Jack," said Julie. "He's a perfect beast, and I shan't speak to him again."

Peter laughed. "Pas possible," he said. "But come on, Donovan; do as you're told."

"Well, old bird," said Donovan, "first we meet here. Got that? It's safer than any other camp, and we don't want to meet in town. We'll have tea and a chat and then clear off. We'll order dinner in a private room at the Grand, and it'll be a dinner fit for the occasion. They've got some priceless sherry there, and some old white port. Cognac fine champagne for the liqueur, and what date do you think?--1835 as I'm alive. I saw some the other day, and spoke about it. That gave me the idea of the dinner really, and I put it to the old horse that that brandy was worthy of a dinner to introduce it. He tumbled at once. Veuve Cliquot as the main wine. What about it?"

Peter balanced himself on the back of his chair and blew out cigarette-smoke.

"What time are you ordering the ambulances?" he demanded.

"The beds, you mean," cried Julie, entirely forgetting her last words. "That's what I say. *I shall never be able to walk to a taxi even.*"

"I'll carry you," said Donovan.

"You won't be able, not after such a night; besides, I don't believe you could, anyhow. You're getting flabby from lack of exercise."

"Am I?" cried Donovan. "Let's see, anyway."

He darted at her, slipped an arm under her skirts and another under her arms, and lifted her bodily from the chair.

"Jack," she shrieked, "put me down! Oh, you beast! Tommy, help, help! Peter, make him put me down and I'll forgive you all you've said."

Tommy Raynard sprang up, laughing, and ran after Donovan, who could not escape her. She threw an arm round his neck and bent his head backwards. "I shall drop her," he shouted. Peter leaped forward, and Julie landed in his arms.

For a second she lay still, and Peter stared down at her. With her quick intuition she read something new in his eyes, and instantly looked away, scrambling out and standing there flushed and breathing hard, her hands at her hair. "You perfect brute!" she said to Donovan, laughing. "I'll pay you out, see if I don't. All my hair's coming down."

"Capital!" said Donovan. "I've never seen it down, and I'd love to. Here, let me help."

He darted at her; she dodged behind Peter; he adroitly put out a foot, and Donovan collapsed into the big chair.

Julie clapped her hands and rushed at him, seizing a cushion, and the two struggled there till Tommy Raynard pulled Julie forcibly away.

"Julie," she said, "this is a positive bear-garden. You must behave."

"And I," said Pennell, who had not moved, "would like to know a little more about the dinner." He spoke so dryly that they all laughed, and order was restored. Donovan, however, refused to get out of the big chair, and Julie deliberately sat on his knee, smiling provocatively at him.

Peter felt savage and bitter. Like a man, he was easily deceived, and he had been taken by surprise at a bad moment. But he did his best to hide it, and merely threw any remnants of caution he had left at all to the winds.

"I suppose this is the best we can hope for, Captain Graham," said Miss Raynard placidly. "Perhaps now you'll give us your views. Captain Donovan never gets beyond the drinks, but I agree with Mr. Pennell we want something substantial."

"I'm blest if I don't think you all confoundedly ungrateful," said Donovan. "I worked that fine champagne for you beautifully. Anyone would think you could walk in and order it any day. If we get it at all, it'll be due to me and my blarney. Not but what it does deserve a good introduction," he added. "I don't suppose there's another bottle in the town."

Tommy sighed. "He's off again, or he will be," she said. "Do be quick, Captain Graham."

"Well," said Peter. "I suggest, first, that you leave the ordering of the room to me, and the decorations. I've most time, and I'd like to choose the flowers. And the smokes and crackers. And I'll worry round and get some menu-cards, and have 'em printed in style. And, if you like, I'll interview the chef and see what he can give us. It's not much use our discussing details without him."

"A Daniel come to judgment," said Pennell. "Padre, I didn't know you had it in you."

"A Solomon," said Julie mischievously.

"A Peter Graham," said Miss Raynard. "I always knew he had more sense in his little finger than all the rest of you in your heads."

Donovan sighed from the depths of the chair. "Graham," he said, "for Heaven's sake remember those..."

Julie clapped her hand over his mouth. He kissed it. She withdrew it with a scream.

"...Drinks," finished Donovan. "The chef must suggest accordin'."

"Well," said Pennell, "I reckon that's settled satisfactorily. I'll get out my invitation. In fact, I think, if I may be excused, I'll go and do it now." He got up and reached for his cap.

They all laughed. "We'll see to it that there's mistletoe," cried Julie.

"Ah, thanks!" said Pennell; "that will be jolly, though some people I know seem to get on well enough without it. So long. See you later, padre."

He avoided Julie's flung cushion and stepped through the door. Miss Raynard got up. "We ought to get a move on too, my dear," she said to Julie.

"Oh, not yet," protested Donovan. "Let's have some bridge. There are just four of us."

"You can never have played bridge with Julie, Captain Donovan," said Miss Raynard. "She usually flings the cards at you half way through the rubber. And she never counts. The other night she played a diamond instead of a heart, when hearts were trumps, and she had the last and all the rest of the tricks in her hand."

"Ah, well," said Donovan, "women are like that. They often mistake diamonds for hearts."

"Jack," said Julie, "you're really clever. How do you do it? I had no idea. Does it hurt? But don't do it again; you might break something. Peter, you've been praised this evening, but you'd never think of that."

"He would not," said Miss Raynard.... "Come on, Julie."

Peter hesitated a second. Then he said: "You're going my way. May I see you home?"

"Thanks," said Miss Raynard, and they all made a move.

"It's deuced dark," said Donovan. "Here, let me. I'll go first with a candle so that you shan't miss the duck-boards."

He passed out, Tommy Raynard after him. Peter stood back to let Julie pass, and as she did so she said: "You're very glum and very polite to-night, Solomon. What's the matter?"

"Am I?" said Peter; "I didn't know it. And in any case Donovan is all right, isn't he?"

He could have bitten his tongue out the next minute. She looked at him and then began to laugh silently, and, still laughing, went out before him. Peter followed miserably. At the gate Donovan said good-bye, and the three set out for the hospital. Miss Raynard walked between Peter and Julie, and did most of the talking, but the ground was rough and the path narrow, and it was not until they got on to the dock road that much could be said.

"This is the best Christmas I've ever had," declared Miss Raynard. "I'm feeling positively done up. There was something on every afternoon and evening last week, and then Julie sits on my bed till daybreak, more or less, and smokes cigarettes. We've a bottle of benedictine, too, and it always goes to her head. The other night she did a Salome dance on the strength of it."

"It was really fine," said Julie. "You ought to have seen me."

"Till the towel slipped off: not then, I hope," said Tommy dryly.

"I don't suppose he'd have minded--would you, Peter?"

"Not a bit," said Peter cheerfully--"on the contrary."

"I don't know if you two are aware that you are positively indecent," said Tommy. "Let's change the subject. What's your news, Captain Graham?"

Peter smiled in the dark to himself. "Well," he said, "not much, but I'm hoping for leave soon. I've pushed in for it, and our Adjutant told me this morning he thought it would go through."

"Lucky man! I've got to wait three months. But yours ought to be about now, Julie."

"I think it ought," said Julie shortly. Then: "What about the menu-cards, Peter? Would you like me to help you choose them?"

"Would you?" said he eagerly. "To-morrow?"

"I'm on duty at five o'clock, but I can get off for an hour in the afternoon. Could you come, Tommy?"

"No. Sorry; but I must write letters. I haven't written one for ages."

"Nor have I," said Julie, "but I don't mean to. I hate letters. Well, what about it, Peter?"

"I should think we had better try that stationer's in the Rue Thiers," he said. "If that won't do, the Nouvelles Galleries might. What do you think?"

"Let's try the Galleries first. We could meet there. Say at three, eh? I want to get some baby-ribbon, too."

Tommy sighed audibly. "She's off again," she said.

"Thank God, here's the hospital! Good-night, Captain Graham. You mustn't cross the Rubicon to-night."

"You oughtn't to swear before him," said Julie in mock severity. "And what in the world is the Rubicon?"

"Materially, to-night, it's the railway-line between his camp and the hospital," said Tommy Raynard. "What else it is I'll leave him to decide."

She held out her hand, and Peter saw a quizzical look on her face. He turned rather hopelessly to Julie. "I say," he said, "didn't you *know* it was my afternoon at the hospital?"

"Yes," said Julie, "and I knew you didn't come. At least, I couldn't see you in any of the wards."

"Oh," he exclaimed, "I thought you'd been out all the afternoon. I'm sorry. I am a damned fool, Julie!"

She laughed in the darkness. "I've known worse, Peter," she said, and was gone.

\* \* \* \* \*

Next day Julie was in her most provocative of moods. Peter, eminently respectable in his best tunic, waited ten minutes for her outside the Nouvelles Galleries, and, like most men in his condition, considered that she

was never coming, and that he was the cynosure of neighbouring eyes. When she did come, she was not apparently aware that she was late. She ran her eyes over him, and gave a pretended gasp of surprise. "You're looking wonderful, Padre Graham," she said. "Really, you're hard to live up to. I never know what to expect or how to behave. Those black buttons terrorise me. Come on."

She insisted on getting her ribbon first, and turned over everything there was to be seen at that counter. The French girl who served them was highly amused.

"Isn't that chic?" Julie demanded of Peter, holding up a lacy camisole and deliberately putting it to her shoulders. "Wouldn't you love to see me in it?"

"I would," he said, without the ghost of a smile.

"Well, you never will, of course," she said. "I shall never marry or be given in marriage, and in any case, in that uniform, you've nothing whatever to hope for.... Yes, I'll take that ribbon, thank you, ma'm'selle. Peter, I suppose you can't carry it for me. Your pocket? Not a bad idea; but let me put it in."

Peter stood while she undid his breast-pocket and stuffed it inside.

"Anything more?" demanded the French saleswoman interrogatively.

"Not to-day, merci," said Julie. "You see, Peter, you couldn't carry undies for me, even in your pocket; it wouldn't be respectable. *Do* come on. You will keep us here the entire day."

They passed the smoking department, and she stopped suddenly. "Peter," she said, "I'm going to give you a pipe. Those chocolates you gave me at Christmas were too delicious for anything. What sort do you like? A briar? Let me see if it blows nicely." She put it to her lips. "I swear I shall start a pipe soon, in my old age. By the way, I don't believe you have any idea how old I am--have you, Peter? Guess."

She was quick to note the return to his old manner. He was nervous with her, not sure of himself, and so not sure of her either. And she traded on it. At the stationery department she made eyes at a couple of officers, and insisted on examining Kirschner picture-postcards, some of which she would not show him. "You can't possibly be seen looking at them with those badges up," she whispered. "Dear me, if only Donovan were here! He wouldn't mind, and I don't know which packet I like best. These have got very little on, Peter--*very* little, but I'm not sure that they are not more decent than those. It's *much* worse than a camisole, you know...."

Peter was horribly conscious that the men were smiling at her. "Julie," he said desperately, "*do* be sensible, just for a minute. We must get those menu-cards."

"Well, you go and find the books," she said merrily. "I told you you ought not to watch me buy these. I'll take the best care of myself," and she looked past him towards the men.

Peter gave it up. "Julie," he said savagely, "if you make eyes any more, I'll kiss you here and now--I swear I will."

Julie laughed her little nearly silent chuckle, and looked at him. "I believe you would, Peter," she said, "and I certainly mustn't risk that. I'll be good. Are those the books? Fetch me a chair, then, and I'll look through them."

He bent over her as she turned the leaves. She wore a little toque that had some relation to a nurse's uniform, but was distinctive of Julie. Her fringe of brown hair lay along her forehead, and the thick masses of the rest of it tempted him almost beyond endurance. "How will that do?" she demanded, her eyes dancing. "Oh, do

look at the cards and not at me! You're a terrible person to bring shopping, Peter!"

The card selected, she had a bright idea. "What about candle-shades?" she queried. "We can't trust the hotel. I want some with violets on them: I love violets."

"Do you?" he said eagerly. "That's just what I wanted to know. Yes, it's a fine idea; let's go and get them."

Outside, she gave a sigh of relief, and looked at the little gold wrist-watch on her arm. "We've time," she said. "Take me to tea."

"You must know it's not possible," he said. "They're enforcing the order, and one can't get tea anywhere."

She shook her head at him. "I think, Peter," she said, "you'll never learn the ropes. Follow me."

Not literally, but metaphorically, he followed her. She led him to a big confectioner's with two doors and several windows, in each of which was a big notice of the new law forbidding teas or the purchase of chocolates. Inside, she walked up to a girl who was standing by a counter, and who greeted her with a smile. "It is cold outside," she said. "May I have a warm by the fire?"

"Certainly, mademoiselle," said the girl. "And monsieur also. Will it please you to come round here?"

They went behind the counter and in at a little door. There was a fire in the grate of the small kitchen, and a kettle singing on the hob. Julie sat down on a chair at the wooden table and looked round with satisfaction.

"Why, it's all ready for us!" she exclaimed. "Chocolate cakes, Suzanne, please, *and* hot buttered scones. I'll butter them, if you bring the scones."

They came, and she went to the fire, splitting them open and spreading the butter lavishly. "I love France," she said. "All laws are made to be broken, which is all that laws are good for, don't you think?"

"Yes," he said deliberately, glancing at the closed door, and bent and kissed her neck. She looked up imperiously. "Again," she said; and he kissed her on the lips. At that she jumped up with a quick return to the old manner: "Peter! For a parson you are the outside edge. Go and sit down over there and recollect yourself. To begin with, if we're found, here, there'll be a row, and if you're caught kissing me, who knows what will happen?"

He obeyed gaily. "Chaff away, Julie," he said, "but I shan't wear black buttons at the dinner. You'll have to look out that night."

She put the scones on the table, and sat down. "And if I don't?" she queried. Peter said nothing. He had suddenly thought of something. He looked at her, and for the first time she would not meet his eyes.

It was thought better on New Year's Eve that they should go separately to Donovan's camp, so Peter and Pennell set out for it alone. By the canal Pennell left his friend to go and meet Elsie Harding, the third girl. Peter went on alone, and found Donovan, giving some orders in the camp. He stood with him till they saw the other four, who had met on the tow-path, coming in together.

"He's a dark horse," called Julie, almost before they had come up, "and so's she. Fancy Elsie being the third! I didn't know they knew each other. We're a Colonial party to-night, Jack--all except Peter, that is, for Mr. Pennell is more Canadian than English. We'll teach them. By the way, I can't go on saying 'Mr. Pennell' all night. What shall I call him, Elsie?"

Peter saw that the new-comer wore an Australian brooch, and caught the unmistakable but charming accent in her reply. "He's 'Trevor' to me, and he can be to you, if you like, Julie," she said.

Tommy sighed audibly. "They're beginning early," she said; "but I suppose the rest of us had better follow the general example--eh, Peter?"

In the anteroom, where tea was ready, Peter saw that Elsie was likely to play Julie a good second. She was tall, taller than Pennell himself, and dark skinned, with black hair and full red lips, and rather bigly built. It appeared that her great gift was a set of double joints that allowed her to play the contortionist with great effect. "You should just see her in tights," said Julie. "Trevor, why didn't you say whom you were bringing, and I'd have made her put them on. Then we could have had an exhibition, but, as it is, I suppose we can't."

"I didn't know you knew her," he said.

"You never have time to talk of other people when you're together, I suppose," she retorted. "Well, I've no doubt you make the most of your opportunities, and you're very wise. But to-night you've got to behave, more or less--at least, till after the coffee. Otherwise all our preparations will be wasted--won't they, Peter?"

After tea they set off together for the tram-car that ran into town. It was Julie who had decided this. She said she liked to see the people, and the cars were so perfectly absurd, which was true. Also, that it would be too early to enjoy taxis, the which was very like her. So they walked in a body to the terminus, where a crowd of Tommies and French workmen and factory girls were waiting. The night was cloudy and a little damp, but it had the effect of adding mystery to the otherwise ugly street, and to the great ships under repair in the dockyards close by. The lights of the tram appeared at length round the corner, an engine-car and two trailers. There was a bolt for them. They were packed on the steps, and the men had to use elbows freely to get the whole party in, but the soldiers and the workmen were in excellent humour, and the French girls openly admiring of Julie. In the result, then, they were all hunched up in the end of a "first" compartment, and Peter found himself with his back to the glass door, Julie on his right, Elsie on his left.

"Every rib I have is broken," said the former.

"The natural or the artificial?" demanded Elsie. "Personally, I think I broke a few of other people's."

They started, and the rattling of the ramshackle cars stopped conversation. Julie drew Peter's attention to a little scene on the platform outside, and he looked through the glass to see a big French linesman with his girl. The man had got her into a corner, and then, coolly putting his arms out on either side to the hand-rail and to the knob of their door, he was facing his amorata, indifferent to the world. Peter looked at the girl's coarse face. She was a factory hand, bareheaded, and her sleeves were rolled up at her elbows. For all that, she was neat, as a Frenchwoman invariably is. The girl caught his gaze, and smiled. The linesman followed the direction of her eyes and glanced friendly at Peter too. Then he saw Julie. A look of admiration came over his face, and he put one hand comically to his heart. The girl slapped it in a pretended fury, and Julie doubled up with laughter in her corner. Peter bent over her. "*Everybody's doing it, doing it, doing it,*" he quoted merrily.

The tram stopped, in the square before the Hôtel de Ville. There was a great air of festivity and bustle about as they stepped out, for the New Year is a great time in France. Lights twinkled in the misty dark; taxis sprinted across the open spaces; and people greeted each other gaily by the brightly-lit shops. Somehow or another the whole thing went to Peter's head like wine. The world was good and merry, he thought exultantly, and he, after all, a citizen of it. He caught Julie's arm, "Come on," he called to the others. "I know the way," And to her: "Isn't it topping? Do you feel gloriously exhilarated? I don't know why, Julie, but I could do anything to-night."

She slipped her fingers down into his hand. "I'm so glad," she said. "So could I."

They whirled across the road, the others after them, round the little park in the centre of the square, and down an empty side-street. Peter had reconnoitred all approaches, he said, and this was the best way. Begging him to give her time to breathe, Tommy came along with Donovan, and it suddenly struck Peter that the latter seemed happy enough. He pressed Julie's hand: "Donovan's dropped into step with Tommy very easily," he said. "Do you mind?"

She laughed happily and glanced back. "You're as blind as a bat, Peter, when all's said and done," she said; "but oh, my dear, I can't play with you to-night. There's only one person I want to walk with Peter."

Peter all but shouted. He drew her to him, and for once Julie was honestly alarmed.

"Not now, you mad boy!" she exclaimed, but her eyes were enough for him.

"All right," he laughed at her; "wait a bit. There's time yet."

In the little entrance-hall the *maître d'hôtel* greeted them. They were the party of importance that night. He ushered them upstairs and opened a door. The mademoiselles might make the toilette there. Another door: they would eat here.

The men deposited their caps and sticks and coats on pegs outside, and the girls, who had had to come in uniform also, were ready as soon as they. They went in together. Elsie gave a little whistle of surprise.

Peter had certainly done well. Holly and mistletoe were round the walls, and a big bunch of the latter was placed in such a way that it would hang over the party as they sat afterwards by the fire. In the centre a silver bowl held glorious roses, white and red, and at each girl's place was a bunch of Parma violets and a few sprigs of flowering mimosa. Bon-bons were spread over the white cloth. Julie's candle-shades looked perfect, and so did the menu-cards.

"I trust that monsieur is satisfied," said the *maître d'hôtel*, bowing towards the man who had had the dealings with him. He got his answer, but not from Peter, and, being a Frenchman, smiled, bowed again, and discreetly left the room; for Elsie, turning to Peter cried: "Did you do it--even the wattle?" and kissed him heartily. He kissed her back, and caught hold of Julie. "Tit for tat," he said to her under his breath, holding her arms; "do you remember our first taxi?" Then, louder: "Julie is responsible for most of it," and he kissed her too.

They sorted themselves out at last, and the dinner, that two of them at least who were there that night were never to forget, began. They were uproariously merry, and the two girls who waited came and went wreathed in smiles.

With the champagne came a discussion over the cork. "Give It to me" cried Julie; "I want to wear it for luck."

"So do I," said Elsie; "we must toss for it."

Julie agreed, and they spun a coin solemnly.

"It's mine," cried Elsie, and pounced for it.

Julie snatched it away, "No, you don't," she said. "A man must put it in, or there's no luck in it. Here you are, Trevor."

Pennell took it, laughing, and pushed back his chair. The others stood up and craned over to see. Elsie drew up her skirt and Trevor pushed it down her stocking amid screams of laughter, and the rattle of chaff.

"No higher or I faint," said Tommy.

Trevor stood up, a little flushed. "Here," said Peter, filling his glass with what was left in the bottle, "drink this, Pen. You sure want it."

"It's your turn next," said Trevor, "and, by Jove, the bottle's empty! Encore le vin," he called.

"Good idea. It's Julie's next cork, and Graham's the man to do it." said Jack Donovan. "And then it'll be your turn, Tommy."

"And yours," she said, glancing at him.

"Bet you won't dare," said Elsie.

"Who won't?" retorted Julie.

"Peter, of course."

"My dear, you don't know Peter. Here you are, Peter; let's show them."

She tossed the cork to him and stood up coolly, put up her foot on the edge of the table, and lifted her skirt. Peter pushed the cork into its traditional place amid cheers, but he hardly heard. His fingers had touched her skin, and he had seen the look in her eyes. No wine could have intoxicated him so. He raised his glass. "Toasts!" he shouted.

They took him up and everyone rose to their feet.

"Here's to all those that I love; Here's to all those that love me; Here's to all those that love them that love those That love those that love them that love me!"

he chanted.

"Julie's turn," cried Elsie.

"No," she said; "they know all my toasts."

"Not all," said Donovan; "there was one you never finished--something about Blighty."

"Rhymes with nighty," put in Tommy coolly; "don't you remember, Julie?"

It seemed to Peter that he and Julie stood there looking at each other for seconds, but probably no one but Tommy noticed. "Take it as read," cried Peter boisterously, and emptied his glass. His example was infectious, and they all followed suit, but Donovan remarked across the table to him:

"You spoiled a humorous situation, old dear."

Dinner over, they pushed the table against the wall, and pulled chairs round the fire. Dessert, crackers, chocolates and cigarettes were piled on a small table, and the famous liqueur came in with the coffee. They filled the little glasses. "This is a great occasion," said Donovan; "let's celebrate it properly. Julie, give us a dance first."

She sprang up at once. "Right-o," she said. "Clear the table."

They pushed everything to one side, and Peter held out his hand. Just touching his fingers, she leaped up, and next minute circled there in a whirl of skirts. A piano stood in a corner of the room, and Elsie ran to it. Looking over her shoulder, she caught the pace, and the notes rang out merrily.

Julie was the very spirit of devilment and fun. So light that she seemed hardly to touch the table, she danced as if born to it. It was such an incarnation of grace and music that a little silence fell on them all. To Peter she appeared to dance to him. He could not take his eyes off her; he cared nothing what others thought or saw. There was a mist before him and thunder in his ears. He saw only her flushed, childlike face and sparkling brown eyes, and a wave of her loosened hair that slipped across them....

The music ceased. Panting for breath, she leaped down amid a chorus of "Bravo's!" and held out her hand for the liqueur-glass. Peter put it in her fingers, and he was trembling more than she, and spilt a little of it. "Well, here's the best," she cried, and raised the glass. Then, with a gay laugh, she put her moistened fingers to his mouth and he kissed them, the spirit on his lips.

And now Elsie must show herself off. They sat down to watch her, and a more insidious feeling crept over Peter as he did so. The girl bent her body this way and that; arched herself over and looked at them between her feet; twisted herself awry and made faces at them. They laughed, but there was a new note in the laughter. An intense look had come into Pennell's face, and Donovan was lolling back, his head on one side, smiling evilly.

She finished and straightened herself, and they had more of the liqueur. Then Tommy, as usual, remembered herself. "Girls," she said, "we must go. It's fearfully late."

Donovan sat up. "What about taxis?" he demanded.

Peter went to the door. "They'll fetch them," he said. "I've made an arrangement."

He went a little unsteadily to find the *maitre d'hôtel*, and a boy was despatched, while he settled the bill. They were tramping down the stairs as he came out of the little office. Julie leading and laughing uproariously at some joke. Donovan and Tommy were the steadiest, and they came down together. It seemed to Peter that it was natural for them to do so.

Pennell and Elsie got into one taxi. She leaned out of the window and waved her hand. "We're the luckiest," she called; "we've the farthest to go. Good-night everyone, and thanks ever so much."

A second taxi came up. "Jump in, Julie," said Tommy.

She got in, and Peter put his hand on the door. "I've settled everything, Donovan," he said. "See you to-morrow. Good-night, Tommy."

"Good-night," she called back, and he got in. And next minute he was alone with Julie.

In the closed and darkened taxi he put his arm round her and drew her to him. "Oh, my darling," he murmured. "Julie, do you love me as I love you? I can't live without you." He covered her face with hot kisses, and she kissed him back.

"Julie," he said at length, breathlessly, "listen. My leave's come. I knew this morning. Couldn't you possibly be in England when I am? I saw you first on the boat coming over--remember? And you're due again."

"When do you go?" she queried.

"Fourteenth," he answered.

She considered. "I couldn't get off by then," she said, "but I might the twenty-first or thereabouts. I'm due, as you say, and I think it could be managed."

"Would you?" he demanded, and hung on her words.

She turned her face up to him, and even in the dark he could see her glowing eyes. "It would be heaven, Peter," she whispered.

He kissed her passionately.

"I could meet you in town easily," he said.

"Not the leave-boat train," she replied; "it's not safe. Anyone might be there. But I'll run down for a day or two to some friends in Sussex, and then come up to visit more in town. I know very few people, of course, and all my relations are in South Africa. No one would know to whom I went, and if I didn't go to them, Peter, why nobody would know either."

"Splendid!" he answered, the blood pounding in his temples. "I'll make all the arrangements. Shall I take a flat, or shall we go to an hotel? An hotel's more fun, perhaps, and we can have a suite."

She leaned over against him and caught his hand to her breast, with a little intake of breath.

"I'll leave it all to you, my darling," she whispered.

The taxi swung into the clearing before the hospital. "Peter," said Julie, "Tommy's so sharp; I believe she'll suspect something."

"I don't care a damn for anyone!" said Peter fiercely; "let her. I only want you."

## CHAPTER VI

Peter secured his leave for Monday the 21st from Boulogne, which necessitated his leaving Le Havre at least twenty-four hours before that day. There were two ways of travelling--across country in a troop-train, or by French expresses via Paris. He had heard so much of the latter plan that he determined to try it. It had appeared to belong to the reputation of the Church.

His movement order was simply from the one port to the other, and was probably good enough either way round with French officials; but there was a paper attached to it indicating that the personnel in question would report at such a time to the R.T.O. at such a station, and the time and the station spelt troop-train unmistakably. Now, the troop-train set out on its devious journey an hour later than the Paris express from the same station, and the hour of the Paris express corresponded with the time that all decent officers go to dinner. Peter therefore removed the first paper, folded it up thoughtfully, and put it in his pocket. He then reported to the R.T.O. a quarter of an hour before the Paris train started, and found, as he expected, a N.C.O. in sole charge. The man took his paper and read it. He turned it over; there was no indication of route anywhere. "Which train are you going by, sir?" he asked.

"Paris mail," said Peter coolly. "Will you please put my stuff in a first?"

"Certainly, sir," said the man, endorsed the order to that effect, and shouldered a suit-case. Peter followed him. He was given a first to himself, and the Deputy R.T.O. saw the French inspector and showed him the paper. Peter strolled off and collected a bottle of wine, some sandwiches, and some newspapers; then he made himself comfortable. The train left punctually. Peter lay back in his corner and watched the country slip by contentedly. He had grown up, had this young man.

He arrived in Paris with the dawn of Sunday morning, and looked out cautiously. There was no English official visible. However, his papers were entirely correct, and he climbed up the stairs and wandered along a corridor in which hands and letters from time to time indicated the lair of the R.T.O. Arriving, he found another officer waiting, but no R.T.O. The other was "bored stiff," he said; he had sat there an hour, but had seen no sign of the Transport Officer. Peter smiled, and replied that he had no intention whatever of waiting; he only wanted to know the times of the Boulogne trains. These he discovered by the aid of a railway guide on the table, and selected the midnight train, which would land him in Boulogne in time for the first leave-boat, if the train were punctual and the leave-boat not too early. In any case, he could take the second, which would only mean Victoria a few hours later that same day. And these details settled, he left his luggage in a corner and strolled off into the city.

A big city, seen for the first time by oneself alone when one does not know a soul in it, may be intensely boring or intensely interesting. It depends on oneself. Peter was in the mood to be interested. He was introspective. It pleased him to watch the early morning stir; to see the women come out in shawls and slipshod slippers and swill down their bit of pavement; to see sleepy shopkeepers take down their shutters and street-vendors set up their stalls; to try to gauge the thoughts and doings of the place from the shop-windows and the advertisements. His first need was a wash and a shave, and he got both at a little barber's in which monsieur attended to him, while madame, in considerable *négligée*, made her toilette before the next glass. His second was breakfast, and he got it, *à l'anglaise*, with an omelette and jam, in a just-stirring hotel; and then, set up, he strolled off for the centre of things. Many Masses were in progress at the Madeleine, and he heard one or two with a curious contentment, but they had no lesson for him, probably because of the foreign element in the atmosphere, and he did not pray. Still, he sat, chiefly, and watched, until he felt how entirely he was a stranger here, and went out into the sun.

He made his way to the river, and lingered there long. The great cathedral, with its bare January trees silhouetted to the last twig against the clear sky, its massive buttresses, and its cluster of smaller buildings, held his imagination. He went in, but they were beginning to sing Mass, and he soon came out. He crossed to

the farther bank and found a seat and lit a pipe. Sitting there, his imagination awoke. He conceived the pageant of faith that had raised those walls. Kings and lords and knights, all the glitter and gold of the Middle Ages, had come there--and gone; Bishops and Archbishops, and even Popes, had had their day of splendour there--and gone; the humbler sort, in the peasant dress of the period, speaking quaint tongues, had brought their sorrows there and their joys--and gone; yet it seemed to him that they had not so surely gone. The great have their individual day and disappear, but the poor, in their corporate indistinguishableness remain. The multitude, petty in their trivial wants and griefs, find no historian and leave no monument. Yet, ultimately, it was because of the Christian faith in the compassion of God for such that Notre-Dame lifted her towers to the sky. The stage for the mighty doings of Kings, it was the home of the people. As he had seen them just now, creeping about the aisles, lighting little tapers, crouched in a corner, so had they always been. Kings and Bishops figured for a moment in pomp before the altar, and then monuments must be erected to their memory. But it was not so with the poor. Peter, in a glow of warmth, considered that he was in truth one of them. And Jesus had had compassion on the multitude, he remembered. The text recalled him, and he frowned to himself.

He knocked out his pipe, and set out leisurely to find luncheon. The famous book-boxes held him, and he bought a print or two. In a restaurant near the Châtelet he got *déjeuner*, and then, remembering Julie, bought and wrote a picture-postcard, and took a taxi for the Bois. He was driven about for an hour or more, and watched the people lured out by the sun, watched the troops of all the armies, watched an aeroplane swing high over the trees and soar off towards Versailles. He discharged his car at the Arc de Triomphe, and set about deciphering the carven pictures. Then, he walked up the great Avenue, made his way to the Place de la République, wandered through the gardens of the Louvre, and, as dusk fell, found himself in the Avenue de l'Opéra. It was very gay. He had a bock at a little marble table, and courteously declined the invitations of a lady of considerable age painted to look young. He at first simply refused, and finally cursed into silence, a weedy, flash youth who offered to show him the sights of the city in an apparently ascending scale till he reached the final lure of a *cancan*, and he dined greatly at a palace of a restaurant. Then, tired, he did not know what to do.

A girl passing, smiled at him, and he smiled back. She came and sat down. He looked bored, she told him, which was a thing one should not be in Paris, and she offered to assist him to get rid of the plague.

"What do you suggest?" he demanded.

She shrugged her shoulders--anything that he pleased.

"But I don't know what I want," he objected.

"Ah, well, I have a flat near," she said--"a charming flat. We need not be bored there."

Peter demurred. He had to catch the midnight train. She made a little gesture; there was plenty of time.

He regarded her attentively. "See, mademoiselle," he said, "I do not want that. But I am alone and I want company. Will you not stroll about Paris with me for an hour or two, and talk?"

She smiled. Monsieur was unreasonable. She had her time to consider; she could not waste it.

Peter took his case from his pocket and selected a note, folded it, and handed it to her, without a word. She slipped it into her bag. "Give me a cigarette," she said. "Let us have one little glass here, and then we will go on to an 'otel I know, and hear the band and see the dresses, and talk--is it not so?"

He could not have found a better companion. In the great lounge, later on, leaning back by his side, she chatted shrewdly and with merriment. She described dresses and laughed at his ignorance. She acclaimed certain pieces, and showed a real knowledge of music. She told him of life in Paris when the Hun had all but

knocked at the gates, of the gaiety of relief, of things big and little, of the flowers in the Bois in the spring. He said little, but enjoyed himself. Much later she went with him to the station, and they stood outside to say good-bye.

"Well, little girl," he said, "you have given me a good evening, and I am very grateful. But I do not even know your name. Tell it me, that I may remember."

"Mariette," she said. "And will monsieur not take my card? He may be in Paris again. He is très agréable; I should like much to content him. One meets many, but there are few one would care to see again."

Peter smiled sadly. For the first time a wistful note had crept into her voice. He thought of others like her that he knew, and he spoke very tenderly. "No, Mariette," he said. "If I came back I might spoil a memory. Good-bye. God bless you!" and he held out his hand. She hesitated a second. Then she turned back to the taxi.

"Where would you like to go?" he demanded.

She leaned out and glanced up at the clock. "L'Avenue de l'Opéra," she said, "s'il vous plait."

The man thrust in the clutch with his foot, and Mariette was lost to Peter for ever in the multitude.

In Boulogne he heard that he was late for the first boat, but caught the second easily. Remembering Donovan's advice, he got his ticket for the Pullman at once, and was soon rolling luxuriously to town. The station was bustling as it had done what seemed to him an age before, but he stepped out with the feeling that he was no longer a fresher in the world's or any other university. Declining assistance, he walked over to the Grosvenor and engaged a room, dined, and then strolled out into Victoria Street.

It was all so familiar and it was all so different. He stood aloof and looked at himself, and played with the thought. It was incredible that he was the Peter Graham of less than a year before, and that he walked where he had walked a score of times. He went up Whitehall, and across the Square, and hesitated whether or not he should take the Strand. Deciding against it, he made his way to Piccadilly Circus and chose a music-hall that advertised a world-famous comedian. He heard him and came out, still laughing to himself, and then he walked down Piccadilly to Hyde Park Corner, and stood for a minute looking up Park Lane. Hilda ought to come down, he said to himself amusedly. Then, marvelling that he could be amused at all at the thought, he turned off for his hotel.

It is nothing to write down, but to Peter it was very much. Everything was old, but everything was new to him. At his hotel he smoked a cigarette in the lounge just to watch the men and women who came and went, and then he declined the lift and ascended the big staircase to his room. As he went, it struck him why it was that he felt so much wiser than he had been; that he looked on London from the inside, whereas he had used to look from the outside only; that he looked with a charity of which he had never dreamed, and that he was amazingly content. And as he got into bed he thought that when next he slept in town he would not be alone. He would have crossed Tommy's Rubicon.

Next morning he went down into the country to relations who did not interest him at all; but he walked and rode and enjoyed the English countryside with zest. He went to the little country church on the Sunday twice, to Matins and Evensong, and he came home and read that chapter of Mr. Wells' book in which Mr. Britling expounds the domestication of God. And he had some fierce moments in which he thought of Louise, and of Lucienne's sister, and of Mariette, and of Pennell, and, last of all, of Jenks, and asked himself of what use a domesticated God could be to any of them. And then on the Thursday he came up to meet Julie.

It thrilled him that she was in England somewhere and preparing to come to him. His pulses beat so as he thought of it that every other consideration was temporarily driven from his mind; but presently he caught

himself thinking what ought to be done, and of what she would be like. He turned it over in his mind. He had known her in France, in uniform, when he was not sure of her; but now, what would she be like? He could not conceive, and he banished the idea. It would be more splendid when it occurred if he had made no imaginary construction of it.

His station was King's Cross, and he took a taxi to a big central hotel in the neighbourhood of Regent Street. And as he passed its doors they closed irrevocably on his past.

The girl at the bureau looked up and smiled. "Good-morning," she said. "What can I do for you? We are very full."

"Good-morning," he replied. "I expect you are, but my wife is coming up to town this afternoon, and we have only a few days together. We want to be as central as possible. Have you a small suite over the week-end?"

"I don't know," she said, and pulled the big book toward her. She ran a finger down the page. "Four-twenty," she said--"double bedroom, sitting-room, and bathroom, how would that do?"

"It sounds capital," said Peter. "May I go and see it?"

She turned in her seat, reached for a key, and touched a button. A man appeared, soundlessly on the thick, rich carpet. "Show this officer four-twenty, will you?" she said, and turned to someone else. What means so much to some of us is everyday business to others.

Peter followed across the hall and into a lift. They went up high, got out in a corridor, took a turn to the right, and stopped before a door numbered 420. The man opened it. Peter was led into a little hall, with two doors leading from it. The first room was the sitting-room. It was charmingly furnished and very cosy, a couple of good prints on the walls, wide fireplace, a tall standard lamp, some delightfully easy chairs--all this he took in at a glance. He walked to the window and looked out. Far below was the great thoroughfare, and beyond a wilderness of roofs and spires. He stood and gazed at it. London seemed a different, place up there. He felt remote, and looked again into the street. Its business rolled on indifferent to him, and unaware. He glanced back into the snug pretty little room. How easy it all was, how secure! "This is excellent," he said, "Show me the bedroom."

"This way, sir," said, the man.

The bedroom was large and airy. A pretty light paper covered the walls, and two beds stood against one of them, side by side. The sun shone in at the big double windows and fell on the white paint of the woodwork, the plate-glass tops of the toilet-tables, and the thick cream-coloured carpet. A door was open on his right. He walked across, and looked in there too. A tiled bathroom, he saw it was, the clean towels on the highly polished brass rail heated by steam, the cork-mat against the wall, the shower, douche, and spray all complete, even the big cake of delicious-looking soap on its sliding rack across the bath. He looked as a man in a fairy-story might look. It was as if an enchanted palace, with the princess just round the corner, had been offered him. Smiling at the conceit, he turned to the man. "I didn't notice the telephone," he said; "I suppose it is installed?"

"In each room, sir," said the man.

"That will do," said Peter. "It will suit me admirably. Have my baggage sent up, will you, and say that I engage the suite. I will be down presently."

"Yes, sir," said the man, and departed.

Peter went back to the sitting-room, and threw himself into a chair. Then he had an idea, got up, went to the telephone, ordered a bottle of whisky to be sent up, and a siphon, and went back to his seat. Presently he was pouring himself out a drink and smoking a cigarette on his own (temporary) hearth-rug. The little incident increased his satisfaction. He was reassuring himself. Here he was really safe and remote and master, with a thousand servants and a huge palace at his beck and call, and all for a few pounds! It was absurd, but he thought to himself that he was feeling civilised for the first time, perhaps.

He looked round, and considered Julie. What would she want? Flowers to begin with, heaps of them; she liked violets for one thing, and by hook or by crook he would get a little wattle or mimosa to remind her of Africa. Then chocolates and cigarettes, both must never be lacking, and a few books--no, not books, magazines; and he would have some wine sent up. What else? Biscuits; after the theatre they might be jolly. Ah, the theatre! he must book seats. Well, a box would be better; they did not want to run too great a risk of being seen. Donovan was quite possibly in town, to say nothing of--older friends. Possibly, considering the run on the theatres, he had better book up fairly completely for the days they had together. But what would she like? Julie would never want to go if she did not spontaneously fancy a play. It was a portentous question, and he considered it long. Finally he decided on half-and-half measures, leaving some time free.... Time! how did it go? By Jove! he ought to make a move. Luncheon first; his last meal alone for some time; then order the things; and Victoria at 5.30. He poured himself another short drink and went out.

He lunched in a big public grill-room, and chatted with a naval officer at his table who was engaged in mine-sweeping with a steam-tramp. The latter was not vastly enthusiastic over things, but was chiefly depressed because he had to report at a naval base that night, and his short London leave was all but run out.

"Tell you what," he said, "I've seen a good many cities one way and another, from San Francisco to Singapore, and I know Paris and Brussels and Berlin, but you can take my word for it, there's no better place for ten days' leave than this same old blessed London. You can have some spree out East if you want it, but you can get much the same, if not better, here. If a fellow wants a bit of a skirt, he can get as good a pick in London as anywhere. If you want a good show, there isn't another spot in the universe that can beat it, whatever it is you feel like. If you want to slip out of sight for a bit, give me a big hotel like this in London. They don't damn-well worry about identification papers much here--too little, p'raps, these days. Did you hear of those German submarine officers who lived in an hotel in Southampton?"

Peter had; there were few people who hadn't, seeing that the same officers lived in most of the coast towns in England that year; but it is a pity to damp enthusiasm. He said he had heard a little.

"Walked in and out cool as you please. When they were drowned and picked up at sea, they had bills and theatre tickets in their pockets, and a letter acknowledging the booking of rooms for the next week! Fact. Had it from the fellow who got 'em. And I ask you, what is there to prevent it? You come here: 'Will you write your name and regiment, please.' You write the damned thing--any old thing, in fact--and what happens? Nothing. They don't refer to them. In France the lists go to a central bureau every day, but here--Lord bless you, the Kaiser himself might put up anywhere if he shaved his moustache!"

Peter heard him, well content. He offered a cigarette, feeling warmly disposed towards the world at large. The naval officer took it. "Thanks," he said. "You in town for long?"

"No," said Peter--"a week end. I've only just happened. What's worth seeing?"

"First and last all the way, *Carminetta*. It's a dream. Wonderful. By Gad, I don't know how that girl does it! Then I'd try *Zigzag*--oh! and go to *You Never Know, You Know*, at the Cri. Absolutely toppin'. A perfect scream all through. The thing at Daly's' good too; but all the shows are good, though, I reckon. Lumme, you wouldn't think the war was on, 'cept they all touch it a bit! *The Better 'Ole* I like, but you mightn't, knowing the real thing. But don't miss *Carminetta* if you have to stand all day for a seat in the gods. Well, I must be

going. Damned rough luck, but no help for it. Let's have a last spot, eh?"

Peter agreed, and the drinks were ordered. "Chin-chin," said his acquaintance. "And here's to old London town, and the Good Lord let me see it again. It's less than even chances," he added reflectively.

"Here's luck," said Peter; then, for he couldn't help it: "It's you chaps, by God, that are winning this war!"

"Oh, I don't know," said the other, rising. "We get more leave than you fellows, and I'd sooner be on my tramp than in the trenches. The sea's good and clean to die in, anyway. Cheerio."

Peter followed him out in a few minutes, and set about his shopping. He found a florist's in Regent Street and bought lavishly. The girl smiled at him, and suggested this and that. "Having a dinner somewhere to-night?" she queried. "But I have no violets."

"Got my girl comin' up," said Peter expansively; "that's why there must be violets. See if you can get me some and send them over, will you?" he asked, naming his hotel. She promised to do her best, and he departed.

He went into a chocolate shop. "Got some really decent chocolates?" he demanded.

The girl smiled and dived under the counter. "These are the best," she said, holding out a shovelful for Peter to taste. He tried one. "They'll do," he said. "Give me a couple of pounds, in a pretty box if you've got one."

"Two pounds!" she exclaimed. "What are you thinking of? We can only sell a quarter."

"Only a quarter!" said Peter. "That's no good. Come on, make up the two pounds."

"If my boss comes in or finds out I'll be fired," said the girl; "can't be done."

"Well, that doesn't matter," said Peter innocently, "You'll easily get a job--something better and easier, I expect."

"It's easy enough, perhaps," said the girl, "but you never can tell. *And* it's dangerous, *and* uncertain."

Peter stared at her. When he bought chocolates as a parson, he never had talks like this. He wondered if London had changed since he knew it. Then he played up: "You're pretty enough to knock that last out, anyway?" he said.

"Am I?" she demanded. "Do you mean you'd like to keep me?"

"I've got one week-end left of leave," said Peter. "What about the chocolates?"

"Poor boy!" she said. "Well, I'll risk it." And she made up the two pounds.

He wandered into a tobacconist's, and bought cigarettes which Julie's soul loved, and then he made for a theatre booking-office.

Outside and his business done, he looked at his watch, and found he had a bit of time to spare. He walked down Shaftesbury Avenue, and thought he would get himself spruced up at a hairdresser's. He saw a little place with a foreigner at the door, and he went in. It was a tiny room with three seats all empty. The man seated him in one and began.

Peter discovered that his hair needed this and that, and being in a good temper and an idle mood acquiesced.

Presently a girl came in. Peter smelt her enter, and then saw her in the glass. She was short and dark and foreign, too, and she wore a blouse that appeared to have remarkably little beneath it, and to be about to slip off her shoulders. She came forward and stood between him and the glass, smiling. "Wouldn't you like your nails manicured?" she demanded.

"Oh, I don't know," said Peter; "I had not meant to ..." and was lost.

"Second thoughts are best," she said; "but let me look at your hands. Oh, I should think you did need it! Whatever will your girl say to you to-night if you have hands like this?"

Peter, humiliated, looked at his hands. They did not appear to him to differ much from the hands Julie and others had seen without visible consternation before, but he had no time to say so. The young lady was now seated by his side with a basin of hot water, and was dabbling his hand in it. "Nice? Not too hot?" she inquired brightly.

Peter watched her as she bent over her work and kept up a running fire of talk. He gathered that many officers habitually were manicured by her, many of them in their own rooms. It was lucky for him that she was not out. Possibly he would like to make an appointment; she could come early or late. No? Then she thought his own manicure-set must be a poor one, judging from these hands, and perhaps she could sell him another. No? Well, a little cream. Not to-day? He would look in to-morrow? He hadn't a chance? She would tell him what: where was he staying? (Peter, for the fun of it, told her he had a private suite in the hotel.) Well, that was splendid. She would call in with a new set at any time, before breakfast, after the theatre, as he pleased; bring the cream and do his hands once with it to show him how. How would that suit him?

Peter was not required to say, for at that minute the shop-bell rang and a priest came in, a little old man, tired-looking, in a black cassock. He was apparently known, though he seemed to take no notice of anyone. The man was all civility, but put on an expression meant to indicate amusement, to Peter, behind the clerical back. The girl put one of Peter's fingers on her own lips by way of directing caution, and continued more or less in silence. The room became all but silent save for the sound of scissors and the noise of the traffic outside, and Peter reflected again on many things. When he had had his hair cut previously, for instance, had people made faces behind his back? Had young ladies ceased from tempting offers that seemed to include more than manicuring?

He got up to pay. "Well," she demanded, *sotto voce*, "what of the arrangement? She could do him easily at any..."

He cut her short. No; it was really impossible. His wife was coming up that afternoon. It was plain that she now regarded it as impossible also. He paid an enormous sum wondering, and departed.

Outside it struck him that he had forgotten one thing. He walked briskly to the hotel, and went up to his rooms. In the sitting-room was the big bunch of flowers and a maid unwrapping it. She turned and smiled at him. "These have just come for you, sir," she said. "Shall I arrange them for you?"

"No, thank you," said Peter. "I'd rather do them myself. I love arranging flowers, and I know just what my wife likes. I expect you'd do them better, but I'll have a shot, if you don't mind. Would you fill the glasses and get me a few more? We haven't enough here."

"Certainly, sir. There was a gentleman here once who did flowers beautifully, he did. But most likes us to do it for them."

She departed for the glasses. Peter saw that the florist had secured his violets, and took them first and filled a bowl. Then he walked into the bedroom and contemplated for a minute. Then he put the violets critically on

the little table by the bed nearest the window, and stood back to see the result. Finding it good, he departed. When next he came in, it was to place a great bunch of roses on the mantelshelf, and a few sprays of the soft yellow and green mimosa on the dressing-table. For the sitting-room he had carnations and delphiniums, and he placed a high towering cluster of the latter on the writing-table, and a vase of the former on the mantelpiece. A few roses, left over, went on the small table that carried the reading-lamp, and he and the chambermaid surveyed the results.

"Lovely, I do think," she said; "any lady would love them. I likes flowers myself, I do. I come from the country, sir, where there's a many, and the wild flowers that Jack and I liked best of all. Specially primroses, sir." There was a sound in her voice as she turned away, and Peter heard it.

"Jack?" he queried softly.

"E's been missing since last July, sir," she said, stopping by the door.

"Has he?" said Peter. "Well, you must not give up hope, you know; he may be a prisoner."

She shook her head. "He's dead," she said, with an air of finality. "I oughtn't to have spoke a word, but them flowers reminded me. I'm glad as how I have to do these rooms, sir. Most of them don't bother with flowers. Is there anything else you might be wanting, sir?"

"Light fires in both the grates, please," he said. "I'm so sorry about Jack," he added.

She gave him a look, and passed out.

Peter wandered about touching this and that. Suddenly he remembered the magazines. He ran out and caught a lift about to descend, and was once more in the street. Near Leicester Square was a big foreign shop, and he entered it, and gathered of all kinds. As he went to pay, he saw *La Vie Parisienne*, and added that also to the bundle; Julie used to say she loved it. Back in the hotel, he sent them to his room, and glanced at his watch. He had time for tea. He went out into the lounge and ordered it, sitting back under the palms. It came, and he was in the act of pouring out a cup when he saw Donovan.

Donovan was with a girl, but so were most men; Peter could not be sure of her. It was only a glimpse he had, for the two had finished and were passing out. Donovan stood back to let her first through the great swing-doors, and then, pulling on his gloves, followed. They both disappeared.

Peter sat on, in a tumult. He had been too busy all day to reflect much, but now just what he was about to do began to overwhelm him. If Donovan met him with Julie? Well, they could pretend they had just met, they could even part, and meet again. Could they? Would Donovan be deceived for a minute? It seemed to him impossible. And he might be staying there. Suppose he met someone else. Langton? Sir Robert Doyle? His late Vicar? Hilda? Mr. Lessing? And Julie would have acquaintances too. He shook himself mentally, and lit a cigarette. Well, suppose they did; he was finished with them. Finished? Then, what lay ahead--what, after this, if he were discovered? And if he were not discovered? God knew....

His mind took a new train of thought: he was now just such a one as Donovan. Or as Pennell. As Langton? He wasn't sure; no, he thought not; Langton kept straight because he had a wife and kids. He had a centre. Donovan and Pennell had not, apparently. Well, he, Peter Graham, would have a centre; he would marry Julie. It would be heavenly. They had not spoken of it, of course, that night of the dinner, but surely Julie would. There could be no doubt after the week-end.... "I shan't marry or be given in marriage," she had said. It was like her to speak so, but of course she didn't mean it. No, he would marry; and then?

He blew out smoke. The Colonies, South Africa; he would get a job schoolmastering? He hated the idea; it

didn't interest him. A farm? He knew nothing about it--besides, one wanted capital. What would he do? What did he want to do? *Want*--that was it; how did he want to spend his life? Well, he wanted Julie; everything else would fit round her, everything else would be secondary beside her. Of course. And as he got old it would still be the same, though he could not imagine either of them old. But still, when they did get old, his work would seem more important, and what was it to be? Probably it would have to be schoolmastering. Teaching Latin to little boys--History, Geography, Mathematics. He smiled ruefully; even factors worried him. They would hardly want Latin and Greek much in the Colonies, either. Perhaps at home; but would Julie stop at home? What *would* Julie do? He must ask her, sometime before Monday. Not that night--no, not *that* night....

He ground his cigarette into his cup, and pushed his hands into his pockets, his feet out before him. That night! He saw the sitting-room upstairs; they would go there first. Then he would suggest a dinner to her, in Soho; he knew a place that Pennell had told him of, Bohemian, but one could take anyone--at least, take Julie. It would be jolly watching the people, and watching Julie. He saw her, mentally, opposite him, and her eyes sparkling and alluring. And afterwards, warmed and fed--why, back to the hotel, to the sitting-room, by the fire. They would have a little supper, and then....

He pictured the bedroom. He would let Julie go first. He remembered reading in a novel how some newly married wife said to the fellow: "You'll come up in half an hour or so, won't you, dear?" He could all but see the words in print. And so, in half an hour or so, he would go in, and Julie would be in bed, by the violets, and he--he would know what men talked about, sometimes, in the anteroom.... He recalled a red-faced, coarse Colonel: "No man's a man till he's been all the way, I say...."

And he was a chaplain, a priest. Was he? The past months spun before him, his sermons, his talks to the wounded at the hospital, the things he had seen, the stories he had heard. He sighed. It was all a dream, a sham. There was no reality in it all. Where and what was Christ? An ideal, yes, but no more than an ideal, and unrealisable--a vision of the beautiful. He thought he had seen that once, but not now. The beautiful! Ah! What place had His Beauty in Travalini's, in the shattered railway-carriage, in the dinner at the Grand in Havre with Julie?

Julie. He dwelt on her, eyes, hair, face, skin, and lithe figure. He felt her kisses again on his lips, those last burning kisses of New Year's Night, and they were all to be his, as never before.... Julie. What, then, was she? She was his bride, his wife, coming to him consecrate--not by any State convention, not by any ceremony of man-made religion, but by the pure passion of human love, virginal, clean. It was human passion, perhaps, but where was higher love or greater sacrifice? Was this not worthy of all his careful preparation, worthy of the one centre of his being? Donovan, indeed! He wished he had stopped and told him the whole story, and that he expected Julie that night.

He jumped up, and walked out in the steps of Donovan, but with never another thought of him. A boy in uniform questioned him: "Taxi, sir?" He nodded, and the commissionaire pushed back the great swing-door. He stood on the steps, and watched the passers-by, and the lights all shaded as they were, that began to usher in a night of mystery. His taxi rolled up, and the man held the door open. "Victoria!" cried Peter, and to himself, as he sank back on the seat, "Julie!"

## CHAPTER VII

"Julie!" exclaimed Peter, "I should hardly have known you; you do look topping!"

"Glad rags make all that difference, old boy? Well, I am glad you did know me, anyhow. How are you? Had long to wait?"

"Only ten minutes or so, and I'm very fit, and just dying for you, Julie."

She smiled up at him and blushed a little. "Are you, Peter? It's much the same here, my dear. But don't you think we had better get a move on, and not stop here talking all night?"

Peter laughed excitedly. "Rather," he said. "But I'm so excited at seeing you that I hardly know if I'm on my head or my heels. What about your luggage? What have you? Have you any idea where it is? There's a taxi waiting."

"I haven't much: a big suit-case, most important because it holds an evening dress--it's marked with my initials; a small leather trunk, borrowed, with a big star on it; and my dressing-case, which is here. And I *think* they're behind, but I wouldn't swear, because we've seemed to turn round three times in the course of the journey, but it may have been four!"

Peter chuckled. She was just the old Julie, but yet with a touch of something more shining in her eyes, and underlying even the simplest words.

"Well, you stand aside just a moment and I'll go and see," he said, and he hurried off in the crowd.

Julie stood waiting patiently by a lamp-stand while the world bustled about her. She wore a little hat with a gay pheasant's wing in it, a dark green travelling dress and neat brown shoes, and brown silk stockings. Most people looked at her as they passed, including several officers, but there was a different look in her brown eyes from that usually there, and they all passed on unhesitatingly.

It seemed to her a good while before Peter came up again, in his wake a railway Amazon with the trunk on her shoulder and the suit-case in her hand. "Sorry to keep you, dear," he said. "But there was a huge crush and next to no porters, if these *are* porters. It feels rotten to have a woman carrying one's luggage, but I suppose it can't be helped. Come on. Aren't you tired? Don't you want tea?"

"I am a little," she said "And I do a bit. Where are we going to get it? Do they sell teas in London, Peter, or have you taken a leaf out of my book?"

They laughed at the reminiscence. "Julie," said Peter, "this is my outfit, and you shall see what you think of it. Give me your ticket, will you? I want to see you through myself."

She handed him a little purse without a word, and they set off together. She was indulging in the feeling of surrender as if it were not a victory she had won, and he was glowing with the sense of acquisition, as if he had really acquired something.

Julie got into the taxi while Peter settled the luggage, gave directions, and paid the Amazon. Then he climbed in and pulled the door to, and they slipped out of the crowded station-yard into the roar of London. Julie put her hand in his. "Peter," she said, "do tell me where we're going. I'm dying to know. What arrangements have you made? Is it safe?"

He leaned over her, his eyes sparkling. "A kiss, first, Julie: no one will see and it doesn't matter a damn if they do. That's the best of London. My dear, I can hardly believe we're both here at last, and that I've really got you." Their lips met.

Julie flung herself back with a laugh. "Oh, Peter," she said, "I shall never forget that first taxi. If you could have seen your own face! Really it was too comic, but I must say you've changed since then."

"I was a fool and a beast," he said, more gravely; "I'm only just beginning to realise how much of a fool. But don't rub it in, Julie, or not just now. I'm starting to live at last, and I don't want to be reminded of the past."

She pressed his hand and looked out of window. "Where are we, Peter? Whitehall? Where are we off to?"

"I've got the snuggest little suite in all London, darling," he said, "with a fairy palace at our beck and call. I've been revelling in it all day--not exactly in it, you know, but in the thought of it. I've been too busy shopping to be in much; and Julie, I hope you notice my hands: I've had a special manicure in preparation for you. And the girl is coming round to-morrow before breakfast to do me again--or at least she wanted to."

"What are you talking about? Peter, what have you been doing to-day?" She sighed a mock sigh. "Really, you're getting beyond me; it's rather trying."

Peter launched out into the story to fill up time. He really did not want to speak of the rooms, that they might give her the greater surprise. So he kept going till the taxi stopped before the hotel. He jumped out gaily as the commissionaire opened the door.

"Come on," he said, "as quick as ever you can." Then, to the man: "Have these sent up to No. 420, will you, please?" And he took Julie's arm.

They went in at the great door, and crossed the wide entrance-hall. Everyone glanced at Julie, Peter noted proudly, even the girls behind the sweet-counter, and the people waiting about as always. Julie held her head high and walked more sedately than usual. She *was* a bit different, thought Peter, but even nicer. He glowed at the thought.

He led her to the lift and gave his landing number. They walked down the corridor in silence and in at their door. Peter opened the door on the left and stood back. Julie went in. He followed and shut the door behind them.

The maid had lit a fire, which blazed merrily. Julie took it all in--the flowers, the pile of magazines, even the open box of cigarettes, and she turned enthusiastically to him and flung her arms round his neck, kissing him again and again. "Oh, Peter darling," she cried, "I can't tell you how I love you! I could hardly sit still in the railway carriage, and the train seemed worse than a French one. But now I have you at last, and all to myself. Oh, Peter, my darling Peter!"

There came a knock at the door. Julie disengaged her arms from his neck, but slipped her hand in his, and he said, "Come in."

The maid entered, carrying tea. She smiled at them. "I thought madame might like tea at once, sir," she said, and placed the tray on the little table.

"Thank you ever so much," said Julie impulsively; "that is good of you. I'm longing for it. One gets so tired in the train." Then she walked to the glass. "I'll take off my hat, Peter," she said, "and my coat, and then well have tea comfortably. I do want it, and a cigarette. You're an angel to have thought of my own De Reszke."

She threw herself into a big basket chair, and leaned over to the table. "Milk and sugar for you, Peter? By the way, I ought to know these things; not that it much matters; ours was a war marriage, and I've hardly seen you at all!"

Peter sat opposite, and watched her pour out. She leaned back with a piece of toast in her hands, her eyes on him, and they smiled across at each other. Suddenly he could bear it no longer. He put his cup down and knelt forward at her feet, his arms on her knees, devouring her. "Oh, Julie," he said, "I want to worship you--I do indeed. I can't believe my luck. I can't think that *you love me*."

Her white teeth bit into the toast. "You old silly," she said. "But I don't want to be worshipped; I *won't* be worshipped; I want to be loved, Peter."

He put his arms up, and pulled her head down to his, kissing her again and again, stroking her arm, murmuring foolish words that meant nothing and meant everything. It was she who stopped him. "Go and sit down," she said, "and tell me all the plans."

"Well," he said, "I do hope you'll like them. First, I've not booked up anything for to-night. I thought we'd go out to dinner to a place I know and sit over it, and enjoy ourselves. It's a place in Soho, and quite humorous, I think. Then we might walk back: London's so perfect at night, isn't it? To-morrow I've got seats for the Coliseum matinee. You know it, of course; it's a jolly place where one can talk if one wants to, and smoke; and then I've seats in the evening for *Zigzag*. Saturday night we're going to see *Carminetta*, which they say is the best show in town, and Saturday morning we can go anywhere you please, or do anything. And we can cut out any of them if you like," he added.

She let her arms lie along the chair, and drew a breath of delight. "You're truly wonderful," she said. "What a blessing not having to worry what's to be done! It's a perfect programme. I only wish we could be in Paris for Sunday; it's so slow here."

He smiled. "You're sure you're not bored about to-night?" he asked. She looked him full in the eyes and said nothing. He sprang up and rushed towards her. She laughed her old gay laugh, and avoided him, jumping up and getting round the table. "No," she warned; "no more now. Come and show me the rest of the establishment."

Arm in arm they made the tour of inspection. In the bathroom Julie's eyes danced. "Thank the Lord for that bath, Peter," she said. "I shall revel in it. That's one thing I loathe about France, that one can't get decent baths, and in the country here it's no better. I had two inches of water in a foot-bath down in Sussex, and when you sit in the beastly thing only about three inches of yourself get wet and those the least important inches. I shall lie in this for hours and smoke, and you shall feed me with chocolates and read to me. How will you like that?"

Peter made the only possible answer, and they went back to the bedroom. The man was bringing up her luggage, and he deposited it on the luggage-stool. "Heavens!" said Julie, "where are my keys? Oh, I know, in my purse. I hope you haven't lost it. Do give it to me. The suit-case is beautifully packed, but the trunk is in an appalling mess. I had to throw my things in anyhow. By the way, I wonder what they'll make of different initials on all our luggage? Not that it matters a scrap, especially these days. Besides, I don't suppose they noticed."

She was on her knees by the trunk, and had undone it. She lifted the lid, and Peter saw the confusion inside, and caught sight of the unfamiliar clothes, Julie was rummaging everywhere. "I know I've left them behind!" she exclaimed. "Whatever shall I do? My scent and powder-puff! Peter, it's terrible! I can't go to Soho to dinner without them."

"Let's go and get some," he suggested; "there's time."

"No, I can't," she said. "You go. Don't be long. I want to sit in front of the fire and be cosy."

Peter set off on the unfamiliar errand, smiling grimly to himself. He got the scent easily enough, and then inquired for a powder-puff. In the old days he would scarcely have dared; but he had been in France. He selected a little French box with a mirror in the lid and a pretty rosebud pattern, and paid for it unblushingly. Then he returned.

He opened the door of their sitting-room, and stood transfixed for a minute. The shaded reading-lamp was on, the other lights off. The fire glowed red, and Julie lay stretched out in a big chair, smoking a cigarette. She turned and looked up at him over her shoulder. She had taken off her dress and slipped on a silk kimono, letting her hair down, which fell in thick tumbled masses about her. The arm that held the cigarette was stretched up above her, and the wide, loose sleeve of the kimono had slipped back, leaving it bare to her shoulder. Her white frilled petticoat showed beneath, as she had pushed her feet out before her to the warmth of the fire. Peter's blood pounded in his temples.

"Good boy," she said; "you haven't been long. Come and show me. I had to get comfortable: I hope you don't mind."

He came slowly forward without a word and bent over her. The scent of her rose intoxicatingly around him as he bent down for a kiss. Their lips clung together, and the wide world stood still.

Julie made room for him beside her. "You dear old thing," she exclaimed at the sight of the powder-puff. "It's a gem. You couldn't have bettered it in Paris." She opened it, took out the little puff, and dabbed her open throat. Then, laughing, she dabbed at him: "Don't look so solemn," she said, "Solomon!"

Peter slipped one arm round her beneath the kimono, and felt her warm relaxed waist. Then he pushed his other hand, unresisted, in where her white throat gleamed bare and open to him, and laid his lips on her hair. "Oh, Julie," he said, "I had no idea one could love so. It is almost more than I can bear."

The clock on the mantelpiece struck a half-hour, and Julie stirred in his arms and glanced up. "Good Lord, Peter!" she exclaimed, "do you know what the time is? Half-past seven! I shall never be dressed, and we shall get no dinner. Let me up, for goodness sake, and give me a drink if you've got such a thing. If not, ring for it. I shall never have energy enough to get into my things otherwise."

Peter opened the little door of the sideboard and got out decanter, siphon, and glasses. Julie, sitting up and arranging herself, smiled at him. "Is there a single thing you haven't thought of, you old dear?" she said.

"Say when," said Peter, coming towards her. Then he poured himself out a tumbler and stood by the fire, looking at her.

"It's a pity we have to go out at all," he said, "for I suppose you can't go like that."

"A pity? It's a jolly good thing. You wait till you've seen my frock, my dear. But, Peter, do you think there's likely to be anyone there that we know?"

He shook his head. "Not there, at any rate," he said.

"Here?"

"More likely, but it's such a big place we're not likely to meet them, even so. But if you feel nervous, do you

know the best cure? Come down into the lounge, and see the crowd of people. You sit there and people stream by, and you don't know a face. It's the most comfortable, feeling in the world. One's more alone than on a desert island. You might be a ghost that no one sees."

Julie shuddered. "Peter don't! You make me feel creepy." She got up "Go and find that maid, will you? I want her to help me dress."

Peter walked to the bell and rang it, "Where do I come in?" he asked.

"Well, you can go and wash in the bathroom, and if you're frightened of her you can dress there!" And she walked to the door laughing.

"I'll just finish my drink," he said. "You will be heaps longer than I."

Five minutes later, having had no answer to his ring, he switched off the light, and walked out into the hall. He hesitated at Julie's door, then he tapped. "Come in," she said.

She was standing half-dressed in front of the glass doing her hair, "Oh, it's you, is it?" she said. "Wherever is that maid? I can't wait all night for her; you'll have to help."

Peter sat down and began to change. Half-surreptitiously he watched Julie moving about, and envied her careless abandon. He was much the more nervous of the two.

Presently she called him from the bathroom to fasten her dress. When it was done, she stood back for him to examine her.

"That all right?" she demanded, putting a touch here and there.

Not every woman could have worn her gown. It was a rose pink with some rich flame-coloured material in front, and was held by two of the narrowest bands on her shoulders. In the deep *décolleté* she pushed two rosebuds from the big bunch, and hung round her neck a pendant of mother-of-pearl and silver. She wore no other jewellery, and she needed none. She faced him, a vision of loveliness.

They went down the stairs together and out into the crush of people, some of the women in evening dress, but few of the men. The many uniforms looked better, Peter thought, despite the drab khaki. They had to stand for awhile while a taxi was found, Julie laughing and chatting vivaciously. She had a wrap for her shoulders that she had bought in Port Said, set with small metallic points, and it sparkled about her in the blaze of light. She flattered him by seeming unconscious of anyone else, and put her hand on his arm as they went out.

They drove swiftly through back-streets to the restaurant that Peter had selected, and stopped in a quiet, dark, narrow road off Greek Street. Julie got out and looked around with pretended fear. "Where in the world have you brought me?" she demanded. "However did you find the place? It's worse than some of your favourite places in Havre."

Inside, however, she looked round appreciatively. "Really, Peter, it's splendid," she said under her breath--"just the place," and smiled sweetly on the padrone who came forward, bowing. Peter had engaged a table, and they were led to it.

"I had almost given you up, sir," said the man, "but by good fortune, some of our patrons are late too."

They sat down opposite to each other, and studied the menu held out to them by a waiter. "I don't know the meaning of half the dishes," laughed Julie. "You order. It'll be more fun if I don't know what's coming."

"We must drink Chianti," said Peter, and ordered a bottle. "You can think you are in Italy."

Elbows on the table as she waited, Julie looked round. In the far corner a gay party of four were halfway through dinner. Two officers, an elderly lady and a young one, she found rather hard to place, but Julie decided the girl was the fiancée of one who had brought his friend to meet her. At other tables were mostly couples, and across the room from her, with an elderly officer, sat a well-made-up woman, very plainly *demimonde*. Immediately before her were four men, two of them foreigners, in morning dress, talking and eating hare. It was evidently a professional party, and one of the four now and again hummed out a little air to the rest, and once jotted down some notes on the back of a programme. They took no notice of anyone, but the eyes of the woman with the officer, who hardly spoke to her, searched Julie unblushingly.

Julie, gave a little sigh of happiness. "This is lovely, Peter," she said. "We'll be ages over dinner. It's such fun to be in nice clothes just for dinner sometimes and not to have to worry about the time, and going on elsewhere. But I do wish my friends could see me, I must say. They'd be horrified. They thought I was going to a stodgy place in West Kensington. I was must careful to be vague, but that was the idea. Peter, how would you like to live in a suburb and have heaps of children, and dine out with city men and their wives once or twice a month for a treat?"

Peter grimaced. Then he looked thoughtful. "It wouldn't have been any so remarkable for me at one time, Julie," he said.

She shook her head. "It would, my dear. You're not made for it."

"What am I made for, then?"

She regarded him solemnly, and then relaxed into a smile. "I haven't a notion, but not that. The thing is never to worry. You get what you're made for in the end, I think."

"I wonder," said Peter. "Perhaps, but not always. The world's full of square pegs in round holes."

"Then they're stodgy pegs, without anything in them. If I was a square peg I'd never go into a round hole."

"Suppose there was no other hole to go into," demanded Peter.

"Then I'd fall out, or I wouldn't go into any hole at all. I'd sooner be anything in the world than stodgy, Peter. I'd sooner be like that woman over there who is staring at me so!"

Peter glanced to one side, and then back at Julie. He was rather grave. "Would you really?" he questioned.

The waiter brought the Chianti and poured out glasses. Julie waited till he had gone, and then lifted hers and looked at Peter across it. "I would," she said. "I couldn't live without wine and excitement and song. I'm made that way. Cheerio, Solomon!"

They drank to each other. Then: "And love?" queried Peter softly.

Julie did not reply for a minute. She set her wine-glass down and toyed with the stem. Then she looked up at him under her eyelashes with that old daring look of hers, and repeated: "And love, Peter. But real love, not stodgy humdrum liking, Peter. I want the love that's like the hot sun, and the wide, tossing blue sea east of Suez, and the nights under the moon where the real world wakes up and doesn't go to sleep, like it does in the country in the cold, hard North. Do you know," she went on, "though I love the cities, and bands, and restaurants, and theatres, and taxis, and nice clothes, I love best of all the places where one has none of these things. I once went with a shooting-party to East Africa, Peter, and that's what I love. I shall never forget the

nights at Kilindini, with the fireflies dancing among the bushes, and the moon glistening on the palms as if they were wet, and the insects shrilling in the grass, and the hot, damp air. Or by day, up in the forest, camped under the great trees, with the strange few flowers and the silence, while the sun trickled through the leaves and made pools of light on the ground. Do you know, I saw the most beautiful thing I've ever seen or, I think, shall see in that forest."

"What was that?" asked Peter, under her spell, for she was speaking like a woman in a dream.

"It was one day when we were marching. We came on a glade among the trees, and at the end of it, a little depression of damp green grass, only the grass was quite hidden beneath a sheet of blue--such blue, I can't describe it--that quivered and moved in the sun. We stood quite still, and then a boy threw a little stone. And the blue all rose in the air, silently, like magic. It was a swarm of hundreds and hundreds of blue butterflies, Peter. Do you know what I did? I cried--I couldn't help it. It was too beautiful to see, Peter."

A little silence fell between them. She broke it in another tone.

"And the natives--I love the natives. I just love the all but naked girls carrying the water up to the village in the evening, tall and straight, like Greek statues; and the men, in a string of beads and a spear. I wanted to go naked myself there--at least, I did till one day I tried it, and the sun skinned me in no time. But at least one needn't wear much--cool loose things, and it doesn't matter what one does or says."

Peter laughed. "Who was with you when you tried the experiment?" he demanded.

Julie threw her head back, and even the professional four glanced up and looked at her. "Ah, wouldn't you like to know?" she laughed. "Well, I won't tease you--two native girls if you want to know, that was all. The rest of the party were having a midday sleep. But I never can sleep at midday. I don't mind lying in a hammock or a deck-chair, and reading, but I can't sleep. One feels so beastly when one wakes up, doesn't one?"

Peter nodded, but steered her back. "Tell me more," he said. "You wake something up in me; I feel as if I was born to be there."

"Well," she said reflectively, "I don't know that anything can beat the great range that runs along our border in Natal. It's different, of course, but it's very wonderful. There's one pass I know--see here, you go up a wide valley with a stream that runs in and out, and that you have to cross again and again until it narrows and narrows to a small footpath between great kranzes. At first there are queer stunted trees and bushes about, with the stream, that's now a tiny thing of clear water, singing among them, and there the trees stop, and you climb up and up among the boulders, until you think you can do no more, and at the last you come out on the top."

"And then?"

"You're in wonderland. Before you lies peak on peak, grass-grown and rocky, so clear in the rare, still air. There is nothing there but mountain and rock and grass, and the blue sky, with perhaps little clouds being blown across it, and a wind that's cool and vast--you feel it fills everything. And you look down the way you've come, and there's all Natal spread out at your feet like a tiny picture, lands and woods and rivers, till it's lost in the mist of the distance."

She ceased, staring at her wine-glass. At last the chatter of the place broke in on Peter. "My dear," he exclaimed, "one can see it. But what do you do there?"

She laughed and broke the spell. "What would one do?" she demanded. "Eat and drink and sleep, and make love, Peter, if there's anybody to make love to."

"But you couldn't do that all your life," he objected.

"Why not? Why do anything else? I never can see. And when you're tired--for you *do* get tired at last--back to Durban for a razzle-dazzle, or back farther still, to London or Paris for a bit. That's the life for me, Peter!"

He smiled: "Provided somebody is there with the necessary, I suppose?" he said.

"Solomon," she mocked, "Solomon, Solomon! Why do you spoil it all? But you're right, of course, Peter, though I hate to think of that."

"I see how we're like, and how we're unlike, Julie," said Peter suddenly, "You like real things, and so do I. You hate to feel stuffy and tied up in conventions, and so do I. But you're content with just that, and I'm not."

"Am I?" she queried, looking at him a little strangely.

Peter did not notice; he was bent on pursuing his argument. "Yes, you are," he said. "When you're in the grip of real vital things--nature naked and unashamed--you have all you want. You don't stop to think of to-morrow. You live. But I, I feel that there is something round the corner all the time. I feel as if there must be something bigger than just that. I'd love your forest and your range and your natives, I think, but only because one is nearer something else with them than here. I don't know how to put it, but when you think of those things you feel *full*, and I still feel *empty*."

"Peter," said Julie softly, "do you remember Caudebec?"

He looked up at her then. "I shall never forget it, dear," he said.

"Then you'll remember our talk in the car?"

He nodded. "When you talked about marriage and human nature and men, and so on," he said.

"No, I don't mean that. I did talk of those things, and I gave you a little rather bitter philosophy that is more true than you think; but I don't mean that. Afterwards, when we spoke about shams and playing. Do you remember, I hinted that a big thing might come along--do you remember?"

He nodded again, but he did not speak.

"Well," she said, "it's come--that's all."

"Another bottle of Chianti, sir?" queried the padrone at his elbow.

Peter started. "What? Oh, yes, please," he said. "We can manage another bottle, Julie? And bring on the dessert now, will you? Julie, have a cigarette."

"If we have another bottle you must drink most of it," she laughed, almost as if they had not been interrupted, but with a little vivid colour in her cheeks. "Otherwise, my dear, you'll have to carry me upstairs, which won't look any too well. But I want another glass. Oh, Peter, do look at that woman now!"

Peter looked. The elderly officer had dined to repletion and drank well too. The woman had roused herself; she was plainly urging him to come on out; and as Peter glanced over, she made an all but imperceptible sign to a waiter, who bustled forward with the man's cap and stick. He took them stupidly, and the woman helped him up, but not too noticeably. Together they made for the door, which the waiter held wide open. The woman tipped him, and he bowed. The door closed, and the pair disappeared into the street.

"A damned plucky sort," said Julie; "I don't care what anyone says."

"I didn't think so once, Julie," said Peter, "but I believe you're right now. It's a topsy-turvy world, little girl, and one never knows where one is in it."

"Men often don't," said Julie, "but women make fewer mistakes. Come, Peter, let's get back. I want the walk, and I want that cosy little room."

He drained his glass and got up. Suddenly the thought of the physical Julie ran through him like fire. "Rather!" he said gaily. "So do I, little girl."

The waiter pulled back the chairs. The padrone came up all bows and smiles. He hoped the Captain would come again--any time. It was better to ring up, as they were often very full. A taxi? No? Well, the walk through the streets was enjoyable after dinner, even now, when the lights were so few. Good-evening, madame; he hoped everything had been to her liking.

Julie sauntered across the now half-empty little room, and took Peter's arm in the street. "Do you know the way?" she demanded.

"We can't miss it," he said. "Up here will lead us to Shaftesbury Avenue somewhere, and then we go down. Sure you want to walk, darling?"

"Yes, and see the people, Peter, I love seeing them. Somehow by night they're more natural than they are by day. I hate seeing people going to work in droves, and men rushing about the city with dollars written all across their faces. At night that's mostly finished with. One can see ugly things, but some rather beautiful ones as well. Let's cross over. There are more people that side."

They passed together down the big street. Even the theatres were darkened to some extent, but taxis were about, and kept depositing their loads of men and smiling women. The street-walks held Tommies, often plainly with a sweet-heart from down east; men who sauntered along and scanned the faces of the women; a newsboy or two; a few loungers waiting to pick up odd coppers; and here and there a woman by herself. It was the usual crowd, but they were in the mood to see the unusual in usual things.

In the Circus they lingered a little. Shrouded as it was, an atmosphere of mystery hung over everything. Little groups that talked for a while at the corners or made appointments, or met and broke up again, had the air of conspirators in some great affair. The rush of cars down Regent Street, and then this way and that, lent colour to the thought, and it affected both of them. "What's brooding over it all, Julie?" Peter half-whispered. "Can't you feel that there is something?"

She shrugged her shoulders, and then gave a little shiver. "Love, or what men take for love," she said.

He clasped the hand that lay along his arm passionately. "Come along," he said.

"Oh, this *is* good, Peter," said Julie a few minutes later. She had thrown off her wrap, and was standing by the fire while he arranged the cigarettes, the biscuits, and a couple of drinks on the little table with its shaded light. "Did you lock the door? Are we quite alone, we two, at last, with all the world shut out?"

He came swiftly over to her, and took her in his arms for answer. He pressed kisses on her hair, her lips, her neck, and she responded to them.

"Oh, love, love," he said, "let's sit down and forget that there is anything but you and I."

She broke from him with a little laugh of excitement. "We will, Peter," she said; "but I'm going to take off this dress and one or two other things, and let my hair down. Then I'll come back."

"Take them off here," he said; "you needn't go away."

She looked at him and laughed again. "Help me, then," she said, and turned her back for him to loosen her dress.

Clumsily he obeyed. He helped her off with the shimmering beautiful thing, and put it carefully over a chair. With deft fingers she loosened her hair, and he ran his fingers through it, and buried his face in the thick growth of it. She untied a ribbon at her waist, and threw from her one or two of her mysterious woman's things. Then, with a sigh of utter abandonment, she threw herself into his arms.

They sat long over the fire. Outside the dull roar of the sleepless city came faintly up to them, and now and again a coal fell in the grate. At long last Peter pushed her back a little from him. "Little girl," he said, "I must ask one thing. Will you forgive me? That night at Abbeville, after we left Langton, what was it you wouldn't tell me? What was it you thought he would have known about you, but not I? Julie, I thought, to-night--was it anything to do with East Africa--those tropical nights under the moon? Oh, tell me, Julie!"

The girl raised her eyes to his. That look of pain and knowledge that he had seen from the beginning was in them again. Her hand clasped the lappet of his tunic convulsively, and she seemed to him indeed but a little girl.

"Peter! could you not have asked? But no, you couldn't, not you.... But you guess now, don't you? Oh, Peter, I was so young, and I thought--oh, I thought: the big thing had come, and since then life's been all one big mockery. I've laughed at it, Peter: it was the only way. And then you came along. I haven't dared to think, but there's something about you--oh, I don't know what! But you don't play tricks, do you, Peter? And you've given me all, at last, without a question.... Oh, Peter, tell me you love me still! It's your love, Peter, that can make me clean and save my soul--if I've any soul to save," she added brokenly.

Peter caught her to him. He crushed her so that she caught her breath with the pain of it, and he wound his hand all but savagely in her hair. He got up--and she never guessed he had the strength--and carried her out in his arms, and into the other room.

And hours later, staring into the blackness while she slept as softly as a child by his side, he could not help smiling a little to himself. It was all so different from what he had imagined.

## CHAPTER VIII

Peter awoke, and wondered where he was. Then his eye fell on a half-shut, unfamiliar trunk across the room, and he heard splashing through the open door of the bathroom. "Julie!" he called.

A gurgle of laughter came from the same direction and the splashing ceased. Almost the next second Julie appeared in the doorway. She was still half-wet from the water, and her sole dress was a rosebud which she had just tucked into her hair. She stood there, laughing, a perfect vision of unblushing natural loveliness, splendidly made from her little head poised lightly on her white shoulders to her slim feet. "You lazy creature!" she exclaimed; "you're awake at last, are you? Get up at once," and she ran over to him just as she was, seizing the bed-clothes and attempting to strip them off. Peter protested vehemently. "You're a shameless baggage," he said, "and I don't want to get up yet. I want some tea and a cigarette in bed. Go away!"

"You won't get up, won't you?" she said. "All right; I'll get into bed, then," and she made as if to do so.

"Get away!" he shouted. "You're streaming wet! You'll soak everything."

"I don't care," she retorted, laughing and struggling at the same time, and she succeeded in getting a foot between the sheets. Peter slipped out on the other side, and she ran round to him. "Come on," she said; "now for your bath. Not another moment. My water's steaming hot, and it's quite good enough for you. You can smoke in your bath or after it. Come on!"

She dragged him into the bathroom and into that bath, and then she filled a sponge with cold water and trickled it on him, until he threatened to jump out and give her a cold douche. Then, panting with her exertions and dry now, she collapsed on the chair and began to fumble with her hair and its solitary rose. It was exactly Julie who sat there unashamed in her nakedness, Peter thought. She had kept the soul of a child through everything, and it could burst through the outer covering of the woman who had tasted of the tree of knowledge of good and evil and laugh in the sun.

"Peter," she said, "wouldn't you love to live in the Fiji--no, not the Fiji, because I expect that's civilised these days, but on an almost desert island?--though not desert, of course. Why does one call Robinson Crusoe sort of islands *desert*? Oh, I know, because it means deserted, I suppose. But I don't want it quite deserted, for I want you, and three or four huts of nice savages to cut up wood for the fire and that sort of thing. And I should wear a rose--no, a hibiscus--in my hair all day long, and nothing else at all. And you should wear--well, I don't know what you should wear, but something picturesque that covered you up a bit, because you're by no means so good-looking as I am, Peter." She jumped up and stretched out her arms, "Am I not good-looking, Peter? Why isn't there a good mirror in this horrid old bathroom? It's more necessary in a bathroom than anywhere, I think."

"Well, I can see you without it," said Peter. "And I quite agree, Julie, you're divine. You are like Aphrodite, sprung from the foam."

She laughed. "Well, spring from the foam yourself, old dear, and come and dress. I'm getting cold. I'm going to put on the most thrilling set of undies this morning that you ever saw. The cami-..."

Peter put his fingers in his ears. "Julie," he said, "in one minute I shall blush for shame. Go and put on something, if you must, but don't talk about it. You're like a Greek goddess just now, but if you begin to quote advertisements you'll be like--well, I don't know what you'll be like, but I won't have it, anyway. Go on; get away with you. I shall throw the sponge at you if you don't."

She departed merrily, singing to herself, and Peter lay a little longer in the soft warm water. He dwelt lovingly on the girl in the other room; he told himself he was the happiest man alive; and yet he got out of the bath,

without apparent rhyme or reason, with a little sigh. But he was only a little quicker than most men in that. Julie had attained and was radiant; Peter had attained--and sighed.

She was entirely respectable by contrast when he rejoined her, shaven and half-dressed, a little later, but just as delectable, as she stood in soft white things putting up her hair with her bare arms. He went over and kissed her. "You never said good-morning at all, you wretch," he said.

She flung her arms round his neck and kissed him again many times. "Purposely," she said. "I shall never say good-morning to you while you're horribly unshaven--never. You can't help waking up like it, I know, but it's your duty to get clean and decent as quickly as possible. See?"

"I'll try *always* to remember," said Peter, and stressed the word.

She held him for an appreciable second at that; then loosed him with a quick movement. "Go, now," she said, "and order breakfast to be brought up to our sitting-room. It must be a very nice breakfast. There must be kippers and an omelette. Go quick; I'll be ready in half a minute."

"I believe that girl is sweeping the room," said Peter. "Am I to appear like this? You must remember that we're not in France."

"Put on a dressing-gown then. You haven't got one here? Then put on my kimono; you'll look exceedingly beautiful.... Really, Peter, you do. Our island will have to be Japan, because kimonos suit you. But I shall never live to reach it if you don't order that breakfast."

Peter departed, and had a satisfactory interview with the telephone in the presence of the maid. He returned with a cigarette between his lips, smiling, and Julie turned to survey him.

"Peter, come here. Have you kissed that girl? I believe you have! How dare you? Talk about being shameless, with me here in the next room!"

"I thought you never minded such things, Julie. You've told me to kiss girls before now. *And* you said that you'd always allow your husband complete liberty--now, didn't you?"

Julie sat down on the bed and heaved a mock sigh. "What incredible creatures are men!" she exclaimed. "Must I mean everything I say, Solomon? Is there no difference between this flat and that miserable old hotel in Caudebec? And last, but not least, have you promised to forsake all other and cleave unto me as long as we both shall live? If you had promised it, I'd know you couldn't possibly keep it; but as it is, I have hopes."

This was too much for Peter. He dropped into the position that she had grown to love to see him in, and he put his arms round her waist, looking up at her laughingly. "But you will marry me, Julie, won't you?" he demanded.

Before his eyes, a lingering trace of that old look crept back into her face. She put her hands beneath his chin, and said no word, till he could stand it no longer.

"Julie, Julie, my darling," he said, "you must."

"Must, Peter?" she queried, a little wistfully he thought.

"Yes, must; but say you want to, say you will, Julie!"

"I want to, Peter," she said--"oh, my dear, you don't know, you can't know, how much. The form is nothing to

me, but I want *you*--if I can keep you."

"If you can keep me!" echoed Peter, and it was as if an ice-cold finger had suddenly been laid on his heart. For one second he saw what might be. But he banished it. "What!" he exclaimed. "Cannot you trust me, Julie? Don't you know I love you? Don't you know I want to make you the very centre of my being, Julie?"

"I know, dearest," she whispered, and he had never heard her speak so before. "You want, that is one thing; you can, that is another."

Peter stared up at her. He felt like a little child who kneels at the feet of a mother whom it sees as infinitely loving, infinitely wise, infinitely old. And, like a child, he buried his head in her lap. "Oh, Julie," he said, "you must marry me. I want you so that I can't tell you how much. I don't know what you mean. Say," he said, looking up again and clasping her tightly--"say you'll marry me, Julie!"

She sprang up with a laugh. "Peter," she said, "you're Mid-Victorian. You are actually proposing to me upon your knees. If I could curtsy or faint I would, but I can't. Every scrap of me is modern, down to Venne's cami-knickers that you wouldn't let me talk about. Let's go and eat kippers; I'm dying for them. Come on, old Solomon."

He got up more slowly, half-smiling, for who could resist Julie in that mood? But he made one more effort. He caught her hand. "But just say 'Yes' Julie," he said--"just 'Yes.'"

She snatched her hand away. "Maybe I will tell you on Monday morning," she said, and ran out of the room.

As he finished dressing, he heard her singing in the next room, and then talking to the maid. When he entered the sitting-room the girl came out, and he saw that there were tears in her eyes. He went in and looked sharply at Julie; there was a suspicion of moisture in hers also. "Oh, Peter," she said, and took him by the arm as the door closed, "why didn't you tell me about Jack? I'm going out immediately after breakfast to buy her the best silver photo-frame I can find, see? And now come and eat your kippers. They're half-cold, I expect. I thought you were never coming."

So began a dream-like day to Peter. Julie was the centre of it. He followed her into shops, and paid for her purchases and carried her parcels: he climbed with her on to buses, which she said she preferred to taxis in the day-time; he listened to her talk, and he did his best to find out what she wanted and get just that for her. They lunched, at her request, at an old-fashioned, sober restaurant in Regent Street, that gave one the impression of eating luncheon in a Georgian dining-room, in some private house of great stolidity and decorum. When Julie had said that she wanted such a place Peter had been tickled to think how she would behave in it. But she speedily enlightened him. She drew off her gloves with an air. She did not laugh once. She did not chat to the waiter. She did not hurry in, nor demand the wine-list, nor call him Solomon. She did not commit one single Colonial solecism at table, as Peter had hated himself for half thinking that she might. Yet she never had looked prettier, he thought, and even there he caught glances which suggested that others might think so too. And if she talked less than usual, so did he, for his mind was very busy. In the old days it was almost just such a wife as Julie now that he would have wanted. But did he want the old days? Could he go back to them? Could he don the clerical frock coat and with it the clerical system and outlook of St. John's? He knew, as he sat there, that not only he could not, but that he would not. What, then? It was almost as if Julie suggested that the alternative was madcap days, such as that little scene in the bathroom suggested. He looked at her, and thought of it again, and smiled at the incongruity of it, there. But even as he smiled the cold whisper of dread insinuated itself again, small and slight as it was. Would such days fill his life? Could they offer that which should seize on his heart, and hold it?

He roused himself with an effort of will, poured himself another glass of wine, and drank it down. The generous, full-bodied stuff warmed him, and he glanced at his wrist-watch. "I say," he said, "we shall be late,

Julie, and I don't want to miss one scrap of this show. Have you finished? A little more wine?"

Julie was watching him, he thought, as he spoke, and she, too, seemed to him to make a little effort. "I will, Peter," she said, not at all as she had spoken there before--"a full glass too. One wants to be in a good mood for the Coliseum. Well, dear old thing, cheerio!"

Outside he demanded a taxi. "I must have it, Julie," he said. "I want to drive up, and have the old buffer in gold braid open the door for me. Have a cigarette?"

She took one, and laughed as they settled into the car. "I know the feeling, my dear," she said. "And you want to stroll languidly up the red carpet, and pass by the pictures of chorus-girls as if you were so accustomed to the real thing that really the pictures were rather borin', don't you know. And you want to make eyes at the programme-girl, and give a half-crown tip when they open the box, and take off your British warm in full view of the audience, and...."

"Kiss you," said Peter uproariously, suiting the action to the word. "Good Lord, Julie, you're a marvel! No more of those old restaurants for me. We dine at our hotel to-night, in the big public room near the band, and we drink champagne."

"And you put the cork in my stocking?" she queried, stretching out her foot.

He pushed his hand up her skirt and down to the warm place beneath the gay garter that she indicated, and he kissed her passionately again. "It doesn't matter now," he said. "I have more of you than that. Why, that's nothing to me now, Julie. Oh, how I love you!"

She pushed him off, and snatched her foot away also, laughing gaily. "I'm getting cheap, am I?" she said. "We'll see. You're going to have a damned rotten time in the theatre, my dear. Not another kiss, and I shall be as prim as a Quaker."

The car stopped. "You couldn't," he laughed, helping her out. "And what is more, I shan't let you be. I've got you, old darling, and I propose to keep you, what's more." He took her arm resolutely. "Come along. We're going to be confoundedly late."

Theirs was a snug little box, one of the new ones, placed as in a French theatre. The great place was nearly dark as they entered, except for the blaze of light that shone through the curtain. The odour of cigarette-smoke and scent greeted them, with the rustle of dresses and the subdued sound of gay talk. The band struck up. Then, after the rolling overture, the curtain ran swiftly up, and a smart young person tripped on the stage in the limelight and made great play of swinging petticoats.

Julie had no remembrance of her promised severity at any rate. She hummed airs, and sang choruses, and laughed, and was thrilled, exactly as she should have been, while the music and the panorama went on and wrapped them round with glamour, as it was meant to do. She cheered the patriotic pictures and Peter with her, till he felt no end of a fellow to be in uniform. The people in front of them glanced round amusedly now and again, and as like as not Julie would be discovered sitting there demurely, her child's face all innocence, and a big chocolate held between her fingers at her mouth. Peter would lean back in his corner convulsed at her, and without moving a muscle of her face she would put her leg tip on his seat and push him. One scene they watched well back in their dark box, his arm round her waist. It was a little pathetic love-play and well done, and in the gloom he played with the curls at her ears and neck with his lips, and held her hand.

When it was over they went out with the crowd. The January day was done, but it was bewildering for all that to come out into real life. There was no romance for the moment on the stained street, and in the passing traffic. The gold braid of the hall commissioner looked tawdry, and the pictures of ballet-girls but vulgar. It

is the common experience, but each time one feels it there is a new surprise. Julie had her own remedy:

"The liveliest tea-room you can find, Peter," she demanded.

"It will be hard to beat our own," said Peter.

"Well, away there, then; let's get back to a band again, anyhow."

The great palm-lounge was full of people, and for a few minutes it did not seem as if they would find seats; but then Julie espied a half-empty table, and they made for it. It stood away back in a corner, with two wicker armchairs before it, and, behind, a stationary lounge against the wall overhung by a huge palm. The lounge was occupied. "We'll get in there presently," whispered Peter, and they took the chairs, thankful in the crowded place to get seated at all.

"Oh, it was topping, Peter," said Julie. "I love a great place like that. I almost wish we had had dress-circle seats or stalls out amongst the people. But I don't know; that box was delicious. Did you see how that old fossil in front kept looking round? I made eyes at him once, deliberately--you know, like this," and she looked sideways at Peter with subtle invitation just hinted in her eyes. "I thought he would have apoplexy--I did, really."

"It's a good thing I didn't notice, Julie. Even now I should hate to see you look like that, say, at Donovan. You do it too well. Oh, here's the tea. Praise the Lord! I'm dying for a cup. You can have all the cakes; I've smoked too much."

"Wouldn't you prefer a whisky?"

"No, not now--afterwards. What's that they're playing?"

They listened, Julie seemingly intent, and Peter, who soon gave up the attempt to recognise the piece, glanced sideways at the couple on the lounge. They did not notice him. He took them both in and caught--he could not help it--a few words.

She was thirty-five, he guessed, slightly made-up, but handsome and full figured, a woman of whom any man might have been proud. He was an officer, in Major's uniform, and he was smoking a cigarette impatiently and staring down the lounge. She, on the other hand, had her eyes fixed on him as if to read every expression on his face, which was heavy and sullen and mutinous.

"Is that final, then, George?" she said.

"I tell you I can't help it; I promised I'd dine with Carstairs to-night."

A look swept across her face. Peter could not altogether read it. It was not merely anger, or pique, or disappointment; it certainly was not merely grief. There was all that in it, but there was more. And she said--he only just caught the sentence of any of their words, but there was the world of bitter meaning in it:

"Quite alone, I suppose? And there will be no necessity for me to sit up?"

"Peter," said Julie suddenly, "the tea's cold. Take me upstairs, will you? we can have better sent up."

He turned to her in surprise, and then saw that she too had heard and seen.

"Right, dear," he said, "It is beastly stuff. I think, after all, I'd prefer a spot, and I believe you would too."

He rose carefully, not looking towards the lounge, like a man; and Julie got up too, glancing at that other couple with such an ordinary merely interested look that Peter smiled to himself to see it. They threaded their way in necessary silence through the tables and chairs to the doors, and said hardly a word in the lift. But in their sitting-room, cosy as ever, Julie turned to him in a passion of emotion such as he had scarcely dreamed could exist even in her.

"Oh, you darling," she said, "pick me up, and sit me in that chair on your knee. Love me, Peter, love me as you've never loved me before. Hold me tight, tight, Peter hurt me, kiss me, love me, say you love me..." and she choked her own utterance, and buried her face on his shoulder, straining her body to his, twining her slim foot and leg round his ankle. In a moment she was up again, however, and glanced at the clock. "Peter, we must dress early and dine early, mustn't we? The thing begins at seven-forty-five. Now I know what we'll do. First, give me a drink, a long one, Solomon, and take one yourself. Thanks. That'll do. Here's the best.... Oh, that's good, Peter. Can't you feel it running through you and electrifying you? Now, come"--she seized him by the arm--"come on! I'll tell you what you've got to do."

Smiling, though a little astonished at this outburst, Peter allowed himself to be pulled into the bedroom. She sat down on the bed and pushed out a foot. "Take it off, you darling, while I take down my hair," she said.

He knelt and undid the laces and took off the brown shoes one by one, feeling her little foot through the silk as he did so. Then he looked up. She had pulled out a comb or two, and her hair was hanging down. With swift fingers she finished her work, and was waiting for him. He caught her in his arms, and she buried her face again. "Oh, Peter, love me, love me! Undress me, will you? I want you to. Play with me, own me, Peter. See, I am yours, yours, Peter, all yours. Am I worth having, Peter? Do you want more than me?" And she flung herself back on the bed in her disorder, the little ribbons heaving at her breast, her eyes afire, her cheeks aflame.

"Well," said Peter, an hour or two later, "we've got to get this dinner through as quickly as we've ever eaten anything. You'll have to digest like one of your South African ostriches. I say," he said to the waitress in a confidential tone and with a smile, "do you think you can get us stuff in ten minutes all told? We're late as it is, and we'll miss half the theatre else."

"It depends what you order," said the girl, rather sharply. Then, after a glance at them both: "See, if you'll have what I say, I'll get you through quick. I know what's on easiest. Do you mind?"

"The very thing," said Peter; "and send the wine-man over on your way, will you? How will that do?" he added to Julie.

"I'll risk everything to-night, Peter, except your smiling at the waitress," she said. "But I must have that champagne. There's something about champagne that inspires confidence. When a man gives you the gold bottle you know that he is really serious, or as serious as he can be, which isn't saying much for most men. And not half a bottle; I've had half-bottles heaps of times at tête-à-tête dinners. It always means indecision, which is a beastly thing in anyone, and especially in a man. It's insulting, for one thing.... Oh, Peter, do look at that girl over there. Do you suppose she has anything on underneath? I suppose I couldn't ask her, but you might, you know, if you put on that smile of yours. Do walk over, beg her pardon, and say very nicely: 'Excuse me, but I'm a chaplain, and it's my business to know these things. I see you've no stays on, but have you a bathing costume?'"

"Julie, do be quiet; someone will hear you. You must remember we're in England, and that you're talking English."

"I don't care a damn if they do, Peter! Oh, here's the champagne, at any rate. Oh, and some soup. Well, that's something."

"I've got the fish coming," said the girl, "if you can be ready at once."

Julie seized her spoon. "I suppose I mustn't drink it?" she said. "I don't see why I shouldn't, as a matter of fact, but it might reflect on you, Peter, and you're looking so immaculate to-night. By the way, you've never had that manicure. Do send a note for the girl. I'd hide in the bathroom. I'd love to hear you. Peter, if I only thought you would do it, I'd like it better than the play. What is the play, by the way? *Zigzag*? Oh, *Zigzag*" (She mimicked in a French accent.) "Well, it will be all too sadly true if I leave you to that bottle of fizz all by yourself. Give me another glass, please."

"What about you?" demanded Peter. "If you're like this now, Heaven knows what you'll be by the time you've had half of this."

"Peter, you're an ignoramus. Girls like me never take too much. We began early for one thing, and we're used to it. For another, the more a girl talks, the soberer she is. She talks because she's thinking, and because she doesn't want the man to talk. Now, if you talked to-night, I don't know what you might not say. You'd probably be enormously sentimental, and I hate sentimental people. I do, really. Sentiment is wishy-washy, isn't it? I always associate it with comedians on the stage. Look over there. Do you see that girl in the big droopy hat and the thin hands? And the boy--one must say 'boy,' I suppose? He's a little fat and slightly bald, and he's got three pips up, and has had them for a long time. Well, look at them. He's searching her eyes, he is, Peter, really. That's how it's done: you just watch. And he doesn't know if he's eating pea-soup or oyster-sauce. And she's hoping her hat is drooping just right, and that he'll notice her ring is on the wrong finger, and how nice one would look in the right place. To do her justice, she isn't thinking much about dinner, either; but that's sinful waste, Peter, in the first place, and bad for one's tummy in the second. However, they're sentimental, they are, and there's a fortune in it. If they could only bring themselves to do just that for fifteen minutes at the Alhambra every night, they'd be the most popular turn in London."

"That's all very well," said he; "but if you eat so fast and talk at the same time, you'll pay for it very much as you think they will. Have you finished?"

"No, I haven't. I want cheese-straws, and I shall sit here till I get them or till the whole of London zigzags round me."

"I say," said Peter to their waitress, "if you possibly can, fetch us cheese-straws now. Not too many, but quickly. Can you? The lady won't go without them, and something must be done."

"Wouldn't the management wait if you telephoned, Peter dear?" inquired Julie sarcastically. "Just say who you are, and they sure will. If the chorus only knew, they'd go on strike against appearing before you came, or tear their tights or something dreadful like that, so that they couldn't come on. Yes, now I am ready. One wee last little drop of the bubbly--I see it there--and I'll sacrifice coffee for your sake. Give me a cigarette, though. Thanks. And now my wrap."

She rose, the cigarette in her fingers, smiling at him. Peter hastily followed, walking on air. He was beginning to realise how often he failed to understand Julie, and to see how completely she controlled her apparently more frivolous moods; but he loved her in them. He little knew, as he followed her out, the tumult of thoughts that raced through that little head with its wealth of brown hair. He little guessed how bravely she was already counting the fleeting minutes, how resolutely keeping grip of herself in the flood which threatened to sweep her--how gladly!--away.

A good revue must be a pageant of music, colour, scenery, song, dance, humour, and the impossible. There must be good songs in it, but one does not go for the songs, any more than one goes to see the working out of a plot. Strung-up men, forty-eight hours out of the trenches, with every nerve on edge, must come away with a smile of satisfaction on their faces, to have a last drink at home and sleep like babies. Women who have been

on nervous tension for months must be able to go there, and allow their tired senses to drink in the feast of it all, so that they too may go home and sleep. And in a sense their evening meant all this to Peter and Julie; but only in a sense.

They both of them bathed in the performance. The possible and impossible scenes came and went in a bewildering variety, till one had the feeling that one was asleep and dreaming the incomprehensible jumble of a dream, and, as in a nice dream, one knew it was absurd, but did not care. The magnificent, brilliant staging dazzled till one lay back in one's chair and refused to name the colours to oneself or admire their blending any more. The chorus-girls trooped on and off till they seemed countless, and one abandoned any wish to pick the prettiest and follow her through. And the gay palace of luxury, with its hundreds of splendidly dressed women, its men in uniform, its height and width and gold and painting, and its great arching roof, where, high above, the stirring of human hearts still went on, took to itself an atmosphere and became sentient with humanity.

Julie and Peter were both emotional and imaginative, and they were spellbound till the notes of the National Anthem roused them. Then, with the commonplaces of departure, they left the place. "It's so near," said Julie in the crowd outside; "let's walk again."

"The other pavement, then," said Peter, and they crossed. It was cold, and Julie clung to him, and they walked swiftly.

At the entrance Peter suggested an hour under the palms, but Julie pleaded against it. "Why, dear?" she said. "It's so cosy upstairs, and we have all we want. Besides, the lounge would be an anti-climax; let's go up."

They went up, and Julie dropped into her chair while Peter knelt to poke the fire. Then he lit a cigarette, and she refused one for once, and he stood there looking into the flame.

Julie drew a deep sigh. "Wasn't it gorgeous, Peter?" she said. "I can't help it, but I always feel I want it to go on for ever and ever. Did you ever see *Kismet*? That was worse even than this. I wanted to get up and walk into the play. These modern things are too clever; you know they're unreal, and yet they seem to be real. You know you're dreaming, but you hate to wake up. I could let all that music and dancing and colour go on round me till I floated away and away, for ever."

Peter said nothing. He continued to stare into the fire.

"What do you feel?" demanded Julie.

Peter drew hard on his cigarette, and then he blew out the smoke. "I don't know," he said. "Yes, I do," he added quickly; "I feel I want to get up and preach a sermon."

"Good Lord, Peter! what a dreadful sensation that must be! Don't begin now, will you? I'm beginning to wish we'd gone into the lounge after all; you surely couldn't have preached there."

Peter did not smile. He went on as if she had not spoken, "Or write a great novel, or, better still, a great play," he said.

"What would be the subject, then, you Solomon, or the title, anyway?"

"I don't know," said Peter dreamily. "*All Men are Grass, The Way of all Flesh*--no, neither of those is good, and besides, one at least is taken. I know," he added suddenly, "I would call it *Exchange*, that's all. My word, Julie, I believe I could do it." He straightened himself, and walked across the room and back again, once or twice. "I believe I could: I feel it tingling in me; but it's all formless, if you understand; I've no plot. It's just

what I feel as I sit there in a theatre, as we did just now."

Julie leaned forward and took the cigarette she had just refused. She lit it herself with a half-burnt match, and Peter stood and watched her, but hardly saw what she was doing. She was as conscious of his preoccupation as if it were something physical about him.

"Explain, my dear," she said, leaning back and staring into the fire.

"I don't know that I can," he replied, and she felt as if he did not speak to her. "It's the bigness of it all, the beauty, the triumphant success. It's drawn that great house full, lured them in, the thousands of them, and it does so night after night. Tired people go there to be refreshed, and sad people to be made gay, and people sick of life to laugh and forget it. It's the world's big anodyne. It offers a great exchange. And all for a few shillings, Julie, and for a few hours. The sensation lingers, but one has to go again and again. It tricks one into thinking, almost, that it's the real thing, that one can dance like mayflies in the sun. Only, Julie, there comes an hour when down sinks the sun, and what of the mayflies then?"

Julie shifted her head ever so little. "Go on," she said, looking up intently at him.

He did not notice her, but her words roused him. He began to pace up and down again, and her eyes followed him. "Why," he said excitedly, "don't you see that it's a fraudulent exchange? It's a fraudulent exchange that it offers, and it itself is an exchange as fraudulent as that which our modern world is making. No, not our modern world only. We talk so big of our modernity, when it's all less than the dust--this year's leaves, no better than last year's, and fallen to-morrow. Rome offered the same exchange, and even a better one, I think--the blood and lust and conflict of the amphitheatre. But they're both exchanges, offered instead of the great thing, the only great thing."

"Which is, Peter?"

"God, of course--Almighty God; Jesus, if you will, but I'm not in a mood for the tenderness of that. It's God Himself Who offers tired and sad people, and people sick of life, no anodyne, no mere rest, but stir and fight and the thrill of things nobly done--nobly tried, Julie, even if nobly failed. Can't you see it? And you and I to-night have been looking at what the world offers--in exchange."

He ceased and dropped into a chair the other side of the fire. A silence fell on them. Then Julie gave a little shiver. "Peter, dear," she said tenderly, "I'm a little tired and cold."

He was up at once and bending over her. "My darling, what a beast I am! I clean forgot you for a minute. What will you have? What about a hot toddy? Shall I make one?" he demanded, smiling. "Donovan taught me how, and I'm really rather good at it."

She smiled back at him, and put her hand up to smooth his hair. "That would be another exchange, Peter," she said, "and I don't want it. Only one thing can warm me to-night and give me rest."

He read what she meant in her eyes, and knelt beside the chair to put his arms around her. She leaned her face on his shoulder, and returned the kisses that he showered upon her. "Poor mayflies," she said to herself, "how they love to dance in the sun!"

## CHAPTER IX

Ever after that next day, the Saturday, will remain in Peter's memory as a time by itself, of special significance, but a significance, except for one incident, very hard to place. It began, indeed, very quietly, and very happily. They breakfasted again in their own room, and Julie was in one of her subdued moods, if one ever could say she was subdued. Afterwards Peter lit a cigarette and strolled over to the window. "It's a beastly day," he said, "cloudy, cold, windy, and going to rain, I think. What shall we do? Snow up in the hotel all the time?"

"No," said Julie emphatically, "something quite different. You shall show me some of the real London sights, Westminster Abbey to begin with. Then we'll drive along the Embankment and you shall tell me what everything is, and we'll go and see anything else you suggest. I don't suppose you realise, Peter, that I'm all but absolutely ignorant of London."

He turned and smiled on her. "And you really *want* to see these things?" he said.

"Yes, of course I do. You don't think I suggested it for your benefit? But if it will make you any happier, I'll flatter you a bit. I want to see those things now, with you, partly because I'm never likely to find anyone who can show me them better. Now then. Aren't you pleased?"

At that, then, they started. Westminster came first, and they wandered all over it and saw as much as the conditions of war had left for the public to see. It amused Peter to show Julie the things that seemed to him to have a particular interest--the Chapter House, St. Faith's Chapel, the tomb of the Confessor, and so on. She made odd comments. In St. Faith's she said: "I don't say many prayers, Peter, but here I couldn't say one."

"Why not?" he demanded.

"Because it's too private," she said quaintly. "I should think I was pretending to be a saint if I went past everybody else and the vergers and things into a little place like this all by myself. Everyone would know that I was doing something which most people don't do. See? Why don't people pray all over the church, as they do in France in a cathedral, Peter?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "Come on," he said; "your notions are all topsy-turvy, Julie. Come and look at the monuments."

They wandered down the transept, and observed the majesty of England in stone, robed in togas, declaiming to the Almighty, and obviously convinced that He would be intensely interested; or perhaps dying in the arms of a semi-dressed female, with funeral urns or ships or cannon in the background; or, at least in one case, crouching hopelessly, before the dart of a triumphant death. Julie was certainly impressed, "They are all like ancient Romans, Peter," she said, "and much more striking than those Cardinals and Bishops and Kings, kneeling at prayer, in Rouen Cathedral. But, still, they were *not* ancient Romans, were they? They were all Christians, I suppose. Is there a Christian monument anywhere about?"

"I don't know," said Peter, "but we'll walk round and see."

They made a lengthy pilgrimage, and finally Peter arrested her. "Here's one," he said.

A Georgian Bishop in bas-relief looked down on them, fat and comfortable. In front of him was a monstrous cup, and a plate piled with biggish squares of stone. Julie did not realise what it was. "What's he doing with all that lump-sugar?" she demanded.

Peter was really a bit horrified. "You're an appalling pagan," he said. "Come away!" And they came.

They roamed along the Embankment. Julie was as curious as a child, and wanted to know all about everything, from Boadicea, Cleopatra's Needle, and the Temple Church, to Dewar's Whisky Works and the Hotel Cecil. Thereabouts, Julie asked the name of the squat tower and old red-brick buildings opposite, and when she heard it was Lambeth Palace instantly demanded to visit it. Peter was doubtful if they could, but they crossed to see, and they were shown a good deal by the courtesy of the authorities. The Archbishop was away, to Peter's great relief, for as likely as not Julie would have insisted on an introduction, but they saw the chapel and the dining-hall amongst other things. The long line of portraits fascinated her, but not as it fascinated Peter. The significance of the change in the costumes of the portraits struck him for the first time--first the cope and mitre and cross, then the skull-cap and the tippet, then the balloon-sleeves and the wig, then the coat and breeches and white cravat, then the academic robes, and then a purple cassock. Its interest to Julie was other, however. "Peter," she whispered, "perhaps you'll be there one day."

He looked at her sharply, but she was not mocking him, and, marvelling at her simplicity and honest innocence, he relaxed into a smile. "Not very likely, my dear," he said. "In other days a pleasant underground cell in the Lollards' Tower would have been more likely."

Then, of course, Julie must see the famous tower, and see a little of it they did. She wanted to know what Lollardy was; their guide attempted an explanation. Julie was soon bored. "I can't see why people make such a bother about such things," she said. "A man's religion is his own business, surely, and he must settle it for himself. Don't you think so, Peter?"

"Is it his own business only?" he asked gravely.

"Whose else should it be?" she demanded.

"God's," said Peter simply.

Julie stared at him and sighed. "You're very odd, Peter," she said, "but you do say things that strike one as being true. Go on."

"Oh, there's no more to say," said Peter, "except, perhaps, this: if anyone or any Church honestly believed that God had committed His share in the business to them--well, then he might justifiably feel that he or it had a good deal to do with the settling of another man's religion. Hence this tower, Julie, and as a matter of fact, my dear, hence me, past and present. But come on."

She took his arm with a little shiver which he was beginning to notice from time to time in her. "It's a horrible idea, Peter," she said. "Yes, let's go."

So their taxi took them to Buckingham Palace and thereabouts, and by chance they saw the King and Queen. Their Majesties drove by smartly in morning dress with a couple of policemen ahead, and a few women waved handkerchiefs, and Peter came to the salute, and Julie cheered. The Queen turned towards where she was standing, and bowed, and Peter noticed, amazed, that the eyes of the Colonial girl were wet, and that she did not attempt to hide it.

He had to question her. "I shouldn't have thought you'd have felt about royalty like that, Julie," he said.

"Well, I do," she said, "and I don't care what you say. Only I wish they'd go about with the Life Guards. The King's a King to me. I suppose he is only a man, but I don't want to think of him so. He stands for the Empire and for the Flag, and he stands for England too. I'd obey that man almost in anything, right or wrong, but I don't know that I'd obey anyone else."

"Then you're a survival of the Dark Ages," he said.

"Don't be a beast!" said Julie.

"All right, you're not, and indeed I don't know if I am right. Very likely you're the very embodiment of the spirit of the Present Day. Having lost every authority, you crave for one."

Julie considered this. "There may be something in that," she said. "But I don't like you when you're clever. It was the King, and that's enough for me. And I don't want to see anything more. I'm hungry; take me to lunch."

Peter laughed. "That's it," he said--"like the follower of Prince Charlie who shook hands once with his Prince and then vowed he would never shake hands with anyone again. So you've seen the King, and you won't see anything else, only your impression won't last twelve hours, fortunately."

"I don't suppose the other man kept his vow," said Julie. "For one thing, no man ever does. Come on!"

And so they drifted down the hours until the evening theatre and *Carminetta*. They said and did nothing in particular, but they just enjoyed themselves. In point of fact, they were emotionally tired, and, besides, they wanted to forget how the time sped by. The quiet day was, in its own way too, a preparation for the evening feast, and they were both in the mood to enjoy the piece intensely when it came. The magnificence of the new theatre in which it was staged all helped. Its wide, easy stairways, its many conveniences, its stupendous auditorium, its packed house, ushered it well in. Even the audience seemed different from that of last night.

Julie settled herself with a sigh of satisfaction to listen and watch. And they both grew silent as the opera proceeded. At first Julie could not contain her delight. "Oh, she's perfect, Peter," she exclaimed--"a little bit of life! Look how she shakes her hair back and how impudent she is--just like one of those French girls you know too much about! And she's boiling passion too. And a regular devil. I love her, Peter!"

"She's very like you, Julie," said Peter.

Julie flashed a look at him. "Rubbish!" she said, but was silent.

They watched while *Carminetta* set herself to win her bet and steal the heart of the hero from the Governor's daughter. They watched her force the palace ballroom, and forgot the obvious foolishness of a great deal of it in the sense of the drama that was being worked out. The whole house grew still. The English girl, with her beauty, her civilisation, her rank and place, made her appeal to her fiancé; and the Spanish bastard dancer, with her daring, her passion, her naked humanity, so coarse and so intensely human, made her appeal also. And they watched while the young conventionally-bred officer hesitated; they watched till *Carminetta* won.

Julie, leaning forward, held her breath and gazed at the beautiful fashionable room on the stage, gazed through the open French windows to the moonlit garden and the night beyond, and gazed, though at last she could hardly see, at the Spanish girl. That great renunciation held them both entranced. So bitter-sweet, so humanly divine, the passionate, heart-broken, heroic song of farewell, swelled and thrilled about them. And with the last notes the child of the gutter reached up and up till she made the supreme self-sacrifice, and stepped out of the gay room into the dark night for the sake of the man she loved too much to love.

Then Julie bowed her head into her hands, and in the silence and darkness of their box burst into tears. And so, for the first and last time, Peter heard her really weep.

He said foolish man-things to comfort her. She looked up at last, smiling, her brown eyes challengingly brave through her tears, "Peter, forgive me," she said. "I shouldn't be such a damned fool! You never thought I could be like that, did you? But it was so superbly done, I couldn't help it. It's all over now--all over, Peter," she added soberly. "I want to sit in the lounge to-night for a little, if you don't mind. Could you possibly get a taxi? I don't want to walk."

It was difficult to find one. Finally Peter and another officer made a bolt simultaneously and each got hold of a door of a car that was just coming up. Both claimed it, and the chauffeur looked round good-humouredly at the disputants. "Settle it which-hever way you like, gents," he said. "Hi don't care, but settle it soon."

"Let's toss," said Peter.

"Right-o," said the other man, and produced a coin.

"Tails," whispered Julie behind Peter, and "Tails!" he called.

The coin spun while the little crowd looked on in amusement, and tails it was. "Damn!" said the other, and turned away.

"A bad loser, Peter," said Julie; "and he's just been seeing *Carminetta*, too! But am I not lucky! I almost always win."

In the palm lounge Julie was very cheerful. "Coffee, Peter," she said, "and liqueurs."

"No drinks after nine-thirty," said the waiter. "Sorry, sir."

Julie laughed. "I nearly swore, Peter," she said, "but I remembered in time. If one can't get what one wants, one has to go without singing. But I'll have a cigarette, not to say two, before we've finished. And I'm in no hurry; I want to sit on here and pretend it's not Saturday night. And I want to go very slowly to bed, and I don't want to sleep."

"Is that the effect of the theatre?" asked Peter. "And why so different from last night?"

Julie evaded. "Don't you feel really different?" she demanded.

"Yes," he said.

"How?"

"Well, I don't want to preach any sermon to-night. It's been preached."

Julie drew hard on her cigarette, and blew out a cloud of smoke. "It has, Peter," she said merrily, "and thank the Lord I am therefore spared another."

"You're very gay about it now, Julie, but you weren't at first. That play made me feel rather miserable too. No, I think it made me feel small. *Carminetta* was great, wasn't she? I don't know that there is anything greater than that sort of sacrifice. And it's far beyond me," said Peter.

Julie leaned back and hummed a bar or two that Peter recognised from the last great song of the dancer.

"Well, my dear, I was sad, wasn't I?" she said. "But it's over. There's no use in sadness, is there?"

Peter did not reply, and started as Julie suddenly laughed. "Oh, good Lord, Peter!" she exclaimed, "to what *are* you bringing me? Do you know that I'm about to quote Scripture? And I damn-well shall if we sit on here! Let's walk up Regent Street; I can't sit still. Come on." She jumped up.

"Just now," he said, "you wanted to sit still for ages, and now you want to walk. What is the matter with you, Julie? And what was the text?"

"That would be telling!" she laughed. "But can't I do anything I like, Peter?" she demanded. "Can't I go and get drunk if I like, Peter, or sit still, or dance down Regent Street, or send you off to bed and pick up a nice boy? It would be easy enough here. Can't I, Peter?"

Her mood bewildered him, and, without in the least understanding why, he resented her levity. But he tried to hide it. "Of course you can," he said lightly; "but you don't really want to do those things, do you--especially the last, Julie?"

She stood there looking at him, and then, in a moment, the excitement died out of her voice and eyes. She dropped into a chair again. "No, Peter," she said, "I don't. That's the marvel of it. I expect I shall, one of these days, do most of those things, and the last as well, but I don't think I'll ever *want* to do them again. And that's what you've done to me, my dear."

Peter was very moved. He slipped his hand out and took hers under cover of her dress. "My darling," he whispered, "I owe you everything. You have given me all, and I won't hold back all from you. Do you remember, Julie, that once I said I thought I loved you more than God? Well, I know now--oh yes, I believe I do know now. But I choose you, Julie."

Her eyes shone up at him very brightly, and he could not read them altogether. But her lips whispered, and he thought he understood.

"Oh, Peter, my dearest," she said, "thank God I have at least heard you say that. I wouldn't have missed you saying those words for anything, Peter."

So might the serving-girl in Pilate's courtyard have been glad, had she been in love.

## CHAPTER X

Part at least of Julie's programme was fulfilled to the letter, for they lay long in bed talking--desultory, reminiscent talk, which sent Peter's mind back over the months and the last few days, even after Julie was asleep in the bed next his. Like a pageant, he passed, in review scene after scene, turning it over, and wondering at significances that he had not before, imagined. He recalled their first meeting, that instantaneous attraction, and he asked himself what had caused it. Her spontaneity, freshness, and utter lack of conventionality, he supposed, but that did not seem to explain all. He wondered at the change that had even then come about in himself that he should have been so entranced by her, He went over his early hopes and fears; he thought again of conversations with Langton; and he realised afresh how true it was that the old authorities had dwindled away; that no allegiance had been left; that his had been a citadel without a master. And then Julie moved through his days again--Julie at Caudebec, daring, iconoclastic, free; Julie at Abbeville, mysterious, passionate, dominant; Julie at Dieppe--ah, Julie at Dieppe! He marvelled that he had held out so long after Dieppe, and then Louise rose before him. He understood Louise less than Julie, perhaps, and with all the threads in his hand he failed to see the pattern. He turned over restlessly. It was easy to see how they had come to be in London; it would have been more remarkable if they had not so come together; but now, what now? He could not sum up Julie amid the shifting scenes of the last few days. She had been so loving, and yet, in a way, their love had reached no climax. It had, indeed, reached what he would once have thought a complete and ultimate climax, but plainly Julie did not think so. And nor did he--now. The things of the spirit were, after all, so much greater than the things of the flesh. The Julie of Friday night had been his, but of this night...? He rolled over again. What had she meant at the play? He told himself her tears were simple emotion, her laughter simple reaction, but he knew it was not true....

And for himself? Well, Julie was Julie. He loved her intensely. She could stir him to anything almost. He loved to be with her, to see her, to hear her, but he did not feel satisfied. He knew that. He told himself that he was an introspective fool; that nothing ever would seem to satisfy him; that the centre of his life *was* and would be Julie; that she was real, tinglingly, intensely real; but he knew that that was not the last word. And then and there he resolved that the last word should be spoken on the morrow, that had, indeed, already come by the clock: she should promise to marry him.

He slept, perhaps, for an hour or two, but he awoke with the dawn. The grey light was stealing in at the windows, and Julie slept beside him in the bed between. He tried to sleep again, but could not, and, on a sudden, had an idea. He got quietly out of bed.

"What is it, Peter?" said Julie sleepily.

He went round and leaned over her. "I can't sleep any more, dearest," he said. "I think I'll dress and go for a bit of a walk. Do you mind? I'll be in to breakfast."

"No," she said. "Go if you want to. You are a restless old thing!"

He dressed silently, and kept the bathroom door closed as he bathed and shaved. She was asleep again as he stole out, one arm flung loosely on the counterpane, her hair untidy on the pillow. He kissed a lock of it, and let himself quietly out of their suite.

It was still very early, and the Circus looked empty and strange. He walked down Piccadilly, and wondered at the clean, soft touch of the dawning day, and recalled another memorable Sunday morning walk. He passed very familiar places, and was conscious of feeling an exile, an inevitable one, but none the less an exile, for all that. And so he came into St. James's Park, still as aimlessly as he had left the hotel.

Before him, clear as a pointing finger in the morning sky, was the campanile of that stranger among the great cathedrals of England. It attracted him for the first time, and he made all but unconsciously towards it, Peter

was not even in the spiritual street that leads to the gates of the Catholic Church, and it was no incipient Romanism that moved him. He was completely ignorant of the greater part of that faith, and, still more, had no idea of the gulf that separates it from all other religions. He would have supposed, if he had stopped to think, that, as with other sects, one considered its tenets, made up one's mind as to their truth or falsehood one by one, and if one believed a sufficient majority of them joined the Church. It was only, then, the mood of the moment, and when, he found himself really moving towards that finger-post he excused himself by thinking that as he was, by his own act, exiled, from, more familiar temples, he would visit this that would have about it a suggestion of France.

He wondered if it would be open as he turned into Ashley Gardens. He glanced at his watch; it was only just after seven. Perhaps an early Mass might be beginning. He went to the central doors and found them fast; then he saw little groups of people and individuals like himself making for the door in the great tower, and these he followed within.

He stood amazed for a few minutes. The vast soaring space, so austere in its bare brick, gripped his imagination. The white and red and gold of the painted Christ that hung so high and monstrous before the entrance to the marbles of the sanctuary almost troubled him. It dominated everything so completely that he felt he could not escape it. He sought one of the many chairs and knelt down.

A little bell tinkled, Peter glanced sideways towards the sound, and saw that a Mass was in progress in a side-chapel of gleaming mosaics, and that a soldier in uniform served. Hardly had he taken the details in, when another bell claimed his attention. It came from across the wide nave, and he perceived that another chapel had its Mass, and a considerable congregation. And then, his attention aroused, he began to spy about and to take in the thing.

The whole vast cathedral was, as it were, alive. Seven or eight Masses were in progress. One would scarcely finish before another priest, preceded by soldier in uniform or server in cassock and cotta, would appear from beyond the great pulpit and make his way to yet another altar. The small handbells rang out again and again and again, and still priest after priest was there to take his place. Peter began cautiously to move about. He became amazed at the size of the congregation. They had been lost in that great place, but every chapel had its people, and there were, in reality, hundreds scattered about in the nave alone.

He knelt for awhile and watched the giving of Communion in the guarded chapel to the north of the high altar. Its gold and emblazoned gates were not for him, but he could at least kneel and watch those who passed in and out. They were of all sorts and classes, of all ranks and ages; men, women, children, old and young, rich and poor, soldier and civilian, streamed in and out again. Peter sighed and left them. He found an altar at which Mass was about to begin, and he knelt at the back on a mosaic pavement in which fishes and strange beasts were set in a marble stream, and watched. And it was not one Mass that he watched, but two or three, and it was there that a vision grew on his inner understanding, as he knelt and could not pray.

It is hard and deceptive to write of those subconscious imaginings that convict the souls of most men some time or another. In that condition things are largely what we fashion them to be, and one may be thought to be asserting their ultimate truth in speaking of their influence. But there is no escaping from the fact that Peter Graham of a lost allegiance began that Sunday morning to be aware of another claimant. And this is what dawned upon him, and how.

A French memory gave him a starting-point. Here, at these Low Masses, it was more abundantly plain than ever that these priests did not conceive themselves to be serving a congregation, but an altar. One after the other they moved through a ritual, and spoke low sentences that hardly reached him, with their eyes holden by that which they did. At first he was only conscious of this, but then he perceived the essential change that came over each in his turn. The posturing and speaking was but introductory to the moment when they raised the Host and knelt before it. It was as if they were but functionaries ushering in a King, and then effacing

themselves before Him.

Here, then, the Old Testament of Peter's past became to him a schoolmaster. He heard himself repeating again the comfortable words of the Prayer-Book service: "Come unto Me...." "God so loved...." "If any man sin...." Louise's hot declaration forced itself upon him: "It is He Who is there." And it was then that the eyes of his mind were enlightened and he saw a vision--not, indeed, of the truth of the Roman Mass (if it be true), and not of the place of the Sacrament in the Divine scheme of things, but the conception of a love so great that it shook him as if it were a storm, and bowed him before it as if he were a reed.

The silent, waiting Jesus.... All these centuries, in every land.... How He had been mocked, forgotten, spurned, derided, denied, cast out; and still He waited. Prostitutes of the streets, pardoned in a word, advanced towards Him, and He knew that so shortly again, within the secret place of their hearts, He would be crucified; but still He waited. Careless men, doubtless passion-mastered, came up to Him, and He knew the sort that came; but still He waited. He, Peter, who had not known He was here at all, and who had gone wandering off in search of any mistress, spent many days, turned in by chance, and found Him here. What did He wait for? Nothing; there was nothing that anyone could give, nothing but a load of shame, the offering of a body spent by passionate days, the kiss of traitor-lips; but still He waited. He did more than wait. He offered Himself to it all. He had bound Himself by an oath to be kissed if Judas planned to kiss Him, and He came through the trees to that bridal with the dawn of every day. He had foreseen the chalice, foreseen that it would be filled at every moon and every sun by the bitter gall of ingratitude and wantonness and hate, but He had pledged Himself--"Even so, Father"--and He was here to drink it. Small wonder, then, that the paving on which Peter Graham knelt seemed to swim before his eyes until it was in truth a moving ocean of love that streamed from the altar and enclosed of every kind, and even him.

The movement of chairs and the gathering of a bigger congregation than usual near a chapel that Peter perceived to be for the dead aroused him. He got up to go. He walked quickly up Victoria Street, and marvelled over the scene he had left. In sight of Big Ben he glanced up--twenty to nine! He had been, then, an hour and a half in the cathedral. He recalled having read that a Mass took half an hour, and he began to reckon how many persons had heard Mass even while he had been there. Not less than five hundred at every half-hour, and most probably more. Fifteen hundred to two thousand souls, of every sort and kind, then, had been drawn in to that all but silent ceremony, to that showing of Jesus crucified. A multitude--and what compassion!

Thus he walked home, thinking of many things, but the vision he had seen was uppermost and would not be displaced. It was still in his eyes as he entered their bedroom and found Julie looking at a magazine as she lay in bed, smoking a cigarette.

"Lor', Peter, are you back? I suppose I ought to be up, but I was so sleepy. What's the time? Why, what's the matter? Where have you been?"

Peter did not go over to her at once as she had expected. It was not that he felt he could not, or anything like that, but simply that he was only thinking of her in a secondary way. He walked to the dressing-table and lifted the flowers she had worn the night before and put there in a little glass.

"Where have you been, old Solomon?" demanded Julie again.

"Seeing wonders, Julie," said Peter, looking dreamily at the blossoms.

"No? Really? What? Do tell me. If it was anything I might have seen, you were a beast not to come back for me, d'you hear?"

Peter turned and stared at her, but she knew as he looked that he hardly saw her. Her tone changed, and she

made a little movement with her hand, "Tell me, Peter," she said again.

"I've seen," said Peter slowly, "a bigger thing than I thought the world could hold, I've seen something so wonderful, Julie, that it hurt--oh, more than I can say. I've seen Love, Julie."

She could not help it. It was a foolish thing to say just then, she knew, but it came out. "Oh, Peter," she said, "did you have to leave me to see that?"

"Leave you?" he questioned, and for a moment so lost in his thought was he that he did not understand what she meant. Then it dawned on him, and he smiled. He did not see as he stood there, the clumsy Peter, how the two were related. So he smiled, and he came over to her, and took her hand, and sat on the bed, his eyes still full of light. "Oh, you've nothing to do with it," he said. "It's far bigger than you or I, Julie. Our love is like a candle held up to the sun beside it. Our love wants something, doesn't it? It burns, it--it intoxicates, Julie. But this love waits, *waits*, do you understand? It asks nothing; it gives, it suffices all. Year after year it just waits, Julie, waits for anyone, waits for everyone. And you can spurn it, spit on it, crucify it, and it is still there when you--need, Julie." And Peter leaned forward, and buried his face in her little hand.

Julie heard him through, and it was well that before the end he did not see her eyes. Then she moved her other hand which held the half-burnt cigarette and dropped the smoking end (so that it made a little hiss) into her teacup on the glass-topped table, and brought her hand back, and caressed his hair as he lay bent forward there. "Dear old Peter," she said tenderly, "how he thinks things! And when you saw this--this love, Peter, how did you feel?"

He did not answer for a minute, and when he did he did not raise his head. "Oh, I don't know, Julie," he said. "It went through and through me. It was like a big sea, and it flooded me away. It filled me. I seemed to drink it in at every pore. I felt satisfied just to be there."

"And then you came back to Julie, eh, Peter?" she questioned.

"Why, of course," he said, sitting up with a smile. "Why not?" He gave a little laugh. "Why, Julie," he said, "I never thought of that before. I suppose I ought to have been--oh, I don't know, but our days together didn't seem to make any difference. That Love was too big. It seemed to me to be too big to be--well, jealous, I suppose."

She nodded. "That would be just it, Peter. That's how it would seem to you. You see, I know. It's strange, my dear, but I don't feel either--jealous."

He frowned. "What do you mean?" he said. "Don't you understand? It was God's Love that I saw."

She hesitated a second, and then her face relaxed into a smile. "You're as blind as a bat, my dear, but I suppose all men are, and so you can't help it. Now go and ring for breakfast and smoke a cigarette in the sitting-room while I dress." And Peter, because he hated to be called a bat and did not feel in the least like one, went.

He rang the bell, and the maid answered it. She did not wait for him to give his order, but advanced towards him, her eyes sparkling. "Oh, sir," she said, "is madame up? I don't know how to thank her, and you too. I've wanted a frame for Jack's picture, but I couldn't get a real good one, I couldn't. When I sees this parcel I couldn't think *what* it was. I forgot even as how I'd give the lady my name. Oh, she's the real good one, she is. You'll forgive me, sir, but I know a real lady when I see one. They haven't got no airs, and they know what a girl feels like, right away. I put Jack in it, sir, on me table, and if there's anything I can do for you or your lady, now or ever, I'll do it, sir."

Peter smiled at the little outburst, but his heart warmed within him. How just like Julie it was! "Well," he said, "it's the lady you've really to thank. Knock, if you like; I expect she'll let you in. And then order breakfast, will you? Bacon and eggs and some fish. Thanks." And he turned away.

She made for the door, but stopped, "I near forgot, sir," she said. "A gentleman left this for you last night, and they give it to me at the office--this morning. There was no answer, he said. He went by this morning's train." She handed Peter an unstamped envelope bearing the hotel's name, and left the room as he opened it. He did not recognise the handwriting, but he tore it open and glanced at once at the signature, and got a very considerable surprise, not to say a shock. It was signed "Jack Donovan."

"MY DEAR GRAHAM, [the letter ran],

"Forgive me for writing, but I must tell you that I've seen you twice with Julie (and each time neither of you saw anyone else but yourselves!). It seems mean to see you and not say so, but for the Lord's sake don't think it'll go further, or that I reproach you. I've been there myself, old bird, and in any case I don't worry about other people's shows. But I want to tell you a bit of news--Tommy Raynard and I have fixed it up. I know you'll congratulate me. She's topping, and just the girl for me--no end wiser than I, and as jolly as anyone, really. I don't know how you and Julie are coming out of it, and I won't guess, for it's a dreadful war; but maybe you'll be able to sympathise with me at having to leave *my* girl in France! However, I'm off back to-morrow, a day before you. If you hadn't run off to Paris, you'd have known. My leave order was from Havre.

"Well, cheerio. See you before long. And just one word, my boy, from a fellow who has seen a bit more than you (if you'll forgive me): remember, *Julie'll know best*.

"Yours, ever, "JACK DONOVAN."

Peter frowned over his letter, and then smiled, and then frowned again. He was still at it when he heard Julie's footstep outside, and he thrust the envelope quickly into his pocket, thinking rapidly. He did not in the least understand what the other meant, especially by the last sentence, and he wanted to consider it before showing Julie. Also, he wondered if it was meant to be shown to Julie at all. He thought not; probably Donovan was absolutely as good as his word, and would not even mention anything to Tommy. But he thought no more, for Julie was on him.

"Peter, it's started to rain! I knew it would. Why does it always rain on Sundays in London? Probably the heavens themselves weep at the sight of so gloomy a city. However, I don't care a damn! I've made up my mind what we're going to do. We shall sit in front of the fire all the morning, and you shall read to me. Will you?"

"Anything you like, my darling," he said; "and we couldn't spend a better morning. But bacon and eggs first, eh? No, fish first, I mean. But pour out a cup of tea at once, for Heaven's sake. *I* haven't had a drop this morning."

"Poor old thing! No wonder you're a bit off colour. No early tea after that champagne last night! But, oh, Peter, wasn't *Carminetta* a dream?"

Breakfast over, Peter sat in a chair and bent over her. "What do you want me to read, Julie darling?" he demanded.

She considered. "*Not* a magazine, *not La Vie Parisienne*, though we might perhaps look at the pictures part of the time. I know! Stop! I'll get it," She ran out and returned with a little leather-covered book. "Read it right through, Peter," she said. "I've read it heaps of times, but I want to hear it again to-day. Do you mind?"

"Omar Khayyám!" exclaimed Peter. "Good idea! He's a blasphemous old pagan, but the verse is glorious and it fits in at times. Do you want me to start at once?"

"Give me a cigarette! no, put the box there. Stir up the fire. Come and sit on the floor with your back to me. That's right. Now fire away."

She leaned back and he began. He read for the rhythm; she listened for the meaning. He read to the end; she hardly heard more than a stanza:

"Oh, threats of Hell and Hopes of Paradise! One thing at least is certain--*this* Life flies; One thing is certain, and the rest is lies-- The flower that once has blown for ever dies."

They lunched in the hotel, and at the table Peter put the first necessary questions that they both dreaded. "I'm going to tell them to make out my bill, Julie," he said. "I've to be at Victoria at seven-thirty a.m. to-morrow, you know. You've still got some leave, haven't you, dear; what are you going to do? How long will you stay on here?"

"Not after you've gone, Peter," she said. "Let them make it out for me till after breakfast to-morrow."

"But what are we going to do?" he demanded.

"Oh, don't ask. It spoils to-day to think of to-morrow. Go to my friends, perhaps--yes, I think that. It's only for a few days now."

"Oh, Julie, I wish I could stay."

"So do I, but you can't, so don't worry. What about this afternoon?"

"If it's stopped raining, let's go for a walk, shall we?"

They settled on that, and it was Julie who took him again to St. James's Park. As they walked: "Where did you go to church this morning, Peter?" she asked.

He pointed to the campanile. "Over there," he said.

"Then let's go together to-night," she said.

"Do you mean it, Julie?"

"Of course I do. I'm curious. Besides, it's Sunday, and I want to go to church."

"But you'll miss dinner," objected Peter. "It begins at six-thirty."

"Well, let's get some food out--Victoria Station, for instance. Won't that do? We can have some supper sent up afterwards in the hotel."

Peter agreed, but they did not go to the station. In a little cafe outside Julie saw a South African private eating eggs and bacon, and nothing would do but that they must do the same. So they went in. They ate off thick plates, and Julie dropped the china pepper-pot on her eggs and generally behaved as if she were at a school-treat. But it was a novelty, and it kept their thoughts off the fact that it was the last night. And finally they went to church.

The service did not impress Peter, and every time he looked at Julie's face he wanted to laugh; but the atmosphere of the place did, though he could not catch the impression of the morning. For the sermon, a stoutish, foreign-looking ecclesiastic mounted the pulpit, and they both prepared to be bored. However, he gave out his text, and Peter sat bolt upright at once. It would have delighted the ears of his Wesleyan corporal of the Forestry; and more than that it was the text he had quoted in the ears of the dying Jenks. He prepared keenly to listen. As for Julie, she was regarding the altar with a far-away look in her eyes, and she scarcely moved the whole time.

Outside, as soon as they were out of the crowd, Peter began at once.

"Julie," he said, "whatever did you think of that sermon?"

"What did you?" she said. "Tell me first."

"I don't believe you listened at all, but I can't help talking of it. It was amazing. He began by speaking about Adam and Eve and original sin and the Garden of Eden as if he'd been there. There might never have been a Higher Critic in existence. Then he said what sin did, and that sin was only truly sin if it did do that. *That* was to hide the face of God, to put Him and a human being absolutely out of communication, so to speak. And then he came to Christ, to the Cross. Did you hear him, Julie? Christ comes in between--He got in between God and man. All the anger that darted out of God against sin hit Him; all the blows that man struck back against God hit Him. Do you see that, Julie? That was wonderfully put, but the end was more wonderful. Both, ultimately, cannot kill the Heart of Jesus. There's no sin there to merit or to feel the anger, and we can hurt, but we can't destroy His love."

Peter stopped, "That's what I saw a little this morning," he said after a minute.

"Well?" said Julie.

"Oh, it's all so plain! If there was a way to that Heart, one would be safe. I mean, a way that is not an emotional idea, not a subjective experience, but something practical. Some way that a Tommy could travel, as easily as anyone, and get to a real thing. And he said there was a way, and just sketched it, the Sacraments--more than ours, of course, their seven, all of them more or less, I suppose. He meant that the Sacraments were not signs of salvation, but salvation itself. Julie, I never saw the idea before. It's colossal. It's a thing to which one might dedicate one's life. It's a thing to live and die gladly for. It fills one. Don't you think so, Julie?" He spoke exultantly.

"Peter, to be honest," said Julie, "I think you're talking fanatical rubbish."

"Do you really, Julie? You can't, *surely* you can't."

"But I do, Peter," she said sadly; "it makes no appeal to me. I can only see one great thing in life, and it's not that. 'The rest is lies,' But, oh! surely that great thing might not be false too. But why do you see one thing, and I another, my dear?"

"I don't know," said Peter, "unless--well, perhaps it's a kind of gift, Julie, 'If thou knewest the gift of God...' Not that I know, only I can just see a great wonderful vision, and it fills my sight."

"I, too," she said; "but it's not your vision."

"What is it, then?" said he, carried away by his own ideas and hardly thinking of her.

Her voice brought him back. "Oh, Peter, don't you know even yet?"

He took her arm very tenderly at that. "My darling," he said, "the two aren't incompatible. Julie, don't be sad. I love you; you know I love you. I wish we'd never gone to the place if you think I don't, but I haven't changed towards you a bit, Julie. I love you far, far more than anyone else. I won't give you up, even to God!"

It was dark where they were. Julie lifted her face to him just there. He thought he had never heard her speak as she spoke now, there, in a London street, under the night sky. "Peter, my darling," she said, "my brave boy. How I love you, Peter! I know *you* won't give me up, Peter, and I adore you for it. Peter, hell will be heaven with the memory of that!" There, then, he sealed her with his kiss.

\* \* \* \* \*

Julie stirred in his arms, but the movement did not wake him any more than the knock of the door had done. "All right," she called. "Thank you," and, leaning over, she switched on the light. It was 5.30, and necessary. In its radiance she bent over him, and none of her friends had ever seen her look as she did then. She kissed him, and he opened his eyes.

"Half-past five, Peter," she said, as gaily as she could. "You've got to get a move on, my dear. Two hours to dress and pack and breakfast--no, I suppose you can do that on the train. But you've got to get there. Oh, Lord, how it brings the war home, doesn't it? Jump up!"

Peter sighed. "Blast the war!" he said lazily. "I shan't move. Kiss me again, you darling, and let your hair fall over my face."

She did so, and its glossy curtain hid them. Beneath the veil she whispered; "Come, darling, for my sake. The longer you stay here now, the harder it will be."

He threw his arms round her, and then jumped out of bed yawning.

"That's it," she said. "Now go and shave and bath while I pack for you. Hurry up; then we'll get more time."

While he splashed about she sought for his things, and packed for him as she never packed for herself. As she gathered them she thought of the night before, when, overwhelmed in a tempest of love, it had all been left for the morning. She filled the suit-case, but she could not fasten it.

"Come and help, Peter," she called.

He came out. She was kneeling on it in her loose kimono, her hair all about her, her nightdress open at the throat. He drank her beauty in, and then mastered himself for a minute and shut the case. "That all?" she queried.

"Yes," he said. "You get back into bed, my darling, or you'll catch cold. I'll be ready in a second, and then we can have a few minutes together."

At the glass he marshalled his arguments, and then he came over to her. He dropped by the bedside and wound his arms about her. "Julie," he whispered, "my darling, say you'll marry me--please, *please!*"

She made no reply. He kissed her, unresisting, again and again.

"Julie," he said, "you know how I love you. You do know it. You know I'm not begging you to marry me because I've got something out of you, perhaps when you were carried away, and now I feel I must make reparation. My darling, it isn't that. I love you so much that I can't live without you. I'll give up everything for you. I want to start a new life with you. I can't go back to the old, anyhow; I don't want to: it's a sham to me

now, and I hate shams--you know I do. But you're not a sham; our love isn't a sham. I'd die for you, Julie, my own Julie; I'd die for the least little bit of this hair of yours, I think! But I want to live for you. I want to put you right in the centre of everything, and live for you, Julie. Say 'Yes,' my love, my own. You must say 'Yes,' Why don't you, Julie?"

And still she made no reply.

A kind of despair seized him. "Oh, Julie," he cried, "what can I say or what can I do? You're cruel, Julie; you're killing me! You *must* say 'Yes' before I go. We'll meet in Havre, I know; but that will be so different. I must have my answer now. Oh, my darling, please, please, speak! You love me, Julie, don't you?"

"Peter," said Julie slowly, "I love you so much that I hardly dare speak, lest my love should carry me away. But listen, my dear, listen. Peter, I've watched you these days; I've watched you in France. I've watched you from the moment when I called you over to me because I was interested and felt my fate, I suppose. I've watched you struggling along, Peter, and I understand why you've struggled. You're built for great things, my dear--how great I can't see and I can't even understand. No, Peter, I can't even understand--that's part of the tragedy of it. Peter, I love you so that my love for you *is* my centre, it's my all in all, it's my hope of salvation, Peter. Do you hear, my darling?--my love, it's my one hope! If I can't keep that pure and clean, Peter, I ruin both of us. I love you so, Peter, that I won't marry you!"

He gave a little cry, but swiftly she put a hand over his mouth. She smiled at him as she did so, a daring little smile. "Be quiet, you Solomon, you," she said; "I haven't finished. There! Now listen again, Peter: you can't help it, but you can't love me as I love you. I see it. I--I hate it, I think; but I know it, and there's an end. You, my dear, you *would put me* in the centre, but you can't. I can't put *you* out of *my* centre, Peter. You *would* give up God for me, Peter, but you can't, or if you did, you'd lose us both. But I, Peter--oh, my darling, I have no god but you. And that's why I'll worship you, Peter, and sacrifice to you, Peter, sacrifice to your only ultimate happiness, Peter, and sacrifice my all."

He tried to speak, but he could not. The past days lay before him in a clear light at last. Her love shone on them, and shone too plainly for mistake. He tried to deny, but he couldn't; contradict, but his heart cried the truth, and his eyes could not hide it. But he could and did vent his passion. "Damn God! Curse Him!" he cried. "I hate Him! Why should He master me? I want you, Julie; I will have you; I will worship *you*, Julie!"

She let him speak; and, being Julie, his words only brought a more tender light into her face. "Peter," she said, "one minute. Do you remember where you first kissed me, my darling?--the first real kiss, I mean," and her eyes sparkled with fun even then. "You know--ah, I see you do! You will never forget that, will you? Perhaps you thought I didn't notice, but I did. Neither you nor I chose it; it was Fate; perhaps it was your God, Peter. But, anyway, look at me now as you looked then. What do you see?"

He stared at her, and he saw--how clearly he saw! Her sweet back-bent head, her shining eyes, the lamp-light falling on her hair out of the night. He even heard the sea as it beat on the stones of the quay--or thought he did--and felt the whip of the wind. And behind her, dominating, arms outspread, the harbour crucifix. And she saw that he saw, and she whispered: "*Do* you hate Him, Peter?" And he sank his head into her hands and sobbed great dry sobs.

"Ah, don't, don't," he heard her say--"don't Peter! It's not so bad as that. Your life is going to be full, my beloved, with a great and burning love; and you were right this morning, Peter, more right than you knew. When that is there you will have place even for me--yes, even for me, the love of what you will call your sin. And I, my dear, dear boy, I have something even now which no devil, Peter, and no god can take away."

He looked up. "Then there's a chance, Julie. You won't say 'Yes,' but don't say 'No.' Let us see. I shall take no vows, Julie. I haven't an idea what I shall do, and maybe it won't be quite as you think, and there will be a

little room for you one day. Oh, say you'll wait a while, Julie, just to see!"

It was the supreme moment. She saw no crucifix to sustain her, but she did see the bastard Spanish dancing-girl. And she did not hesitate. "No, Peter," she said, "I would not take that, and you never could give it. I did not mean such place as that. It never can be, Peter; you are not made for me."

And thus did Julie, who knew no God, but Julie of the brave, clean, steadfast heart, give Peter to Him.

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The maid came in answer to her ring. "Will you light a fire, please?" said Julie. "I suppose Captain Graham has gone?"

"Yes, mam, he's gone, and he felt it terrible, I could see. But don't you fear, mam, he'll be kept, I know he will. You're that good, he'll come back to you, never fear. But it's 'ard on those they leave, ain't it, mam?--their wives an' all."

"Yes," said Julie, and she never spoke more bravely. "But it's got to be, hasn't it? Would you pull the blind up? Ah, thanks; why, it's sunny! I'm so glad. It will be good for the crossing."

"It will be that, 'm. We gets the sun first up here. Shall I bring up the tea, madame?"

"I'll ring," said Julie, "when I want it. It won't be for a few minutes yet."

The girl went out, and the door shut behind her. Julie lay on still for a little, and then she got up. She walked to the window and looked out, and she threw her arms wide with a gesture, and shut her eyes, and let the sun fall on her. Then she walked to her little trunk, and rummaged in it. From somewhere far down she drew out a leather case, and with it in her hand she went over and sat by the fire. She held it without moving for a minute, and then she slowly opened it. One by one she drew out a few worthless things--a withered bunch of primroses, a couple of little scribbled notes, a paper cap from a cracker, a menu card, a handkerchief of her own that she had lent to him, and that he (just like Peter) had given back. She held them all in her hand a minute, and then she bent forward and dropped them in the open fire.

And the sun rose a little higher, and fell on the tumbled brown hair that Peter had kissed and that now hid her eyes.

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*Simon Called Peter, by Robert Keable*