The Man on the Other Side

Ada Barnett

THE MAN ON THE OTHER SIDE

BY

ADA BARNETT

NEW YORK
DODD, MEAD AND COMPANY
1922

DEDICATED
TO HIM

"*Oh, I would siege the golden coasts*
Of space, and climb high Heaven's dome,
So I might see those million ghosts
Come home."

Stella Benson

CONTENTS

The Man on the Other Side

CHAPTER I

Ruth Courthope Seer stood on her own doorstep and was content. She looked across the garden and the four-acre field with the white may hedge boundary. It was all hers. Her eyes slowly followed the way of the sun. Another field, lush and green, sloped to a stream, where, if the agents had spoken truth, dwelt trout in dim pools beneath the willows. Field and stream, they too were hers. Good fields they were, clover thick, worthy fields for feed for those five Shorthorns, bought yesterday at Uckfield market.

The love of the land, the joy of possession, the magic of the spring, they swept through her being like great clean winds. She was over forty; she had worked hard all her life. Fate had denied her almost everything—father or mother, brother or sister, husband or children. She had never had a home of her own. And now fate had given her enough money to buy Thorpe Farm. The gift was immense, still almost unbelievable.

"You perfectly exquisite, delicious, duck of a place," she said, and kissed her hand to it.

The house stood high, and she could see on the one hand the dust-white road winding for the whole mile to Mentmore station; on the other, green fields and good brown earth, woodland, valley, and hill, stretching to the wide spaces of the downs, beyond which lay the sea. In 1919, the year of the Great Peace, spring had come late, but in added and surpassing beauty. The great yearly miracle of creation was at its height, and behold, it was very good.

In front of her sat Sarah and Selina. The day's work was over. They had watched seeds planted and seeds watered. They had assisted at the staking of sweet-peas and the two-hourly feeding of small chicken. Now they demanded, as their habit was, in short sharp

barks of a distinctly irritating nature, that they should be taken for a walk.

Sarah and Selina were the sole extravagance of Ruth's forty years of life. They had been unwanted in a hard world. Aberdeens were out of fashion, and their sex, like Ruth's own in the struggle for existence, had been against them. So bare pennies which Ruth could ill afford had gone to the keep of Sarah and Selina, and in return they loved her as only a dog can love.

Sarah was a rather large lady, usually of admirable manners and behaviour. Only once had she seriously fallen from grace, and, to Ruth's horror, had presented her with five black and white puppies of a description unknown before in heaven or earth. Moreover, she was quite absurdly pleased with herself, and Selina was, equally absurdly, quite unbearably jealous.

Selina had never been a lady, either in manners or behaviour. She was younger and smaller than Sarah, and of infinite wickedness both in design and execution.

Ruth looked at them as they sat side by side before her.

"To the stile and back," she said, "and you may have ten minutes' hunt in the wood."

The pathway to the stile led through a field of buttercups, the stile into the station road. That field puzzled Ruth. It was radiantly beautiful, but it was bad farming. Also it was the only bit of bad farming on the whole place. Every other inch of ground was utilized to the best advantage, cultivated up to the hilt, well-fed, infinitely cared for.

Ruth was not curious, and had asked no questions concerning the late owner of Thorpe, nor was any one of this time left on the farm. The war had swept them away. But after two months' possession of the place, she had begun to realize the extraordinary amount of love and care that had been bestowed on it by some one. In a subtle way the late owner had materialized for her. She had begun to wonder why he had done this or that. Once or twice she had caught herself wishing she could ask his advice over some possible improvement.

So she looked at the buttercups and wondered, and by the stile she noticed a hole in the hedge on the left-hand side, and wondered again. It was the only hole she had found in those well-kept hedges.

She sat on the stile and sniffed the spring scents luxuriously, while Sarah and Selina had their hunt. The may, and the wild geranium, and the clover. Heavens, how good it all was! The white road wandered down the hill, but no one came. She had the whole beautiful world to herself. And then a small streak came moving slowly along the centre of the road. Presently it resolved itself into a dog. Tired, sore-footed, by the way it ran, covered with dust, but running steadily. A dog with a purpose. Sarah and Selina, scenting another of their kind, emerged hot foot and giving tongue from the centre of the wood. The dog—Ruth could see now it was a Gordon Setter in haste about his business—slipped through the hole in the hedge, and went, trotting wearily but without pause, across the buttercup field towards the house. To Ruth's amazement, Sarah and Selina made no attempt to follow. Instead they sat down side by side in front of her and proceeded to explain.

Ruth looked at the hole, wondering. "He must have belonged here once, of course," she said, "I wonder how far he has come, the poor dear." She hurried up the slope, and reached the house in time to hear Miss McCox's piercing wail rend the air from the kitchen.

"And into every room has he been like greased lightning before I could hinder, and covered with dust and dirt, and me that have enough to do to keep things clean as it is, with those two dirty beasts that Mistress Seer sets such store by. But it's encouraging such things she is, caring for the brutes that perish more than for Christian men and women with mortal souls——"

Red of face, shrewish of tongue, but most excellent as a cook, Miss McCox paused for breath.

"She do be wonderful set on animals," said the slow Sussex voice of the cowman. He settled his folded arms on the kitchen window-sill. A chat about the new mistress of Thorpe never failed in interest. "But 'tis all right so long as we understand one another."

Ruth passed his broad back, politely blind to Miss McCox's facial efforts to inform him of her appearance in the background.

The dog was now coming up the garden path between apple-trees still thickest with blossom. A drooping dejected dog, a dog sick at heart with disappointment, a dog who could not understand. A dusty forlorn thing wholly out of keeping with the jubilant spring world.

Ruth called to him, and he came, politely and patiently.

"Oh, my dear," she said. "You have come to look for some one and he is not here, and I cannot help you."

She did what she could. Fetched some water, which he drank eagerly, and food, which he would not look at. She bathed his sore feet and brushed the dust from his silky black and tan coat, until he stood revealed as a singularly beautiful dog. So beautiful that even Miss McCox expressed unwilling admiration.

Sarah and Selina behaved with the utmost decorum. This was unusual when a stranger entered their domain. Ruth wondered while she brushed. It seemed they acknowledged some greater right. Perhaps he had belonged to the man who had so loved and cared for Thorpe before she came. And he had left all—and the dog.

Presently the dog lay down in a chosen place from which he could command a view of both the front drive and the road from the station. He lay with his nose between his paws and watched.

After supper Ruth Seer went and sat with him. The stars looked down with clear bright eyes. The night wind brought the scent of a thousand flowers. An immense peace and beauty filled the heavens. Yet, as she sat, she fancied she heard again the low monotonous boom from the Channel to which people had grown so accustomed through the long war years. She knew it could not really be; it was just fancy. But suddenly her eyes were full of tears. She had lost no one out there—she had no one to lose. But she was an English woman. They were all her men. And there were so many white roads, from as many stations.

The next morning the stranger dog had vanished, after, so Miss McCox reported bitterly at 6 A. M., a night spent on the spare-room bed. It was a perfect wonder of a morning. Even on that first morning when the stars sang together it could not have been more wonderful, thought Ruth Seer, looking, as she never tired of looking, at the farm that was hers. The five Shorthorns chewed the cud in the four-acre field. The verdict of Miss McCox, the cowman and the boy, upon them was favourable. To-morrow morning Ruth would have her first lesson in milking. The Berkshire sow, bought also at Uckfield market, had produced during the night, somewhat

unexpectedly, but very successfully, thirteen small black pigs, shining like satin and wholly delectable.

The only blot on the perfection of the day was the behaviour of Selina. At 11 A. M. she was detected by Miss McCox, in full pursuit of the last hatched brood of chicken. Caught, or to be fair to Selina, cornered, by the entire staff, at 11.30, she was well and handsomely whipped, and crept, an apparently chastened dog, into the shelter of the house. There, however, so soon as the clang of the big bell proclaimed the busy dinner hour, she had proceeded to the room sacred to the slumbers of Miss McCox and, undisturbed, had diligently made a hole in the pillow on which Miss McCox's head nightly reposed, extracting therefrom the feathers of many chickens. These she spread lavishly, and without favouritism, over the surface of the entire carpet, and, well content, withdrew silently and discreetly from the precincts of Thorpe Farm.

At tea time she was still missing, and Sarah alone, stiff with conscious rectitude, sat in front of Ruth and ate a double portion of cake and bread-and-butter. Visions of rabbit holes, steel traps, of angry gamekeepers with guns, had begun to form in Ruth's mind. Her well-earned appetite for tea vanished. Full forgiveness and an undeservedly warm welcome awaited Selina whenever she might choose to put in an appearance.

Even Miss McCox, when she cleared away the tea, withdrew the notice given in the heat of discovery, and suggested that Selina might be hunting along the stream. She had seen the strange dog down there no longer than an hour ago.

It seemed to Ruth a hopeful suggestion. Also she loved to wander by the stream. In all her dreams of a domain of her own always there had been running water. And now that too was hers. One of the slow Sussex streams moving steadily and very quietly between flowered banks, under overhanging branches. So quietly that you did not at first realize its strength. So quietly that you did not at first hear its song.

It was that strange and wonderful hour which comes before sunset after a cloudless day of May sunshine, when it is as if the world had laughed, rejoiced, and sung itself to rest in the everlasting arms. There is a sudden hush, a peace falls, a strange silence—if you listen.

Ruth ceased to worry about Selina. She drifted along the path down the stream, and love of the whole world folded her in a great content. A sense of oneness with all that moved and breathed, with the little brethren in hole and hedge, with the flowers' lavish gift of scent and colour, with the warmth of the sun, a oneness that fused her being with theirs as into one perfect flame. Dear God, how good it all was, how wonderful! The marshy ground where the kingcups and the lady smocks were just now in all their gold and silver glory, the wild cherry, lover of water, still in this late season blossoming among its leaves, the pool where the kingfishers lived among the willows and river palms.

And, dreaming, she came to a greensward place where lay the stranger dog. A dog well content, who waved a lazy tail as she came. His nose between his paws, he watched no longer a lonely road. He watched a man. A man in a brown suit who lay full length on the grass. Ruth could not see his face, only the back of a curly head propped by a lean brown hand; and he too was watching something. His absolute stillness made Ruth draw her breath and remain motionless where she stood. No proprietor's fury against trespassers touched her. Perhaps because she had walked so long on the highway, looking over walls and barred gateways at other people's preserves. She crept very softly forward so that she too could see what so engrossed him. A pair of kingfishers teaching their brood to fly.

Two had already made the great adventure and sat side by side on a branch stretching across the pool. Even as Ruth looked, surrounded by a flashing escort, the third joined them, and there sat all three, very close together for courage, and distinctly puffed with pride.

The parent birds with even greater pride skimmed the surface of the stream, wheeled and came back, like radiant jewels in the sunlight. Ruth watched entranced. Hardly she dared to breathe. All was very still.

And then suddenly the scream of a motor siren cleft the silence like a sword. Ruth started and turned round. When she looked again all were gone. Man, dog and birds. Wiped out as it were in a moment. The birds' swift flight, even the dog's, was natural enough, but how had the slower-moving human being so swiftly vanished? Ruth

looked and, puzzled, looked again, but the man had disappeared as completely as the kingfishers. Then she caught sight of the dog. Saw him run across the only visible corner of the lower field, and disappear in the direction of the front gate. Towards the front gate also sped a small two-seated car, down the long hill from the main road which led to the pleasant town of Fairbridge.

Ruth felt suddenly caught up in some sequence of events outside her consciousness. Something, she knew not what, filled her also with a desire to reach the front gate. She ran across the plank which bridged the stream at that point, and, taking a short cut, arrived simultaneously with the car and the dog. And lo and behold! beside the driver, very stiff and proud, sat Selina; the strange dog had hurled himself into the driver's arms, while, mysteriously sprung from somewhere, Sarah whirled round the entire group, barking furiously.

Ruth laughed. The events were moving with extraordinary rapidity.

"Larry will have already explained my sudden appearance," said the driver, looking at her with a pair of humorous tired eyes over the top of the dog's head.

"Oh, is his name Larry?" gasped Ruth, breathless from Selina's sudden arrival in her arms after a scramble over the man and a takeoff from the side of the car; "I did so want to know. Be quiet, Selina; you are a bad dog."

"I must explain," said the driver gravely, "that I have not kidnapped Selina. We stopped to water the car at Mentmore, and she got in and refused to get out. She seemed to know what she wanted, so I brought her along."

"I am ever so grateful," said Ruth; "she has been missing since twelve o'clock, and I have been really worried."

He nodded sympathetically.

"One never knows, does one? Larry, you rascal, let me get out. I have been worried about Larry too. I only came home two hours ago and found he had been missing since yesterday morning. May I introduce myself? My name is Roger North."

"Oh!" exclaimed Ruth, involuntarily.

It was a name world-famous in science and literature.

"Yes, *the* Roger North! It is quite all right. People always say 'Oh,' like that when I introduce myself. And you are the new owner of Thorpe."

"I am that enormously lucky person," said Ruth. "Do come in, won't you? And won't you have some tea—or something? That sounds rather vague, but I haven't a notion as to time."

"Capital! Is that a usual habit of yours, or only this once?" asked this somewhat strange person who was *the* Roger North. "I don't know if you've noticed it, but most people seem to spend their days wondering what time it is! And I can drink tea at any moment, thanks very much. Take care of the car, Larry."

Larry jumped on the seat, stretched himself at full length and became a dog of stone.

"The car belonged to his master," explained Roger North, as they went up the garden path. "Larry and the car both came to me when he went to France, and though the old dog has often run over here and had a hunt round, this is the first time he has not come straight back to me."

"He arrived here about six o'clock last evening," said Ruth. "He hunted everywhere, as you say, and then lay down and watched. I gather he spent the night in the spare room, but this morning he had disappeared, and I only found him again half an hour ago down by the stream. Quite happy apparently with a man. I don't know who the man is. He was lying by the stream watching some kingfishers, and then your car startled us all, and I can't think where he disappeared to."

North shook his head.

"I don't know who it could have been. All the men Larry knew here left long ago, and he doesn't make friends readily."

The path to the house was a real cottage-garden path, bordered thickly with old-fashioned flowers, flowers which must have grown undisturbed for many a long year, only thinned out, or added to, with the forethought born of love. Memories thronged North's mind as he looked. He wondered what demon had induced him to come in, to accept tea. It was unlike him. But to his relief the new owner of Thorpe made no attempt at small talk. Indeed, she left his side, and

gathered a bunch of the pinks, whose fragrance went up like evening incense to Heaven, leaving him to walk alone.

For Ruth Seer sensed the shadow of a great grief. It fell like a chill across the sunlight. A sense of pity filled her. Fearing the tongue of Miss McCox, which ceased not nor spared, she fetched the tea herself, out on to the red-bricked pathway, facing south, and proudly called the terrace.

Sarah and Selina had somehow crowded into the visitor's chair and fought for the largest space.

"I won't apologize," said Ruth. "That means you are a real dog lover."

He laughed. "My wife says because they cannot answer me! How did the little ladies take Larry's intrusion?"

"They seemed to know he had the greater right."

North dropped a light kiss on each black head.

"Bless you!" he said.

He drank his tea and fed the dogs shamelessly, for the most part in silence, and Ruth watched him in the comfortable certainty that he was quite oblivious of her scrutiny. He interested her, this man of a world-wide fame, not because of that fame, but because her instinct told her that between him and the late owner of Thorpe there had been a great love. When she no longer met the glance of the humorous, tired eyes, and the pleasant voice, talking lightly, was silent, she could see the weary soul of the man in his face. A tragic face, tragic because it was both powerful and hopeless. He turned to her presently and asked, "May I light a pipe, and have a mouch round?"

Ruth nodded. She felt a sense of comradeship already between them.

"You will find me here when you come back," she said. "This is my hour for the newspaper."

But though she unfolded it and spread it out, crumpling its pages in the effort, after the fashion of women, she was not reading of "The Railway Deadlock," of "The Victory March of the Guards," or of "The 1,000–Mile Flight by British Airship," all spread temptingly before her; she was thinking of the man who had owned Thorpe Farm, the

man whom Larry and Roger North had loved, the man who lived for her, who had never known him, in the woods and fields that had been his.

The first evening shadows began to fall softly; a flight of rooks cawed home across the sky. The sounds of waking life about the farm died out one by one.

Presently Roger North came back and sat down again, pulling hard at his pipe. His strong dark face was full of shadows too.

"I am glad you have this place," he said abruptly. "He would have been glad too."

And suddenly emboldened, Ruth asked the question that had been trembling on her lips ever since he had come.

"Will you tell me something about him?" she said. "Lately I have so wanted to know. It isn't idle curiosity. I would not dare to ask you if it were. And it would be only some one who cared that can tell me what I want to know. Because—I don't quite know how to explain—but I seem to have got into touch, as it were, with the mind of the man who made and loved this place. At first it was only that I kept wondering why he had done this or that, if he would approve of what I was doing. But lately I have—oh, how can I explain it?—I have a sense of awareness of him. I *know* in some sort of odd way, what he would do if he were still here. And when I have carried a thing out, made some change or improvement, I know if he is pleased. Of course I expect it sounds quite mad to you. It isn't even as if I had known him——"

She looked at North apologetically.

"My dear lady," said North gently, "it is quite easily explained. You love the place very much, that is easily seen, and you realized at once that the previous owner had loved it too. There was evidences of that on every hand. And it was quite natural when you were making improvements to wonder what he would have done. It only wants a little imagination to carry that to feeling that he was pleased when your improvements were a success."

Ruth smiled.

"Yes, I know. It sounds very natural as you put it. But, Mr. North, it is more than that. How shall I explain it? My mind is in touch somehow with another mind. It is like a conscious and quiet

effortless telepathy. Thoughts, feelings, they pass between us without any words being necessary. It is another mind than mine which thinks, 'It will be better to put that field down in lucerne this year,' when I had been thinking of oats. But I catch the thought, and might not he catch mine? In the same way I feel when he is pleased; that is the most certain of all."

Roger North shook his head.

"Such telepathy might be possible if he were alive," he said. "We have much to learn on those lines. But there was no doubt as to his fate. He was killed instantaneously at Albert."

"You do not think any communication possible after death?"

There was a pause before North answered.

"Science has no evidence of it."

"I could not help wondering," said Ruth diffidently, and feeling as it were for her words, "whether this method by which what he thinks or wishes about Thorpe seems to come to me might not possibly be the method used for communication on some other plane in the place of speech. Words are by no means a very good medium for expressing our thoughts, do you think?"

"Very inadequate indeed," agreed North. He got up as he spoke, and passed behind her, ostensibly to knock the ashes out of his pipe against the window-sill. When he came back to his chair he did not continue the line of conversation.

"You asked me to tell you something of my friend, Dick Carey," he said as he sat down. "And at any rate what you have told me gives you, I feel, the right to ask. There isn't much to tell. We were at school and college together. Charterhouse and Trinity. And we knocked about the world a good bit together till I married. Then he took Thorpe and settled down to farming. He loved the place, as you have discovered. And he loved all beasts and birds. A wonderful chap with horses, clever too on other lines, which isn't always the case. A great reader and a bit of a musician. He went to France with Kitchener's first hundred thousand, and he lived through two years of that hell. He wasn't decorated, or mentioned in dispatches, but I saw the men he commanded, and cared for, and fought with. They knew. They knew what one of them called 'the splendid best' of him. Oh well! I suppose he was like many another we lost out there, but

for me, when he died, it was as if a light had gone out and all the world was a darker place."

"Thank you," said Ruth quite simply, yet the words said much.

There was a little pause, then he added:

"He became engaged to my daughter just before he was killed."

"Ah!" The little exclamation held a world of pain and pity.

He felt glad she did not add the usual "poor thing," and possibly that was why he volunteered further. "She has married since, but I doubt if she has got over it."

It was some time before either spoke again. Then Ruth said, almost shyly, "There is just one thing more. The buttercup field? I can't quite understand it. It is bad farming, that field. The only bit of bad farming on the place."

"You did not guess?"

"No." Ruth looked at him, her head a little on one side, her brow drawn, puzzled.

"He kept it for its beauty," said North. "It is a wonderful bit of colour you know, that sheeted gold," he added almost apologetically, when for a moment Ruth did not answer.

But she was mentally kicking herself.

"Of course!" she exclaimed. "How utterly stupid of me. I ought to have understood. How utterly and completely stupid of me. I have never thought of what he would wish from that point of view. I have been simply trying to farm well. And I love that field for its beauty too. Look at it in the western sunlight against the may hedge."

"It was the same with the may hedges," said North. "A fellow who came here to buy pigs said they ought to be grubbed up, they were waste of land. He wanted railings. He thought old Dick mad when he said he got his value out of them to look at, and good value too."

"I didn't know about the hedges wasting land," said Ruth. "But I might have grubbed up the buttercups."

She looked so genuinely distressed that North laughed.

"Don't let this idea of yours get on your nerves," he said kindly. "Believe me it is really only what I said, and don't worry about it. I am glad though that you love the place so much. It would have hurt

to have it spoilt or neglected, or with some one living here who—jarred. Indeed, to own the truth, I have been afraid to come here; I could not face it. But now"—he paused, then ended the sentence deliberately—"I am glad."

"Thank you," she said again, in that quiet simple way of hers, and for a while they sat on in silence. The warmth was still great, the stillness perfect, save for the occasional sleepy twitter of a bird in its nest.

Never since Dick Carey had been killed had he felt so at rest. The burden of pain seemed to drop away. The bitterness and resentment faded. He felt as so often in the old days, when he had come from some worry or fret or care in the outer world or in his own home, to the peace of the farm, to Dick's smile, to Dick's understanding. Almost it seemed that he was not dead, had never gone away. And he thought of his friend, for the first time since that telegram had come, without an anguish of pain or longing, thought of him as he used to, when the morrow, or the next week at least, meant the clasp of his hand, his "Hullo, old Roger," and the content which belongs to the mere presence only of some one or two people alone in our journey through life.

He wisely made no attempt to analyse the why and wherefore. He remembered with thankfulness that he had left word at home that he might be late, and just sat on and on while peace and healing came dropping down like dew.

And this quite marvellous woman never tried to make conversation, or fussed about, moving things. She just sat there looking out at the spring world as a child looks at a play that enthralls.

She had no beauty and could never have had, either of feature or colouring, only a slender length of limb, a certain poise, small head and hands and feet, and a light that shone behind her steady eyes. A soul that wonders and worships shines even in our darkness. She gave the impression of strength and of tranquillity. Her very stillness roused him at length, and he turned to look at her.

She met the look with one of very pure friendliness.

"I hope now I have made the plunge you will let me come over here sometimes," he said; "somehow I think we are going to be friends."

“I think we are friends already,” she said, smiling, “and I am very glad. One or two of the neighbours have called and asked me to tea parties. But I have lived such a different life. Except for those who farm or garden we haven’t much in common.”

“You have always lived on the land?” he asked.

“Oh *no*!” she laughed, looking at him with amusement. “I lived all my life until I was seventeen at Parson’s Green, and after that in a little street at the back of Tottenham Court Road, until the outbreak of war. And then I was for four years in Belgium and Northern France, cooking.”

“Good heavens! And all the time this was what you wanted!”

“Yes, this was what I wanted. I didn’t know. But this was it. And think of the luck of getting it!” She looked at him triumphantly. “The amazing wonderful luck! I feel as if I ought to be on my knees, figuratively, all the time, giving thanks.”

“Of course,” said Roger North slowly. “That *is* your mental attitude. No wonder you are so unusual a person. And how about the years that have gone before?”

“I sometimes wonder,” she said, thinking, “since I have come here of course, whether every part of our lives isn’t arranged definitely, with a purpose, to prepare us for the next part. It would help a bit through the bad times as well as the good, if one knew it was so, don’t you think?”

“I daresay,” Roger North answered vaguely, as was his fashion, Ruth soon discovered, if questioned on such things. “I wish you would tell me something of yourself. What line you came up along would really interest me quite a lot. And it isn’t idle curiosity either.”

There was a little silence.

“I should like to tell you,” she said at length.

But she was conscious at the back of her mind that some one else was interested too, and it was that some one else whom she wanted most of all to tell.

CHAPTER II

Ruth Seer's father had been a clergyman of the Church of England, and had spent a short life in doing, in the eyes of his family—a widowed mother and an elderly sister—incredibly foolish things.

To begin with he openly professed what were then considered extreme views, and thereby hopelessly alienated the patron of the comfortable living on which his mother's eye had been fixed when she encouraged his desire to take Holy Orders.

"As if lighted candles, and flowers on the altar, and that sort of thing, mattered two brass farthings when £800 a year was at stake," wailed Mrs. Seer, to a sympathizing friend.

Paul Seer then proceeded to fall in love, and with great promptitude married the music mistress at the local High School for Girls. She was adorably pretty, with the temper of an angel, and they succeeded in being what Mrs. Seer described as "wickedly happy" in a state of semi-starvation on his curate's pay of £120 a year.

They had three children with the greatest possible speed.

That two died at birth Mrs. Seer looked upon as a direct sign of a Merciful Providence.

Poor lady, she had struggled for so many years on a minute income, an income barely sufficient for one which had to provide for three, to say nothing of getting the boy educated by charity, that it was small wonder if a heart and mind, narrow to start with, had become entirely ruled by the consideration of ways and means.

And, the world being so arranged that ways and means do bulk iniquitously large in most people's lives, obliterating, even against their will, almost everything else by comparison, perhaps it was also

a Merciful Providence which took the boyish curate and his small wife to Itself within a week of each other, during the first influenza epidemic. You cannot work very hard, and not get enough food or warmth, and at the same time hold your own against the Influenza Fiend when he means business. So, at the age of three, the Benevolent Clergy's Orphanage, Parson's Green, London, S.E., swallowed Ruth Courthope Seer. A very minute figure all in coal black, in what seemed to her a coal-black world. For many a long year, in times of depression, that sense of an all pervading blackness would swallow Ruth up, struggle she never so fiercely.

Asked, long after she had left it, what the Orphanage was like, she answered instantly and without thought:

"It was an ugly place."

That was the adjective which covered to her everything in it, and the life she led there. It was ugly.

The Matron was the widow of a Low Church parson. A worthy woman who looked on life as a vale of tears, on human beings as miserable sinners, and on joy and beauty as a distinct mark of the Beast.

She did her duty by the orphans according to the light she possessed. They were sufficiently fed, and kept warm and clean. They learnt the three R's, sewing and housework. Also to play "a piece" on the piano, and a smattering of British French. The Orphanage still in these days considered that only three professions were open to "ladies by birth." They must be either a governess, a companion, or a hospital nurse.

The Matron inculcated the virtues of gratitude, obedience and contentment, and two great precepts, "You must bow to the Will of God" and "You must behave like a lady."

"The Will of God" seemed to typify every unpleasant thing that could possibly happen to you; and Ruth, in the beginnings of dawning thought, always pictured It as a large purple-black storm-cloud, which descended on all and sundry at the most unexpected moments, and before which the dust blew and the trees were bent double, and human beings were scattered as with a flail. And in Ruth's mind the storm-cloud was peculiarly terrible because unaccompanied by rain.

With regard to the second precept, when thought progressed still farther, and she began to reason things out, she one day electrified the whole Orphanage when rebuked for unladylike behaviour, by standing up and saying, firmly but politely, “If you please, Matron, I don’t want to be a lady. I want to be a little girl.”

But for the most part she was a silent child and gave little trouble.

Twice a year a severe lady, known as “your Grandmother,” and a younger less severe lady, known as “your Aunt Amelia,” came to see her, and they always hoped she “was a good girl.”

Then Aunt Amelia ceased to come, for she had gone out to India to be married, and “your Grandmother” came alone. And then Grandmother died and went to heaven, and nobody came to see Ruth any more. Only a parcel came, an event hitherto unknown in Ruth’s drab little existence, and of stupendous interest. It contained a baby’s first shoe, a curl of gold hair in a tiny envelope, labelled “Paul, aged 2,” in a pointed writing, a letter in straggling round hand beginning “My dear Mamma,” another letter in neat copper plate beginning “My dear Mother,” and a highly coloured picture of St. George attacking the dragon, signed “Paul Courthope Seer,” with the date added in the pointed writing.

It was many years later that Ruth first understood the pathos of that parcel.

When she was seventeen the Committee found a situation for her as companion to a lady. The Matron recommended her as suitable for the position, and the Committee informed her, on the solemn occasion when she appeared before them to receive their parting valediction, delivered by the Chairman, that she was extremely lucky to secure a situation in a Christian household where she would not only have every comfort, but even Every Luxury.

So Ruth departed to a large and heavily furnished house, where the windows were only opened for a half an hour each day while the servants did the rooms, and which consequently smelt of the bodies of the people who lived in it. Every day, except Sunday, she went for a drive with an old lady in a brougham with both windows closed. On fine warm days she walked out with an old lady leaning on her arm. Every morning she read the newspaper aloud. At other times she

picked up dropped stitches in knitting, played Halma, or read a novel aloud, by such authors as Rhoda Broughton or Mrs. Hungerford.

Any book less calculated to have salutary effect on a young girl who never spoke to any man under fifty, and that but rarely, can hardly be imagined.

If there had been an animal in the house, or a garden round it, Ruth might have struggled longer. As it was, at the end of three months she proved to be one of the Orphanage's few failures and, without even consulting the Committee, gave notice, and took a place as shop assistant to a second-hand bookseller in a small back street off the Tottenham Court Road. And here Ruth stayed and worked for the space of seventeen years—to be exact, until the year of the Great War, 1914.

The Committee ceased to take an interest in her, and her Aunt Amelia, still in India, ceased to write at Christmas, and Ruth's last frail links with the world of her father were broken.

It was a strange life for a girl in the little bookshop, but at any rate she had achieved some measure of freedom, she had got rid of the burden of her ladyhood, and in some notable directions her starved intelligence was fed.

Her master, Raphael Goltz, came of the most despised of all race combinations; he was a German Jew, and he possessed the combined brain-power of both races.

He had the head of one of Michael Angelo's apostles, on the curious beetle-shaped body of the typical Jew. He was incredibly mean, and rather incredibly dirty, and he had three passions—books, music, and food.

When he discovered in his new assistant a fellow lover of the two first, and an intelligence considerably above the average, he taught her how and what to read, and to play and sing great music not unworthily. With regard to the third, he taught her, in his own interest, to be a cook of supreme excellence.

And on the whole Ruth was not unhappy. Sometimes she looked her loneliness in the face, and the long years struck at her like stones. Sometimes her dying, slowly dying, youth called to her in the night watches, and she counted the hours of the grey past years, hours and hours with nothing of youth's meed of joy and love in them. But for

the most part she strangled these thoughts with firm hands. There was nothing to be gained by them, for there was nothing to be done. An untrained woman, without money or people, must take what she can get and be thankful.

She read a great many both of the wisest and of the most beautiful books in the world, she listened to music played by the master hand, and her skilled cooking interested her. As the years went on, old Goltz left the business more and more to her, spending his time in his little back parlour surrounded by his beloved first editions, which he knew better by now than to offer for sale, drawing the music of the spheres from his wonderful Bluthner piano, and steadily smoking. He gave Ruth a sitting-room of her own upstairs, and allowed her to take in the two little dogs Sarah and Selina. On Saturday afternoons and Sundays she would take train into the country, and tramp along miles with them in the world she loved.

And then, when it seemed as if life were going on like that for ever and ever, came the breathless days before August 4, 1914, those days when the whole world stood as it were on tiptoe, waiting for the trumpet signal.

Ah well! there was something of the wonder and glory of war, of which we had read, about it then—before we knew—yes, before we knew! The bugle call—the tramp of armed men—the glamour of victory and great deeds—and of sacrifice too,—of sacrifice too. The love of one's country suddenly made concrete as it were. Just for that while, at any rate, no one thinking of himself, or personal profit. Personal glory, perhaps, which is a better matter. Every one standing ready. "Send me."

The world felt cleaner, purer.

It was a wonderful time. Too wonderful to last perhaps. But the marks last. At any rate we have known. We have seen white presences upon the hills. We have heard the voices of the Eternal Gods.

The greatest crime in history. Yes. But we were touched to finer issues in those first days.

And then Raphael Goltz woke up too. He talked to Ruth in the hot August evenings instead of sleeping. Even she was astonished at what the old man knew. He had studied foreign politics for years. He

knew that the cause of the war lay farther back, much farther back than men realized. He saw things from a wide standpoint. He was a German Jew by blood and in intellect, Jew by nature, but England had always been his home. That he loved her well Ruth never had any doubt after those evenings.

He never thought, though, that it would come to war. It seemed to him impossible. “It would be infamy,” he said.

And then it came. Came with a shock, and yet with a strange sense of exhilaration about it. Men who had stood behind counters, and sat on office stools since boyhood, stretched themselves, as the blood of fighting forefathers stirred in their veins. They were still the sons of men who had gone voyaging with Drake and Frobisher, of men who had sailed the seven seas, and fought great fights, and found strange lands, and died brave deaths, in the days when a Great Adventure was possible for all. For them too had, almost inconceivably, come the chance to get away from greyly monotonous days which seemed like “yesterday come back”; for them too was the Great Adventure possible. The lad who, under Ruth’s supervision, took down shutters, cleaned boots, knives and windows, swept the floors and ran errands, was among the first to go, falsifying his age by two years, and it was old Raphael Goltz, German Jew, who even in those first days knew the war as the crime of all the ages.

Ruth was the next, and he helped her too; while the authorities turned skilled workers down, and threw cold water in buckets on the men and women standing shoulder to shoulder ready for any sacrifice in those first days, old Raphael Goltz, knowing the value of Ruth’s cooking and physical soundness, found her the money to offer her services free—old Raphael Goltz, who through so many years had been so incredibly mean. He disliked dogs cordially, yet he undertook the care of Sarah and Selina in her absence. To Ruth’s further amazement, he also gave her introductions of value to leading authorities in Paris who welcomed her gladly and sent her forthwith into an estaminet behind the lines in Northern France.

Something of her childhood in the Orphanage, and of the long years with Raphael Goltz, Ruth told North, as they sat together in the warmth and stillness of the May evening, but of the years in France she spoke little. She had seen unspeakable things there. The memory of them was almost unbearable. They were things she held away

from thought. Beautiful and wonderful things there were too, belonging to those years. But they were still more impossible to speak of. She carried the mark of them both, the terrible and the beautiful, in her steady eyes. Besides, some one else, who was interested too, who was surely—the consciousness was not to be ignored—interested too, knew all about that. And suddenly she realized how that common knowledge of life and death at their height was also a bond, as well as love of Thorpe, and she paused in her tale, and sat very still.

"And then?" said North, after a while.

"I was out there for two years, without coming home, the first time. There seemed nothing for me to come home for, and I didn't want to leave. There was always so much to be done, and one felt of use. It was selfish of me really, but I never realized somehow that Raphael Goltz cared. Then I had bad news from him. You remember the time when the mobs wrecked the shops with German names? Well, his was one of them. So I got leave and came back to him. It was very sad. The old shop was broken to pieces, his books had been thrown into the street and many burnt, and the piano, his beautiful piano, smashed past all repair. I found him up in the back attic, with Sarah and Selina. He had saved them for me somehow. He cried when I came. He was very old, you see, and he had felt the war as much as any of us."

Her eyes were full of tears, and she stopped for a moment to steady her voice. "He bore no malice, and three days after I got back he died, babbling the old cry, 'We ought to have been friends.'

"It was always that, 'We ought to have been friends,' and once he said, 'Together we could have regenerated the world.' He left everything he had to me, over £60,000. It is to him I owe Thorpe." Her eyes shone through the tears in them.

"Come! and let me show you," she said, and so almost seemed to help him out of his chair, and then, still holding his hand, led him through the door behind them, along the passage into the front hall. Here he stopped, and undoubtedly but for the compelling hand would have gone no farther. But the soft firm grip held, and something with it, some force outside both of them, drew him after her into the room that once was his friend's. A spacious friendly

room, with wide windows looking south and west, and filled just now with the light of a cloudless sunset.

And the dreaded moment held nothing to fear. Nothing was changed. Nothing was spoilt. He had expected something, which to him, unreasonably perhaps, but uncontrollably, would have seemed like sacrilege; instead he found it was sanctuary. Sanctuary for that, to him, annihilated personality which had been the companion of the best years of his life.

Dick might have come back at any moment and found his room waiting for him, as it had waited on many a spring evening just like this. His capacious armchair was still by the window. The big untidy writing-table, with its many drawers and pigeon-holes, in its place. The piano where he used to sit and strum odd bits of music by ear.

“But it is all just the same,” he said, standing like a man in a dream when Ruth dropped his hand inside the threshold.

“I was offered the furniture with the house,” she said, “and when I saw this room I felt I wanted it just as it is. Before that I had all sorts of ideas in my head as to how I would furnish! But this appealed to me. There is an air of space and comfort and peace about the room that I could not bear to disturb. And now I am very glad, because I feel he is pleased. Of course, his more personal things have gone, and I have added a few things of my own. Look, this is what I brought you to see.”

She pointed towards the west window, where stood an exquisitely carved and gilded table of foreign workmanship which was new to him, and on it burnt a burnished bronze lamp, its flame clear and bright even in the fierce glow of the setting sun. Beside the lamp stood a glass vase, very beautiful in shape and clarity, filled with white pinks.

North crossed the room and examined the lamp with interest.

“What does it mean?” he asked.

“It is a custom of the orthodox Jews. When anyone belonging to them dies, they keep a lamp burning for a year. The flame is never allowed to go out. It is a symbol. A symbol of the Life Eternal. All the years of the war Raphael Goltz kept this lamp burning for the men who went West. You see it is in the west window. And now I keep it

burning for him. You don't think *he* would mind, although my poor old master *was* a German Jew, racially?"

She looked up at North anxiously, as they stood side by side before the lamp.

"Not Dick—certainly not Dick!" said North. Ruth heaved a sigh of relief.

"You see, I don't really know anything about him except what I feel about the farm, and I did want the lamp here."

"No, Dick wouldn't mind. But you are mad, you know, quite mad!"

For all that his eyes were very kindly as he looked down at her.

"I expect it is being so much alone," she said tranquilly, stooping to smell the pinks.

"Was Goltz an orthodox Jew then?" asked North.

"Oh no, very far from it. He wasn't anything in the least orthodox. If you could have known him!" Ruth laughed a little. "But he had some queer religion of his own. He believed in Beauty, and that it was a revelation of something very great and wonderful, beyond the wildest dreams of a crassly ignorant and blind humanity. That glass vase was his. Have you noticed the wonderful shape of it? And look now with the light shining through. Do you think it is a shame to put flowers in it? But their scent is the incense on the altar."

"Oh, that's the idea, is it?" said North. He spoke very gently, as one would to a child showing you its treasures.

"This place is full of altars," said Ruth, her eyes looking west. "Do you know the drive in the little spinney? All one broad blue path of hyacinths, and white may trees on either side."

"Oh, that's the idea, is it?" said North. He in his voice—"you mean Dick's 'Pathway to Heaven'!"

"Did he call it that?"

"He said it was so blue it must be."

"Yes, and it seems to vanish into space between the trees."

"As I must," said North. "I have paid you an unwarrantable visitation, and I shall only just get home now before lighting-up time."

“You will come again?” said Ruth as they went down the garden. “I want to show you the site for my cottages. I *think* it is the right one.”

“Cottages?”

“Yes, I am going to build three. My lawyer tells me it is economically an unsound investment. My conscience tells me it has got to be done, if I am to enjoy Thorpe properly. Two couples are waiting to be married until the cottages are ready, and one man is working here and his wife living in London because there is no possible place for them. I am giving him a room here at present.”

North raised his eyebrows.

“Do you take in anybody promiscuously who comes along?” he asked.

“Well, this man went through four years of the war. Was a sergeant, and holds the Mons Medal and the D.C.M. He is a painter by trade, and worked for Baxter, who is putting up a billiard-room and a garage at Mentmore Court.”

“Mentmore Court?” North looked across at the big white house on the hill. “Why, there is a billiard-room and a garage there already.”

“I believe they are turning the existing billiard-room into a winter garden, or something of that sort. And they have six cars, so the present garage is not big enough.”

“Your cottages will probably be of more use to the country,” said North. “I hear he made his money in leather, and his name is Pithey. Do you know him?”

“Well, he took a ‘fancy’ to my Shorthorns, and walked in last week to ask if I’d sell. Price was no object. He fancied them. Then he took a fancy to some of the furniture and offered to buy that, and finally he said if I was open to take ‘a profit on my deal’ over the farm, he was prepared to go to a fancy price for it.”

North stopped and looked at her.

“Are you making it up?” he asked.

Ruth bubbled over into an irrepressible laugh.

“When he went away he told me not to worry. Mrs. Pithey *was* coming to call, but she had been so busy, and now those lazy dogs of workmen couldn’t be out of the place for another month at least.”

“And my wife is worrying me to call on him,” groaned North. “Halloo, where is Larry?”

“He was there a moment ago; I saw him just before you stopped, but I never saw him jump out.”

North called in vain until he gave a peculiar whistle, which brought a plainly reluctant Larry to view.

“He doesn’t want to come with me,” said North. “Get in, Larry.” And Larry obeyed the peremptory command, while Ruth checked an impulse to suggest that she should keep him.

As the car started slowly up the hill he turned, laying his black and tan velvet muzzle on the back of the hood. Long after they had vanished, Ruth was haunted by the wistful amber eyes looking at her from a cloud of dust.

Slowly she went up home through the scented evening. It had been a wonderful day. And she had made a friend. It was not such an event as it would have been before she went to France, but it was sufficiently uplifting even now. She sang to herself as she went. And then quite suddenly she thought of the man in the brown suit. “I wonder who he was, and where he disappeared to,” she said to herself, as she answered Miss McCox’s injured summons to supper.

CHAPTER III

"My dear Roger," said Mrs. North, with that peculiar guinea-hen quality in her voice which it was her privilege and pleasure to keep especially for her husband, "have you nothing of interest to tell us? No one has seen you since four o'clock yesterday afternoon. At any rate, not to speak to."

North looked across the beautifully appointed lunch-table at the ill-chosen partner of his joys and sorrows, while the silence, which usually followed one of her direct attacks on him, fell upon the party surrounding it.

"I see you brought Larry back with you, and conclude you found him at Thorpe," continued Mrs. North, "and I suppose you saw Miss Seer. As it is a moot point whether we call on her or not, you might rouse yourself so far as to tell us what you thought of her. I am sure Arthur would like to hear too."

"Very much! Very much!" said the fair, cherubic-looking little man sitting on her right hand. "Thorpe was such a pleasant house in poor dear Carey's time. It would be a serious loss if the new owner were impossible. I look upon the changes in the neighbourhood very seriously, very seriously indeed. I was only thinking yesterday that of our old circle only poor old Mentmore, the Condors, and ourselves are left. The Court and Whitemead both bought by newly rich people, whom I really dread inspecting."

"The St. Ubes may be all right," interpolated Mrs. North. "I hear they made their money doing something with shipping, and St. Ubes does not sound a bad name."

"No," allowed Mr. Fothersley. "No. Yet I do not remember to have heard it before. It has a Cornish sound. We must inquire. They have not arrived yet, I gather, as the new servants' wing is not ready. But

the people at the Grange, I fear, are not only Jews, but German Jews! What a *milieu*! And we were such a happy little set before the war, very happy—yes."

"At any rate," said the fourth member of the lunch party, a very beautiful young woman, the only child and married daughter of the house, "they have all an amazing amount of money, which I have no doubt they are prepared to spend, and the German Jews I conclude you will not take up. As for Thorpe, it is disgusting that anyone should have it. What *is* the woman like, father?"

"Oh, all right," said North. "She is looking after the place well, and hasn't been seized with the present mania for building billiard-rooms and winter gardens and lordly garages."

"But what is she *like*?" asked Mrs. North.

"Is she a lady, or isn't she? You can't call on a woman because she hasn't built a winter garden."

"Why not?" returned her husband, in his most irritating fashion.

"By the way," interposed Mr. Fothersley adroitly, "I hear Miss Seer intends building cottages. A thing I do not consider at all desirable."

"Why not?" asked his host again.

"We want nothing of that sort in Mentmore," said Fothersley decisively. "It is, in its way, the most perfect specimen of an English village in the country—I might say in England. Building new cottages is only the thin end of the wedge."

"They appear to be wanted," said North, pushing the cigars towards his guest.

"That is the Government's business," answered Mr. Fothersley, making a careful selection. "And we may at least hope they will put them up in suitable places. Thank Heaven the price of land here is prohibitive. There, however, is the danger of these newly rich people. They must spend their money somehow. However, it may not be true. I only heard it this morning."

"Did she say anything about it, Roger?" asked Mrs. North.

"Yes she mentioned it," answered North curtly.

Mrs. North made an exaggerated gesture of despair as she struggled with a cigarette. She had never succeeded in mastering the art of smoking.

“Are you going to tell us what we want to know or not?” she asked, with ominous calmness. “Do you advise calling on the woman, or don’t you?”

Here Violet Riversley broke in.

“When will you learn to put things quite plainly to father?” she asked. “You know he can’t understand our euphuisms. I suppose it’s one of the defects of a scientific brain.”

She helped herself to a cigarette and held it out to North for a light.

“What we want to know, father, is just this. Do you think Miss Seer is likely to subscribe to the Hunt and various other things we are interested in? If to this she adds the desire to entertain us, so much the better, but the subscriptions are the primary things.”

“No, no, my dear!” exclaimed Mr. Fothersley, deeply pained. “That is just what I complain about in you young people of the present day. You have not the social sense—you——”

“Dear Arthur,” Violet cut him short ruthlessly, “don’t be a humbug with me. Your Violet has known you since she was two years old. Let us in our family circle be honest. Lord Mentmore and the Condors called on the Pithey people because Mr. Pithey has subscribed liberally to the Hunt, and you and mother have called because they did. Incidentally they will probably give us excellent dinners. All I can say is, I hope you will draw the line at the German Jews, however much money they have.”

“Well, Roger,” said Mrs. North, who had kept her eyes fixed on her husband during her daughter’s diversion, “shall I call or not? Surely you are the proper person to advise me, as you have met Miss Seer.”

North frowned irritably.

“No, I certainly should not call,” he said, rising from the table. “She *is* a lady, but you would have nothing in common, and I should not think she has enough money to make it worth while from the point of view Vi has put so delicately before us. That all right, Vi?”

His daughter rose too, and slipped her arm through his.

“Quite good for you!” she said. “And now come and smoke your cigar with me in the garden. Arthur will excuse you.”

“Certainly! Certainly!” said Mr. Fothersley, who sincerely liked both husband and wife apart, and inwardly deplored the necessity

that they should ever be together. He recognized the lack of fine feeling in the wife which so constantly irritated the husband, but which did not alienate Fothersley himself because his own mind moved really on the same plane, in that he cherished no finer ideals. He recognized, too, the corresponding irritation North's total lack of the social instinct was to a woman of his wife's particular type. Pretty, vivacious, with a passionate love of dress, show, and amusement, Mrs. North would have liked to go to a party of some sort, or give one, every day in the year. She was an admirable and successful hostess, and Mr. Fothersley was wont to declare that Mentmore would be lost without Mrs. North.

They were great friends. Mr. Fothersley had never seen his way to embark on matrimony. At the same time he enjoyed the society of women. As a matter of fact he was on terms of platonic, genuinely platonic, friendship, with every attractive woman within reasonable reach of Mentmore. Undoubtedly, however, Mrs. North held the first place. For one thing the Norths were his tenants, occupying the Dower House on his estate. It was always easy to run across to Westwood, hot foot with any little bit of exciting gossip. They both took a lively interest in their neighbours' private affairs. Violet Riversley had once said that if there was nothing scandalous to talk about, they evolved something, after the fashion of the newspapers in the silly season. They both loved, not money, but the things which money means. To give a perfect little dinner, rich with all the delicacies of the season, was to them both a keen delight. He was nearly as fond of pretty clothes as she was, and liked to escort her to the parties, where she was always the centre of the liveliest group and from which North shrank in utter boredom. They agreed on all points on matters of the day, both social and political; he gathered his opinions from *The Times* and she from the *Daily Mail*. He looked upon her as an extremely clever and intelligent woman. Also he was in entire sympathy with her intense and permanent resentment against her husband because he had persisted in devoting to further chemical research the very large sums of money which his scientific discoveries had brought him in from time to time. The fact that, in addition to these sums, he derived a considerable income from a flourishing margarine factory started by his late father's energy and enterprise, of which income she certainly spent by far the larger portion, consoled her not at all. She spent much, but she could very

easily have spent more. She too could have done with four or five cars, she too could have enlarged and expanded in various expensive directions, even as these new *nouveaux riches*. Fothersley, who devoutly held the doctrine that not only whatsoever a man earned, but whatsoever he inherited, was for his own and his family's benefit and spending, with a reasonable contribution to local charities, or any exceptional collection in time of stress authorized by the Mayor, felt that Mrs. North's resentment was wholly natural. A yearly contribution of, say, twenty-five guineas, to research would have amply covered any possible claim on even a scientist's philanthropy in this direction, and he had even told North so.

Therefore it was only natural for Mrs. North to turn to him, even more than to her other friends, for sympathy and understanding.

"There now!" she exclaimed as her husband left the room. "Can you imagine any man being so disagreeable and surly? Just because he was asked a perfectly natural question. And I shall certainly call on the woman."

"I believe she is quite possible from all I have heard," said Mr. Fothersley, adroitly lighting Mrs. North's cigarette, which had gone out. "As you know, I mean to call myself, if you would prefer to wait for my report."

"Thank you. But may as well come with you. I shall probably be a help, and you see Roger says she is a lady, and, funnily enough, he really knows. I expect she is as dull as ditchwater; I hear she was something in the nature of a companion before she came into some money. But anything must be better than the Pitheys."

She shuddered as she replenished Mr. Fothersley's wineglass.

"They appear from all accounts to be very bad," sighed Mr. Fothersley.

"I could bear their commonness," said Mrs. North, "one has got used to it these days, when one meets everyone everywhere, but it is the man's self-satisfaction that is so overpowering. However, I am depending on you to look after him this afternoon. Roger won't, and Violet is nearly as bad. I don't know if you have noticed it, but Violet is getting Roger's nasty sarcastic way of saying things, and she always seems to back him up now against me."

Her pretty eyes were tearful, and Mr. Fothersley looked distressed.

“Dear Violet has never been the same since poor Carey’s death,” he said.

Mrs. North agreed. “And yet, as you know,” she added, “I never really approved of the engagement. Poor Dick was a dear—no one could help liking him; but, after all, there was no getting away from the fact that he was old enough to be her father, and besides he was not very well off, and owing to Roger’s folly, wasting his money as he has, we could not have made Violet a big allowance. Really, you know, Fred is a much better match for her in every way.”

“Quite, quite,” assented Mr. Fothersley. “But there is no doubt she felt Carey’s death very much at the time. I certainly have noticed a difference in her since, which her marriage has not dispelled. But indeed all the young people seem altered since this terrible war—there is—how shall I put it?—a want of reticence—of respect for the conventions.” Mr. Fothersley shook his head. “I regret it very much—very much.”

In the meantime North and his daughter had wandered out into the shade of the great beech-tree which was the crowning glory of an exquisite lawn. The garden was in full perfection this wonderful May, and the gardeners were busy putting the finishing touches before the afternoon’s party. Not a weed or stray leaf was to be seen. Every edge was clipped to perfection. The three tennis courts were newly marked out, their nets strung to the exact height, while six new balls were neatly arranged on each service line. Presently Mrs. North would come out and say exactly where each chair and table should go.

Violet Riversley looked at the pretty friendly scene with her beautiful gold brown eyes, and the misery in them was like a devouring fire. She was one of the tragedies of the war. She could neither endure nor forget. With her mother’s good looks, pleasure-loving temperament, and quick temper, she had much of her father’s ability. Spoilt from her cradle, she had gone her own way and taken greedily of the good things of this world with both hands, until Dick Carey’s death had smitten her life into ruins.

She was twenty-four, and she had never before known pain, sorrow or trouble. Always she had had everything she wanted. Other people’s griefs passed her by. She simply had no understanding of them. She was not generous, because she never realized what it was

to go without. And yet everyone liked and many loved her. She was so gay and glad and beautiful a thing.

When she said good-bye to Dick Carey, she was simply unable to grasp that he could be taken from her, and when the news of his death came she had passionately and vehemently fought against the agony and pain and desolation that came with it. She had genuinely and really loved him, and nothing, absolutely nothing, seemed left. There was no pleasure any more in anything. That was what she could not understand, could not cope with. Her conventional faith fell from her, and she let it go without a struggle. But her happiness she refused to let go. She clung to it, or to the mirage of it, savagely, desperately. Dick was dead, yes, and she wanted him with a devouring hunger. But all the other things were left. Things she had loved. Things that had made her happy. She would not let them go.

After a brief space, in which the devils of bitterness and resentment and impotent wrath rent her in pieces, she took up her old life again, with apparently added zest. Her friends said "Violet was very plucky," and no one was astonished when after a year she accepted and married Fred Riversley. It was altogether a more suitable match than one with poor Dick Carey. Riversley was of more suitable age, rich, devoted, and a good fellow, and as North said to her best friends, "Violet was never suited for the wife of a poor man." Only Roger North watched her anxiously at times. She had been her mother's child before, but since Dick's death she had turned more and more to her father. Something of his dogged patient strength of mind seemed to become clear to her. Something of the courage with which he faced life.

She remembered a saying of his one day when her mother had been flagrantly unjust and bitter to him on some matter of expenditure, so that even she had felt ashamed. Whatever her father's faults, his generosity was past question. She had gone into the study and striven to make amends, and he had looked at her with those tired humorous eyes of his and said:

"My dear, nothing can hurt you if you don't let it."

She seized on that as some sort of creed amid the welter of all she had ever thought she believed.

She would not let things hurt her, She plunged more eagerly than ever into the amusements of her world. After her marriage she started and ran a smart officers' hospital in London. Mrs. Riversley's name was on many committees. She was a noted giver of the then fashionable boy and girl dances. A celebrated personage said she reminded him of a human fire. There seemed a fever in her body, a restlessness which never left her. Since the cessation of hostilities this restlessness had increased, or possibly now that others were ceasing their activities it was more noticeable.

While North sat smoking his cigar she fetched a racquet and began to practice her service on the court nearest him. She served over-hand a swift hard service, and North watched the long slim line of her figure, her exquisite poise, as she swung her racquet above her head and drove the ball home. It was typical somehow of the driving force that seemed behind her restlessness.

Presently she stopped, and came and sat down close beside him, and when he looked at her he saw that her mask was down and the tormented soul of her for a moment bare.

"It all looks just the same as ever, doesn't it!" she said. "And we've got to get through it somehow to the very end.

"My dear," began her father, and stopped. A blank hideous horror of emptiness possessed him. He shivered in the hot sunshine. There was nothing to say. He had no comfort to give her.

"Heaven knows I've done my best," she said. "I swore I wouldn't let Dick's death spoil my life. I married Fred because he could give me everything else—everything but what was impossible, and he's a good fellow." She paused, then went on again, her voice very low and thin. "There's only one thing would do me any good—if I could hurt those who've hurt me. That God, who let all this happen. I'm not the only one. That God they teach us is almighty, and this is the best he can do for us. You don't believe He's there at all, father—oh no, you don't—I'm not a fool! But I do, and I see Him watching it all happening, *letting* it all happen, according to plan, as those damned Germans used to say. If only I could hurt them—hurt them myself. If they had only one neck that I could wring—with my own two hands—slowly—very slowly—I think that would do me good."

North pulled himself together.

“How long have you been feeling like this, Vi?” he asked.

“Ever since they killed Dick,” she said dully, as if the fire had smouldered down, after a sudden sheet of flame. “I think I am made up of hate, father. It’s the strongest thing in me. It’s so strong that I can’t love any more. I don’t think I love Dick now. And Fred, sometimes I hate Fred, and he’s a good fellow, you know.”

The words filled North with a vague uncanny horror. He struggled after normal, everyday words, but for a moment none came. He knew the girl was overwrought, suffering from strain, but what was it that had looked at him out of those vehement, passionate eyes?

“Look here, Vi,” he said at length, striving to speak naturally, “you are just imagining things. Can’t you take a pull on yourself and go easy for a bit? You’re overdoing it, you know, and these sort of ideas are the result.”

“I’m sorry, father.”

She bent sideways, letting her head rest against his shoulder, and seeking his hand, held it close. Such a demonstration was foreign to her with him. When she was small, some queer form of jealousy on her mother’s part had come between them. He felt shy and awkward.

“I don’t know what made me break out like that,” she went on. “I think it must have been coming back here and seeing everything just the same as it used to be before the war came. Until to-day, when I’ve been down it’s been so quiet and different, with no parties, and nothing going on. Now it’s gone back like everything else is going back—only I cannot.”

“Nothing goes back, dear,” answered North. “It’s not the same for anyone really. Not even for the quiet young people who’ll come and play here without a trouble as you used to. But there’s always the interest of going forward. If we’ve suffered, at least we’ve gained experience from it, which is knowledge. And there’s always some work to be done for every season that could not be done sooner or later. That helps, I think.”

“Dear old father,” she said softly. “We used not to be really great friends in the old days. But now somehow you’re the only person I find any comfort in. I think perhaps it is because we are both putting up a hard fight.”

“Don’t forget the spice of life is battle, Vi, as Stevenson has it. I’m inclined to think, though”—he spoke slowly as one envolving a thought new to him—“I’m inclined to think we sometimes confuse bitterness and rebellion with it. That’s not clean fighting. My dear, put that hate you speak of away from you, if you can—and have nothing to do with bitterness—they are forces which can only make for evil.”

There was a little pause.

“I don’t think I can, father. It’s part of me. Sometimes I think it’s all me, and sometimes I’m frightened.”

“Look here, Vi,” said North, struggling with a disinclination to make the proposition that was in his mind, a disinclination that he felt was ridiculous, “I wish you would go over to Thorpe and get to know Miss Seer.”

Violet sat up and looked at him with wide-open eyes.

“But why? I should hate it!” she exclaimed. “It would remind me—oh, of so many things! It would make me feel even worse——”

“Well, so I thought,” said North. “I can tell you I dreaded going. But the old place is full of a—a strange sort of rest. I didn’t realize how full of bitterness and resentment I had been until sitting there it all dropped away from me. It was as if a stone had been rolled away. I hadn’t realized how it was hurting until it left off.”

He spoke disjointedly, and as if almost against his will. He was glad when the sound of his wife’s and Mr. Fothersley’s approaching voices made Violet release his hand and stand up.

“You think Thorpe would lay my devils too?” she asked, looking down at him.

“I think,” he said gravely, “it is worth trying.”

CHAPTER IV

Mrs. North's tennis party pursued its usual successful career in the brilliant sunshine, which, as Mr. Fothersley remembered, always favoured her. Fred Riversley had brought an unexpected carload of R. A. F. boys down from London with him. This made a tournament possible, as Mrs. North saw at once. They drew partners with much fun and laughter. Mr. Fothersley telephoned to Fairbridge for a selection of prizes to be sent out by the 4.30 bus. It was one of the charming sort of things which Mr. Fothersley did. It was more particularly nice of him on this particular afternoon than usual, because, so far as Mr. Fothersley was concerned, Mr. Pithey was making it almost unbearable.

He was a large, flat, pale yellow gentleman, with a peculiarly penetrating metallic voice. He had a very long nose, with a broad tip curving upwards, and small keen eyes which darted everywhere. Without the slightest hesitation he took the place which from time immemorial belonged to Mr. Fothersley at all Mentmore parties. Under the beech-tree, where by all the rights of precedence Mr. Fothersley should have led the conversation, Mr. Pithey's metallic voice held sway and drove all before it. In the usual walk round the garden, always personally conducted by Mr. Fothersley and his hostess, Mr. Pithey laid down the correct lines on which to bed out, to grow carnations, to keep down weeds, or anything else that cropped up. When Mr. Fothersley drew attention to the fact that on any of the courts the final of the hard-fought set was in progress, it was Mr. Pithey's voice that drowned all others as he shouted "Well played!" and gave advice to all concerned. In fact, Mr. Pithey dominated the party.

Mrs. Pithy, a small blue-faced lady, very expensively dressed, sat in a comfortable basket chair with her feet on a stool and, unless

actually asked a question, she spoke to no one except her husband, whom she always addressed by name. Bertie when she remembered, 'Erb when she forgot.

Even the arrival of Lady Condor, undoubtedly the personage of the place, made no impression on this strange couple's evident conviction that they were people of supreme importance in the universe. Lady Condor could have put the Old Gentleman himself in his place if the mood were on her, but on this occasion, as it happened, she was frankly and evidently entertained by the Pitheys. Mr. Fothersley regretted it. Seldom had he looked out more anxiously for the arrival of her wheeled chair surrounded by its usual escort of five white West Highlanders. Lady Condor always used her chair, in preference to her car, for short journeys, so that her dogs also might have an outing. Seldom had he been more disappointed in her, and Lady Condor was given to amazing surprises. This was certainly one of them. Solemnly, and as far as was possible in his manner conveying the honour being conferred on him, Mr. Fothersley led Mr. Pithey to Lady Condor's chair, so soon as she had been ensconced by her hostess in a comfortable and shady spot near the tea-tables and with a good view of the tennis. Not that she ever looked at it for more than a second at a time, she was always too busy talking, but it was *de rigueur* that she should have the best place at any entertainment.

Mrs. Pithey, for the moment, it was impossible to introduce, as it would plainly not occur to her to leave her chair until she had finished her tea for anybody, except, possibly, Mr. Pithey.

Mr. Fothersley effected Mr. Pithey's introduction admirably. The delicate shade of deference in his own manner left nothing to be desired.

"May I be allowed to present Mr. Pithey, dear Lady Condor?" he asked, deftly bringing that gentleman's large pale presence into her line of vision.

"Ah—how-d'ye-do? No, don't trouble to shake hands." She waved away a large approach. "You can't get at me for the dogs. And where are my glasses? Arthur, I have dropped them somewhere. Could it have been in the drive? No, I had them since. What! on my lap? Oh yes—thank you very much."

She put them on and looked at Mr. Pithey, and Mr. Pithey looked at her.

"Pleased to meet you," he said. "Do you always take a pack of dogs about with you?" Plainly Mr. Pithey disapproved. Jock and Jinny, father and mother of the family, were moving in an unfriendly manner round his feet. "Just call them off, will you?"

Mr. Fothersley awaited the swift and complete annihilation of Mr. Pithey. It was a matter of doubt if even Lady Condor could have accomplished it; at any rate, she made no attempt. She continued to look at him with what might almost be described as appreciation in her shrewd eyes under their heavy lids. Only she did not call the dogs off.

And then, to an amazed company of the Mentmore élite, she gave Mr. Pithey her whole and undivided attention for the space of nearly half an hour.

Mr. Pithey gave his opinion as it was always apparently his pride and pleasure to do, on many and various things.

"The old order changeth, yielding place to new," might have served for the text of Mr. Pithey's conversation.

"Who's been at the head of affairs in this village *I* don't know," he said largely, "but more rotten management, more want of enterprise, more lack of ordinary sense, I've never come across. Why, you see it everywhere! Here's the whole place without any light, unless you call lamps and candles light, and a stream running through the place. Water power at your doors, by Jingo! And money in it too, or I shouldn't be taking it up. Ever been in Germany?" He gulped down his third cup of tea, and looked around at his now more or less interested audience.

"Well, they've got electric light in every potty little village you go to, got it there still at this minute, and"—Mr. Pithey laid a large yellow hand on Lady Condor's knee—"*cheaper* than you can get it over here."

"One really can't believe it!" exclaimed Mrs. North. "Surely it's not possible!"

"Everything is possible," said Lady Condor, curiously examining Mr. Pithey's hand through her glasses.

“I was over there, staying near Cologne on business last week,” returned Mr. Pithey impressively. “So I ought to know. And when you know me better, Mrs. North”—Mr. Fothersley’s shudder was almost audible—“you’ll know I don’t talk without my book. I got nails over there—metal, mind you—cheaper than you can get ’em here. P’rhaps you won’t credit that!”

He helped himself to more cake, and started afresh.

“Now look at the farming round about here. Rotten, that’s what it is, rotten! Never went in for it myself before, but I know when a concern’s run as it should be or not. There’s only one farm in this district that’s real tip-top, and that’s Thorpe. It’s a little bit of a place, but it’s well run. Run by a woman too! But she’s a fool. If you’ll believe me, I offered her a twenty-five per cent. profit on whatever the price she gave for that little place, and she wouldn’t take it. Just have suited me to play with. And there’s one or two things there I’d like up at the Court. By the way, any gentleman or lady here got some of those old lead water tanks they’d like a fancy price for, because I’m a buyer.”

By this time the assembly under the beech-tree was more or less paralysed, and Mrs. North was wondering what madness had possessed her to be the first to ask Mr. Pithey to meet Lady Condor. But Lady Condor continued to beam; not only to beam, but every now and then to break into a chuckle. And yet this was not at all the sort of thing one would have expected to amuse her.

“Old lead water tanks!” she repeated, thoughtfully. “Dear Arthur, would you mind putting Jock on my lap? Thank you so much. And now Jinny! There, darlings! Don’t be nervous, Mr. Pithey. They never really *bite* unless you come too close. Let me see, where were we? Oh—yes—tanks! No, I am afraid I have none for sale just now.”

“You see,” said Mr. Pithey confidentially, “if I get the stuff off some of you old inhabitants I know it’s the right sort, and I don’t mind what I pay.”

“If you go on talking much longer, Bertie, you’ll be late for seeing the man who’s coming about the butler’s place,” said Mrs. Pithey, suddenly, from her chair. She had just finished her tea, and swept many crumbs from her lap as she spoke.

“Quite right, my dear! Quite right!” Mr. Pithey rose as he spoke. “I’m never late for an appointment, Mrs. North. Matter of conscience with me, never mind who it’s with, butler or duke.” It was characteristic of Mr. Pithey that he put the butler first. “Well, good-by to you all.” Mr. Pithey shook hands largely all round, followed by Mrs. Pithey. “Pleased to have met your Ladyship. Sorry not to have seen your good husband, Mrs. North. *The* man in this place, I reckon. That margarine business of his is one of the best managed in Leicester, and we don’t let flies walk on us there, anyhow. He goes in for a bit of science and writing as well, doesn’t he? Good all round man, eh?”

And, conscious of having been generally pleasant, Mr. Pithey removed his large pale presence to where his Rolls-Royce car awaited him in the front drive.

“I know you will forgive me, dear lady,” said Mr. Fothersley, his voice trembling with emotion, “if I do not see them off.”

“Indeed, yes!” exclaimed Mrs. North. The allusion to the margarine factory had made her hot all over. “What perfectly hateful people! He did nothing but talk, and she did nothing but eat!”

Lady Condor arose briskly from her chair, scattering West Highlanders around her.

“Where is Roger?” she demanded. “I am going to be really clever if I can only concentrate sufficiently to say what I mean. Don’t distract my thoughts, any of you! But I must have Roger! He is the only really brainy one among us—at least, I mean he is the only one who’s used his brains. I have naturally a very good brain, but it is rusty from want of use. All our brains are rusty. But what is it I want? Oh yes—Roger. In his study, my dear? Let us all go—yes. Where are my glasses, and my gloves? Please put them in your pocket until I go, Arthur. I cannot afford to lose them as I used to do. Down, children! down!”

She took Mrs. North’s arm, and with Mr. Fothersley on her other hand and the dogs in full chorus, started across the lawn toward the house.

“Well played, Violet! well played! The child’s as good as ever at it. But where were we going? Oh yes—I must have Roger. We will

surprise him through the window. He will be very cross, but he won't say anything because it's me. Ah—but there he is——"

North's long figure came out into the sunlight, and as he approached the group he had much the air of a big schoolboy who had been playing truant.

"I apologize profusely," he said. "My intentions were of the very best. I intended to come out to tea, but I happened on Mr. Pithey in the hall, where he was endeavouring to purchase Mansfield——"

There was a chorus of exclamations.

"Well, he was asking Mansfield to recommend him a good butler for a gentleman's establishment. Salary no object, if man satisfactory. I confess I ran away. Lady Condor, if you will drink another cup of tea I should love to fetch it for you, but it is plainly not my fault if you will encourage my wife to entertain these people."

"You would never entertain anybody if you had your own way," said his wife.

"I would always entertain Lady Condor. Or rather, I am always sure Lady Condor will entertain me."

"Well, I am delighted with Mr. Pithey," announced Lady Condor, reoccupying her chair, and enjoying the sensation she created. "Yes. In Mr. Pithey I see our—now what is the word I want?—oh yes—our avenger! The people have dethroned Us. They are taxing Us out of existence. Condor told me this morning he must put the Cleve estate into the market. I shall be lucky if I keep my diamonds, and poor Hawkhurst will be lucky if he and his wife don't end in the workhouse. But where was I? I had got it all in my head just now. If only I could write it all down directly I think of it, I could make my fortune as a writer of leaders in a daily paper. Yes. They have dethroned Us, and they will get Pitheys, dozens of Pitheys, instead. We shall be ruined, obsolete, extinct, but we shall be revenged. They will get Pitheys in our place. Heaven be praised! The old *nouveaux riches* were bearable. They had reverence, they recognized their limitations, they were prepared to be taught. Look at you dear people, of course we have all known about the margarine. And you, dear Nita, yours was wine—or was it mineral water?—something to drink, wasn't it? We needn't hide anything now, because the Pitheys will strip everything bare. If you dear things had come here with

2½d. a year, and lived in a villa, we should never have known you. And yet—yes, now I have it—yet really and truly, Roger was the real aristocracy. The aristocracy of brains. The margarine and wine didn't matter, nor did the money—at least, I mean it ought not to have. I'm getting terribly muddled! And where is my scarf? Did I drop it when I got up? Oh, here it is. You see, We made the aristocracy of wealth. We couldn't resist the shoots in Scotland for the boys, and the balls for the girls, and the snug directorships on big companies. Yes—we smirched our position—our grandfathers and grandmothers would never have done it. And now here we are positively being patronized—yes, dear Arthur—patronized by Pitheys. I think I have gone off on to another tack. It was losing my scarf! But I am delighted with Pithey. He will avenge Us on the masses—Pithey the Avenger—yes. But I should have put it much better if I could have said it while he was here. Arthur, do look more cheerful! Think of Pithey as the avenger. It makes him so bearable. And I will have that cup of tea, Roger!"

"I cannot laugh," said Mr. Fothersley. His voice, even though addressing Lady Condor, held a word of rebuke. "We should never have called! It enrages me to think that we should have submitted to such—such——"

Words failed him. "However," he added, "we have reason to be thankful we did not call on the St. Ubes. I gathered to-day that the name, which might easily have misled us, was originally *Stubbs*. I shall *not* call. These Pithey people——"

Again words failed him, and Lady Condor chuckled.

"Mrs. Pithey disapproves of me," she announced. "She is probably telling Mr. Pithey that I paint. I must own it is very badly done to-day; Mullins was in a temper. She always makes me up badly when she is in a temper. Now do let us enjoy ourselves! Let us forget the Pithian invasion. Thank you—and some cake—yes. And some one else must have some tea to keep me company. Dear Nita—yes. The poor hostess never gets enough tea. Now this is cosy. And where are my glasses? I have not *looked* at the tennis yet. And I know it is very good. And I have not spoken to dear Violet, or to Fred. And there, why surely they are playing together. Did they draw together? How strange! The child is lovelier than ever. And now they have finished. Bring them to have tea with me. What is Fred now? A major! Isn't it

too ridiculous? And I suppose those little boys you have brought with you in R.A.F. uniforms are Brigadier-Generals. And have you won the tournament, my dears?"

"No," said Fred Riversley. He and Violet had shaken hands and had waited till Lady Condor stopped for breath. "No. I played very badly. Even Vi couldn't pull me through."

He was a fair heavily-built young man, and while the ladies talked, all three seemingly at once, for Lady Condor rarely ceased, he sat down on the grass and was at once the centre of attraction for the five dogs. When a momentary pause occurred, he asked, "How's Dudley?"

"Dudley," said Lady Condor, "has got his aluminium leg. It is really too wonderful. You'd never guess it wasn't a real live leg—unless he tries to run, which of course he mustn't do. But everything else. And John, we had letters from only yesterday. Russia—yes—and Heaven knows when we'll get him back. And where is your Harry? Why, it seems only yesterday he was retrieving tennis balls in a sailor suit!"

"Harry is stuck at Marseilles," said Riversley, "on his way to Egypt. Doesn't know what's going to happen to him till Peace is signed."

The little group fell on a sudden silence, a silence that the steady thud of the tennis balls, the call of the scores, the applause, did not touch. A shadow seemed to cross the sunbathed lawns and brilliant flower-beds. There were others whom they all remembered, of whom no one would ever ask for news again.

Riversley got up and carried the empty cups back to the tea-table. Then he stood and watched the tennis for a little space.

His mind moved heavily, but he was conscious that, in spite of all the momentum given by a great reaction, it would not be so easy as of old to make a business of pleasure.

Presently he slipped away to the peace and seclusion of his father-in-law's study. It was a long low room, lined from floor to ceiling with books. North's writing-table stood in one window, the other opened on to the lawn, while a further means of escape was afforded by a second door at the end of the room opening into his laboratory. In the great armchair guarding the hearth slept respectively Larry and Victoria, the little lady fox-terrier who owned Roger North. Between Vic and Larry there existed a curious compact, immovable

apparently as the laws of the Medes and Persians. Each had a share of the room on which the other never encroached, and Larry possessed certain privileges, plainly conceded by Victoria, with regard to North, beyond which he never went. In all other matters the two were fast friends, and had been so long before Larry came to live at Westwood. Lady Condor's West Highlanders they tolerated in the garden, but never in the house. Both dogs greeted Riversley with effusion, and the heavy, silent young man sat with Victoria on his knee and Larry at his feet, surrounding himself with clouds of smoke and stroking the little sleek head against his arm.

Presently North joined him. "You are staying the night?" he asked, accepting a proffered cigar.

"No." Riversley emptied his pipe of ashes and began to refill it.

"I've made the excuse of business in London," he went on after that little pause. "I think Vi wants a change from—everything."

There was another pause, but still North did not speak. He understood this stolid and apparently rather ordinary young man better than most people did. He knew the difficulty with which he spoke of things that touched him deeply, things that really mattered. So he lit his cigar and passed the light in silence, and presently Riversley went on again.

"You see, I still think Vi did the best thing she could, under the circumstances, when she married me," he said, "but even so it has not been the success I hoped it would have been. There's something wrong. Something more than having to put up with me instead of a chap like old Dick. It was a knock-down blow losing him, but Vi was damned plucky over that, and it doesn't account for——"

"What?" asked North, sharply this time, when the usual pause came.

"I don't know," answered Riversley, stolid as ever. "That's what worries me. I can't put a name to it. But there's something wrong. Vi's altered, and it isn't for the better."

"Altered?"

"Well, she looks at things differently—she's lost—oh, I don't know."

"My dear fellow, can't you be a little more explicit?"

“No. I’m a stupid sort of a fellow, or perhaps I’d understand better what’s wrong. The only thing definite that I can lay hold of is, that she gets sudden spasms of hatred, and it’s—well, it’s like looking into a red-hot hell. I don’t know how else to describe it. She always had a bit of a temper, you know, but this is different. And”—his voice dropped a little and lost its steadiness for a moment—“the animals won’t go near her sometimes.”

There was a queer strange silence for a minute across which the laughter outside broke like a jangling wire.

“I expect she’s treated them unjustly,” said North, conscious even as he spoke of the futility of his reason.

“Dogs never resent where they care,” said Riversley briefly. “It’s not that. They—they are afraid of her for some reason, and it’s horribly uncanny sometimes. I thought perhaps if she came down here without me, had a rest from me you know, it would help her a bit.”

North nodded. “I think you are wise. I hope it’s only a passing phase. She’s been through a stiff time, and we are none of us yet quite normal, I fancy.”

“It isn’t as if she’d care for me,” Riversley went on steadily. “I took my risk, and I’d take it again, and I’m not blaming her, mind you. And I’m only telling you about it because she seems to hang on to you, and you’ll be able to help her better if you know.”

“Yes, I understand that,” returned North. He felt, as a matter of fact, particularly helpless. What Riversley had just told him, coupled with Violet’s outburst to himself that afternoon, worried and disturbed him not a little. He remembered those words of hers: “Sometimes I am frightened.” The words overwrought, hysterical, long-strained, jumbled in his mind and brought no comfort. Then suddenly, like a hand stretched out to a stumbling man, came the thought of Thorpe, its radiant peace, the steady eyes of Ruth Seer. And with that came the thought of Dick Carey. He looked across at Riversley.

“There’s one thing I’d like to tell you,” he said, “and that is, Dick wished Violet had chosen you instead of himself. He felt somehow that you were really better suited to her.”

Riversley’s eyes met his in blank amazement. “Dick thought that?”

“He always felt he was too old for Vi. But she was desperately in love with him, and he knew it, and you know old Dick. Besides, Vi could twist almost any man round her little finger. But that he would have been glad if her choice had fallen on you instead of himself, I have no doubt whatever.”

Riversley stood up, filling his chest with a long breath. “Thank you for telling me,” he said. “It’s a help.”

“There’s one other thing I’d like to say,” North went on, speaking rather hurriedly, “and that is, see that you and Vi don’t get like myself and her mother. Vi is like her in some ways, and though no doubt I’ve been in fault too, and we were always wholly unsuited, yet we began under better conditions than you have. And now we’ve got on each other’s nerves so much that everything she says or does irritates me, and vice versa. We *can’t* get right now if we would. She thinks she’s fond of me still, because it’s the correct thing to be fond of your husband, but it’s far nearer hatred than love. And I—have no delusions. And for God’s sake, my boy, keep clear of following in our footsteps.”

“We come of a different generation, sir,” said Riversley simply. “If we can’t hit it off, we shall part. Only if there is trouble ahead for her, and I am afraid there is, I’m right there.”

North looked at him with kindly eyes, but he sighed. He knew only too well how the long years of misunderstanding, and irritability, and want of give and take, can wear out what at first seemed such a wonderful and indestructible thing.

“Roger! Roger!” shrilled his wife’s voice from the lawn. “Everyone is going. Aren’t you coming to say good-bye?”

She flashed on their vision as she called, her face flushed with indignation under her beflowered hat, her hands full of small boxes, tissue paper and cotton wool.

“I really do think you might help a little! It looks so odd, and all my friends think you peculiar enough already.”

Brought back with a shock to the deadly importance of the ordinary routine, North became flippant. “You don’t mean to say they tell you so?” he asked.

“It’s easy enough to guess what they must think, without any telling,” retorted his wife. “At any rate, if you can’t behave with

common civility yourself, you might let Fred come and help me. Fred, I have arranged for cold supper at 8.30. Will you come at once and look after the friends you brought down, while Violet and I change. And don't, I beg you, for Violet's sake, get into the same ways as her father."

Riversley followed her meekly across the lawn. "I'm really awfully sorry," he apologized. "Is there anything else I can do?"

Then he stopped. His mother-in-law was immersed in a group of her guests saying good-bye, and his eyes had found the figure they always sought. Outside the front door, Lady Condor, her scarves, gloves, and glasses, were all being packed carefully into her bath-chair, and a little way down the drive was his wife. In front of her, just out of arm's length, were the little pack of West Highlanders, barking furiously. She stooped down, coaxing them to come and be petted.

He progressed across the lawn towards her in his usual rather ponderous fashion, and stood watching. All the light of the sun seemed for him to centre round that slim white figure. It touched the smooth dark silk of her hair with a crown of glory, and found no flaw in the clear pale skin, the rose-red mouth. Those slender hands held out to the dogs, he would have followed them to the end of the earth. He loved all of her, with every thing he had or was.

Presently she gave up her hopeless efforts, and, standing to her full height, looked at him across the still barking dogs.

"They have forgotten me, the little pigs!" she said. "They won't even let me pat them."

But Riversley knew, even as dogs do not resent where they love, neither do they forget.

CHAPTER V

"If I were not a farmer, I would like to be a master mason," said Ruth Seer very firmly.

She was sitting by the roadside, watching the workmen lay the foundation for her first cottage. The process interested her enormously. The master mason at intervals paused in his work and instructed her as to its purport. She was learning the use and meaning of the square, the level, and the plumb-rule. She was also enjoying herself quite a lot.

Across her knees lay Bertram Aurelius. He guggled cheerfully in answer, and bit her forefinger vigorously with such teeth as he possessed.

Bertram Aurelius had come into the world without benefit of clergy. His father belonged to the B.E.F., his mother was a between-maid, and in the ordinary course of events he should have gone to his own place. But values had shifted considerably during the years of the Great War, and in the year of Peace both male babies, even though unauthorized, and between-maids, had come to be recognized as very distinctly valuable assets.

Gladys Bone, Bertram Aurelius's mother, aged eighteen, was pathetically anxious to please, a trait which had probably assisted in her undoing, and took the good advice meekly, except where Bertram Aurelius was concerned. Here the good ladies, who had with great difficulty scraped together the money to start a rescue home for unmarried mothers in Fairbridge, reasoned with her in vain. She insisted on his certainly somewhat startling combination of names and persisted in calling him by both. She was perfectly unashamed of the fact that he had no authentic father.

“Ain’t he beautiful?” seemed to appear to her quite a sufficient answer to those who endeavoured to present the subject in its proper light. And, worst of all, she absolutely refused to be separated from him.

The little grey-haired, pink-cheeked spinster, who practically settled such matters, was in despair. In her inmost heart she sympathized with Gladys, Bertram Aurelius being an infant of considerable charm. At the same time she realized that it was almost impossible to find anyone mad enough to engage a housemaid, or even a between-maid, with a baby thrown in.

One day, however, when Bertram Aurelius had reached the adorable age of ten months, the unexpected happened. Little Miss Luce travelled from London in the same carriage with Ruth Seer, and getting into conversation, told her the story of Gladys and Bertram Aurelius Bone. At the moment Ruth was meditating the possibility of getting a girl to help Miss McCox without permanently destroying the peace of Thorpe Farm. Gladys Bone seemed the possibility. Never having lived, save for her brief three months’ companionship, in a well-regulated family, the accompanying baby did not strike her as an impossibility, but rather as a solution.

Then and there on arriving at Fairbridge did Miss Luce carry her off to see them both.

Bertram Aurelius had eyes the colour of a delphinium, a head of red down, and a skin like strawberries and cream. He had little hands that held you tight and pink toes which he curled and uncurled. He crowed at Ruth and promptly put her finger in his mouth.

“Ain’t he beautiful?” said his small mother.

“She is really an excellent worker,” said little Miss Luce, when Gladys and Bertram Aurelius had been dismissed. “And she will do anything for anyone who is good to the baby. If you think you *could* manage with him, possibly——?”

She looked at Ruth anxiously.

Ruth laughed. “My dear lady,” she said, “I have just discovered that the one thing wanted to make Thorpe perfect is a baby.”

“But you have other servants,” suggested Miss Luce. “I fear you may find them a difficulty.”

Certainly Miss McCox's attitude towards the situation was more than doubtful, but Ruth had learnt that a distinctly soft kernel existed somewhere under the hard shell of an unattractive personality. She thought of Bertram Aurelius's blue eyes and soft red head.

"I think you must send Gladys out to Thorpe to apply for the situation *with* Bertram Aurelius," she said.

They looked at each other, and Miss Luce nodded comprehensively. "He is a very attractive baby," she murmured.

It was the next morning, while Ruth was revelling in the arrival of delicious fluffy yellow things in her fifty-egg incubator, that Miss McCox emerged from the house, evidently the bearer of news of importance.

As always, she was spotlessly clean and almost unbearably neat, and her clothes appeared to be uncomfortably tight. Her collar was fastened by a huge amber brooch, her waist-belt by a still larger glittering metal buckle, both presents from the young man to whom she had been engaged in her distant youth, and who had died of what Miss McCox described as a declining consumption. Out of the corner of Ruth's eye she looked distinctly uncompromising.

"There's a young woman come to apply for the situation," she announced.

"Does she seem likely to be any good?" asked Ruth, still busy with the incubator.

"She's got a baby," said Miss McCox, who always came to the point. "And she wants to keep it."

"A baby?"

"A baby," repeated Miss McCox firmly. "A baby as didn't ought to have come, but it's there."

"Oh!" said Ruth weakly. "Well, what do you think about it?"

Miss McCox fingered the amber brooch. This Ruth knew to be a distinct sign of weakness.

"The young woman's civil spoken, and I reckon there's worse about *with* their ring on," she said darkly. "I'm willin' to try her, if you are."

Ruth hid a smile among the yellow chicks. The charm of Bertram Aurelius had worked.

“But the baby?” she asked. “Can we possibly manage with the baby?”

“Why not?” returned Miss McCox sharply. “Babies aren’t much trouble, God knows! It’s the grown-ups make *me* sick!”

So Bertram Aurelius came to live at Thorpe, and was rapidly absorbed into the life on the farm. He was a good and cheerful infant, and anyone could take charge of him. He was equally contented, whether viewing the world over Ruth’s shoulder while she inspected the farm, or in his cradle in the corner of the kitchen listening to curious noises called singing, which Miss McCox, to the amazement of the whole establishment, produced for his benefit. He would lie among the hay in a manger, even as the Babe of all time, while Ruth and the cowman milked, or on his crawler on the terrace, guarded by Sarah and Selina, who took to him much as if he had been one of those weird black and white puppies of Sarah’s youthful indiscretion. And Gladys, his mother, worked cheerfully and indefatigably to please, sitting at Miss McCox’s feet for instructions, and the peace and comfort of Thorpe deepened and broadened day by day.

It was now near mid-June, and the fine weather still held. Day after day broke to unclouded sunshine, a world full of flowers and the rhythmic life of growing things. The seeds and baby plants cried for rain, the hay and fruit crops would suffer, but Ruth, her heart torn both ways, could not regret. It was all so beautiful, and when the rain came, who could tell? It might be all the real summer weather of the year, this wonderful May and June.

To-day, little ever-so-soft white clouds broke the clear blue of the sky, but there was still no sign of change. The wild roses and the broom were in perfection, and everywhere was the honey and almond scent of gorse; the buttercup glory was over but the ox-eyed daisies were all out, turning their sweet moon faces to the sun.

From where she sat Ruth could see the rose-red roofs of Thorpe with the white pigeons drowsing in the heat. Her cottages were to be equally beautiful on a smaller scale. She dreamt, as she sat in the warmth and the sweetness, with Bertram Aurelius cooing softly in her lap, visualizing pictures such as were growing in the minds of many in the great year of Peace, seeing beautiful homes where the strong man and the mother, with sturdy round-limbed children, should live, where the big sons and comely daughters should come in

and out, in the peace of plenty and to the sound of laughter. It might all be so wonderful, for the wherewithal is ours, is here with us. The good brown earth, the sun and the rain, fire and water, all the teeming life of nature, all ours to mould into a life of beauty for ourselves and our children.

Dreams? Yes. But such dreams are the seeds of the beautiful, which shall, if they find soil, blossom into beauty in the time to come, for the little children lying on our knees, clutching at our hearts.

Presently there intruded into Ruth's dreams the large presence of Mr. Pithey, and she discovered him standing in the white dust of the road in front of her. Disapproval and curiosity both appeared together in his little sharp eyes. According to Mr. Pithey's ideas it was distinctly unseemly for a person in Ruth's position to sit by the roadside "like a common tramp," as he expressed it to Mrs. Pithey later on. To his mind, somehow, the baby in her lap accentuated the unseemliness, and it made the thing worse that she was both hatless and gloveless. Had she been properly dressed for the roads, the rest might have been an accident.

"I should think you'd get a sunstroke, sitting by the road like that without your hat," he said.

Mr. Pithey himself was expensively dressed in pale grey with a white waistcoat and spats. On his head he wore a five-guinea panama, and his general appearance forcibly reminded Ruth of an immaculately groomed large, pale yellow pig. Her grey eyes smiled at him out of her sun-browned face. She had a disarming smile.

"I believe I was nearly asleep," she said, and dug her knuckles into her eyes much as a child does.

Mr. Pithey softened. "What on earth are you sitting there for?" he asked.

"Just dreaming. But you mustn't think I'm an idler, Mr. Pithey. Even Pan sleeps at this hour."

Her smile deepened, and Mr. Pithey softened still more. He stepped out of the dust into the grass, passing as he did so into a more friendly attitude.

"Pan?—that's a queer name for a baby!" he said.

The smile became just the softest thing in laughs. "Well, his proper name is Bertram Aurelius. But Pan——" She held Bertram Aurelius

up the while he chuckled at her, striving to fit his hand into his mouth. “Look at his blue eyes, and his little pointed ears, and his head of red down. Really Pan suits him much better.”

“Um,” said Mr. Pithey. “Bertram is a good sensible name for a boy, like my own, and not too common. Better stick to that. So you’ve started your cottages. Well, you remember what I told you. Don’t you think they’re going to pay, because they won’t.”

“Oh yes, they’ll pay,” said Ruth. “Why, of course they’ll pay!” There was mischief in her eye.

“Now look here,” said Mr. Pithey heavily. “It’s no good talking to a woman; it’s in at one ear and out of the other. But if you’ll walk up to the house with me, I’ll put it down in black and white. The return you’ll get for your money——”

“Oh, money!” interrupted Ruth. “I wasn’t thinking of money.”

Mr. Pithey heeled over, as it were, like a ship brought up when sailing full before the wind.

“If it’s damned rotten sentiment you’re after,” he exclaimed, “well you can take my word for it *that* doesn’t pay either!”

Ruth looked up at him as he stood over her, a very wrathfully indignant immaculate, pale yellow pig indeed. She thought of his millions, and the power they wielded and then of the power they might wield if backed by any imagination.

“Mr. Pithey,” she said, and her voice was very low, and it had in it the sound of many waters which had gone over her soul, “I have seen our dead men lie in rows, many hundreds, through the dark night, waiting till the dawn for burial; they did not ask if it paid.”

Mr. Pithey shuffled with his big feet in the grass. “That’s different,” he said, but his little sharp eyes fell. “I should have gone myself, but my business was of national importance, as of course you know. Yes, that’s different. That’s different.” He seemed to find satisfaction in the words. He eyed Ruth again with equanimity. “Of course you ladies don’t understand, but you can’t bring sentiment into business.”

He puffed himself out. Again the phrase pleased.

Ruth rose to her feet. Even to her broad charity he had become oppressively obnoxious.

“How much did you offer me for Thorpe?” she asked suddenly.

Mr. Pithey’s eyes snapped. “Twenty-five per cent. on your money,” he said, “or I might even go a bit higher as you’re a lady.”

Ruth tossed Bertram Aurelius over her shoulder, laughing.

“Do you know what has made Thorpe the gem it is?” she asked. “Why, sentiment! Unless you have some to spend on it, it wouldn’t pay you to buy.”

She nodded a farewell and left him with a strangled “damn” on his lips. He yearned after Thorpe. As a pleasure farm for himself it left little to be desired.

He expressed his feelings to Mrs. Pithey, who, coming along presently in her Rolls-Royce, with the two elder children in their best clothes, picked him out of the dust and took him home to tea.

“Why, it must have been her I passed just now!” she exclaimed. “There now, if I didn’t think it was just a common woman, and never bowed!”

“A good thing too!” said Mr. Pithey majestically. And he said to Mrs. Pithey all the things he would have said to Miss Seer if she had given him a chance.

Undisturbed by the omission, Ruth went home across the flowered fields, but Mr. Pithey himself oppressed her. It seemed grossly unfit, somehow, that the life sacrifice of those dead boys should result in benefit, material benefit at any rate, to the Pitheys of the world; it shocked even one’s sense of decency.

But Bertram Aurelius’s head was very soft against her throat as he dropped into sleep. The sun was very warm, the almond and honey scent of gorse was very sweet. Presently she unruffled, and began to sing the song which seemed to her to belong especially to Thorpe:

“When I have reached my journey’s end
And I am dead and free,
I pray that God will let me go
Along the flowered fields I know
That look towards the sea.”

So she came to the stile which led to the buttercup field, crimson and white now with sorrel and ox-eyed daisies. And standing among the flowers was a slim figure, the figure of a woman dressed all in

white. Ruth stopped on the stile to look. It was so beautiful in poise and outline, it gave her that little delightful shock of joy which only beauty gives. Backed by the blue sky, bathed in the broad afternoon sunlight, it was worthy even of her flower fields. Very still the figure stood, gazing across those fields that "looked towards the sea," and just as still, in a breathless pause, Ruth stood and watched and wondered.

For gradually she became aware of a strange appearance as of fire surrounding the slim figure. It was of oval shape, vivid scarlet in colour, deepening at the base. Other colours there were in the oval, but the fiery glow of the red drowned them into insignificance. Ruth shaded her eyes with her disengaged hand, suspecting some illusion of light, but the oval held its shape under the steady scrutiny, and with a little gasp she realized that she was looking at that which the ordinary physical sight does not reveal. Vague memories of things read in old books out of Raphael Goltz's library, descriptions of the coloured auric egg which, invisible to the human eye, surrounds all living forms, raced hurriedly through her mind, but she had read of them more with curiosity than with any thought that they would ever come within the boundary of her own consciousness. As she realized what the phenomenon was, a growing shrinking from it, a sense of horror, a feeling that there was something sinister, threatening, in the fiery implacable red of the appearance, came over her like a wave. She was glad of Bertram Aurelius's warm little body against her own, and found she was fighting a desire to turn back and retrace her steps. A desire so wholly absurd on the face of it, that she shook herself together and resolutely moved forward. As she did so, the white figure moved too, coming down the slope of the field to meet her, and as it came the scarlet oval faded, flickered, and, so far as Ruth was concerned, seemed to go out. The ordinary everyday things of life came back with a curious dislocating jerk, and she found herself looking into a very wonderful pair of golden-brown eyes set in short, but oddly thick, black lashes, and a light high voice spoke, a voice with sudden bell-like cadences in it, so often heard in the voice of French women. It was as attractive as all the rest of Violet Riversley's physical equipment.

"Is it Miss Seer? May I introduce myself? I expect as Roger North's daughter will be simplest," she said, holding out her hand "Father

dropped me here on his way to Fairbridge with Lady Condor. They are both calling here later to see you and pick me up, also hoping for tea, father told me to say. Your maid told me I should find you if I came down this way. Do you mind that I have picked some of your moon daisies? There are none fine as grow in this field."

"No, no, of course not," Ruth half stammered, realizing for the first time that she carried a sheaf of daisies in the bend of her arm. Why, everything would have been hers but for the chance of war. This was the woman who was to have married Dick Carey. And somehow, all at once, Ruth knew that this meeting was not the ordinary everyday occurrence such meetings mostly are. It had a meaning, a purpose of its own. She felt a sudden shrinking of some inner sense, even as she had just now felt a physical shrinking. She wanted to back out of something, she knew not what, just as she had had that ridiculous desire just now to turn round and go the other way. And yet, standing staring at her in this stupid dumb way, she did not dislike Violet Riversley; far from it. She was distinctly attracted by her, and her beauty drew Ruth like a charm.

It seemed quite a long time before she heard her own voice saying, "Please pick—take—anything you like."

"Thanks ever so much," said Mrs. Riversley. She had turned to walk up the path. "I'm just like a child. I always want to pick flowers when I see them, and they seem to grow here better than anywhere else I know. Mr. Carey used to say he had squared the Flower Elementals."

She spoke the name quite simply and casually, while Ruth was conscious of a ridiculous feeling of shyness.

"I think it quite likely," she answered. "Look at the wisteria." They had reached the ridge of the slope and could see where the flowered fields merged into the garden proper. "All along the top of the wall, against the blue. I have never seen any so wonderful."

It was amazingly wonderful, but Mrs. Riversley looked at it without any apparent pleasure.

"It is ever so good of you to let me come and invade you in this informal way," she said, with her little gracious social manner. "Father said he was sure you would not mind. And you won't let me

interrupt you, will you? You work on the farm yourself, don't you? It is not just a pretence of farming with you."

"I was just going to milk," said Ruth, smiling. "We are one hand short to-day, so if you won't mind my leaving you till teatime, and you will just do exactly what you like, and pick anything you like——"

Then Violet Riversley did, for her, an unusual thing. She slipped her hand into Ruth's, as a shy, rather lonely child might have done. It was one of the moments when she was irresistible.

"Let me come with you and watch," she said. "And why do you carry that big baby about? Is it a good work?"

"He's the farm baby," said Ruth, her eyes twinkling. "And we found him under a gooseberry-bush."

They had reached the terrace, and the pigeons, just awake from their midday slumber on the sun-baked roof, came tumbling down, fluttering round Ruth, searching the big pockets of her overall for corn, while Bertram Aurelius vainly strove to catch a wing or tail.

Mrs. Riversley stood at a little distance. "My goodness, they are tame," she exclaimed, as the pretty chase for the hidden food went on. "Just as tame as they were with——" She stopped and looked round her. "It is extraordinary how little the place has changed—and it's not pretending either—it really is just the same here. The same old comfortable at-home feeling. Did you know Mr. Carey by any chance? No, I suppose not. But it's funny—I have something the same feeling with you I always had with him, and with no one else ever in the world. You rest me—you do me good—you are something cool on a hot day. You know, father felt it too, and he is not given to feelings. Do get rid of that great fat lump. Put him back under his gooseberry-tree. Then we will go milking." She advanced on Bertram Aurelius threateningly. "Where *does* he go?"

Ruth broke into laughter. "He will go in the manger on the hay, or anywhere else that comes handy. Or—but wait a minute—here come the dogs."

Sarah and Selina were proceeding decorously up the path from the front gate. To all appearances they had been taking a little gentle exercise. There was an air of meekness, an engaging innocence, about them which, to those who knew them, told its own tale. They had undoubtedly been up to mischief.

“The dogs?” queried Mrs. Riversley.

“They will look after him,” explained Ruth.

She went into the house and brought out a small wooden cradle on rockers. In this she arranged Bertram Aurelius, who took the change with his usual philosophy, waved his bare pink legs with vigour, and strove to catch the sunbeams flickering through the jasmine leaves. The little dogs sat side by side, very alert and full of responsibility.

It was a picture full of charm, but Mrs. Riversley held herself aloof, though she watched the swift neat movement of Ruth’s work-worn hands with interest until she joined her.

Then she became for the next half-hour an entirely delightful companion, talking gaily in her pretty cadenced voice, flitting here and there like some white bird about the big fragrant cowshed, eager with the impulsive eagerness of a child to show that she too knew how to milk. Dick had taught her. She spoke of him frequently and without self-consciousness. She told Ruth many things that interested her to know. And gradually the curious shell of hardness, that apparent want of sympathy with all the beautiful teeming life of the farm disappeared. She milked, to Ruth’s astonishment, well and deftly. She understood much about chicken and pigs. She held the down-soft yellow ducklings in her shapely hands, and broke into open enthusiasm over the little white kid who ran with the herd.

“I wonder,” she said, when the milking was over and Ruth suggested tea, “I wonder if by any chance our ‘house on the wall’ is still there?”

“You mean where the kitchen garden wall is built out to meet the beech-tree, and the branches are like three seats, the highest one in the middle, and there are some shelves?”

“Yes—yes! and you can see all round and no one can see you. Dick built it for us when we were children—Fred, and I, and the Condor boys. We were always here. We played at keeping house up there, and Dick used to tell us stories about all the animals—there was one about a mouse family too—and about the Elementals. The Water Elementals, who took care of the river, and who brought the rain, and the dew in the early summer mornings; they were all like silver gossamer and white foam. And the Earth Elementals, who looked after the flowers’ food; and the Elementals of Fire.”

She stopped suddenly and shivered. They were crossing a corner of the orchard on their way to the kitchen garden, and, to Ruth's astonishment, she looked round her with something like fear in her eyes.

"Did you feel it get colder, quite cold," she said, "as we crossed the footpath just there?"

"I believe it did, now you say so," said Ruth. "You get those funny bands of colder air sometimes. The ground dips too, under those apple-trees."

Violet shivered again. She looked at the apple trees and the odd look of fear in her eyes deepened. "Has anyone ever spoken to you of a man called von Schäde, a German, who used to stay here?" she asked.

"No," said Ruth, and wondered.

"He asked me to marry him, just over there, under that biggest tree. It was covered with blossom then, and there were white butterflies about. Oh, he frightened me!" Her voice rose in a little cry. "He frightened me. I hate to think of it even now. I felt as if he could make me do it, whether I wanted to or no. He kissed me—like no one had ever kissed me before—I could have killed him, I hated him so. But even then I was afraid he might make me do it. I was afraid. I would not see him again alone, and I never felt really safe till I was engaged to Dick, and even then"—her voice dropped very low—"I was glad when Karl was killed. Do you think it was very horrid of me? I couldn't help it. Sometimes, even now, I dream in the night that he has never died, that he has come back and can make me do what he likes." She shuddered. "I have to shake myself quite wide awake before I know it is only a beastly dream. And I haven't Dick now any more."

She looked back over her shoulder and shivered again.

"You are sure that cold feeling was just quite ordinary?"

"Why, yes," said Ruth. "What should it be?"

"I don't know. Let us get to the house on the wall."

She hurried on, and her slender feet in white went up the rough steps as one at home. She stood for a few moments and looked round, while the old memories of what seemed like another life came thronging back. Then she climbed up into the middle seat, and sat

there, gathering herself together as a child does when it is concentrating deeply. In the flickering shadow of the leaves above and around, her face looked wan, mysterious almost, her strange golden eyes curiously alive, yet gazing, it seemed, into another world.

Her seat in the circle looked out across the great endless valley stretching away to the west. Immediately below was the big hay field, ready now for cutting. It fell in a gentle slope to the river, which, diving under the roadway by the front gate, curved round the garden, and broke out into a miniature pond at the bottom of the field, before it vanished among the bracken where the territory of Thorpe ended and the great beautiful forest of the Condor estate commenced. In the pond were water-lilies, rose-coloured and white, and tall brown bulrushes, all in their season of perfection. Most noticeable in the noble stretch of landscape beyond was a clump of beech-trees on the ridge of the near side of the valley, lifted up sheer against the height of the sky. They had caught for many years the full blast of the winds coming up from the north-east, and only the topmost branches survived, leaving their straight exquisite trunks bare. To-day, standing high above the blue distances, in the shimmering light and heat, they had about them more than usual of majesty and mystery.

Violet Riversley sat very still. The myriads of summer leaves rustled softly; here and there a bird sang. Presently she began to speak, even as another bird might have begun to sing.

“And it takes a long time to get the water-lilies to grow, because they won’t come anywhere until they are sure you really love them, not just want them for show. It’s the same with the Madonna lilies. And they never make mistakes. You’ve got really to love them. And the water-lilies like bulrushes close at hand for a bodyguard, because the water-lilies are of royal birth. The Water Elementals told Dick all this. And so the lilies grew, and I loved the pink ones best, but he loved the white. And the tops of the beech-trees with the long trunks are where the Earth Elementals say their prayers; they choose trees like that so that the Earth children cannot climb up and disturb them. If you disturb them when they are saying their prayers they get cross, and then the flowers come all wrong. Red roses with a green spike in their hearts, and the lime flowers covered with black. And all that shimmery heat is like it is in the desert, all like that and no green. Only here and there water in a grove of palm-trees. And there

is the wood where the Winds live. They will all be at home to-day, resting."

Ruth held her breath while she listened, and then the voice fell very softly into silence. And quite suddenly there came a sudden shower of big soft tears. They made blurred marks on the lustrous white skin, and she looked at Ruth with dim wet eyes like a child who had been naughty.

Presently she got up and came and sat down on the top of the wall facing the garden.

"Come and sit here too," she said, patting the bricks beside her. "It's quite comfy if you put your heels back into the steps. There's just room for two. We used to watch for Dick coming home from here—I and Fred and the eldest Condor boy. He was killed at Messines—and little Teddy Rawson, the Vicar's son—he was afraid of almost everything—mice and ferrets—just like a girl—and he died a hero's death at Gallipoli. And Sybil Rawson—she went as a nurse to Salonica, and was torpedoed coming home, and drowned. Only Fred and I left, and the two youngest Condors."

Again she fell on silence, and again Ruth held her breath. She feared that any word of hers might break the spell of this return to the past days which were like another life.

"The flowers grow for you too. They are just as wonderful as ever," Mrs. Riversley went on again, after a little while. "And you have got a blue border. Delphinium, anchusa, love-in-the-mist, and the nemophila—all of them. I wonder how you came to think of that?"

"There were some of the plants still left, and I—somehow I think I guessed."

"And the birds? Are they still as tame?"

"They were shy at first, but they are beginning to come back."

"The robins used to fly in and out of the house. And even the swallow and kingfishers used to come quite close to Dick. If I was with him I had to be quite still for a long time before they would come."

Ruth's face lighted with a sudden thought. "The kingfishers?" she said.

“They are the shyest of all birds. I suppose we humans have always tried to catch and kill them for their plumage. Dick hated that sort of thing.” Her face grew hard and the strange fire burnt up again in her eyes. “And then he was shot down himself—shot down as we shoot any bird or beast.”

She stopped suddenly, the words choked back in her throat, as the Condor car came over the bridge and pulled up at the gate.

Then she slipped down from the wall and stood looking up at Ruth. “Thank you for letting me go round with you—and talk. It’s been good.” She pushed up the heavy wave of hair from her forehead under her wide-brimmed hat. “It’s taken me back for a little, to what life used to be, from what I am to what I was. And now let us go and pick up all the things Lady Condor will drop.”

Lady Condor’s cheerful chatter was already with them.

“Now have I got everything? Yes—no—where is my handkerchief? Did I put it into the pocket? The parcels can all stay. No one will touch them. Oh, there it is! Thank you, Roger.”

She began to ascend the path, shedding a blue chiffon scarf, which North retrieved as he followed her.

“Oh, there you are, Violet! And this is Seer? An unpardonably late call, but I have been taking the chair at a meeting to discuss the Women’s Victory Memorial. We discussed for hours—the weirdest ideas! And the heat! At the Town Hall? Yes. Why are town halls and hospitals always hideous? There can’t be any necessity for it. Tea indoors, out of the sun? How nice! I never do like tea out-of-doors myself really, though sometimes I pretend to. And the dear old room—almost just like it used to be. I am glad, though it makes me want to cry. Yes. But where was I? Oh yes, the weirdest ideas. Even a crematorium was suggested. No, I am not inventing, dear Violet. The good lady had lost her husband and was obliged to take him all the way to Woking. Most trying, of course! I was really sorry for her. But seemed so odd for a Victory Memorial. So we settled on a maternity home, a quite excellent idea. Trenching on the improper, of course. It brought the fact of babies coming into the world into such a very concrete form as it were. But so necessary just now—and that they should have every chance. So even the dear ladies who attend St.

Christopher's Church agreed. We parted in the utmost harmony. So pleasant—and so unusual!"

"And have you settled on a War Memorial?" asked North, rescuing her handkerchief from Selina's clutches.

"Not yet! And I see no prospect—we are still talking. We *shall* until some adventurous spirit among us says, 'Well, something must be *done*.' Then we shall go the way of least resistance—always so safe and so unoriginal. Another of those delightful sandwiches, please. Your own Devonshire cream, of course. Why can't my cook make Devonshire cream? But where was I? Oh yes—the War Memorial. Then we shall erect an artistically offensive monument. Who invented that word, I wonder. And did the word come from the monstrosity, or after? But it is so descriptive of what it is. Yes. And what is your idea of a good memorial, Miss Seer?"

"I have only one idea at present," said Ruth, smiling. "And that is cottages."

"Quite a good one too," said North. "Why hasn't anyone thought of it?"

"Much too obvious, my dear," exclaimed Lady Condor. "The people are shrieking to be housed, so we shall build them a library—yes."

"And the Pithians will build themselves winter gardens and billiard-rooms and marble swimming-baths," said Mrs. Riversley.

"Pithians!" exclaimed Lady Condor. "Who was it thanked someone else for a word! Thank you, dear Violet. Did I invent it myself the other day? How clever of me! Pithians—yes. Democracy will kill privilege as it did in France, but the Pithians arise on our ashes—or should it be Phœnix? I am getting dreadfully muddled—it comes from talking too much. Roger, why don't you talk, instead of letting me monopolize Miss Seer and all the conversation?"

"My dear lady, the Pithian glory is but for a moment. We are all converging to the same heap of ashes with amazing velocity, and what will arise from those ashes you must ask a wiser man than I."

"You think seriously of the outlook?" asked Ruth.

North helped himself to more bread-and-butter. "I don't think," he said. "It won't bear thinking of—when you can do nothing."

Then Lady Condor, for once, put a straight question without continuation.

"What do you think of things?" she asked, looking at Ruth.

The silence grew, in some odd way, tense, while they all waited for the answer. It surprised North to find that he was waiting for it with something which distinctly approached interest.

Ruth Seer's face looked troubled for a moment, and the colour came sweeping into it like a flood, and left her very white. When she spoke she felt as if the words came, dragged with difficulty, from some unknown consciousness. And though the words she spoke, undoubtedly she felt to be true, were a testimony of her own faith, yet she had only that moment known the truth she was stating.

"I believe," she said slowly, haltingly, but with a strange intensity of conviction, "I believe we are not alone. Things are in the hands of the men who have given their lives so that things should be different—better. Their influence is here—all about us. They, with added knowledge—guide—through our darkness. It is their great reward."

There was another silence, and Ruth flushed again painfully, under the scrutiny of three pairs of eyes. "Where did you get that idea from?" asked Lady Condor.

"I don't know," she answered, then amended her statement. "At least, I am not sure. But I believe it is true."

"I like it," announced her Ladyship. "I like it enormously—yes—quite enormously. My poor dear Hartley! He was so keen on everything, so interested in *this* old world. He didn't want rest in heaven—at twenty-four. No—is it likely? And *les choses ne vont pas si vite*. It isn't in the nature of things they should. Nature hasn't great big gaps like that with no sense in them. I don't know, my dear, if *I'm* talking sense, but I know what I mean, and I'm sure it's right. Yes—I like your idea."

"But that does not make it true. Some people can believe anything they want to. I can't." Mrs. Riversley moved impatiently from her seat. "All we know is, they are gone, so far as we are concerned; we cannot see or touch or hold them any more. Why do you discuss and imagine? They are gone."

Lady Condor shrank together at the words. The wonderful vitality which enabled her to defy age and satiety failed for the moment. She

looked old and piteous.

"Yes," she said, "they are gone." She looked at North. "And you can tell us nothing—with all your learning—with all your discoveries. And the parsons talk of faith and hope. Yes. But we have lost our first-borns."

North did not answer. He gathered her various belongings and put them in her lap. "There are one or two things I have to do to the car," he said.

The door opened on to a clamour of dogs. Sarah and Selina, shrill with welcome, barked in chorus around Larry, who appeared to have just arrived. "Now what the devil——" muttered North to himself, while Larry smote him with a feathered paw, and begged with wistful eyes for pardon.

Ruth sat very late out on her terrace that night. The heavens were dark, but full of stars. Their radiance filled all space. Who and what was it had spoken those words this afternoon, for neither the thought nor the words had been her own? She believed it was a true thought; something deeper than brain or understanding knew it was true. And Ruth Seer sat and prayed. Was she on the threshold of that Open Doorway, which in all ages men have sought and sought in vain? Had she somehow stumbled on something vast and beyond all measure valuable? She knew how valuable, she had seen the dead men lie in thousands waiting burial, and heard with her soul the tears of their women. Gone, as Violet Riversley said, out of sight, or touch, or sound. And yet surely a communion deeper and fuller than sight, or touch, or hold, had sprung up, was growing, between herself and one of those dead men. A man unknown to her on this physical plane. That was the crowning wonder of this wonderful thing which was happening. How had it come about? What did it mean? And it was no thing apart from this earthly life, from the little daily round. It was no other world.

The night deepened. A magic of starlight lay on the farm, on the dull silver of the stream, over the violet distances. The little farm she loved, with all its sleeping creatures, belonged to the wonderful whole, the great space, the immensity of light, the glory and the mystery.

The beauty of it all was like a draught of wine, was like a silver sword, was like a harp of gold.

And suddenly a nightingale began to sing. A small brown-feathered thing with that wonder of sound in its tiny throat. And then it came. Faith—Hope—they cannot pass the open door—only Love. And love not of one to another, however deep, however true, but love of the universal whole, that love which she and Dick Carey had in common, focused as it were on Thorpe. That was the password, that the key, that the communion between the living and the dead which she had found.

And Larry, lying at her feet, for North had let him stay, waved a slow-moving tail, and dreamed, content.

Up above, on the hill, the lights of the great Pithian mansion, with all it symbolized, went out one by one, and Ruth, who loved her England, was not afraid.

A deep sense of great responsibility remained. If that which she had sensed was really so, and she had neither then nor at any later time any doubt of it, what had They, with their wider knowledge, the great advance in evolution which they who had made the supreme gift of all they had on this physical plane must surely have attained, what had They to build the new order with save those who were left? Living stones for the Great New Temple never made with hands.

The glory of it touched Ruth as with a sudden blaze of light. The thought was like a bugle call. To work with for them still. She had only herself to offer. One small stone to shape for use, to make as perfect as might be. She offered it under the starlit heavens with all her heart. Life took on a new and more beautiful meaning, any work of service a deeper, fuller joy. It was still for, and with, Them.

CHAPTER VI

It was a few days later that Mr. Fothersley, as was his frequent custom, emerged from his front door at eleven o'clock, on his way to the post. In his left hand he carried a sheaf of letters for the twelve o'clock post out. As he often said, it made "an object for his morning stroll." Not that Mr. Fothersley ever really strolled. It would have been a physical impossibility. His little plump legs always trotted. They trotted now along the immaculate gravel drive which curved between two wide strips of smooth mown sward. On the right hand the grass merged into a magnificent grove of beech-trees, on the left it was fenced by a neat iron railing, dividing it from what the house agent describes as finely timbered park-land. Behind him, with all its sun-blinds down, the grey old house slept serenely in the sunshine. The parterres were brilliant with calceolaria, geranium, and heliotrope. Mr. Fothersley rather prided himself on an early Victorian taste in gardening, and his herbaceous borders, very lovely though they were, dwelt in the kitchen garden region.

Leigh Manor had belonged to Mr. Fothersley from the day of his birth, which occurred two months after the death of his father. That gentleman had married late in life for the sole and avowed purpose of providing his estate with an heir, of which purpose his son most cordially approved. At the same time he had never seen his way to go so far himself. The Fothersleys were not a marrying family. His mother, a colourless person, of irreproachable lineage, and a view of life which contemplated only two aspects, the comfortable and the uncomfortable, had lived long enough to see him well into the forties, by which time he was as skillful as she had been in the management of an establishment. Everything continued to run in the same perfect order, and Mr. Fothersley felt no more inclined than during her lifetime to disturb the smooth current of his pleasant life by

embarking on the very uncertain adventure of matrimony. On this particular morning he paused outside his own gate to look at the view—almost the same view that was obtainable from the "house on the wall" at Thorpe Farm. Ever since he was a small child, Mr. Fothersley could remember taking visitors to see "our view," and he had, at an early age, esteemed it unfortunate that none so good was to be obtained from the grounds of Leigh Manor. He looked out over the quiet scene. The great beautiful valley, with the suggestion only of the sea beyond, the dotted farmsteads, with here and there some noble old mansion like his own secluded among its trees, and, at his feet, little Mentmore village, with its grey church tower, half hidden in the hollow. It was typical of all he held most dearly. A symbol of the well-ordered ease and superiority of his position, of the things which were indeed, though unconsciously, Mr. Fothersley's religion.

In the grey church his forbears had, like himself, sat with their peers, in the front pews, while their dependents had herded discreetly at the back behind the pillars. In these eminently picturesque cottages, of two or three rooms, dwelt families who, he had always taken more or less for granted, regarded him and his with a mixture of respect and reverence, just touched—only touched—with awe. On the whole most worthy and respectable people. Mr. Fothersley was generous to them out of his superabundance. He was indeed attached to them; and although Mr. Fothersley prided himself on moving with the times, it was plain that any alteration in the admirable state of things existing in Mentmore would not only be a mistake, but absolutely wrong.

Therefore, on this fine June morning, Mr. Fothersley was perturbed. The knowledge that Mr. Pithey dwelt in the noble grey stone house on the opposite hill, in the place of his old friend, Helford Rose, spoilt "his view" for him. And, for the first time, too, one of Ruth Seer's new cottages had become visible just below his own pasture fields. The workmen were putting on the roof. It was to Mr. Fothersley an unseemly sight in Mentmore. Ruth had done her best, she had spent both time and money in securing material that would not spoil the harmony or character of the little village, but as Mr. Fothersley had said, it was the thin end of the wedge.

What was to prevent Mr. Pithey from scattering some horrible epidemic of hideous utilitarian domiciles broadcast over his wide

estate? Mr. Fothersley shuddered, and remembered with thankfulness that they were not at present a paying proposition.

Still, he wished Miss Seer had not these queer manias. Not that he disliked her—far from it. Indeed, the little basket of his special early strawberries, poised in his right hand, was on its way to her. And he had even traced a distant cousinship with her on the Courthope side. Since what was now familiarly known in his set as the Pithian Invasion he considered her a distinct asset at Thorpe.

"I would not have had old Dick's place vulgarized for a good deal," he said to himself as he descended the hill. "And I know even he did talk of building some cottages before the war, poor dear fellow."

All the same, he did not feel in his usual spirits, and presently, to add to his discomfort, he passed the local sweep, window cleaner, and generally handy man, who, instead of touching his hat as of old, nodded a cheery, "Good-morning, Mr. Fothersley! Nice weather," to him.

Mr. Fothersley did not like it. Most distinctly it annoyed him! It had been one thing to go and see Mankelow when he was wounded, and a patient in the local V.A.D., and make a considerable fuss over him, but that, as Mr. Pithey was fond of saying, "was different." It was decidedly presuming on it for Mankelow to treat him in that "Hail fellow, well met" way.

This brought to Mr. Fothersley's mind the threatening strikes among the miners, transport workers, and what Mr. Fothersley vaguely designated as "those sort of people." He wondered what would happen if all the sweeps went on strike. It was a most dangerous thing to light fires with a large accumulation of soot up the chimney—most dangerous.

At this moment he nearly collided with Ruth Seer, as she came swiftly round the Post Office corner.

They both stopped, laughed, and apologized.

"I was just on my way to you with some of our early strawberries," said Mr. Fothersley, exposing a corner of the contents of his basket.

"How very good of you!" exclaimed Ruth. "And I do love them. Will you wait for me one moment? I am going on my way to send a telegram to Mr. North."

Now curiosity was the most prominent trait in Mr. Fothersley's funny little character, and it was the naked and unashamed curiosity of the small child. It might almost be looked on as a virtue turned inside out, so real and keen was his interest in his neighbors' affairs, an interest often followed by sympathy and help.

"Telegraphing to North!" he exclaimed. "What about?"

No inhabitant of any length of time would have been in the least astonished, but Ruth, for a moment or two taken thoroughly aback, simply stared at him. Then, somewhat late in the day, it began to dawn on her that her telegram to Roger North might possibly demand an explanation, and one she had no intentions of giving.

"Telegraphing to North? What about?" repeated Mr. Fothersley, his little pink face beaming with kindly interest.

The whole truth being out of the question, there was nothing for it but as much as possible.

"I want to see him to ask his opinion on a matter of importance," said Ruth.

Astonishment mingled with the curiosity on Mr. Fothersley's speaking countenance. Many things flashed through his mind in the minute while he and Ruth again stared at each other, the most prominent being the tongue of the Postmistress and Mrs. North's fiery jealousy.

Mr. Fothersley could remember terrible times, when it had been aroused by lesser matters than this telegram, aroused to such an extent that all Mentmore had become aware of it, and much unnecessary dirty linen washed in public before the storm subsided.

North himself on these occasions was, in Mr. Fothersley's language, difficult, most difficult. He either teased his wife unmercifully, or lost his temper and used bad language. The whole affair was always, again in Mr. Fothersley's language, "regrettable, most regrettable," while the groundwork of the whole matter was, that women bored North far more than they ever amused him, so that if he did talk to one it was noticeable.

It was quite evident to Mr. Fothersley that Miss Seer was wholly unconscious of anything unusual in her action. This surprised him, for he had understood she had been a companion, and a companion's knowledge of such things, as a rule, passes belief.

Ruth made a movement to pass on, the fatal document in her hand. But it was one of those moments when Mr. Fothersley was supreme.

"My dear lady," he exclaimed, "I am going to Westwood so soon as I have deposited my little offering on your doorstep. Allow me to take the message for you."

With a deft movement the paper was in his possession, was neatly folded and placed in safety in his waistcoat pocket. His little plump figure turned, plainly prepared to escort her back to Thorpe.

"The telegram will explain itself?" he asked, "or shall I give any message?"

"I want to consult him about some happenings on the farm," answered Ruth. "Things I should like to talk over with him with as little delay as possible. Mr. North has been very kind, and, I think takes a real interest in Thorpe."

"No doubt. No doubt." Mr. Fothersley acquiesced cordially. "He was poor Carey's most intimate friend. Though indeed we were all his friends. A most lovable fellow. Indeed, he was almost too kind-hearted. Anyone could take him in—and did!" added Mr. Fothersley, with warmth. "There was a German fellow, very pleasant, I own, to meet, who used to stay with him quite a lot at one time. I always felt how, if they had invaded England, he would have known every inch of the country round here, for no doubt he took notes of everything, as they always did. Funnily enough, he was taken prisoner badly wounded by Dick's own regiment, and died at the clearing station, before they could get him to a hospital."

Ruth looked at the sunlit peace of the farm, for they had reached the gate. She remembered what Violet Riversley had told her. And yet Dick Carey had cared for this man.

"And they had parted here as friends," she said.

"I believe Dick was quite cut up about it," said Mr. Fothersley. "Very odd. But poor dear Dick was odd! No sense of proportion, you know!"

This was a favourite saying of both Mr. Fothersley's and Mrs. North's. It is doubtful if either of them quite knew what they meant by it, but it sounded well.

Mr. Fothersley repeated it over again, leaning with his arms on the gate. “No sense of proportion. A lovable fellow though, most lovable. Many’s the time we’ve stood here, just as you and I are standing, watching his birds. You have the bird pool still, I see.” Mr. Fothersley fumbled for his glasses. “Yes, and those wretched little blue-tits everywhere—the worst offenders in the garden. Even the blossom is not safe from them. Madness to encourage them with coconuts and bacon-rind. But as I said, poor Dick——”

By this time Mr. Fothersley had his glasses firmly planted across the bridge of his nose. He could see the pool plainly, and in addition to several blue-tits, two round cherub faces, open-mouthed, very still, hanging over the edge of the bank.

“Good heavens! What are those?” he exclaimed.

“Only two small visitors of mine,” said Ruth, smiling. “It is quite wonderful how still they have learnt to be to watch the birds. They live in Blackwall Tenements, and their only playground there is a strip of pavement under a dust shoot.”

“Oh!” said Mr. Fothersley dubiously. “Blackwall. That is somewhere in the City.”

He was interrupted by a shrill, excited, plainly female voice on its topmost note.

“Oh, Tommy! ’e’s caught a f’y!”

The next moment every bird had gone, while the complete figures belonging to the moon faces arose, as it were out of the ground. Both wore knickers, both had short hair, but it was plainly the master male who administered swift and primitive punishment.

“There, you’ve done it again!”

“I forgot—I——” Sobs, bitter and violent, stopped the lament.

The boy pocketed his hands and moved off.

“Jes’ like a woman,” he called over his shoulder.

The other small figure followed him at a humble distance, wailing aloud till both disappeared from view.

Mr. Fothersley shuddered.

“How can you bear it?” he asked, his little pink face really concerned. “Even Dick——”

“Stopped short at Germans,” Ruth ended for him. “Well, it has its compensations. And after all, what *can* one do? I know that playground under the dust soot! And I have all this. One could not bear it, if one didn’t have them down.”

“How many?” asked Mr. Fothersley faintly.

Ruth leant back against the gate and gave way to helpless laughter, while Mr. Fothersley prodded holes in the bank with his stick and waited with dignity till she should recover. He saw nothing to laugh at.

“I beg your pardon,” said Ruth, hurriedly suppressing what she felt from his manner was most unseemly mirth. “I only have two at a time,” she added appeasingly. “And they are really very good on the whole.”

“I should relegate them to the back garden,” said Mr. Fothersley decisively. “I remember as a child even *I* was never allowed to run wild where I pleased. Good heavens! what is that noise?” He cocked an attentive ear, as a sound, like nothing he had ever heard before, made itself evident.

At the same moment, over the crest of the lawn appeared a wonderful procession. First came the small female figure in knickers, brandishing in her right hand a crimson flag, while with the left she held a small tin trumpet to her lips, with which at intervals she blew a breathless note. The same which had attracted Mr. Fothersley’s attention. Then, strapped into his go-cart, and positively smothered in flags and flowers, came Bertram Aurelius. Finally, pushing the go-cart with somewhat dangerous vigour, the small Lord of the Show. Around the procession, leaping and barking, skirmished Sarah and Selina, while beside the go-cart Larry padded sedately, snuffing the air delicately, waving a stately tail.

The procession circled the lawn at the full speed of the children’s small legs, dropped over into the garden pathway and disappeared towards the farmyard.

Mr. Fothersley softened. The scene had been a pretty one.

“Quite like one of the delightful illustrations in the children’s books of to-day,” he said, smiling. “Please don’t think me unsympathetic, dear lady. A love of children is one of the most beautiful traits in a woman’s character, and philanthropy has also its

due place. But do not be carried away by too much enthusiasm. Do have, as I used to say to poor Dick, a due sense of proportion. Otherwise you will only get imposed upon, and do no good in the long run. Believe me, you have gone quite far enough with these innovations, and do let it stop there before you have cause for regret."

Mr. Fothersley paused and smiled, well pleased with the turning of his phrases. Also he felt his advice was good. Ruth acquiesced with becoming humility, aware only of a little running commentary which conveyed nothing to her. Her mind was entirely absorbed with the fact that Larry had accompanied the small procession which had so swiftly crossed their line of vision and disappeared—Larry, who kept children severely in their place as became a dignified gentleman of a certain age, and on whom not even Selina's wiliest enticement produced the smallest effect.

"No good ever comes of moving people out of their natural surroundings," continued Mr. Fothersley, holding on his way with complete satisfaction. "All men cannot be equal, and it only makes them discontented with the state of life in which it has pleased God to place them. Personally I believe also they are quite unable to appreciate better conditions. Why, when——"

And here, to the little man's astonishment, Ruth suddenly, and very vividly, turned on him, shaking a warning finger in front of his startled nose.

"Mr. Fothersley, if you tell me that old story about the chickens in the bathroom, I warn you I am quite unable to bear it. I shall hold forth, and either make you very cross with me or bore you to death. I have lived amongst the very poor, and between your view of them and mine there is a great gulf fixed. I know what you cannot know—their sufferings, their endurance, their patience. I would have every child in London down here if I could—so there! And they may love their squalor and filth, as people here have said to me. It is all the home they have ever known. It is the great indictment against our civilization."

Then she stopped and suddenly smiled at him, it was a smile that barred offence.

"There, you see! Don't start me off, whatever you do!"

Mr. Fothersley smiled back. “My dear lady, I admire your kindness of heart. It is your lack of any sense of proportion——”

It was at this moment that Mr. Pithey appeared, magnificent in a new tweed knickerbocker suit of a tawny hue, with immaculate gaiters, brown boots and gloves; a cap to match the suit, upon his head; the inevitable cigar in his mouth; looking incongruous enough, between the wild rose and honeysuckle hedges.

To discover a couple of anything like marriageable age alone together, in what he called “the lanes,” suggested one thing and one thing only to Mr. Pithey’s mind. His manner assumed a terrible geniality.

“Now don’t let me disturb you,” he said, waving a large newly gloved hand. “Just a word with this lady, and I’m off.” He perpetrated a wink that caused Mr. Fothersley to shut his eyes. “Two’s company and three’s none, eh?”

Mr. Fothersley opened his eyes and endeavoured to stare him down with concentrated rage and disgust. But Mr. Pithey held on his way, undisturbed.

“Wonderful how you meet everybody in this little place! Just passed Lady Condor. Jove! how that woman does cake her face with paint. At her age too! What’s the use? Doesn’t worry me, but Mrs. Pithey disapproves of that sort of thing root and branches.”

If Mr. Fothersley could have called down fire from heaven and slain Mr. Pithey at that moment, he would undoubtedly have done so; as it was, he could only struggle impotently for words wherewith to convey to him some sense of his insufferable impertinence.

And words failed him. His little round face quivering with rage, he stammered for a moment unintelligibly, making furious gestures with his disengaged hand at the astonished Mr. Pithey. Finally he turned his back and thrust the basket of strawberries into Ruth’s hand.

“Please send the basket back at your convenience, Miss Seer,” he said. Even in that moment he did not forget the importance of the return of one of the Leigh Manor baskets. “Good-morning.”

“Touching little brute,” remarked Mr. Pithey cheerfully, gazing after him. “What’s upset him now? He’ll have an apoplectic fit if he

walks at that rate in this heat, a man of his built and a hearty eater too!"

Indeed poor Mr. Fothersley, by the time he reached the Manor, between rage and nervousness, for who could say what thoughts Mr. Pithey's egregious remarks might not have given rise to in Miss Seer's mind, was in a very sad state.

It was impossible to risk driving to Westwood in an open car. He ordered the landaulette, closed.

It was necessary to go because he had Miss Seer's telegram to deliver. Also the desire was strong upon him for the people of his own little world, those who felt things as he felt them, and saw things even as he saw them. He wanted to talk over the various small happenings of the morning with an understanding spirit; the sweep's familiarity, Miss Seer's odd activities, and last, but not least, Mr. Pithey's hateful facetiousness. Above all, though he hardly knew it himself, he wanted to get with people who were the same as people had been before the war, to get away from this continual obtrusion of an undercurrent of difference, of change, which so disquieted him, and he wanted, badly wanted, comfort and sympathy.

The Norths were by themselves, and proportionately glad to see him. Violet had left, on a sudden impulse, that morning, and fresh visitors were not expected till the following week.

The very atmosphere of Nita North comforted the little man. The atmosphere of the great commonplace, the unimaginative, the egotistic. An atmosphere untouched by the war. Peace descended on his troubled spirit as he unfolded his table napkin and watched the butler, in the very best manner of the best butler lift the silver cover in front of Mrs. North from the golden-brown veal cutlets, each with its dainty roll of fat bacon, Mr. Fothersley's favourite luncheon dish, while North, who had his moments of insight, said:

"Some of the Steinberg Cabinet for Mr. Fothersley, Mansfield."

Indeed, both the Norths saw at once that Mr. Fothersley was not quite himself, that he had been upset.

It was impossible to tell the chief causes of his annoyance before the servants, though, in an interval, he commented on the familiar behaviour of the sweep, and his views as to the results of "the new independence" on the working classes, and the danger of strikes.

“I have no patience with this pandering to the lower classes,” said Mrs. North. “They must be taught.”

North, who was genuinely fond of little Mr. Fothersley, did not ask “How?” as he had an irritating habit of doing when he heard his wife enunciate this formula.

Mr. Fothersley agreed. “Certainly, they must be taught.”

He was distinctly soothed. The Steinberg Cabinet had not altered, indeed it had gained in its power to minister. The objectionable feeling that the foundations on which his world was built were quivering and breaking up subsided into the background, and by the time the coffee came, and the servants departed, he was his usual genial kindly little self, and could even give a risible turn to his account of Mr. Pithey’s impertinence.

“I lost my temper and, I am afraid, practically gibbered at him with rage,” he owned. “I was hardly dignified. But that I should live to hear that Marion Condor is disapproved of by Mrs. Pithey!”

“Insolent brute!” said Mrs. North, all unconscious that her language was Pithian. “Can nobody put him in his place?”

“He must be taught,” suggested North wickedly. But, though his wife shot a doubtful glance at him, Mr. Fothersley took the suggestion in good faith.

“I quite agree with you, Roger. The question is, How? Unfortunately we have all called.”

“We could all cut him,” suggested Mrs. North.

“I don’t approve of cutting people, my dear Nita. In a small community it makes things very unpleasant and leads to such uncomfortable situations.” Indeed, Mr. Fothersley had more than once interposed in almost a high-handed manner to prevent Mrs. North cutting ladies of whom she thought she had reason to be jealous. “No, I sincerely wish we had never called, but having called, and indeed invited these people to our houses, received them as guests, I should deprecate cutting them. You agree with me, Roger?”

“Certainly. The Pitheys would not care if you did. Also he is the sort of man who could worry you a good deal in the village if he took it into his head to do so. Better keep good terms with him if you can.”

“What did Miss Seer say?” asked Mrs. North.

“I don’t remember her saying anything, but I was so agitated. I didn’t, of course, even look at her. You don’t think his remarks will give rise to any ideas——” Mr. Fothersley paused, looking from one to the other.

“Good Lord, no!” said North.

“How do you know?” asked his wife sharply. “I should certainly advise Arthur to keep away for the future.”

North shrugged his shoulders as he rose from the table.

“I expect you will like your cigar in the garden with Nita,” he said, pushing the box across the table to his guest. “I’ve got some letters to write.”

When he reached his study he took Ruth’s telegram out of his pocket-book and, lighting a match, burned it very carefully to ashes. “Bless their small minds,” he said.

CHAPTER VII

Ruth met North as he came up the garden path.

"So you have come this afternoon! I did so hope you would."

"What is it?" he asked. "Nothing wrong with the farm?"

"Wrong with the farm!" Ruth laughed. "Now just *feel* it."

It was steeped in sunshine and the scent of violas. On the garden wall the pigeons cooed sleepily. From the river came the lilt of a child's laugh.

"It feels all right," said North gravely.

"Just as happy and sound and wholesome as can be," she said. "I asked you to come because something wonderful—I believe wonderful—has happened. I felt I must tell you at once. And I want to ask you things, want to ask you quite terribly badly. Come up and sit by the blue flower border. I have the chairs there. It is at its very best."

"So you have kept that too," said North, even as his daughter had said.

"It is one of the many beautiful things I found here," she answered. "The place is full of thoughts just like that. I hope I have not lost any, but if I have they will come back." She stopped to lift up some of the frail nemophilas. Just so North had seen women arrange their children's hair.

"Are not the delphiniums in perfection? They always look to me as if they were praying."

Now years ago, standing in just that selfsame spot, Dick Carey had said that very same thing. It came back to North in a flash, and how he had answered:

“I should think those meek droopy white things look more like it.”

For a moment he hesitated. Then he gave her the same answer.

“Oh no!” she exclaimed. “To pray you must aspire. And they must be blue.”

Dick Carey had said, “Prayer is aspiration, not humility. Besides, they’re not blue.”

Again that sense of well-being which had belonged to the companionship of his friend stole over North. Again the bitterness and pain seemed to fade and melt. The present took on a new interest, a new understanding. He gave himself up to it with a sigh of content as he dropped into the chair by Ruth Seer’s side. The warmth of the June afternoon, the sleepy murmur of the life of the farm, the hum of bees, that wonderful blue, it was all part of it.

“Now light your pipe and be very comfortable,” she said, and left him alone while the peace and beauty soaked in. Left him alone for how long he did not know. When you touch real rest, time ceases.

Presently he re-lit the pipe which he had lighted and left to go out.

“Now,” he said, “tell me. I am ready to be convinced of anything wonderful, just here and now.”

Ruth smiled. She was sitting very still, her elbow on her knee, her chin in the hollow of her hand. A great content made her face beautiful. Her grey eyes dwelt lovingly upon the little world, which held so many worlds in its circle. The laughter of the children came again across the field. Then she began to talk.

“It is so wonderful,” she said. “I can hardly yet believe it can be true, which is so foolish, because the truth undoubtedly *is* wonderful beyond our conceiving. We only see such little bits of it here, even the wisest of us. And we will think it is the whole. When we do see the whole, I think what will be the most wonderful thing about it will be its amazing simplicity. We shall wonder how we ever groped about among so many seeming complications, so much dirt and darkness.”

She stopped for a few moments, and North waited. He felt he was shrinking back into himself, away from whatever might be coming. Like many very intellectual persons, he was inclined to resent what he could not account for, and to be wholly unsympathetic, if not a little brutal, towards it.

Psychical investigation always had repelled him. Repelled him only less, and in a different way, than the search for knowledge among the tortured entrails of friendly dogs. With the great forces of nature he could fight cleanly, and courageously, to harness them to the service of man. They were enormously interesting, amazingly beautiful. Powerful enough to protect themselves if necessary. One wrested their secrets from them at one's own peril. And the scientist who strives with the great forces of nature has the mark of his craft branded into his very soul. Its name is Truth. To that mark, if he be a true scientist, he is faithful absolutely, unswervingly. Indeed it must be so. And, ever seeking the truth, the true scientist knows that his discoveries are ever only partial; that soon, even before his own little day here is ended, will come new discoveries which shall modify the old. So that he will never say "I know," only "I am learning." And now for the first time psychic investigation was making its appeal to him, by the mouth of Ruth Seer, in the name of Truth.

"Very well, tell me," he said, struggling with his dislike. "I will cast from me, as far as possible all preconceived objections, and, possibly, prejudices. I will bring an open mind."

Ruth turned, her whole face alight. "Ah, that is just what I want! Only be as critical as you will. I want that too. That is why I wanted so much to tell you, because you will bring a trained mind to bear on it all. Because of that, and also because you are his friend, I can speak about it to you. It would be very difficult to anyone else."

She stopped, gathering herself up as it were, before she started.

"You remember the day you first came? To fetch Larry?"

North nodded.

"We all forgathered together at the gate, you and I and the dogs. I told you about Larry, how he had come the night before, tired and miserable, and hunted everywhere, and early in the morning he had gone again, so far as I knew. And just before you came I had found him down by the stream, quite happy apparently, with a man. I think I told you?"

"Yes."

"The man was watching some kingfishers, and I stopped to watch them too. Very still we all were. I had never seen the birds close. The man was lying on the grass, but he looked a tall man. He wore a

brown suit, rather shabby. I could not see his face, only the back of his head propped up on his hand. It was a long, thin hand, very sunburnt. A well-shaped, sensitive hand. And he had dark hair with a strong wave in it. Though it was cut very short, the waves showed quite plainly and evenly."

North had taken his pipe out of his mouth now and was staring at it.

"Then your motor siren startled us all, and the man vanished as swiftly, it seemed, as the birds. I wondered just a little—when I thought of it after, where he could have got to—but not for long. This morning I saw the same man again. I was in the buttercup field, and he was standing in the road in front of the new cottages, looking at them. Again I could only see his back, and he is very tall. He had no hat on, and it was the same dark wavy hair. You know the little pitch of hill that goes up to the cottages? When I reached the bottom I could see him quite clearly. He was pulling Larry towards him by a handkerchief lead, and then letting him go suddenly—playing with him, you know. And I could hear Larry snarling as a dog does in play. Then Larry caught sight of me and stopped to look. And when he looked the man turned and looked at me too——"

She paused. The summer sounds of the farm sang on, but it seemed that just around those two there was a tense silence. North broke it.

"Well!" he said, his voice harsh and almost impatient.

"He had a thin, very sunburnt face," Ruth went on, "lined, but with the lines that laughter makes. Very blue eyes, the blue eyes that look as if they had a candle lit behind them. When he saw me he smiled. There was a flash of very white teeth, and his smile was like a sudden bright light."

North's pipe dropped on to the flagged pathway with the little dull click of falling wood.

Ruth leant towards him; her voice dropped almost to a whisper.

"Was Dick Carey like that?" she asked.

"Yes." North met her eyes for the first time since she had begun to tell him. The suggestion of unwillingness to listen which had shown in his manner from the first dropped from him. "What happened next?"

“I don’t quite know how to describe it. He did not fade or vanish or anything like that. He remained quite distinct, and that wonderful smile still shone, but my sight failed. It seemed to grow more and more dim until at last I could not see him at all. I hurried, I even tried to call out to him, but it was no good.”

“But you were not blind; you could see everything else?”

“Yes, when I looked for them I could. I wish I could explain to you how it was. The nearest I can get to it is, that his figure, while I saw it, stood out more distinctly than anything else. All the rest seemed in the background, indistinct by comparison. Ah, I know—like—have you ever noticed on a bright sunny day, looking in a shop window, how suddenly the things reflected are much clearer and more visible than the things actually in the window? They seem to recede, and the reflection is strong and clear. Well, it was something like that. As if one had two sights and one for the moment overbore the other. I’m explaining badly, but it’s difficult. At any rate he did not evaporate or fade as they say these visions invariably do. It was the sight failed me.”

“That is enormously interesting,” said North slowly.

“You see,” said Ruth eagerly, “ever since I came here this—this being in touch with Dick Carey has been growing. It is becoming a wonderful experience; it seems to me of possibly enormous value, but I don’t want to take it one step beyond where it can reasonably and legitimately be taken. I want the truth about it. I want your brains, your intelligence, to help me. I want you honestly and truly to tell me just what you think of these happenings. And I want to know whether you yourself have had any sense of his presence here, even ever so faint.”

North recovered his pipe, re-lit it, and began to smoke again before he answered. Indeed, he smoked in silence for quite a long time.

“I cannot deny the fact,” he said at length, “that I have what perhaps should be described as a prejudice against any supposed communication with the dead. It has always been surrounded, to my mind, with so much that is undesirable, nor do I believe in any revelation save that of science, and on these lines science has no revelation. But there are two things here that do force themselves on my consideration. One is that you never knew Dick in the flesh, the

other that since you came here, not before, I have myself felt, not a presence of any sort, but the sense of well-being and content which always belonged to my companionship with him. And that I never feel anywhere but at Thorpe, or at Thorpe except when you are with me. The latter can be explained in various ways. The former is rather different. Have you ever seen a photograph of Dick, or has anyone described him to you?"

"No. I have never seen a photograph, and no one has ever described his appearance to me."

Then she smiled at him suddenly and delightfully. "I am not a curious woman, but I am human," she said. "Before we go any further, for pity's sake describe Dick Carey to me, and tell me if he was in the habit of leading Larry by a pocket-handkerchief!"

"You *have* described him," said North, smiling too. "Especially his smile. I am short-sighted, but I could always tell Dick in a crowd if he smiled, long before I could distinguish his features. And he did lead Larry by his handkerchief. It was a regular game between them."

"Surely that is in the nature of proof!" exclaimed Ruth.

"Let us call it circumstantial evidence."

"But worth even your—a scientist's—consideration?"

"Undoubtedly! By the way, what happened to Larry?"

"When I thought of him again it was some little time later; he was going back to the house across the field. And—and—oh, I know it sounds mad—he was following somebody, and so were Sarah and Selina. You know, don't you, what I mean? Dogs run quite differently when they are out on their own. And I have never known Sarah and Selina leave me to follow anyone else before, in all their lives."

"Any dog would follow Dick," said North, and then looked as if he would like to have taken the words back, but she stopped him.

"You promised," she said. "And that, too, is a piece of evidence. As I said, I don't want to push it a fraction of an inch beyond where it will go. But think what it means? The breaking down of that awful impassable wall between the living and the dead. Think what some knowledge, of the next step only, beyond the Gateway of Death means."

"Always supposing there is a next step," said North. "Again there is no evidence I can accept. Though, mind you"—he was really in earnest now—"I am not among those who are content, indeed glad, that it should all end here. This old universe is too interesting a riddle to drop after a few years' study."

"Ah, do you know Walt Whitman's lines?—

"This day, before dawn, I ascended a hill and looked at the crowded Heaven.
And I said to my spirit,
When we become the enfolders of these orbs, and the pleasure and knowledge of everything in them,
Shall we be filled and satisfied then?
And my spirit said, No, we but level that lift to pass and continue beyond."

North nodded. "That's it! I'm out for that right enough, if it's going. I don't say, mind you, that I'm certain we don't go on. I'm not such a fool. But, to my mind, all the evidence so far is the other way."

"Have you ever tried to get evidence?"

"No. All the methods appear to me to be objectionable, very. Even over this—this possible sight of yours—I don't feel keen on the idea that those who have gone are hanging round their old homes, round us who cannot cognize them."

He spoke haltingly, as if expressing himself with difficulty. His unwillingness to discuss these matters again became evident.

"But surely time and space in the next world will not exist as we understand them here, and that must make an almost incalculable difference. And when you think that so many gave their lives for this world, isn't it reasonable to think that the work for some of them may still be linked up with it? Do you remember when you were talking of the outlook at the present moment, and Lady Condor asked me what I thought of it? And I said we were not alone, that those who had died that things might be better, they with their added knowledge—guided—helped—you remember? Well, that wasn't *my own* idea somehow. It came to me from somewhere else, quite suddenly, on the moment, as it were. And I had to say it—though I felt shy and uncomfortable. One does not speak of these things to all the world. But *some one* wanted me to say it—just then and there."

She stopped, and in both their minds was a vision of Violet Riversley's beautiful angry unhappy face.

“I remember,” answered North. “And your idea is that Dick’s mind can communicate with yours by thought?”

Ruth thought a little; her eyes looked out without seeing.

“It is not an idea,” she said at last. “I know.”

“And have you any idea or knowledge why it should be so, seeing you never knew each other in this life? If you had, and had loved very deeply, it would be more comprehensible, though less interesting from the point of view of proving communication. As it is, there seems to me nothing sufficiently important to account for it. Nothing beyond a certain likeness of thought and interests.”

Ruth smiled. The interest had gripped him again. He was thinking out aloud. She waited until he looked at her.

“What is your explanation?” he asked.

And suddenly Ruth found it amazingly difficult to explain. The memory of that velvet night of stars, the message in the song of the little brown bird, the revelation which had come to her, swept over her again with a renewed and surprising sweetness, but of words she seemed bereft. Compared with the wonder and beauty of the thought they seemed utterly inadequate and hopeless. She put out both her hands with a little foreign gesture of helplessness.

“You have none?” he asked, and she caught the disappointment in his voice, and looking at him saw, as she had seen once before on his first visit, the lonely tired soul of the man who, losing Dick Carey, had lost much. And Dick Carey was there, so very surely there.

“It isn’t the personal love for one that really brings together,” she said, her voice very, very gentle. “It is the love for everything that has life or breath. *That* love must be communion. It makes you belong.”

There was a little silence before she went on:

“You see, I never had any one person to concentrate on, unless it was old Raphael Goltz, and looking back, I see now he was a cosmic sort of person. He did really in some way grip the whole of things, and it helped me more than I had any idea of at the time. Then I cared so much for all the men out in Flanders who came in and out of my life so swiftly and spasmodically. Then I came here, and found how much I cared for all living things in the lower worlds. And he is linked up too with them all, because he cared so much. And we have

both by chance, whatever chance may be, focused on Thorpe. Do you at all understand what I mean?"

"Yes, after a fashion," said North. "It's like watching some one dimly moving about in an unknown, and to me a visionary, world. I own you are right—he moved in it too; and I am also ready to own it is possible because of my own limitations that I can only regard it as visionary."

"Raphael had many books dealing with these things," said Ruth. "I feel so sorry now that they did not interest me then. You see, I had never lost anyone by death. I had no one to lose. It was only out in France when the men came in and drank my soup or coffee, and some slept like tired children, and others played a game of cards, or talked to me of home, and we all seemed like children of one family belonging to each other. And in a few hours, perhaps less, I would see one or more of them lying dead—gone out like flames extinguished quite suddenly. And I didn't know what life or death meant."

North nodded. "It hits one sometimes," he said.

"And their people at home—I used to write for some of those who were brought in to the estaminet and died before they could get them farther. One thought of them all the time. Going on with their everyday life at home, and waiting. That is why what has happened to me here seems so amazingly important, why its truth needs such close questioning, why I so much want your help."

"For what it is worth it is at your disposal, and"—he paused before he went on with decision—"I own I am interested, as I have never been before in so-called communication with another world."

"There are some books here dealing with psychic faculties. I found them on the top of the oak bookcase. Mostly by German authors. Would they have been Mr. Carey's?"

"More likely they belonged to a friend of his who used to stay here."

"Oh, the German friend!" exclaimed Ruth.

"You have heard of him?"

"Mr. Fothersley spoke of him only this morning, and your daughter mentioned him the other day."

“He was an interesting personality, and very strong on the point that there were extraordinary powers and forces latent in man. I never cared to discuss them with him. He went too far, and looking back I think I almost unconsciously dreaded his influence over Dick. I don’t think I need have. Dick was, I recognize it now, the stronger of the two.”

“But he was interested in the same things?”

“Undoubtedly. Possibly I was jealous; I preferred him to be interested in my particular line of study. He *was* interested to a great extent of course, but von Schäde’s lines of thought appealed to him more. I remember the last night von Schäde was here. It was in the June of 1914. He had been paying Dick a long visit and was leaving in the morning. It was the sort of night when the world seems much bigger than it does by day—a wonderful night. The sky was thick with stars, and he stood just over there with their light on his face, and talked to us as if we were a public meeting. He was a good-looking chap in a hard frozen sort of style. Oliver Lodge had been speaking to the Royal Art Society on the Sources of Power, and it had got von Schäde on to his hobby.

“‘You talk of the power of atomic energy, you scientists,’ he said; ‘it is as nothing compared with the forces possessed by man in himself. If we studied these, if we understood these, if we knew how to harness and direct them, there is nothing in heaven and earth we should not be masters of. Men—we should be gods! And you men with brains puddle about among the forces of nature, blind and deaf to the forces in man which could harness every one of the forces of nature obedient to your will, and leave the study of these things to hysterical madmen and neurotic women. And those who have some knowledge, who have the gift, the power, to experiment with these forces if they would, they are afraid of this and that. My God, you make me sick!’

“He threw out both his arms and his face was as white as a sheet. Old Dick got up and put his arm round the fellow’s shoulders. Goodness knows what he saw in him! ‘We’ll get the forces harnessed right enough, old fellow, when we’re fit to use them,’ he said.

“And they looked at each other for a full minute, von Schäde glaring and Dick smiling, and then von Schäde suddenly began to laugh.

"'Mostly I'm fond of you, Dick,' he said, 'but sometimes I hate you like the deuce!'

"He went the next morning, and I was glad. For another thing he fell in love with Vi, and she was such a little demon to flirt that until the last minute you never knew if she was serious or not. Morally and socially he was irreproachable, but—well, I didn't like him! I often wondered how he took the news of her engagement to Dick."

"That happened after he left?"

"Yes. The second time Dick went out to the front. He wasn't a marrying man really. But you know how things were then. Vi broke down over his going, and he had always been fond of her since she was a baby. But I don't think it would have been a success. I never could picture old Dick as anything but a bachelor."

He stopped, for he saw she was not listening. She was thinking hard. Her black brows bent, her grey eyes almost as black beneath them.

"That is very interesting," she said presently, speaking slowly, as one tracking an idea. "Von Schäde must have known that Dick Carey knew better how to exercise those latent powers than he did. They were both seeking the same thing from different motives."

"Explain, please."

Ruth was silent again for a moment, still thinking hard. "It's not easy, you know," she said. "But this is the best I can do. They were both scientists of the invisible, just as you are a scientist of the visible, but Dick Carey was seeking union with God and von Schäde was seeking knowledge and power for himself. Therefore they studied the unseen sources of life and death by different methods, and Dick Carey had got farther than von Schäde and von Schäde knew it."

North shook his head. "Now you are wandering in the mist so far as I am concerned," he said.

Ruth sighed. "I explain badly, but then I am only struggling in the mist myself. I wish I had cared for these things when Raphael Goltz was alive! So many things he said which passed me by then come back to me now with a new meaning. But there is one thing just lately I have felt very strongly. When he was in the physical body Dick Carey was a far more wonderful man than any of you knew—except

probably von Schäde. Yes, you loved him I know, the world is black without him, but you didn't think he was anything extraordinary. You are a great man and he was nobody, in the eyes of the world. You don't know even now how wonderful he was. And now he has escaped from this clogging mould, this blinding veil of physical matter, he is, I firmly believe, making this little corner of the earth, this little Sussex farm, what every home and village the town might be if we were in touch with the invisible secret source of all."

She stopped, for she felt that North was not following her any longer, was shrinking back again.

"Oh!" she cried, "why won't you believe it is worth your study at any rate?"

North turned on her suddenly, harshly, almost brutally.

"I can't," he said hoarsely. "Don't you see it's all shapeless, formless, to a mind like mine? I want to believe. God! it would give one an horizon beyond eternity; but you talk of what to me is foolishness."

He looked at her with an immeasurable dreariness of soul in his eyes, and very gently she put her worn brown hand in his and held it.

"Listen," she said, and her voice was deep with sudden music. "The children come now. You cannot keep them away. Something draws them to Thorpe. The wild creatures one can understand. It is sanctuary. But the children—it must mean something."

"You are here."

She shrank back as if hurt. "No, oh no! It is not me. It is something altogether beyond me. Oh, do listen. They were always slipping in, or standing by the gate with their little faces peeping between the bars. Quite tinies some of them, and I took them back to their homes at first. I thought their mothers would be anxious. And then—then I began to guess. So now I have given them the field beyond the stream and they come out of school hours."

"The lower field!" exclaimed North. "No wonder you have taken Fothersley's breath away."

"Oh, he does not know of that. Fortunately he was here in the morning during school hours, so he only saw the Blackwall children. You see," she added apologetically, "it is *such* a child's field, with the stream and the little wood with blue-bells, and there are cowslips in

the spring and nuts in the autumn, and I shall make hay as usual, of course. We cut on Tuesday."

"Don't you find them very destructive?"

"They haven't trampled down a yard of grass," said Ruth triumphantly. "I gave them a strip by the stream under the silver birches. The primrose bit, you know, and the wood. And the hay is in a way their property. You go and try to walk across it! You'll have a nest full of jackdaws at you!"

"But the trees and flowers!"

"That is just another thing," she smiled at him. "Oh, why won't you believe? I have had to teach them hardly anything. They know. No branch is ever torn down. Never will you find those pathetic little bunches of picked and thrown-away flowers here. The birds are just as tame. I teach them very little. I'm afraid of spoiling my clumsy help. It is so wonderful. They bring crumbs of any special bit of cake they get, for the birds, and plant funny little bits of roots and sow seeds. Come down and see them with me. I don't take, or tell, other people. I am so afraid of it getting spoilt."

North extracted his long frame from his chair.

"All right," he said, with that odd smile of his as of one humouring a child. "But you are mad, you know, quite mad."

"You said that to me before."

And then North remembered suddenly that he had often said it to Dick Carey.

Their way led across the flower garden, and under the cherry-orchard trees where the daisies shone like snow on the green of the close-cut grass. Here they found Bertram Aurelius lying on his back talking in strange language to the whispering leaves above him, and curling and uncurling his bare pink toes in the dappled sunlight. His mother sat beside him, her back against a tree trunk, mending the household linen when she could keep her eyes off him for more than a minute. The dogs fell upon Bertram Aurelius, who took them literally to his bosom, fighting them just as a little puppy fights, and his mother smiled up at them with her big blue eyes and foolish loose-lipped red mouth.

"Have you ever heard anything of the father?" said North, when they were out of earshot.

“Killed at Bullecourt,” Ruth answered. “I could not help feeling it was perhaps best. He will be a hero to her now always.”

The lower field was steeped in the afternoon sunshine, and the children were chirping like so many birds. Two sat by the stream blowing dandelion clocks, which another small child carried to them with careful footsteps, his tongue protruding in the anxious effort to convey the fragile globes in safety before they floated away. Two bigger boys were planting busily in a clearing in the wood. Another slept, seemingly just as he had fallen, with all the lissom grace of childhood, and on the bank beside him a small girl crooned to something she nursed against her flat little chest.

Roger North looked at the peaceful scene with relief.

“I believe I’d expect a sort of school feast,” he said. “If you don’t break forth any more violently than this, I’m with you. What are the little beggars planting?”

“Michaelmas daisies. They should do there, don’t you think? And we are trying lilies in that far corner. The soil is damp and peaty. We were too late for fruit trees this year but I’ve great plans for autumn planting.”

North, oddly enough, so it seemed to many, was popular with children. He never asked them endless questions, or if they wanted to do this or that. He liked the little people, and had discovered that at heart they were like the shy wild things. Leave them alone and keep quiet, and, ten to one, presently a little hand will creep into yours.

He let himself down on the bank near the crooning child, in silence. She was a thin white slip of a thing, with very fair hair and a pair of big translucent eyes. It was an old doll she was nursing, so old that its face had practically disappeared, and a blank white circle gazed to heaven from under a quite smart tam-o’-shanter. She was telling some story apparently, but only now and then were any words intelligible.

Presently she began to look at North sideways, and her voice rose out of its low monotone into a higher key. It was like the sudden movement of a bird nearer to something or some one whose *bona fides* it has at first mistrusted.

The words she was crooning became more intelligible, and gradually North realized, to his astonishment, that she was repeating, after her own fashion, the old Saga of Brynhild the warrior maid whom Segurd found clad in helm and byrne. A queer mixture of the ride of the Valkyries, of Brynhild asleep surrounded by the eternal fires. Brynhild riding her war-horse on to the funeral pyre. Loki the Fire God. Wotan with his spear. All were mixed up in a truly wonderful whole. But still more to his astonishment it was the sword which appealed evidently above all to this small white maiden. On the sword she dwelt lovingly, and wove her tale around its prowess. And when she had brought her recital to a triumphantly shrill close at the moment when Siegmund draws the sword from the tree, she turned and looked him full in the face, half shyly, half triumphantly, wholly appealing. It was as if she said, “What do you think of that now?”

North nodded at her. “That’s first rate, you know,” he said.

“Which would you choose, if you had the choice? Would you choose the ring or the sword?” she asked.

“Well, I’m inclined to think old Wotan’s spear is more in my line,” said North in a tone of proper thoughtful consideration. “It broke the sword once, didn’t it? At least I believe it did. But it’s rather a long time ago since I read about these things. Do you learn them at school?”

“They aren’t lessons.” She looked at him with some contempt. “They’re stories.”

“It’s such a long time ago since anyone told me stories,” said North apologetically. “I’m afraid I’ve forgotten.”

She looked at him with compassion, holding the battered doll closer to her. Her eyes reminded him of a rain-washed sky.

“I tell Tommy lots of stories,” she said.

Another child’s voice called to her from the wood, “Moira, Moira,” and she fled away. It was like the sudden flight of a bird.

“Who is the child who tells her dolls the story of the Ring?” he asked Ruth, when she rejoined him. “She is rather like one of Rackham’s Rhine Maidens herself, by the way.”

“Moria Kent? Isn’t she a lovely little thing? Her mother is the village school-mistress.”

“Ah, that accounts for it I suppose,” said North.

Ruth opened her mouth to speak, and closed it again. Instead of what she had meant to say, she said, “Come, it is time for tea. And I have ordered strawberries and cream.”

CHAPTER VIII

Roger North let himself down into the cane deck-chair by his study window with a sigh of relief. The wonderful weather still held. It had been a hot morning, there were people staying in the house—people who bored North—and lunch had been to him a wearisome meal. Everyone had consumed a great deal of food and wine and talked an amazing lot of nonsense, and made a great deal of noise, and the heat had become unbearable.

Here, though the warmth was great, the stillness was perfect. The rest of the world had retired to their rooms to change for the tennis party in the afternoon. North felt he could depend on at least an hour of quiet. Across the rosebeds and smooth lawns he could see his cattle lying in the tall grass under the trees. He watched others moving slowly from shade to shade—Daisy and Bettina, and Fancy—and presently Patricia, the big white mother of many pigs, hove in sight on her way to the woods. For North was a farmer too, and loved his beasts better, it must be owned, than he loved his own kind.

He cut a hole in the orange he had brought from the lunch-table and commenced to suck in great content. Like the ladies of Cranford he considered there was no other way to eat an orange. He also agreed with them that it was a pleasure that should be enjoyed in private.

He gave himself up to the soothing peace and rest of his cool shaded room. The friendly faces of his beloved books looked down on him, the fragrance of his roses came in, hot and sweet, a very quintessence of summer. Patricia had reached the wood now; he watched her dignified waddle disappear in its green depths. What a pleasant and beautiful world it all was, except for the humans.

He dropped the jangling remains of the irritating lunch interval out of his consciousness, and his mind drifted back to his morning's work, the conclusion of a week of observation, of measurements, of estimating quantities, of balancing relations. A week of the scientist's all-absorbing pursuit of knowledge, which had, as his wife complained, made him deaf and dumb and blind to all else. A disturbing fact in his work was beginning to force itself upon him. He was becoming more and more conscious that, in spite of the exquisite delicacy of scientific apparatus, observation was becoming increasingly difficult. He could no longer make the atom a subject of observation; it escaped him. He was beginning to base his arguments on mathematical formula. Even with the chemical atom, four degrees below the ultimate physical atom, he was beginning to reason, without basing his reasons on observation, because he could not observe; it was too minute, too fine, too delicate—it escaped him. He had no instrument delicate enough to observe. He had come to a deadlock. The fact forced itself upon him with ever-increasing insistence; he could no longer deny it. He could carry some of his investigations no farther without the aid of finer, subtler instruments. His methods failed him. Nor could his particular order of mind accept the new psychology. He could not investigate by means of hypnotism, or autoscopy, or accept the strange new psychological facts which were revolutionizing all the old ideas of human consciousness, because he could not get away from the fundamental fact that science had no theory with which these strange new things would fit, no explanation, as he had said to Ruth Seer, which could arrange them in a rational order. And, dreaming in the warmth of the afternoon, with the fragrance and beauty of the wonderful universe filtering into his consciousness, the idea penetrated with ever-growing insistence: Had the gods, by some wonderful chance, by some amazing good fortune, placed in his hands, his, Roger North's, an instrument, finer, subtler, more delicate, than any of which he had ever dreamed, the consciousness that was materializing as Ruth Seer? He seemed struggling with himself, or rather with another self—a self that was striving to draw him into misty unreal things, and he shrank back into his world of what seemed to him solid, tangible things, things that he could touch and handle and prove by measure and calculation and observation. And then again the larger vision gripped him. Was there indeed a

finer, subtler, more wonderful matter, waiting to be explored by different, finer, subtler methods? What was it Dick Carey and Ruth Seer cognized, contracted with outside his ken? Could he be certain it did not exist? “God! it would give you an horizon beyond eternity,” he had said to Ruth Seer; that was true enough—if the vision was true. Always till now he had thought of any vision beyond as a fable, invented by wise men to help lesser men through what was after all but a sorry business. And now, for the first time, it really gripped him—what it would mean if it were not a fable, not a useful deception for weaker men who could not face life as it really was. God! it would give you an horizon beyond eternity! The vision was as yet only a dim muddle of infinite possibilities and Roger North’s mind hated muddle. He was like the blind man of Bethsaida who, when Christ touched his eyes, looked up, and saw men, as trees, walking.

Suddenly he got up and moved a photograph of Dick Carey that stood upon his writing-table, moved it to an inconspicuous place on the mantelshelf amongst other photographs. Then he hesitated for a moment before he took one of the others and put it on the writing-table.

And this simple action meant that Roger North had put on one side his shrinking from the intangible and invisible and had started on new investigations with new instruments for observation.

Then he went back to his chair and began a second orange. Mansfield had just carried out the croquet mallets and balls, and was arranging for the afternoon games in his usual admirable manner. North watched him lazily as he sucked the orange, pleasantly conscious that a new interest had gripped his life, his mind already busy, tabulating, arranging the different subtler matter he proposed to work with.

It was here the door opened, and with the little clatter and bustle which always heralded her approach, his wife entered, curled, powdered and adorned, very pretty and very smart, for her afternoon party.

A visit from her at this moment was altogether unexpected. It was also unfortunate.

It is doubtful if much had depended on it, whether Mrs. North could have helped some expression of her objection to orange-

sucking when indulged in by her husband. She came to an abrupt halt in the doorway and looked much as if there was a bad smell under her nose.

There was an unpleasant pause. North, inwardly fumed, continued to suck his orange. He had, it is to be feared, the most complete contempt for his wife's opinion on all subjects, and it irritated him to feel that she had nevertheless, at times, a power which, it must be confessed, she had used unmercifully in the early days of their married life, to make him feel uncomfortable.

Finally he flung the orange at the wastepaper basket, missed his aim, and it landed, the gaping hole uppermost, in the centre of the hearth.

"If you want to speak to me," he said irritably, "you had better come and sit down. On the other hand, if you do not like my sucking an orange, you might have gone away till I had finished."

"I didn't say anything," said Mrs. North.

She skirted the offending orange skin carefully and arranged the fluffy curls at the back of her neck in front of the glass. Then she sat down and arranged the lace in front of her frock.

"I can't think why you are always so disagreeable now," she complained at length. "You used to be so fond of me once."

By this time the atmosphere was electric with irritation. A more inopportune moment for such an appeal could hardly have been chosen.

"I don't suppose you have dressed early to come down and tell me that," said North. It was not nice of him, and he knew it was not nice, but for the life of him he could not help it. Indeed it was only by a superhuman effort that his answer had not verged on the brutal.

"I came to talk to you about Violet, but it's so impossible to talk to you about anything."

"Why try?" interposed North.

"I suppose you take some interest in your own child?" retorted Mrs. North. "I daresay you have not noticed it, but she is looking wretchedly ill."

North relapsed into silence and continued to watch Mansfield's preparation on the lawn.

"*Have* you noticed it?" asked his wife, her voice shrill now with exasperation.

"Yes," said North.

"Very well then, why can't you take some interest? Why can't you ever talk things over with me like other husbands do with their wives? And it isn't only that she looks ill; she's altered—she isn't the same girl she was even a year ago. And people remark on it. She isn't popular like she used to be. People seem afraid of her."

She had secured North's attention now. The drawn lines on his face deepened. There was anxiety as well as irritation in his glances.

"Have you spoken to her? Tried to find out what is wrong?"

"No," said Mrs. North. "At least I have *tried*, but it's impossible to get anything out of her. It's like talking to a stranger. Really, sometimes I'm frightened of her. It sounds ridiculous, of course, but there it is. And we used to be such good friends and tell each other everything."

"I am afraid she has never really got over Dick's death," said North, his manner appreciably gentler. "And possibly her marriage so soon after was not the wisest thing."

"You approved of it quite as much as I did."

"Certainly. I am not in any sense blaming you. Besides, Violet did not ask either our advice or our approval. My meaning rather is, that possibly she is paying now for what I own seemed to me at the time a quite amazing courage."

"She confided in you all that dreadful time far more than she did in me," said Mrs. North fretfully, and with her pitiful inability to meet her husband when his natural kindness of heart or sense of duty moved him to try to discuss things of mutual interest with her in a friendly spirit. "If you had not taken her away from me then, it might have been different."

North shrugged his shoulders, and returned to his contemplation of the croquet lawn and Mansfield's preparations. Violet had never from her babyhood been anything but a bone of contention, unless he had been content never to interfere or express opinions contrary to his wife's.

"What do you want me to do?" he asked.

“Only show some natural interest in your own child,” she retorted. “But you never can talk anything over without being irritable. And as to her marriage with Fred, we were all agreed it was an excellent thing. Of course if you haven’t noticed how altered she is, it’s no good my telling you.”

“I have noticed it,” said North shortly.

“Well, what do you think we had better do?”

“You really want my opinion?”

North had said this before over other matters. He wrestled with the futility of saying it over this. But he knew that his wife was a devoted, if sometimes an unwise, mother, and he had on the whole been very generous to her with regard to their only child. He sympathized with her now in her anxiety.

“Of course I do,” she responded. “Isn’t it what I’ve been saying all this time?”

“Then honestly I don’t see what either you or I can do but stand by. She knows we’re there right enough, both of us. She can depend on Fred too, she knows that. But it seems to me that until she comes to us we’ve got to leave her alone to fight out whatever the trouble is in her own way. I think you are right—there *is* trouble. But we can’t force her confidence and we should do no good if we did. I’m afraid you won’t think that much help.” He looked at her with some kindness. “But I believe it is quite sound advice.”

“It’s dreadful to feel like a stranger with one’s own child,” complained Mrs. North. “It makes me perfectly miserable. Of course I don’t think a father feels the same as a mother.”

A shadow fell across the strip of sunlight coming in from the window. A gay voice broke the sequence of her complaint.

“Oh, *here* you are!” it said.

Both of them looked up hastily, almost guiltily. Violet Riversley stood on the gravel pathway outside. A gay and gallant figure, slim and straight in her favourite white. The sun shone on the smooth coiled satin of her dark hair, on the whiteness of her wonderful skin. Her golden eyes danced as she crossed the step of the French window.

“I felt in my bones you would be having a party this afternoon,” she said. “So I put Fred and myself into the car, and here we are!”

She looked from one to the other and they looked at her, momentarily bereft of speech. For here was the old Violet, gay with over-brimming life and mirth, the beautiful irresistible hoyden of the days before the war, before Dick Carey had died, suddenly back again as it were. And now, and now only, did either of them realize to the full the difference between her and the Violet they had just been discussing.

“What is the matter with you both?” she cried. “You look as if you were plotting dark and desperate deeds! And Mansfield is nearly in tears under the beech-tree because he can’t arrange the chairs to his satisfaction without you.” She looked at her mother. “He says”—she looked at her father and bubbled with mirth—“the trenches have spoilt his sense of the artistic! And he says he is a champion at croquet now himself. He won all the competitions at V.A.D. hospital. Do you think we ought to ask him to play this afternoon?”

“My dear Violet——” began Mrs. North, smitten by the horror of the suggestion.

“Look here, Vi,” said North. On a sudden impulse he put his long legs down from his deck-chair, sat erect, and swept her gay badinage aside. “We were talking about you.”

“Me!”

She bent her straight black brows at him, a shadow swept over her brilliance, she shivered a little.

“I suppose I have been pretty poisonous to you lately.” She meditated for a moment. Then her old irresistible mischievous smile shone out. “But it’s nothing to what I’ve been to poor Fred.”

She ran her lithe fingers through North’s grizzled hair and became serious again.

“Dad and Mums, darlings, I don’t know what’s been the matter with me—but I’ve been in hell. I woke up this morning and felt like Shuna-something’s daughter when the devil was driven out of her. And I got up and danced round the room in my nighty, because the old world was beautiful again and I didn’t hate everything and everybody. And don’t talk to me about what I’ve been like, darlings—

I don't want to think of it. All I know is, it's gone, and if it ever comes back——"

She stopped and repeated slowly:

"If it ever comes back——"

Her slim erect figure shivered, as a rod of steel shivers driven by electric force.

Then she flung up a defiant hand and laughed. The gay light laughter of the old Violet. "But I won't let it! Never again! Never, never, never! Mums, come out and wrestle with Mansfield's lost artistic sense."

She lifted Mrs. North, protesting shrilly, bodily out of her chair.

"My dear Violet! Don't! Oh, my hat!" she cried, and retreated, like a ruffled bird, to the looking-glass over the mantelshelf to rearrange her plumage.

Violet seized her father by both hands and pulled him too out of his chair.

"Come and play a game of croquet with me before the guests come, Herr Professor," she said.

It was her old name for him in the days when Karl von Schäde had brought many German expressions and titles into their midst. It struck North with a curious little unpleasant shock.

"Why have you put poor Dick's photo up here?" asked his wife.

"Oh, do leave my things alone!" exclaimed North.

His wife's capacity for discovering and inquiring into any little thing he did not want to explain was phenomenal. It irritated him to see her pick up the frame. It irritated him that she would always speak of his dead friend as "poor Dick."

The atmosphere disturbed by Violet's sudden radiant entrance became once more charged with electric irritation.

Mrs. North put down the frame with a little click.

"I thought it was some mistake of the servant's," she said stiffly.

Violet pulled her father out of the French window. "Come, we have only time for half a game now," she said.

Mrs. North followed.

“Your Miss Seer is coming this afternoon, Roger,” she said. “I do hope you won’t talk to no one else, if you intend to appear at all. It looks so bad, and only makes everyone talk!”

With which parting shot she retreated towards Mansfield and the chairs.

Violet slipped her arm through her father’s as they crossed the lawn. “She can’t help it, daddy,” she said soothingly.

North laughed, a short mirthless laugh.

“I suppose not. Go ahead, Vi. I’ll take blue.”

They buried themselves in the game after the complete and concentrated manner of the real croquet player. Both were above the average, and it was an infinite relief to North to find Violet taking her old absorbing interest in his defeat.

Presently Fred Riversley wandered out and stood watching them, stolid and heavy as usual, but his nod to North held meaning, and a great content. North was beginning to like this rather dull young man in a way he would once have thought impossible. He had been the plainest, the least attractive, and the least interesting of the group of brilliant children who had grown up in such a bewilderingly sudden way, almost, it seemed, on the declaration of war, and of whom so few were left. North’s mind drifted back to those days which seemed so long ago, another lifetime, to those gay glad children who had centred round his friend and so been part of his own life. And then a sudden nostalgia seized him, a sick sense of the purposeless horror of life. And you cared—really cared—if you made a bad shot at croquet, or if your wife objected to your sucking oranges. Mansfield, who had faced death by torture minute after minute out there, was worried because he could not arrange the chairs at a tennis party. And those boys and the girl, little Sybil Rawson, were all broken up, smashed out of existence, finished. They had not even left any other boys and girls of their own behind; they were some of nature’s waste.

He missed his shot, and Violet gave a cry of triumph. It gave the game into her hands. She went out with a few pretty finish shots.

“Not up to your usual mark that, sir!” said Riversley.

“No,” said North. “It was a rotten shot!” And he *did* care. He was annoyed with himself. “Rotten!” he said, and played the stroke over again.

“Absolutely unworthy!” laughed his daughter.

She put out first one and then the other of her balls with deft precision and waved her mallet to an approaching car.

“Here are the Condors,” she said. “And Condie himself! I haven’t seen him for ages, the old dear!”

She skimmed the lawn like a bird towards the front door.

Mansfield was tenderly assisting an enormously stout gentleman to get out of the car backwards.

“Excellent, bombardier!” said the stout gentleman. “Excellent. You have let me down without a single twinge. Now they put my man into the motor transport. Most unfortunate for me. The knowledge of how to handle a live bomb would have been invaluable.”

He heaved slowly round in time to receive Violet Riversley’s enthusiastic welcome. His face was very round and full, the features, in themselves good, partially buried in many rolls of flesh, the whole aspect one of benign good nature. Only an occasional penetrating flash from under his heavy eyelids revealed the keen intelligence which had given him no small reputation in the political world.

“Ah, little Vi! It’s pleasant to see you again,” he said. “How are you, North?” His voice was soft and thick, but had the beauty of perfect pronunciation.

It was the only sound ever known to check his wife’s amazing flow of conversation. She owned herself that it had been difficult, but she had recognized the necessity early in their married life.

“You see, no one wanted to hear me talk if they could hear him,” she explained. “Now it has become a habit. Condor has only to say ‘Ah!’ and I stop like an automaton.”

At this moment she was following him from the car amid the usual shower of various belongings. Violet and her husband assisted her while North and Mansfield gathered up the débris.

“Yes, my dears, we have been to a meeting as usual. Natural—I mean National Economy. Condor made a really admirable speech, recommending impossible things; excellent, of course—only impossible! My glasses? Thank you, Roger. Yes, isn’t the car shabby? I am so thankful. A new Rolls-Royce has such a painfully rich appearance, hasn’t it? And the old ones go just as well, if not better.

That scarf? Um—yes—perhaps I will want it. Let us put it into Condor's pocket. A little more padding makes no difference to him."

"When I was younger it used to be my privilege and pleasure to pick up these little odds and ends for my wife," said Lord Condor, smiling good-naturedly, while his wife stuffed the scarf into his pocket. "But alas! my figure no longer permits."

"I remember my engagement was a most trying time," said Lady Condor. "My dear mother impressed on me that if Condor once realized the irritation my untidiness and habit of dropping my things about would cause him in our married life, he would break it off. What, Vi? Oh, damn the thing!"

Violet Riversley, holding a gold bag which had mysteriously dropped from somewhere, went off into a helpless fit of laughter.

"Don't laugh, my dear. It is nothing to laugh at. I do hope Mansfield did not hear! One catches these bad habits, but I have not taken to swearing. I do not approve of it for women—or of smoking—do I, Condor? But that wretched bag has spoilt my whole afternoon; that is the fifth time it has been handed to me. I could not really enjoy Condor's speech. Quite admirable—only no one could possibly do the things he recommended. But where was I? Oh yes—the bag—you see, I bought it at Asprey's! You know, in Bond Street—yes. There was a whole window full of them. How should it strike one that they were luxuries, and that the scarcity of gold was so great? One has got quite used to the paper money by now. And somehow it never seems so valuable as real sovereigns. I am sure our extravagance is due to this. It's nearly as bad as paying by cheque. But where was I? Oh, my bag! You see, we all went to this meeting to patronize National Economy. Most necessary, Condor says, and we must all do our best. But it really would have been better, I think, if we had not all gone in our cars and taken our gold bags. Everyone seemed to have a gold bag—and aigrettes on their heads. I never wear them myself. The poor birds—I couldn't. But I know they cost pounds and pounds, and no one could call them necessities. Or the gold bags of course, if gold is so very scarce. Ought we to send them to be melted down? I will gladly send mine into the lower regions. Just as we were entering it plopped down on the step, and you can imagine the noise it made, and a quite poor-looking man picked it up and gave it back to me. He had on one of the dreadful-looking suits, you know, that

they gave our poor dear men when they were demobilized. He was most pleasant, but what must he have thought? And I could not explain to him about the shop window-full because Condor was waiting for me. And then, on the platform, just as Condor was making one of his most telling points, it *clanged* down off my lap, and of course it fell just where there was no carpet. I tried to kick it under the chair, but little Mr. Peckham—you know him, dear—would jump up and make quite a show of it, handing it back to me. No, don't give it me again. Put it into Condor's pocket. But he has gone! To see the pigs with Roger? Isn't it wonderful the attraction pigs have for men of a certain age! My dear father was just the same, and he called his pigs after us—or was it us after the pigs?—I don't quite remember which. And where is your mother? Oh, I see—playing croquet with Mrs. Ingram. My dear, did you ever see such a hat! Like a plate of petrified porridge, isn't it? No, tell your mother not to come. I will just wave my hand. Go and tell her not to stop her game, dear Violet. And here is Arthur! He has something important to tell me—I know by his walk. Now let us get comfortable first, and where we shall not be disturbed. Yes. Those two chairs over there."

"I do want a little chat if possible, Marion," said Mr. Fothersley. He retrieved a scarf which had floated suddenly across his path, with the skill born of long practice. "Yes, I will keep it in case you feel cold."

He folded it in a neat square so that it could go into his pocket without damage to either scarf or pocket, and held the back of her chair while she fitted herself into it.

"A footstool? Thank you, Arthur. I will say for Nita, she understands the art of making her guests comfortable. Now at the Howles' yesterday I had a chair nearly impossible to get into and quite impossible to get out of! But where were we? Oh yes—you have got something you want to tell me. I always know by your walk."

Mr. Fothersley was a little vexed. "I cannot see how it can possibly affect my walk, Marion."

"It is odd, isn't it?" said her Ladyship briskly. "It is just like my dear father. A piece of news was written all over him until he got rid of it. I remember when poor George Somerville shot himself—my dear mother and I were sitting on the terrace, and we saw my father coming up from the village—quite a long way off—you could not

distinguish a feature—but we knew at once he was bringing news—news of importance. But where were we?"

She stopped suddenly and looked at him with the smile which had turned the heads of half the gilded youth of fifty years ago.

"I am a garrulous old woman, my dear Arthur. You are anxious about something, and here am I worrying you with my silly reminiscences—yes—now what is it? Tell me all about it, and we will see what can be done."

"I am certainly perturbed," said Mr. Fothersley. He smoothed down his delicate grey waistcoat and settled himself back in his chair. "I am afraid there is no doubt Nita is becoming jealous of Miss Seer."

"Good heavens! I would as soon suspect that blue iris!"

"Quite so! Quite so! But you know what Nita is about these things. And, unfortunately, it appears that Roger has been over to Thorpe once or twice alone lately."

"Perfectly natural," said her Ladyship judicially. "He would be interested in the farm for Dick's sake. I like to go there myself. She hasn't spoilt the place."

"Nita called her 'that woman' to me just now," said Mr. Fothersley solemnly.

Lady Condor raised her hand. "That settles it, of course! And now, dear Arthur, what is to be done? We really cannot have one of those dreadful performances that have unfortunately occurred in the past!"

"I really don't know," said Mr. Fothersley. He was divided between excitement and distress. "It is quite useless to talk to either of them. Nita generally consults me, but she listens neither to reason nor advice. And Roger only laughs or loses his temper."

"Yes," agreed Lady Condor. "I think it depends on the state of his liver. And as for poor Nita listening to reason on that subject—well—as you say!"

"If only she would not tell everybody it would not be so terrible."

"Ah, that is just the little touch of bourgeois," said Lady Condor. "It was wine, wasn't it? Or was it something dried? And poor dear Roger is really so safe—yes—he would be terribly bored with a real *affair de cœur*. He would forget any woman for weeks if he were arranging a combination of elements to see if they would blow each other up.

And if the poor woman made a scene, or uttered a word of reproach even, he would be off for good and all—pouf—just like that. And what good is that to any woman? I have told Nita so, but it is no good—no! Now if she had been married to Condor! Poor darling, he is perfectly helpless in the hands of anything in petticoats! It is not his fault. It is temperament, you know. All the Hawkhursts have very inflammable dispositions. And when he was younger, women were so silly about him! I used to pretend not to know, and I was always charming to them all. It worked admirably."

"I always admired your dignity, dear Marion," said Mr. Fothersley.

"*We* have always shielded our men," said Lady Condor, and she looked a very great lady indeed.

"Our day is passing," said Mr. Fothersley sadly. "I deplore it very much. Very much indeed."

"Fortunately"—Lady Condor pursued her reminiscences—"Condor has a sense of humour, which always prevented him making himself really ridiculous: that would have worried me. A man running round a woman looking like an amorous sheep! Where are my glasses, Arthur? And who is that girl over there, all legs and neck? Of course the present style of dress has its advantages—one has nothing on to lose. But where was I? Something about sheep? Oh yes, dear Condor. I have always been so thankful that when he lost his figure—he had a very fine figure as a young man you remember—he gave up all that sort of thing. You *must*, of course, if you have any sense of the ridiculous. But about Roger and Miss Seer. She is a woman with dignity. Now where can she have got it from? She seems to have been brought up between an orphan clergy school and some shop—was it old furniture?—something old I know. Not clothes—no—but something old. And some one said she had been a cook. But one can be anything these days."

"She is of gentle birth," said Mr. Fothersley. "Her mother, I gather, was a Courthope, and the Seers seem to be quite good people—Irish I believe—but of good blood. It always tells."

"You never know which way," said her Ladyship sagely. "Now look at my Uncle Marcus. Oh, there *is* Miss Seer. Yes—I really don't think we need worry. It would be difficult to be rude to her. There, you see

—dear Nita is being quite nice! And Roger is quite safe with Condor and the pigs."

It was indeed late in the afternoon before North came upon Ruth, watching a set of tennis.

"You don't play?" he asked.

"I never had the chance to learn any of the usual things," she said, smiling. "I'm afraid I only came to-day with an ulterior motive. I want you to show me a photograph of Dick Carey."

"That, oddly enough, was also in my mind," he said, smiling too. "Come into my study and find it for yourself."

He was conscious of a little pleasant excitement as they went, and also of a curious uncertainty as to whether he wanted the experiment to succeed or not.

Ruth went in front of him through the French window and stood for a while looking round her. She was not a slow woman, but nothing she did ever seemed hurried.

"What a delicious room!" she said. "And what a glory of books! And I do like the way you have your writing-table. How much better than across the window, and yet you get all the light. I may poke about?"

"Of course."

She moved the writing-table and picked up a quaint letter-weight with interest. The photograph she ignored.

"I love your writing-chair," she said.

"It was my grandfather's. The only bit I have of his. My parents cleared out the whole lot when they married—too awful, wasn't it?"

"But your books are wonderful! Surely you have many first editions here. Old Raphael would have loved them."

"The best of my first editions are on the right of the fireplace."

She turned, and then suddenly her face lit. Lit up curiously, as if there were a light behind it.

"Oh!" she said quite softly, then crossed to the fireplace and stood looking at the photograph he had moved that afternoon from the writing-table.

She did not pick it up or touch it; only looked at it with wide eyes for quite a long time.

Then she turned to him.

"That is the man I saw," she said. "Now will you believe?"

And at that moment the Horizon beyond Eternity did indeed approach closer, approach into the realm of the possible.

He admitted nothing, and she did not press it. She sat down in the big armchair on the small corner left by Larry, who was curled up in it asleep. He shifted a little to make more room for her and laid a gentle feathered paw upon her knee.

"That's odd," said North. "He won't let anyone else come near my chair when he's in it."

"He knows I'm a link," said Ruth, smiling. "I wish you could look on me as that too."

"I do—but for purposes of research only. You mustn't drive me too quickly."

"I won't. Indeed I won't." She spoke with the earnestness of a child who has asked a favour. "I only want you just not to shut it all out."

"I'm interested, and that is as far as I can go at present. I wondered if you would care to read a bit of Dick's diary which I have here. It came to me with other papers, and there are some letters here."

"Oh!" The exclamation was full of interest and pleasure.

He gave her the small packet, smiling, and she held it between both her hands for a moment looking at it.

"They will be very sacred to me," she said.

He nodded. "One feels like that. It is only a small portion of a diary. I fancy he kept one very intermittently. Dick was never a writer. But the letter about von Schäde will interest you."

Ruth stood with her eyes fixed on the small packet. "Could you tell me—would you mind—how it happened?" she said.

"A shell fell, burying some of his men. He went to help dig them out. Another shell fell on the same place. That was the end."

She looked up. Her eyes shone.

"He was saving life, not taking it. Oh, I am glad."

She put the packet into the pocket of her linen skirt, gave him a little smile, and slipped away almost as a wraith might slip. She wanted, suddenly and overpoweringly, to get back to Thorpe....

Lady Condor, enjoying, as was her frequent custom, a second tea, said quite suddenly, in the middle of a lament on the difficulty of obtaining reliable cosmetics, "That is a clever woman!"

Mr. Fothersley, who was honestly interested in cosmetics, tore his mind away from them and looked round.

"Who?" he asked.

"Miss Seer. I have been watching, after what you told me. You have not noticed? She has been in Roger's study with him, only about ten minutes—yes—but she has done it without Nita knowing. Look, she is saying good-bye now. And dear Nita all smiles and quite pleasant. Nita was playing croquet of course but even then—— Perhaps it was just luck—but quite amazing."

Mr. Fothersley agreed. "Most fortunate," he added.

"You know, Arthur, she is not unattractive," Lady Condor continued. "By no means in her *première jeunesse* and can never have been a beauty. But there is something cool and restful-looking about her which some men might like. You never know, do you? I remember once Condor was quite infatuated for a few weeks, with a woman rather in the same style."

"But I thought you didn't think——" began Mr. Fothersley.

"Of course I don't think—not really." Lady Condor watched Ruth's farewells through her glasses. "That's what is so stupid about all these supposed affairs of Roger's. There never is anything in them. So stupid——" She stopped suddenly and looked sideways at him, rather the look of a child found with a forbidden toy.

"But——" began Mr. Fothersley, and stopped also.

The two old friends looked at each other.

"Arthur," said Lady Condor. "I believe you are as bad as I am. Yes—don't deny it. I saw the guilt in your eyes. So funny—just as I discovered my own. But so nice—we can be quite honest with each other."

"My dear Marion—I don't——" Mr. Fothersley began to protest.

“Dear Arthur, yes—you do. We both of us enjoy—yes—where are my glasses? What a mercy you did not tread on them. But where was I? Yes. We both of us enjoy these little excitements. Positively”—her shrewd old face lighted up with mischief—“positively I believe we miss it when Roger is not supposed to be carrying on with somebody. I discovered it in a flash just this very moment! I do hope we don’t really hope there is something in it all the time. It would be so dreadful of us.”

“Certainly we do not,” said Mr. Fothersley, deeply pained but associating himself with her from long habit. “Most certainly not! I can assure you my conscience is quite clear. Really, you are allowing your imagination to run away with you. We have always done our best to stop Nita creating these most awkward situations.”

“Yes, of course we have,” said Lady Condor soothingly. “I did not mean that. But now where is Condor? Oh, he has walked home across the fields. So good for his figure! I wish I could do the same for mine. Yes, Nita has been quite nice to Miss Seer, and now Violet is seeing her off.”

“I am motoring back to town to-night,” Violet Riversley was saying as she shut the door of Ruth Seer’s little two-seater car, “or I would like to come over to Thorpe. How is it?”

“Just lovely,” said Ruth, smiling. “Be sure and come whenever you can.”

She had taken off the brakes, put out the clutch and got into gear before Violet answered. Then she laid her hand, as with a sudden impulse, on the side of the car.

“If one day I should—quite suddenly—wire to you and ask you to have me to stay—would you?” she asked.

“Why yes, of course,” said Ruth.

“You might have other visitors—or be away.”

“No, I shall not have other visitors, and I shall not be away.”

The conveyances of other guests had begun to crowd the drive, and Ruth had to give all her attention to getting her car out of a gate built before the day of cars. It was only when she was running clear, down the long slope from Fairbridge, that she remembered the curious and absolute certainty with which she had answered Violet Riversley’s question.

CHAPTER IX

The clouds of a thunderstorm were looming slowly up as Ruth motored home, and soon after she got back a sudden deluge swept over Thorpe. In ten minutes the garden paths were running with water unable to get into the sun-baked ground and every hand on the farm was busy getting young things into shelter.

"I said we should have rain soon," announced Miss McCox, after the triumphant manner of weather prophets, as she brought in Bertram Aurelius, busy trying to catch the falling silver flood with both hands.

"He has never seen rain before to remember. Think of it!" said Ruth. "And he isn't a bit frightened. Where are the other children?"

"A little wet, more or less, will do *them* no harm," replied Miss McCox. "They're more in the river than out of it, I'm thinking, bringing in mess and what not." She handed Bertram Aurelius, protesting for once vigorously, through the kitchen window to his mother. "It's the young chicken up in the top field I'm after," she added.

Ruth laughed as she picked up Selina's shivering little body which was cowering round her feet, and ran for the river. She liked the rush of the rain against her face, the eager thirst of the earth as it drank after the long drought, the scent of the wet grass. It was all very good. And if it only lasted long enough, it would make just all the difference in the world to the hay crop. The thunder was muttering along the hill-tops while she rescued the children from the shelter of a big tree, helped Miss McCox with the young chicken, and hurriedly staked some carnations which should have been done days ago; then she fled for the house, barely in time to escape the full fury of the storm.

“The carnations could have been left,” said Miss McCox, as she met her at the front door. “There’s no sense in getting your feet soaked at your age. I have a hot bath turned on for you and if you don’t go at once it will be cold.”

Bathed, dressed, and glowing with content of mind and body, Ruth watched the end of the storm from the parlour window. The big clouds were drifting heavily, muttering as they went, down towards the east, the rain still fell, but softly now, each silver streak shining separately in the blaze of sunlight from the west and presently, as Ruth watched, a great rainbow, perfect and complete, arched in jewelled glory the sullen blackness of the retreating storm.

After her dinner she took the packet Roger North had given her, and sat holding it between her hands in the big armchair by the window. The beautiful gracious old room was filling with the evening shadows, but here the light was still clear and full. The sunset lingered, although already the evening star was shining brightly. Ruth sat there, as Dick Carey must often have sat after his day’s work, looking across his pleasant fields, dreaming dreams, thinking long thoughts, loving the beauty of it all.

Here he must have thought and planned for the good and welfare of the farm. The crops and flowers and fruit, the birds and beasts. And in those last days, of the children who should come, calling him father, to own the farm one day, and love it as he had loved it.

Masefield’s beautiful lines passed through Ruth’s mind:

> “If there be any life beyond the grave,
> It must be near the men and things we love,
> Some power of quick suggestion how to save,
> Touching the living soul as from above.”

She sat very still; the lamp, symbol of the Life Eternal, gleamed more brightly as the shadows deepened. The glow in the west died away, and the great stars shone with kindly eyes, just as it must have shone on Dick Carey, sitting there dreaming too, loving the beauty of it all.

And presently Ruth became conscious of other things. Curious and poignantly there grew around her, out of the very heart of the stillness, the sense of a great movement of men and things, the clash of warring instincts, an atmosphere of fierce passions, of hatred and

terror, of tense anxiety, like an overstrained rod that must surely break, and yet holds. A terrible tension of waiting for something—something that was coming—coming—something that fell. She knew where she was now; for, through all the drenched sweetness of the fields and gardens, sickening, suffocating, deadly, came the smell of the Great Battlefields of the world. All of it was there—the sweat of men, the sour atmosphere of bivouac and dug-out, rotten sacking and wood, the fumes of explosives, the clinging horror of gas, the smell of the unattended death. It was all there, in one hideous whole. Shuddering, clutching the letters tightly with clenched hands in her lap, Ruth was back there again; again she was an atom in some awful scheme, again she knew the dread approach. The wait.... Great roaring echoes rolled up and filled all space. Sounds crashed and shattered, rent and destroyed.

And then, through it all, Ruth felt—held it as it were between the hands of her heart—something so wonderful it took her breath away, and she knew it for what it was, through all the tumult, the horror, and the evil, the strong determined purpose of a man for a certain end. It grew and grew, in wonder and in glory, until her heart could no longer hold it, could no longer bear it, for it became the strong determined purpose of many men for a certain end. It joined and unified into a current of living light and fire, and sang as it flowed, sang so that the sounds of horror passed and fled and the melody of its flowing filled all space, the sound of the great Song of the Return.

She was no longer a lonely atom in a scheme she could not understand, no longer a stranger and a pilgrim in a weary land, but part of an amazing and stupendous whole, working in unison, making for an end glorious beyond conception. Limits of time and space were wiped out, but when the strange and wonderful happening had passed over, never then, or at any later time, had she any doubt as to the reality of the experience. She knew and understood, though, with the Apostle of old, she could have said, “Whether in the body or out of the body I cannot tell.”

But suddenly the body claimed her again, and Ruth Seer did what was a very unusual thing with her—she put her face between her hands and cried and cried till they were wet with tears, her whole being shaken as by the passing of a great wind.

When, some time later, she opened the packet she found the few pages of diary much what she had somehow expected. Just the short notes of a man pressed for every minute of his time, because every minute not given to definite duty was spent with, or for, his men. His love and care for them were in every line of those hasty scraps of writing, kept principally, it seemed to Ruth, so that nothing for each one might be forgotten. It was that personal touch that struck her most forcibly. Not one of his men had a private trouble but he knew it and took steps to help, not one was missing but he headed the search party if prior duties did not prevent, not one died without him if it were in any way possible for him to be there. That lean brown hand which she knew—had seen—what a sure thing it had been to hold. From the little hastily scribbled scraps it could be pieced together. That wonderful life which he, and many another, had led in the midst of hell. The light was fading when she took the letter out of its thin unstamped envelope, but Dick Carey's writing was very clear, each word somewhat unusually far apart.

"DEAR OLD ROGER (it ran),—

"We have been badly knocked about, and are here to refit. Seven of our officers killed and four wounded; 348 out of 726 men killed and wounded—some horribly maimed—my poor fellows. This is butchery, not war. The Colonel was wounded early in the day and I was in command. Kelsey is gone, and Marriott, and little Kennedy, of those you knew. Writing to mothers and wives is hard work. You might go and see Mrs. Kelsey. She would like it. I have not a scratch and am well, but the damnable horror of this war is past belief. I have told Vi as little as possible, and nothing of the following. Poor von Schäde was brought into our lines, strangely enough, last evening, terribly mutilated. They had to amputate both legs and right arm at the clearing station. I managed to get down after things were over to see him. But he was still unconscious. We are in a ruined château on the right of —— Forest. There is a lake in which we can bathe—a godsend.

"Just midnight; and while I write a nightingale is singing. It goes on though the roar of the guns is echoing through the forest like a great sigh, and even the crash of an occasional shell does not disturb it. I suppose born and bred to it. My God, what wouldn't I give to wake up and hear the nightingales singing to the river at Thorpe and find this was only an evil dream!

"*20th*. Von Schäde is gone. I was with him at the end, but it was terrible. I could not leave him and yet perhaps it would have been better. He seemed mad with hatred. Poor fellow, one can hardly wonder. It was not only himself, so mutilated, but he seemed convinced, certain, that they were beaten. He cursed England and the English. Me and mine and Thorpe. Even Vi. It was indescribably horrible. The evil of this war incarnate as it were——"

The letter broke off, and ended with the scrawled initials

"Yrs., R. C."

and an undecipherable postscript:

"Don't tell Vi."

Had he been called away hurriedly by the falling shell which had buried his men? The envelope was addressed in another writing. She felt it must have been so. Very swiftly he had followed the man who had died cursing him and his, out into the world where thought and emotion, unclogged by this physical matter, are so much the more powerful and uncontrolled. Had they met, these two strong spirits, moving on different lines of force, working for different ends? What had been let loose when Karl von Schäde had died in that British clearing station, cursing "England and the English, me and mine and Thorpe. Even Vi." The great emotional forces, so much greater than the physical body which imprisons them, what power was there when freed; this hatred in a man of great and cultivated intellect, whose aim had been no mean or contemptible thing, whose aim had been power, what was that force on the other side of death? How much could it accomplish if, with added knowledge, it so willed?

Ruth shivered in the warm June night. A sense of danger to the farm stole over her. A warning of something sinister, impending, brooding, as the great thunder-cloud had loomed up before it burst. She stepped out over the low window-ledge on to the terrace, looked across the sleeping beauty before her. Still she held the papers in her hand. A glimmering moon was rising behind the trees, a little faint wind whispered among the leaves. They made black patterns on the silvered grass as it moved them very gently. The wind fell, and with it a great stillness. And out of the stillness came to Ruth Seer a Word.

She went back into the sitting-room, dark now except for the light of the little lamp, and knelt before it, and prayed.

And her prayer was just all the love and the pity she could gather into her heart for the strong spirit that had gone out black, and

bitter, and tortured, and filled with hate. The spirit that had been Karl von Schäde.

CHAPTER X

Thorpe was rich with the autumn yield before Violet Riversley claimed Ruth's promise. July had been on the whole a wet month, providing however much-needed rain, but the August and September of Peace Year were glorious as the late spring, and at Thorpe an abundant harvest of corn was stored by the great stacks of scented hay. The apple and pear trees were heavy with fruit. Blenheim Orange and Ribston Pippin with red cheeks polished by much sun; long luscious Jargonelles and Doyenne du Comice pears gleamed yellow and russet. The damson-trees showed purple black amid gold and crimson plums. Mulberry and quince and filbert, every fruit gave lavishly and in full perfection that wonderful autumn; and all were there. Dick Carey had seen to that. The Blackwall children came and went, made hay, picked fruit and reaped corn, as children should. They gathered blackberries and mushrooms and hazel nuts, and helped Ruth to store apples and pears, and Miss McCox to make much jam. Bertram Aurelius got on his feet and began to walk, to the huge joy of Sarah and Selina. The world was a pleasant place. Ruth moved among her children and animals and fruit and flowers, and listened to her nightingales, amid no alien corn, and sang the song old Raphael Goltz had taught her long ago, in a content so great and perfect that sometimes she felt almost afraid that she would wake up one morning and and it all a dream.

"It's just like a fairy-tale that all this should come to me," she said to Roger North.

The cottages were finished and tenanted, their gardens stored and stocked with vegetables and fruit trees, and bright with autumn flowers, from the Thorpe garden. Even Mr. Fothersley was reconciled to their existence.

Ruth had been to no more parties; the days at home were too wonderful. She garnered each into her store as a precious gift. But the neighbours liked to drop in and potter round or sit on the terrace. The place was undoubtedly amazingly beautiful and perfect in its way. The friendliness and trust of all that lived and moved at Thorpe appealed even to the unreceptive. Here there were white pigeons that fluttered round your head and about your feet. Unafraid, bright-eyed tiny beautiful birds came close, so that you made real acquaintance with those creatures of the blue sky, the leaf and the sunlight. So timid always of their hereditary enemy through the ages, yet here the bolder spirits would almost feed from your hand. Their charm of swift movement, of sudden wings, seen so near, surprised and delighted. Their bright eager eyes looked at you as friends. The calves running with their mothers in the fields rubbed rough silken foreheads against you; and gentle velvet-nosed cart-horses came to you over the gates asking for apples. The children showed you their quaint treasures, their little play homes in the trees and by the river. In their wood the Michaelmas daisies, mauve and white and purple, were making a brave show, and scarlet poppies, bad farmers but good beauties, bordered the pale gold stubble fields. Everywhere was the fragrant pungent scent of autumn and the glory of fruitful old Mother Earth yielding of her wondrous store to those who love her and work for it.

Mr. Pithey was fond of coming, and, still undaunted, made Ruth fresh offers to buy Thorpe.

“You’ve got the pick of the soil here,” he complained. “Now I’ve not a rose in my place to touch those Rayon d’Or of yours. Second crop too! And ain’t for want of the best manure, or choosing the right aspect. My man knows what he’s about too. Better than yours does, I reckon. He was head man to the Duke of Richborough, so he ought to.”

Ruth’s eyes twinkled.

“Try giving them away,” she suggested.

“Givin’ ’em away!” Mr. Pithey glared at her.

“Giving them away,” repeated Ruth firmly. “Now sit down here while I tell you all about it.”

Ruth herself was sitting on a heap of stubble by the side of the corn field, with little Moira Kent tucked close to her side.

Mr. Pithey had one of his little girls with him, and both were dressed as usual in new and expensive clothing. They looked at Ruth's heap of stubble with evident suspicion, then the child advanced a step towards her.

"Are you going to tell us a story?"

Ruth smiled. "If you like I will," she said.

The child's rather commonplace pert little face broke into an answering smile. She took out a very fine lace-bordered handkerchief and spread it carefully on the ground. Then she sat down on it with her legs sticking out in front of her.

Mr. Pithey resigned himself to the inevitable, and let his well-groomed heavy body gingerly down too. During the wet weather of July the little blue-faced lady had contracted pneumonia and very nearly died. Racked with anxiety, for family ties were dear to him, Mr. Pithey's inflation and self-importance had failed him, and between him and Ruth a queer friendship had arisen.

"She cared—she really cared," he explained afterward to his wife.

So Mr. Pithey showed himself to Ruth at his best, and though perhaps it was not a very handsome best, the direct result was a row of cottages as a thank-offering.

"Once upon a time," began Ruth, "there was a little Earth Elemental who had made the most beautiful flower in all the world, or at least it thought it was the most beautiful, so of course, for it, it *was*."

"What is an Earth Elemental?" asked Elaine Pithey.

"The Earth Elementals are the fairies who help make the plants and flowers."

"We don't believe in fairies," said Elaine primly.

"She's a bit beyond that sort of stuff," added Mr. Pithey, looking at the small replica of himself with pride.

"Some people don't," answered Ruth politely, watching the little blue butterflies among the pale gold stubble, with lazy eyes. Almost she heard echoes of elfin laughter, high and sweet.

“I’ve seen them,” Moira broke out very suddenly and to Ruth’s astonishment. That Moira “saw” things she had little doubt, but even to her the little lady was reticent. Something in the Puritan self-complacence had apparently roused her in defence of her inner world.

“What are they like then?” asked Elaine, supercilious still, but with an undercurrent of excitement plainly visible.

“They’re different,” said Moira. “Some are like humming-birds, only they’ve colours, not feathers, and some are like sweet-peas made of starlight. But some of them are just green and brown—very soft.”

“We took first prize for our sweet-peas at the flower show,” announced Elaine suddenly and aggressively.

“As big again as any other exhibit they were,” said Mr. Pithey, dusting the front of his white waistcoat proudly. “You may beat us in roses, but our sweet-peas are bigger, I’ll lay half a crown.”

“Why don’t I see fairies any way, if you do?” asked Elaine, returning to the attack now she had asserted her superiority. But Moira had withdrawn into herself, bitterly repentant of her revelation.

“Have you ever looked through a microscope?” Ruth asked, putting a sheltering arm round the small figure beside her.

Elaine looked at her suspiciously.

“You mean there’s plenty I can’t see,” she said shrewdly. “But why don’t I see fairies if she does?”

Ruth smiled. “I am afraid as a rule they avoid us as much as possible. You see, we human beings mostly kill and torture and destroy all the things they love best.”

“I don’t!”

Ruth pointed to the tightly held bunch of dying flowers in the child’s hand.

“They’re only common poppies!” said Elaine contemptuously.

Ruth took them from her, and, turning back the sheath of one of the dying buds, looked at the perfect silken lining of it.

“Some one took a lot of trouble over making that,” she said. “But suppose you listen to my story.” Moira’s small hot hand crept into hers, and she began again.

“There was once a little Earth Elemental who had made the most beautiful flower in the world. I think it was a crimson rose, and it had all the summer in its scent. And the little Elemental wondered if it was beautiful enough for the highest prize of all.”

“At Battersea Flower Show?” asked Elaine.

“No. The highest prize in the world of the Elementals is to serve. And one day a child came and cut the rose very carefully with a pair of scissors, and the Elemental was sad, for it had made the flower its home and loved it very much. But the child whispered to the rose that it was going into one of the dark places which men had made in the world, with no sunshine, or summer, or joy, or beauty, to take them a message to say that God’s world was still beautiful, and the sun and stars still shone, and morning was still full of joy and evening of peace. Then the Elemental was not sorry any more, for its rose had won the highest prize.”

Elaine’s Pithian armour had fallen from her; out of the little pert face looked the soul of a child. She had lost her self-consciousness for the moment.

“And what became of the Elemental?” she asked.

“The Elemental did not leave its home then. It went with it. And when the rose had done its work and slipped away into the Fountain of all Beauty, the Elemental slipped away with it too.”

“Where is the Fountain of all Beauty?”

“In the Heart of God.”

Elaine looked disappointed. “Then it’s all an alle—gory, I s’pose.”

“No, it’s quite true, or at least I believe it is. Mr. Pithey”—Ruth turned on him and her grave eyes danced—“take a big bunch of your best roses, a big bunch, mind, down to the Fairbridge Common Lodging House for Women, in Darley Street, and tell the Elementals where you are taking them. It will stir them up no end to give you better roses.”

“The Common Lodging House!” Mr. Pithey was plainly aghast. “Why, they’d think I was mad, and ’pon my word and honour I think you are—if you don’t mind my saying so.”

“Not a bit. I get told that nearly every day.”

“I’ll tell the Elementals, Daddy, and you can take the roses, and then we’ll see,” announced Elaine, who had been pondering the matter.

Mr. Pithey regarded her with pride. “Practical that, eh?” he said. “Well, we’ll think about it. But you’ll have to come along now or we’ll be late for tea with mother. And as to the roses, I’ll beat you yet. Elementals all nonsense! Dung—good rich dung—that’s what they want. You wait till next year.”

He shook hands warmly, and took his large presence away.

Ruth sent Moira home to tea, and wandered up the hedgerow, singing to her self, while Sarah and Selina hunted busily. On the terrace she found Roger North. He looked worn and ill and bad tempered. It was some time since he had been to see her. His wife’s jealousy of Ruth had culminated in a scene and he had a dread of disturbing the peace of the farm. But the silliness of the whole thing had irritated him, and he was worried about Violet on whom the strange black cloud had descended again more noticeably than ever. Riversley had gone to Scotland, writing him a laconic note, “I’m better away—this is my address if you want me.”

He drank his tea for the most part in silence, and when she had finished hers Ruth left him and went about her work. North lit his pipe and sat on smoking, while the two little dogs fought as usual for the possession of a seat in his chair, edging each other out. And presently Bertram Aurelius came staggering out of the front door and plump down on the ground before him. His red hair shone like an aureole round his head and he made queer and pleasant noises, gazing at North with friendly and evident recognition. Larry came padding softly up from his favourite haunts by the river and lay watching them with his wistful amber eyes.

“Thank God for the blessed things that don’t talk,” said North.

The deep lines on his face had smoothed out, his irritation subsided, he no longer felt bad tempered.

When Ruth came back he smiled at her. “Thank you, I’m better,” he said. “When I arrived I wasn’t fit to ‘carry guts to a bear.’ You know Marryat’s delightful story, of course? And how is the farm?”

“Can’t you feel?”

She stood in the attitude of one listening. And curiously and strangely there came to North's consciousness a something that all his senses seemed to cognize and contract at once. It was not a sound, it was not a vision, it was not a sensation, though it combined all three. Radiant and sweet and subtle, and white with glory, it came and went in a flash. Was it only a minute or eternity?

"What was it?" His own voice sounded strange in his ears.

Ruth smiled. "You felt it?"

"I felt something. I believe you mesmerized me, you witch woman."

She shook her head. "I couldn't make anyone feel that if I knew all the arts in the world. Only yourself can find that for you."

"What was it, anyhow?"

"I think"—she paused a moment—"I think it is getting into the Unity of All."

"Where does the bad go to?"

There was a moment's silence between them. But the world of the farm was alive with sound. The pigeons' coo, the call of the cowman to his herd, the chuckles of the baby, accompanied by the full evening chorus of birds.

"There isn't any bad in there," said Ruth.

"Your farm is bewitched," said North. "I might be no older than Bertram Aurelius talking nonsense like this. Come down to earth, you foolish woman. There's a telegraph boy coming up the drive."

Ruth's face clouded a little. "I have not got over the dread of telegrams," she said. "It takes one back to those dreadful days——"

She shivered as they waited for the boy to reach them. He whistled as he came, undisturbed by much clamour from Sarah and Selina; they were old friends and he knew their ways.

Ruth tore the envelope open, read the telegram, and handed it to North. "May I come?" were its three short words, and it was signed "Violet Riversley."

"You will have her?" said North.

"Yes, of course." Ruth penciled her answer on the prepaid form and handed it to the boy.

North heaved a sigh of relief. “It’s good of you. You know she has not been well.”

Ruth sat down and pointed to the other chair.

“Tell me all you know. It may help.”

North told her as well as he could. “It’s all so indefinite and intangible,” he ended. “Sometimes I wonder if her mind is affected in any way. From the shock Dick’s death was to her you know. That anyone should be afraid of Vi! It seems ridiculous, remembering what she was. She *isn’t herself*. That’s the only way I can describe it to you. Upon my word sometimes lately I’ve almost believed she’s possessed by a devil. But if she comes here—well, I don’t know why—but I think she will get all right.”

Ruth did not answer at first. She sat thinking, with her elbows on her knees, her face hidden between her hands.

That sense of danger to the farm had swept over her again. A warning as of something impending, brooding; looming up like a great cloud on the edge of her blue beautiful sky. Something strange and terrible was coming, coming into her life and the life of the farm. And she could not avert it, or refuse to meet it. Whatever it was it had to be met and fought. Would it be conquered? For it was strong, terribly strong, and it was helped by many. And while the moment lasted, Ruth felt small and frightened and curiously alone.

“What is the matter?” asked Roger North. His voice was anxious, and when she looked up she met his eyes full of that pure and honest friendship which is so good a thing, and so rare, between man and woman. Just so might he often have looked at Dick Carey.

She put out her hand to meet his, as a man might do on a bargain. “We will do our best,” she said.

And she knew that WE was strong.

CHAPTER XI

"Yes, I am quite satisfied with things on the whole," said Lady Condor. "Dear Roger, you need not snort. Of course *you* are a pessimist, so nice! One of the lucky people who never expect anything, so are never disappointed. Or you always expect everything bad, is it? and you are never disappointed, because you think everything is bad! It doesn't sound right somehow, but you know what I mean."

"Certainly! It is quite clear," said North, with commendable gravity.

They were both calling at Thorpe, one cold afternoon early in October. Ruth had a big log fire burning in the grate, in the room which still seemed to belong to Dick Carey. Its warmth mingled with the scent from big bowls-full of late autumn roses, lent a pleasing illusion of summer. Lady Condor, wonderful to behold in the very latest thing in early autumn hats, on which every conceivable variety of dahlia seemed gathered together, sat by the fire talking of many things.

"So nice of you to understand!" she exclaimed, nodding at North genially. "That is the charm of talking to some one with brains. But where was I? Oh yes! I am quite satisfied with things, because I see the end of this horrible adoration of money. The Pithians have far surpassed my wildest hopes. It has become positively discreditable to be very wealthy. At last everyone begins to realize how truly vulgar has been their idea. I have always resented this kow-towing down to money. It gets the wrong people in everywhere, and no wonder the country goes to the dogs, as my poor dear father used to say. Now why have we got Dunlop Rancid as our member? Because he has brains to help govern? Certainly not! He is our member because his

father made a large fortune in buttons—or was it bones?—perhaps it was bone buttons. But something like that. And he subscribed largely to the party funds, so he represents us, and when he took me into dinner last week he didn't know where King Solomon's Islands were. Nor did I! But of course that was different. My dear"—she looked suddenly at Violet Riversley—"why on earth don't you make Fred stand for Parliament? He has a fund of common sense which would be invaluable to the country, and he has only to write a big cheque for the party funds and there he will be."

Violet Riversley was curled—almost crunched—up in the armchair opposite her Ladyship. She lifted her head when directly questioned and laughed a little. It was not a nice laugh. It fell across the warm sweet-scented room like a note from a jarred string.

"Why should one bother?" she said. "The country is welcome to go to the dogs for all I care. I'm sorry for the dogs, that's all."

There was a little silence, a sense of discomfort. The bitterness underlying the words made them forceful—of account. Lady Condor felt they were in bad taste, and North got up, frowning irritably, and moved away to the window. Violet, however, was paying no attention to either of them. She was looking at Ruth, with her golden eyes full of something approaching malice.

"You go on playing with your little bits of kindness and your toys, and think everything in the garden is lovely!" She laughed again, that little hateful laugh. "And what do you suppose is really going on all the time! You human beings are the biggest fraud on the face of the earth!"

Ruth started a little at the pronoun. Her serenity was disturbed; she looked worried.

"You talk of righteousness, and justice, and brotherhood, and all the rest of the rotten humbug," Violet Riversley went on, "and hold up your hands in horror when other people transgress against your paper ideals. But every nation is out for what it can make, every people will wade through oceans of blood and torture and infamy if it thinks it can reap any benefit from it. And why not? Survival of the fittest, that is nature's law. But why can't you say so? Instead of all this hypocrisy and pretence of high morals. You make me sick! What possible right have you to howl at the Germans? You are all the same

—England and France and America—the whole lot of you. You have all taken by force or fraud. You have all driven out by arms and plots weaker peoples than yourselves. I don't blame you for that—weaker people should go—it is the law of nature. But don't go round whining about how good you are to them. You are just about as good to them as you are to your animals or anything else weaker than yourselves. Why can't you have the courage of your brutality, and your lust, and your strength. It might be worth something then. You might be great. As it is you are only contemptible—the biggest fraud on the face of creation."

She faltered suddenly, and stopped. Ruth's eyes had met hers steadily, all the time she had been speaking; and now her hostess spoke slowly and quietly, as one speaks to a little child when one wants to impress something upon it.

"Why do you talk like that, Violet Riversley?" she asked. "You know you do not think like that yourself."

North, standing by the window, watched, with the fingers of a horrible anxiety gripping him. His daughter's face in the leaping firelight looked like a twisted distorted mask. Lady Condor, open-mouthed, comically perplexed, stared from one to the other, for once speechless.

"It is the truth." Violet Riversley uttered the words slowly, it seemed with difficulty.

"*You* do not think so," answered Ruth, still as one who would impress a fact on a child. Then she rose from her chair. "Come!" she said, with a strange note of command in her voice, "I know you will all like to walk round the place before tea."

Violet passed her hand across her eyes, much as a person will do when waking from the proverbial forty winks. She stood up, and shivered a little.

Ruth was talking, after a fashion unusual to her, almost forcing the conversation into certain channels. "Yes, of course, you are very right, Lady Condor," she said. "No man can be valued truly until you see what he can do just with his brain and his character and his own two hands. Now I can give Violet a really fine character for work. As a matter of fact I am filled with jealousy. She can milk quicker than I

can. I think because she learnt when she was quite young. Mr. Carey taught her."

"Poor dear Dick! He did teach the children such queer things," said Lady Condor, allowing herself to be assisted out of her comfortable chair by the fire without protest. "But who was it learnt to milk? Some one quite celebrated. Was it Marie Antoinette? Or was it Queen Elizabeth? It must be just milking time; let us go, dear Violet, and see you milk. It will interest us so much," she added, with that amazing tact which no one except those who knew her best ever realized.

Violet followed them into the garden without speaking. Her eyes had a curious vacant look; she moved like a person walking in her sleep.

Lady Condor took Ruth's arm and dropped behind the others on the way to the farmyard. "My dear," she said, "I don't know what's the matter, but I see you wish to create a diversion. Poor dear Violet, I have never heard her talk such nonsense before. Rather unpleasant nonsense too, wasn't it? Can it be she has fallen in love with one of those dreadful Socialist creatures? I believe they can sometimes be quite attractive, and the young women of the present day are so *outré*, you never know who or what they will take up with. Besides, I believe they wash nowadays. The Socialists I mean, of course. In my day they thought it showed independence to appear dirty and without any manners. So funny, was it not? But I met one the other day who was charming. Quite good looking and well dressed, even his boots. Or, let me see, was he a Theosophist? There are so many 'ists' now, it is difficult not to get them mixed up. But where was I? Oh yes—dear Violet! Where can she have got those queer ideas from? I do hope she is not attracted by some 'ist.' I so often notice that when a woman gets queer opinions there is either a man, or the want of a man, at the bottom of it. And it cannot be the latter with dear Violet. Ah, now here we are. Don't the dear things look pretty? And you have such a lovely milking shed for them. Violet, you really must show me how you milk. I should like to begin myself. But don't you have to lean your head against the cow?—and it would ruin my dahlias."

"Come and see the real dahlias instead," said Violet, laughing. "Yours are the most wonderful imitation I have ever seen. I don't

believe you could tell them from the real ones. Where did you get them? Madame Elsa?"

Her voice and manner were wholly natural again. North looked palpably relieved, but when his daughter had disappeared with Lady Condor towards the flower garden he turned anxiously to Ruth.

"Does she often talk like that?" he asked. "It is so unlike her—so absolutely unlike—" He stopped, his eyes searched Ruth's, and for a moment there was silence. "What is it?" he asked.

They were wandering now, aimlessly, back to the house.

"If I were to tell you what I think," said Ruth slowly, "you would call me mad."

"You don't mind that." He spoke impatiently. "Tell me."

"Not yet—wait. Did anything strike you when she burst out like that just now?"

North did not answer. He had ridden over and still held his whip in his right hand. He struck the fallen rustling leaves backwards and forwards with it as he walked, with the sharp whish expressive of annoyance and irritation.

"You women are enough to drive a man crazy between you," he said.

This being plainly no answer to her question Ruth simply waited.

"How often has she talked in that strain?" North asked at length.

"Twice only, before to-day."

"And you—call her back to herself—as you did just now?"

"Yes."

They had reached the terrace, and he stood facing her. He searched her eyes with his as he had done before.

"It is not possible," he said, but the words lacked conviction.

Ruth said nothing. Her eyes were troubled, but they met his steadily.

Then at last North told her. "It might have been Karl von Schäde speaking," he said.

"Come indoors," she said gently.

He followed her into the warm rose-scented room and sat down by the fire, shivering. She threw more logs upon it, and the flames shot up, many-hued, rose and amber, sea-green and heliotrope.

"Tell me what you think, what you know," said North.

Ruth looked into the leaping mass of flame, her face very grave. Her voice was very low, hardly above a whisper.

"I think the hatred in which Karl von Schäde passed into the next world has found a physical instrument through which to manifest here," she said.

"And that instrument is—good God!" North's voice was sharp with horror. "It isn't possible—the whole thing is ridiculous. But go on. I heard to-day. That has happened twice before you say. You suspected then, of course. Is there anything else?"

And even as he spoke, things, little things, that Violet had said and done, came back to him. The shrinking of the dogs, his own words —"She is not herself"—took on new meaning.

"There is a blight upon the farm since she came," said Ruth. "The joy and peace are not here as they were. Perhaps you would not feel it, coming so seldom."

"Yes, I noticed it. But Violet has not made for peace of late. I thought it was just her being here."

"The children don't care to come as they did, and there have been quarrels. The creatures are not so tame. Nothing is doing quite so well. These are little things, but taken all together they make a big whole."

"Anyway it's not fair on you," said North shortly. "The place is too good to spoil, and you——"

In that moment, the supreme selfishness with which he and his had used her for their own benefit, as some impersonal creature, that could not be weary or worried or overtaxed, came home to him. He felt suddenly ashamed.

Ruth smiled at him. "No," she said. "The farm, I, you, are all just instruments too, as she has become, poor child. Only we are instruments on the other side." Her voice dropped, and he leant forward to catch the words. "Dick Carey's instruments; we cannot fail him."

“Then you think——”

“See!” She held herself together, after her queer fashion, as a child does when thinking hard. “You remember in the letter about von Schäde, when Mr. Carey wrote: ‘he died cursing England, the English, me and mine and Thorpe. It was like the evil of this war incarnate.’ Do you think that force of emotion perished with the physical, or do you think the shattering of the physical left it free? And remember too, Karl von Schäde had studied those forces, had learnt possibly something of how to handle them. Then Violet, Violet whom he had loved, after his own fashion, and to whom he would therefore be drawn——”

“But if there is any justice, here or there,” broke in North, “why should she become the brute’s instrument?”

“Because she too was filled with hate. Only so could it have been possible. Think for a minute and you will see.”

In his youth, North had been afflicted with spasms of stammering. One seized him now. It seemed part of the horror which was piercing the armour in which he had trusted, distorting with strange images that lucid brain of his, so that all clear train of thought seemed to desert him. He struggled painfully for a few moments before speech returned to him.

“D—damn him. D—damn him. Damn him,” he said.

Ruth sprang up, and laid her hand across his mouth. Fear was in her eyes. He had never thought to see her so moved, she who was always so calm, so secure.

“For pity’s sake stop,” she said; “if you feel like that you must go. You must not come here again. You must keep away from her. Oh, don’t you see you are helping him? I ought not to have told you; I did not realize it might fill you with hate too.”

“I’m sorry,” said North harshly. “I’m afraid anything else is beyond me.”

He had given up all attempt to insist that it was impossible. The uncanny horror had him in its grip. He felt that he had bidden farewell to common sense.

Ruth grew imperative. “For God’s sake, try!” she said. “Don’t hate. Don’t curse him like that. Don’t you see—you cannot overcome hate with hate; you can only add to it. I find it so hard myself not to feel as

you do. But oh, don't you see, all his life Dick Carey must have loved, in a small far-off way of course, as God loves. And everything that lived and moved and breathed came within the scope of his tenderness and his pity. And That which was himself did not perish with the physical either. That too is free—free and fighting. You can only overcome hate with love. But on a physical plane, even God Himself can only work through physical instruments."

She stopped, and looked at North imploringly.

"I have your meaning," he said more gently. Her sudden weakness moved him indescribably.

"And the worst of it is," she went on, "I have lately lost that sense of being in touch with him. You remember how I told you about it. It came, I thought, through us both loving the farm, but indeed I did know, in some strange way, what he wanted done and when he was pleased. You will remember I told you. If I could feel still what was best to do, but it is like struggling all alone in the dark! Only one thing I know, I hold to. You cannot overcome hate with hate. You can only overcome hate with love. But the love is going out of the farm. It was so full of it—so full—I could hear it singing always in my heart. But now there is something awful here. I can sense it in the night, I can feel it in all sorts of ways. The peace has gone that was so beautiful, the radiance and the joy. And always now I have instead the sense of great struggle, and some evil thing that threatens."

"It is not fair on you or on the farm," said North, very gently now. "Violet ought to leave."

"I don't know. Sometimes I have thought so—and yet—I don't know. I am working in the dark. I know so little really of these things—we all know so little."

"Her presence is injuring the farm, or so it seems. Indeed, it must be so. A human being full of hate and misery is no fit occupant for any home. Also we have no right——"

Ruth looked at him, and again he felt ashamed. "I beg your pardon," he said.

"We have the sort of right that you acknowledge, I know, but I don't think we should claim it."

"She came to me, or rather, I think, to the farm, to the nearest she could get to him. Or again, it might be the other force driving her. I

don't know. But I can't send her away. I think of it sometimes, but I know I can't."

"What is she like on the whole?"

"Dull and moody sometimes, wandering about the place, hardly speaking at all. Once or twice she stayed in her room all day and refused all food. But at other times she will follow me about wherever I go, clinging to me like a child, eager to help. Sometimes she will commit some horrible little cruelty, and be ashamed of it afterwards and try to hide it. If she could speak of it at all, confide in anyone it would be better I think. But she does not seem able to."

North sat staring into the fire with haggard eyes, the deep lines of his face very visible as the flames leapt and fell.

"It will send her out of her mind if it goes on," he said at length.

Ruth did not answer. Her silence voiced her own exceeding dread; it seemed to North terrible. If she should fail he knew that it would be one of the worst things which had ever happened to him. In that moment he knew how much she had come to stand for in his mind. He kept his eyes upon the fire and did not look at her. He dreaded to see that fear again in her eyes, dreaded to see her weak. It was as if the evil of the world was the only powerful thing after all. And he knew now that he had begun to hope, things deep down in his consciousness had begun to stir, to come to life.

But presently Ruth spoke again, and, looking up, he met the old comforting friendliness of her smile. Her serenity had returned. Her face looked white and very worn, but it was no longer marred with fear.

"I am sorry," she said, "and I am ashamed to have been so foolish, to have let myself think for a moment that we should fail. Hate is very strong and very terrible; but love is stronger and very beautiful. Let us only make ourselves into fit instruments for its power. We *must*. If Karl von Schäde lasts beyond, so too, more surely still, does Dick Carey. Why should we be afraid? Will you give to Karl von Schäde the instruments for his power and deny them to the friend you loved? And is it so difficult after all? Think what he must have suffered, his poor body broken into pieces, his mind full of anguish that his country was ruined, beaten, and full of the horrors he had seen and which he attributed to us. Think of those last awful hours of

his, and have you at least no pity? Try for it, reach out for it, get yourself into that mind which you knew as Dick Carey. Take Karl van Schäde into it too in your thought."

She stopped, her voice broken, but the light that shone in her face was like a star.

"I will try," said Roger North.

In the pause that followed the approaching clatter of Lady Condor's re-entry was almost a relief. She brought them back into the regions of ordinary everyday things. Violet, too, was laughing, getting more like herself. The tension relaxed.

"Miss Seer, if I had planted my dahlias among yours, really you would, never have found it out. They are an amazing imitation—quite amazing. Condor thinks my taste in hats too loud. But if men had their way we should all dress in black. So depressing! Tea? I should love it. But no, I cannot stay. I have a duty party at home. So dull, but Condor is determined that Hawkhurst shall stand for the Division now he is safely tucked away in the other House himself. All the old party business is beginning again, just as if there had been no war, when we were all shrieking 'No more party politics.' 'No more hidden policies.' So like us, isn't it? I shall put Caroline Holmes in the chair at all the women's meetings. She does so love it—and making speeches. Yes. She is to marry her Major this autumn, but she assures me it will not 'curtail her activities.' Curtail! so nice! But where was I? Oh yes, my tea-party, and I would so much rather stay here. I remember I was just going to be clever, and what happened? Oh, we went out to see Violet milk, and we saw the dahlias instead. Good-bye. Good-bye. And come soon to see me."

So Lady Condor conveyed herself, talking steadily, outside the sitting-room, with Roger North in attendance carrying her various belongings. But as she progressed across the hall, and into her waiting car, she fell upon a most unusual silence. It was not until she was well settled in that she spoke again.

"I don't like Violet's looks, Roger," she said then, her shrewd old eyes very kindly. "Why are there no babies? There should always be a nursery full of babies for the first ten years of a woman's married life. And where is Fred? You should speak to him about it."

She waved a friendly hand at him, various articles falling from her lap as she did so, and the car rolled away.

North gave a little snort of bitter laughter as he turned back into the house. Fred? Fred was eating his heart out, catching salmon in Scotland; and Violet was at Thorpe, obsessed by a dead man's hatred. He was filled with all a man's desire to cut the whole wretched business summarily, but the thing had got him in its devilish meshes, and there was no escape. He stayed to tea because he felt he must help Ruth, and yet with the uneasy consciousness that he was doing rather the reverse. Violet had fallen into one of the moody silences so common to her now, and, after she had had her tea, went back to her chair by the fire and a book. Ruth and Roger talked of the farm intermittently and with a sense of restraint, and presently Violet tossed her book on to the opposite chair and left the room.

"What is she reading?" asked Roger.

He crossed to the fire and picked the book up. It was *The Road to Self-Knowledge*, by Rudolph Steiner, and on the flyleaf, neatly written in a stiff small writing, "K. von Schäde." Then Roger suddenly saw red. The logs still burnt brightly in the grate, and with a concentrated disgust, so violent that it could be felt, he dropped the book into the heart of the flames and rammed it down there with the heel of his riding boot. The smell of burnt leather filled the room before he lifted it, and watched, with grim satisfaction, the printed leaves curl up in the heat.

He made no apology for the act, though presumably the book was now Ruth's property.

"That will show you just how much help I'm likely to be," he said. "Always supposing that you are right. And now I'd better go."

Ruth smiled at him. The child in man will always appeal to a woman. "Yes, go," she said. "I will let you know if there is anything to tell."

North rode home with all the little demons of intellectual pride and prejudice, of manlike contempt for the intangible, whispering to him, "You fool."

His wife made a scene after dinner about his visit to the farm. She resented Violet having gone there. It had aroused her jealousy, and her daughter came under the lash of her tongue equally with her

husband. Then North lost his temper, bitterly and completely; they said horrible things to each other, things that burn in, and corrode and fester after, as human beings will when they utterly lose control of themselves. It ended, as it always did, in torrents of tears on Mrs. North's side, which drove North into his own room ashamed, disgusted, furious with her and himself.

He opened the windows to the October night air. It was keen, with a hint of frost. The thinned leaves showed the delicate tracery of branches, black against the pale moonlit sky. The stars looked a very long way off. Utterly sick at heart, filled with self-contempt for his outbreak of temper, struggling in a miasma of disgust with life and all things in it, he leant against the window-sill; the keen cool wind seemed to cleanse and restore.

A little well-known whine roused him, to find Vic scratching against his knee. He picked her up, and felt the small warm body curl against his own. She looked at him as only a dog can look, and, carrying her, he turned towards the dying embers of the fire and his easy chair. Then he stopped, remembering, noticing, for the first time, that Larry had not come back with him.

CHAPTER XII

North did not visit the farm again. He sent Ruth a brief line: "I am better away." That he made no apology and expressed no thanks gave her the measure of his trust in her and her friendship.

She answered his brief communication by one equally brief: "Try not to think of it at all if you cannot think the right way."

So North buried himself in his work, forced and drove himself to think of nothing else. Slept at night from sheer weariness, and grew more haggard and more silent day by day. At least if he could not be on the side of the angels he would not help the devils.

The month was mostly wild and wet, with here and there days of supreme beauty. It was on one of these, the last day of October, that Ruth and Violet went, as they often did, for a long tramp through the wet woods and over the wind-swept hills towards the sea. The atmosphere was that exquisite clearness which often follows much rain. The few leaves remaining on the trees, of burnished golden-brown, came falling in soft rustling showers with each gust of the fresh strong wind. They had walked far, so far that they had come by hill and dale as the crow flies to where the fall of the ground came so abruptly as to hide the middle distance, and the edge of the downs, broken by its low dark juniper-bushes, stood before them, clear-cut, against the great sweep of coastline far away beneath. Pale gold and russet, the flat lands stretched, streaked with the sullen silver of sea-bound river and stream, to where, like a hard steel-blue line on the horizon, lay the sea itself. And behind that straight line, black and menacing, and touched with a livid ragged edge, rolled up the coming of a great storm.

It made a noble picture, and Ruth watched it for a few moments, her face responding, answering to its beauty. She loved these

landscapes of England, loved them not only with her present self, but also with some far-away depth of forgotten experience. And it seemed to her that she loved with them also those "unknown generations of dead men" to whom they had been equally dear. For these few moments, as she looked out over the edge of the downs, she forgot the haunting evil which was darkening all her days, forgot everything but the beauty of great space, of the wild rushing wind, the freedom—the escape.

Odd bits of quotations came to her, as they always did in these moments; one, more insistent than the others, sang, put itself into music, clear, bell-like, mysterious:

"When I have reached my journey's end,
And I am dead and free."

And in that moment her sense of being in touch with Dick Carey came back to her. Came flooding in like a great tide of help and encouragement and power.

"And I am dead and free."

And yet people were afraid of death!

The great winds came up from the sea across the earth-scented downs, shouting as they came. She loved them, and the big dark masses of cloud. She could have shouted too, for joy of that great sense of freedom, of power, of control, because she was one with those magnificent forces of nature. In her too was that strength and freedom which bowed only to the One who is All.

The blood tingled in her veins; in the full sweep of the wind she was warm—warm with life. She forgot Violet Riversley cowering at her side. Forgot the little dogs crouching, tucked against her feet, and swept for one wild moment out into the immensity of a great freedom. Then, suddenly, the steel-blue line of sea broke into white, the storm-clouds met and crashed, and lightning, like the sharp thrust of a living sword, struck across the downs, struck and struck again. Heaven and earth and the waters under the earth shuddered and reeled in the grip of the storm, and Violet Riversley, screaming with terror, fell on her knees by Ruth, clasping her, crying:

“Keep it away from me! Keep it away! God! I can’t bear it any longer! Keep it away!”

And at her cry all the motherhood in Ruth’s nature, never concentrated only on the few, leapt into full life and splendour, spread its white wings of protection. And away and beyond her own love and pity she felt that of another. Away and above her own fight was a greater fight, infinitely greater. She picked the girl up into the shelter of her arms, and her whole heart cried out in a passion of pity. She said odd little foolish words of tenderness, as mothers will, for the form she held was as light as that of a little child; just a shell it felt, nothing more.

And then, suddenly, the rain fell in one blinding rushing flood, drenching the little group to the skin, blotting out everything with its torrential flow.

“Ah, look!” said Ruth, almost involuntarily. A great flash of light had broken through from the west, and against the violet black sky the rain looked like a silver wall. It was amazingly, even terribly, beautiful.

“We are in for a proper ducking,” she said, trying to regain the normal. “Wet to the skin already, all of us. And Sarah and Selina frightened to death, the little cowards! You’d better keep moving, dear. Come along.”

It seemed a weary way home. Never had Ruth been more thankful for the presence of Miss McCox in her household. Fires, hot baths, hot coffee, all were ready; and she dried even Selina, though surreptitiously, behind the kitchen door that none might behold her weakness, with her own hand. She put Violet to bed after her hot bath, and ordered her to stay there. Nothing but asserting herself forcibly kept Ruth from a like fate.

“Them as will be foolish, there is no reasoning with,” said Miss McCox, with dignity, and retreated to the kitchen muttering like the storm.

After a lull, it had returned again with renewed force. The old house rocked as the great wind hurled itself upon it, shrieking against the shuddering windows as if demanding admittance. Sheets of wild rain broke upon the panes, and every now and then the thunder crashed and broke and rent. After her dinner Ruth went up

and sat by the log fire in Violet's room. The pillow on which she lay was hardly whiter than the girl's face. Her great gold eyes gazed out into the shadows blankly. Very small and young and helpless she looked, and Ruth's heart ached for her. She chatted on cheerfully, as she wove a woollen garment for some little child of France with her ever-busy fingers; chatted of the little things about the farm; told little quaint stories of the animals and flowers. Had she known it, just so had Dick Carey often talked, in the winter evenings over the fire, to the listening children. But Violet Riversley just lay still, gazing into the shadows, taking little notice. She made no allusion to her violent attack of terror out in the storm, and it grew on Ruth uncannily and horribly that the girl who had clung to her, crying for help, had slipped away from her again, somewhere out into the darkness and silence, torn from all known anchorage.

The little dogs had remained in their baskets downstairs; only Larry had followed her up, and lay across the doorway, his nose upon his paws, his eyes gleaming watchfully out of the shadow. Every now and then, when the shattering wind with increasing violence struck against the house again and again and wailed away like a baffled spirit, he growled in his throat as at a visible intruder.

It was late before Ruth gathered her work up and said good-night. She was honestly tired in mind and body, but an unaccountable reluctance to leave Violet held her. And yet the girl was apparently less restless, more normal, than usual. Tired out, like herself, surely she would sleep. Her terror out in the storm seemed entirely to have gone.

So Ruth reasoned to herself as she went downstairs.

In the sitting-room the little dogs slept soundly in their baskets. The fire still burned, a handful of warm red ashes. The whole place seemed full of peace and comfort, in marked contrast to the rush and wail of the storm outside. Ruth crossed to the lamp to see that it was in order, and moved about putting little tidying touches to the room, as women do the last thing before they go upstairs to bed. She was fully alive to the fact that the three weeks of Violet's visit had been a heavy strain on her, mentally and bodily. It would be quite easy to imagine things, to let this knowledge that she was fighting steadily, almost fiercely, against some awful unseen force overwhelm her, to drive her beyond the limits of what was sanely and reasonably

possible. With her renewed sense of awareness of Dick Carey's presence had come an indefinable yearning tenderness for Violet Riversley which had been lacking before in her kindly interest and friendship. To give way to fear or dread was the surest way to fail in both.

She looked out at the night. By the light streaming from the window she could see a streak of rain-washed lawn, and, dimly, beyond, the tortured branches of trees bowed and strained under the whip of the wind. She drew all the forces of her mind to the centre of her being.

"Lord of the heights and depths, Who dwellest in all the Forms that Thou hast made."

She let the blind fall into its place and moved back into the room. Larry had settled himself in the big armchair which had been Dick Carey's. She stooped to stroke his head, and he looked at her with eyes that surely understood.

"Lord of the heights and depths, Who dwellest in all the Forms that Thou hast made."

She kept the words and the thought in her mind quite steadily. Almost as soon as she lay down she passed into sleep, and dreamt—dreamt that she was walking in the buttercup field with Dick Carey and it was early morning in the heart of the springtime. And he told her many things, many and wonderful and beautiful things, which afterwards she tried to recall and could not. And then, suddenly, he was calling to her from a distance, and she was broad wide awake sitting up in bed, and Larry in the room below barked fiercely, then was silent.

The next instant she had thrown her dressing-gown over her shoulders and was running bare-footed across the landing and down the stairs. Midway across the big old hall she stopped dead, for on her had fallen, swiftly and terribly, that old horror of her small childhood, a sense of all-pervading blackness. It gripped her as forcibly as it had done in those far-off days. Again she was a small utterly helpless thing in its hideous clutch. The light streaming from under the sitting-room door accentuated the blackness, gleamed evilly, assumed a sinister and terrible importance.

Almost she turned and fled—fled out of the door behind her into the storm-swept night, away to the clean air, to the darkness which was full of beauty and healing. Not this—this that stifled, and soiled, and buried. Away—anywhere—anyhow—from what was behind that flickering evil light, which made the hideous blackness visible as well as tangible.

Almost, but not quite. That which the long years of patience and endurance had built into her, held. Dick Carey had called to her. What if he were in there, fighting, fighting against odds. For the world was full of this Evil let loose, the vibrations became palpable, engulfed her, beat her down. For a moment that seemed endless she fought for more than physical life.

Then she moved forward again, and it was as in dreams when feet are leaden-weighted and we move them with an effort that seems past our strength. But she did not hesitate again. Steadily she opened the door. Dragging those leaden feet she went in and closed it behind her.

A blast of hot air met her, insufferably hot. Some one had made up the fire again. Piled high with logs it burnt fiercely. The room was in disorder. In the far corner by the south window the little dogs lay cringing with terror, trembling, while before them Larry crouched, his white fangs bare, his lips lifted till the gums showed, his blazing eyes fixed on the figure in the centre of the room—the figure of Violet Riversley.

Before her, piled on the floor, were various articles, books and papers, gathered together and heaped in the shape of a bonfire. At her feet lay the bronze lamp. In her right hand she held the wick, still alight. Curiously, the light from the blazing logs played on the long folds of her white gown. Almost it seemed as if she were clothed in flame.

It was more subconsciously than in any other way that Ruth took in these details, for every sense she had—and all had become most acutely alive—concentrated on the terrific and hideous fact that, enveloping Violet, encasing her as it were, was a great outstanding Figure or Presence. Fear gripped her to the soul like ice. She could have screamed with very terror, but she was beyond the use of the body, beyond, it seemed, all help. For the entity that was not Violet Riversley, very surely not Violet Riversley, but a being infinitely

stronger and more powerful, looked at her with the eyes of a soul self-tortured, self-maimed, and she saw in all their terrific hideousness Hate and Revenge incarnate.

And as she looked a worse horror gripped her. The Thing was trying to master her, to make her its instrument, even as it had made Violet Riversley. The very hair of her head rose upon it as she felt her grip on herself loosening, weakening. Her individuality seemed to desert her, to disintegrate, to disappear.

It might have been a moment; it might have been an eternity.

Then, as from a long way off, she heard Larry give a strange cry. Something between a howl and a bay its vibration stirred the air through miles. The cry of the wolf to the pack for help. The old dog had stood up, his jowl thrust forward, his body tense, ready for the spring.

With a final desperate effort, which seemed to tear her soul out of her body, Ruth cried too—cried to all she had ever thought or dreamed or held to of Good; and in that moment her awareness of Dick Carey suddenly became acute. Afterwards, in her ordinary consciousness, Ruth always found it impossible to recapture, or in any way adequately to remember, the sensations of the next overwhelming moment. Not only were they beyond speech they seemed beyond the grip of ordinary thought.

After that moment of supreme terror, of incredible struggle, with the acute return of her awareness of Dick Carey, with some crash of warring elements and forces, mingling as part of and yet distinct from the raging of the outside storm, she regained Herself. Was out as it were, in illimitable space, fighting shoulder to shoulder, hand to hand, one with Dick Carey. One, too, with some mighty force, fighting gloriously, triumphantly, surely; fighting through all the Ages, through all the Past, on through all the Future, beyond Space and beyond Time.

Then, suddenly, she was carried out—in no other way could she describe it afterwards—out of the stress and the battle on a wave of very pure and perfect compassion into the heart of a radiance before which even the radiance of the fullest sunlight would be as a rush candle. And into that infinite radiance came too the deadly hatred, the unspeakable malice, the craving for revenge, the bitterness, the

rebellion—came and was swallowed up, purified, transmuted. In a great and glorious moment she knew that the Force was one and the same, and that it is the motive power behind which makes it Good or Evil.

Then the outside storm concentrated and fell in one overwhelming crash. The house rocked, and rocked again. Ruth, mechanically stepping forward, caught in her arms a body which fell against her almost like a paper shell. Very swiftly she carried it out into the hall. Her normal senses were suddenly again acute; they worked quickly. And on the stair, infinitely to her relief, appeared the shining polished countenance of Miss McCox. Her attire defied description, and in her hands she held, one in each, at the carry, the proverbial poker and tongs. Behind her came Gladys, open-mouthed, dishevelled, likewise fully armed, and accomplishing a weird sound which appeared to be a combination of weeping and giggling.

Ruth struggled with delightful and inextinguishable laughter, which she felt might very easily degenerate into hysterics, for she was shaking in every limb.

"No, no; it is not burglars!" she said. "Put those things down, and take Mrs. Riversley. She has been walking in her sleep, and I am afraid has fainted. You know what to do. I must telephone the doctor."

In her mind was the immediate necessity of dealing with that sinister bonfire before it could work damage, also before any eyes but her own should see it.

The lighted wick had fallen on to papers sprinkled with the oil, and already, when she returned to the sitting-room, little tongues of flame were alight and a thin pillar of smoke crowned its apex. She dealt swiftly with it with the heavy rugs luckily to her hand, and when the creeping fire was crushed out and stifled she put the injured remains of treasured books and ornaments hurriedly into the drawers of the big bookcase. The damage to the carpet there was no possibility of concealing, and after a moment of thought she took one of the charred logs, black and burnt out, and scattered it where the pile had been. Then she took the wick in which the light still burned, true symbol of the Life Eternal, and restored it and the lamp to its own place, drew back the curtains, and opened the great window looking south.

It was early morning. The storm was riding away in broken masses of heavy cloud. Drenched and dim, and covered with a rising silver mist, the racked world rested in a sudden calm. But the storm had left its traces in the broken branches strewing lawn and garden and field, and across the pathway a great elm-tree, snapped half-way up the main trunk, lay with its proud head prostrate, blocking the main entrance.

The coolness of the dawn touched like a benediction Ruth's tired face and black and bruised hands. For a few moments she stood looking up at the washed sky, the fading stars, while the dogs nestled against her, craving for notice. A great sense of life and happiness came flowing into her, flowing like a mighty tide with the wind behind it, and she knew that all was well.

She would have given a good deal to sit down and cry, but there was much to be done. That morning passed like a hurried nightmare, the whole house pervaded with that painful agitation which the shadow of death, coming suddenly, brings, for Violet Riversley was desperately and dangerously ill. She was in a high fever, wildly delirious, and Ruth found it impossible to leave her. Miss McCox took command in her absence, and moved about house and farm a very tower of strength in emergency, while Gladys haunted her footsteps, crying at every word, as is the manner of her kind in such moments. In the sitting-room, Roger North and his wife, summoned by telephone, waited while the doctor made his examination. The room had been stiffly set in order by Miss McCox's swift capable hands. Over the scorched and blackened patch on the carpet she had set a table, nothing but a general air of bareness and smell of burning remained to hint of anything unusual. Both windows were opened wide to the chill early morning air, and Mrs. North crouched by the fire shivering.

She was utterly unnerved and overcome. The message had arrived just as she was dressing. She had swallowed a hurried breakfast, when, quite strangely, it did not matter that the coffee was not so good as usual, and the half-dozen notes and letters from various friends were of no real concern whatever. She had been engaged to lunch at the Condors. In the afternoon she had promised to give away the prizes at a Village Work Show. And into all this pleasant everyday life had come, shattering it all into little bits, the sudden

paralyzing fact that Violet had been taken dangerously ill during the night.

She and her husband had driven over in the little car to find the doctor still in the sick-room. Ruth was also there, and questioning Miss McCox was much like extracting information from the Sphinx.

"I always disliked that woman; she has no more heart than a stone," Mrs. North complained tearfully. "And I do think she ought to tell Miss Seer we have arrived. It is dreadful to be kept away from one's own child like this and not know what is happening."

"Eliot will be down soon, I expect," said North. He was wandering aimlessly, restlessly, about the room, for as the time lengthened his nerves too grew strained with waiting. What had happened? All sorts of horrible possibilities pressed themselves upon him. If only Ruth would come and he could see her alone for a moment!

He stopped in his restless pacing, and looked down kindly at his wife's shivering form. "Shall I shut the windows?" he asked.

"No," she answered; "never mind. Oh, Roger, do you think she will die? I can't bear it! Oh, why doesn't he come?"

She got up and clutched her husband's coat-sleeve, hiding her face on his shoulder. "Roger, I couldn't bear her to die."

Never before had the great presence of Death really come near to her, except to summon the very old whose life had already almost passed to the other side. And now, suddenly, like a bolt out of a serene blue sky, it was standing beside her, imminent, threatening, and, to her, unspeakably terrible.

Roger North put an awkward arm round her. He felt uncomfortably stiff and useless, and ridiculously conscious of the fact that she had forgotten in her hurry and distress to take her hair out of the curler at the back of her neck.

He was honestly anxious to be sympathetic, to be all that was kind and helpful. His own anxiety racked him, and yet, absurdly enough, that curler obtruded itself on his notice until he found himself saying, "You have left one of your curlers in."

He was acutely aware that it was about the last thing he should have said and wholly unsuitable to the moment, but his wife, fortunately, took no such view.

“It just shows the state of my mind!” she exclaimed, trying with shaking fingers to disentangle it. “I have never done such a thing in my life before! What a mercy you noticed it!”

He helped her to get the little instrument out, and put it in his pocket.

There was the sound of a closing door above, the hurried movement of feet, and Mrs. North clutched her husband’s arm. They both looked towards the door. But silence fell again, and she began to cry.

“Do you think she’s dying, Roger?”

“No, no! Eliot would send for us, of course.” He began his restless walk to and fro again. “I wish we had got here before Eliot did. You could have gone in with him then.”

And here, at last, footsteps came down the stairs, across the hall, the door opened, and the doctor came in.

He was an unusual man to find buried in a country practice. A man of outstanding intellect and of a very charming presence. Between him and North a warm friendship existed.

“Ah, you have come!” he exclaimed.

He took Mrs. North’s hand and looked down at her with exceeding kindness.

“The child is very ill and I fear brain trouble,” he said. “I gather she went for a long walk yesterday and got drenched in the storm, so it is possibly aggravated by a chill. Do you know of any special worry or trouble?”

“Nothing whatever,” said Mrs. North decisively. “Except, of course, poor Dick’s death. She felt that very much at the time, and Roger thinks she has never got over it, don’t you, Roger?”

Roger nodded. For a moment he considered laying before his friend the abnormal situation in which Ruth Seer believed, and which he himself had come anyway to recognize as within the realms of possibility. But the inclination faded almost as soon as born. He had had no speech yet with Ruth, nor did it seem fair to Violet. Possibly, perhaps, some personal pride held him.

The doctor looked at him kindly. “Poor little girl! Well, she made a brave fight, I remember. Now, Mrs. North, no worrying. How old is

the child? Twenty-six? You can get over anything at twenty-six! I'm sending in a nurse, and that woman upstairs is worth her weight in gold. You couldn't have her in better hands. Now you'd like to go up and have a look at her. Don't get worried because she won't know you; that's part of the illness."

But outside he looked at Roger with an anxious face.

"She's very ill, North," he said. "It must have been coming on for some time. The storm—yes—that shook it up into active mischief, no doubt. We'll pull her through, I hope; but would you like a specialist's opinion? These brain troubles are very obscure."

"I leave it to you," said North, his whole being sick and empty.

"Well, we'll see how she goes on in the next twenty-four hours."

He sped away, and Roger wandered aimlessly about the farm, looking at the wreckage of the storm, with Larry and the little dogs, conscious in their dumb way that their beloveds were in trouble, keeping at his heel.

By one of those vagaries which make the English climate so lovable in spite of its iniquities, it was, after the day and night of storm and rain, that very wonderful thing a perfectly beautiful morning in November. The sun shone with astonishing warmth, scattering great masses of grey and silver cloud, against which the delicate black tracery of bough and twig, stripped of every lingering leaf, showed in exquisite perfection.

The farm was wide awake and astir with the life of a new day. But Vi, little Vi, was lying up there, at the Door of Death. Recollections of her as a soft-headed, golden-eyed baby came back to him; as a small child flitting like a white butterfly about the garden; as a swift vision of long black legs and a cloud of dark hair, running wild with the boys; as the glorious hoyden who had taken her world by storm in the days just before the war. And now she lay there a broken thing, tossed and driven to death in the purposeless play of soulless and unpitying forces. He ground his teeth in impotent rage, overcome with a very anguish of helpless pain and wrath. If only Ruth would come and tell him what had happened!

The cowman, who was helping the gardener clear away the remains of the storm, came up from the fallen tree and spoke to him. He was sorry to hear there was illness at the house. North thanked

him mechanically and escaped into the flower garden. The few remaining flowers were beaten to the ground, their heads draggled in the wet earth. He got out his knife and began to cut them off and tidy up the border. He could watch the house at the same time. The minutes dragged like hours, and then, at last, the door on to the terrace opened, and Ruth came out.

She looked round and, catching sight of him, hurried by the shortest way, across the wet grass, to meet him. His pain-ravaged face smote her with a great pity. She held out both her hands to meet his.

"I could not come before," she said. "She is quieter now. Oh, do not feel like that! She will get well. I know she will get well."

"Where can we go to be alone?" he asked. "I must hear what happened. It is that which has been driving me mad."

"Let us go and walk along the path under the 'house on the wall,'" she said. "No one will come there and it is sheltered and warm in the sun."

And there, pacing up and down, she told him, as well as she could, the happenings of the night before.

North ground his teeth. "She would be better dead," he said. "And yet——" He looked at her, a new horror growing in his haggard eyes, a question——?

"She will not die," said Ruth. "But don't you understand, don't you believe, whether she lives or dies the evil is conquered, is transmuted, is taken in to the Eternal Good?"

"No, I cannot believe," said North harshly. "I think you are playing with words. It seems to me that only Evil is powerful. If anything survives, it is that."

Ruth looked at him with very gentle eyes. "Wait," she said. "Have just a little patience. She will get well, and then you will believe."

"I cannot believe," said Roger North. The words fell heavily, like stones. He paced restlessly backwards and forwards, crunching the wet gravel viciously under his feet.

"The house might have been burnt down. You—I suppose you think that was the object?"

"Yes, I think it must have been so. At any rate one of them."

“That is the loathsome horror of it all!” North burst forth savagely. “I believe just enough, because in no other way can I account for what has happened, to make me dread death for her in a way I should never have dreaded it otherwise. I have always looked on our personal grief as fundamentally selfish.”

Ruth was silent. He seemed beyond the reach of help, and she would have given so much to help him. That he, at any rate for the moment, gave no thought to what she had been through disturbed her not at all.

“Listen,” she said presently. “You may think it all imagination, or what people call imagination, but if you could only have seen it, as I did, you would know it was very, very real. It was when I was alone with her waiting for Doctor Eliot. I went to the window to pull the blind down a little, and when I turned round again—I saw”—she stopped, searching for adequate words—“I saw what looked like a wall of white light. I can’t describe it any other way, though it was not like any light we know of here, more wonderful, alive in some strange way. It was all round her. No evil thing could get through. I am so sure.”

She looked at him with her heart in her eyes, but Roger North shook his head.

“It leaves me cold,” he said. “Is that why you feel so sure she will get well?”

“No. But I *am* sure; that is all I know.”

And to that Ruth held through the days of tense anxiety that followed, through the visit of the specialist from London, who gave little hope, through the despair of others. She moved among them as one carrying a secret store of strength. Mrs. North, pitiably broken up, clung to her for help and comfort, but North, after the talk in the garden, had withdrawn into himself and kept aloof. The ravages day after day marked on his face went to Ruth’s heart when he came over to inquire. But for the moment he was beyond her reach or help. Whatever devils from the bottomless pit rent and tore his soul during these dark days, he fought them single-handed, as indeed, ultimately, they must be fought by every man.

Mrs. North and Fred Riversley stayed at Thorpe.

“Uncommonly decent of Miss Seer,” said Mr. Pithey to his wife. “Turning her house into a hotel as well as a hospital! That stuck-up little Mrs. North, too. I’ve heard her say things about Miss Seer that have put my bristles up. Give me Lady Condor every time. Paint or no paint!”

But Mrs. Pithey had learnt things down in the dark valley. She was not so censorious as of old.

“I don’t cotton to Mrs. North myself,” she answered. “She’s a woman who overprices herself. But she’s a mother, and Miss Seer could do no less than take her in. You might take down some of these best Musk Cat grapes after tea, ’Erb. P’raps Mrs. Riversley could fancy ’em.”

Everyone indeed was very kind, but with the exception of Lady Condor and Mr. Fothersley, Ruth kept visitors away from Mrs. North.

Fred Riversley had astonished everyone by turning out a wonderful nurse, and what little rest Violet had was in his strong arms, nursed like a child. She seemed nothing more, and in her delirium had gone back to the days of her childhood and talked of little else, and more and more happily as the time went by.

“One might as well try to keep a snow wreath,” he said one afternoon to Ruth, who was giving him tea after his usual tramp round the fields for some fresh air and exercise.

Even as he spoke there was a little bustle and scurry outside the door, and before it opened Riversley was on his feet and moving towards it.

Mrs. North stood there, half laughing, half crying. “Oh, she is better!” she cried. “She has gone into a real sleep. Nurse says we may hope. She will get well.”

She dropped on to her knees by the fire and buried her face against the cushions of the sofa, sobbing and crying, while Riversley tore across the hall and up the stairs two steps at a time.

It was early on the following morning that Violet Riversley opened her eyes and looked at her husband with recognition in them.

“Dear old Freddy,” she said weakly. “What’s the matter?”

He put his arms round her with the tears running down his cheeks, and she nestled to him like a tired child and fell asleep again.

When she woke the second time the room was full of the pale November sunshine. She looked round it curiously for a moment, then her mind seemed to give up the effort to remember where she was and she looked at him.

"I do love you, Freddy," she said.

The morning sounds of the farm came in through the open window and she smiled. "Of course, I'm at Thorpe. I dreamt I was with Dick."

Outside, Ruth went across the terrace to her farm work. Her face was that of one who holds secure some hidden store of happiness. She sang to herself as she went:

"When I have reached my journey's end,
And I am dead and free."

The words floated up clear and sweet through the still air.

"Dead and free." Violet repeated them in a small faint voice, and again Fear gripped Riversley by the throat. He longed to hold her more closely and dared not. There seemed no perceptible substance to hold. His mouth went dry while he struggled with his difficulty of speech.

"The journey is worth making too, Vi," he said.

The husky strangled voice made its appeal. She looked with more of understanding into his bloodshot eyes, his haggard ravaged face, and her own face became suddenly very sweet and of a marvellous brightness.

"Yes," she said, "the journey is worth making too."

More distant came the sound of Ruth's song:

"I pray that God will let me go
And wander with them to and fro,
Along the flowered fields I know,
That look towards the sea,
That look towards the sea."

The white pigeons swooped down about her. The dogs, so long kept in to heel, rushed wildly over the lawn and down to the river, uttering sharp cries of joy. A robin, perched on the coping of the old

wall, sang sweet and shrill. She looked out over her beloved fields, over the long valley full of misty sunshine, and was content. The farm was Itself again. She moved on across the lawn leaving footprints on the silver wet grass, to where, standing by the gate, she saw Roger North.

He turned at the sound of her coming, and she called to him:

"She has slept ever since I 'phoned to you. She will get well."

"Thank God!" he said, as men will in these moments, whether they believe or no.

His face was curiously alive, alight with some great happening; there was an air of joyous excitement about him. He moved towards her, and smiled a little, rather shamefaced smile, and the odd likeness to a schoolboy who is feeling shy was very apparent. Then he blurted it out.

"I have seen him," he said.

"Ah!" The exclamation was a note of pure joy. "Oh, tell me about it!"

"He was leaning over the gate. He was looking for me, waiting for me, just as he used to do. And he looked at me with his dear old grin. It was ever so real."

"Yes. Yes."

"And he spoke. Just as you have told me. It isn't the same as speaking here. It's something like a thought passing——"

He stopped, his face all alight. He looked years younger. The heavy lines were hardly visible.

"I wish I had spoken. Somehow at the moment I couldn't."

"I know. One cannot. I believe it is because of the vibrations. I suppose——" Ruth hesitated. "Can you tell me?"

"What he said? It—it seems so ridiculous. One expected it would be something important, something—well, different."

She laughed, looking at him with affection, with that wonderful look of pure friendliness.

"But why should it?"

He laughed too—joyously. As he had not laughed since boyhood. Surely again the world was full of wonder and of glory. Again all

things were possible, in the light of the Horizon beyond Eternity.

"He said—just as he used to, you know—'Come *on*, old Roger!'"

TRANSCRIBER'S NOTE

1. Table of Contents added by transcriber.
2. Silently corrected typographical errors and variations in spelling.
3. Retained anachronistic, non-standard, and uncertain spellings as printed.
4. P. 87, changed '"She is really an excellent worker," and little Miss Luce' to '"She is really an excellent worker," said little Miss Luce'.
5. The cover image was created by the transcriber and is placed in the public domain.