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THE FOURTH CEDAR

By

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THE AUTHORIZED ECONOMY STANDARDS

This book is a continuation of" Three Cedars," and many of the characters portrayed there reappear here.

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SETTING

That summer Edith Boyce would go across the park to sit in the gardens of Hathorley. Progress might have dealt hardly by them, but time had cast a mellowing cloak upon their greenness with a grey lichen of kindliness. Hathorley House itself had been pulled down in readiness for the democratic change that was to transform the grounds into a little modern estate. Piles of mushroom-coloured bricks, and shining, over-glazed baths, were stacked in readiness, even before the demolition men had actually destroyed the house.

Most of the trees had come down in preparation for prim front and back gardens. The tall full fountains of elms had fallen ; the dark cirrus of cedars which spread their branches against the sky was no longer there. Never again would the sweet chestnuts blow their over-indulgent scent down the pine walk in July, nor gleam with the shining mahogany of their fruit in October.

Then war, usually the great destroyer, arrested the hand of the vandal, and building suddenly stopped. It happened to Hathorley before it had actually begun. The white baths went away again, like stark ghosts of coffins, and nobody asked whither. The pink bricks were carted off to make air-raid shelters at lightning speed in country towns. Destruction being arrested, Nature, with her full sense of reparation, touched Hathorley with tender green fingers, smoothed out some of the scars, and did her best to make it whole.

The lake lay still, milk-white in autumn, with the mist hung above, or with green weed plunged beneath the surface spring and summer. The swans still nested by the far island in the lower lake every other year, a old-world ships, solemnly sailing on the face or The house, now a rubble heap, grew rosebay willow herb, though the stables and part of

the old kitchen were still left, and there was the little courtyard practically complete, where the jasmine had always hung her starry cloak. The rhododendrons ran riot, clustering together on either side of the water, pearl rose and pure ethereal white in May. And across the lake, where always three cedars had lifted their heads against the sky, and had cast forth their resinous essence of tar, a fourth cedar grew.

It had been dwarfed by its three fellows, each of them representing the spirit of three women who had lived at Hathorley, and had loved it. Each had planted a tree, and had set within its soil the roots of their own lives ; the fourth cedar, that was Edith Boyce, rose tall and elegant, extending its fronds to right and left like lovely feathers above the chaos. The fourth cedar grew amongst die ruins which had been Hathorley and which at no future time could ever be Hathorley again. The place was waiting for the carnage of war to end ; then the builders would return to uproot and to destroy, and to build some dreadful little garden city amongst its beauty.

Until such time, the heart of Hathorley stood still, marked by the single outline of the fourth cedar.

. . . . . .

Edith Boyce had corne here to live in the middle of 1940. Her husband William had bought the lodge at the auction, because he loved the place, and felt that young Pierrot was behaving disgustingly in selling the ground wherein their roots had been spread for so long. Pierrot had a commercial mind ; he had always said that he would sell Hathorley when he came into it. The Income Tax and the rates were millstones about his neck ; sell it and have done with it, said he. So he had sold it.

William Boyce had written him a very strong letter imploring him to think again, urging the bonds of tradition, emphasizing the wrongness of such action, but Pierrot had not replied, and William had bought the lodge for himself.

It stood at the entrance to the far road, where the

drive turned to the right, dipped to cross the lake*, then climbed again with the little group of pines to the left, and the greenly smooth slopes to the right. The lodge was not the house that Edith Boyce would have chosen ; it was old-fashioned and inconvenient, yet it had about it some subtle aura of older times, some intangible beauty that you could not shut away entirely.

" It will do for a holiday cottage," said William, when he had finally bought it.

They had intended it only for this use, yet Edith Boyce came back to Hathorley in the evening of her life, and had never expected that fate could play such a trick. She had always loved the place, but it had run down in the direct line and she had never supposed that she would find herself living permanently on Hathorley soil. She had come here first as a governess to Edward Boyce's two sons, and then she was just a nobody, a girl who did not realize that she was in love with William. Edward was grandfather of Pierrot, but then he had seemed to be quite young. Here, in Hathorley, he had first told her that he cared for her, here there had been the sweetness of that one enchanting night. Iviemories, like singing birds, hovered over the place, and she felt that they always would !

" But Pierrot ought never to have sold it," she told William.

The pride of Hathorley lay in a heap of rubble. Gone was the stately beauty of its grey facade, the library window, out of which Edward had looked so longingly the night that his only daughter little Mee was born, with the yellow moon swung between the darkness of the three cedars, three great trees planted by Boyce women. Elizabeth, in the old days, a royal old lady ; Rose, his own love (never truly a Boyce, yet more Boyce than the others), who had ended her life in the lake, had lain there dripping in weed, and who in death had lived on, a ghost in the great house, for ever. Louise, his wife. The window had gone, the cedars too.

Cavities gaped in the ground where once trees had

lifted their beauty, gradually being overgrown by ragged grass and strong-smelling ivies. The wounds healed in some small way, even the rubble grew beautiful, and the little courtyard by the kitchen still stood, whilst a single dark thread of jasmine climbed the wall again, with the persistence of its kind, and by another summer had trailed a kindly green veil lit by white stars across the summit.

The walled-in back garden was taken over by a firm of market gardeners, and continued much as it had done in the Boyces' time ; its fruit trees were still bearing, and in spring there was the yellow spatter of daffodils running down to the watering pool, filled to repletion then and in the fall of the year.

When the war broke out, Edith and William were living comfortably in Kent, in a village not far from the sea. They had bought the little manor there at the time of their marriage, and were happy enough, though not in love any more. Life's autumn had touched their passion flowers with a withering hand, and though the root still lived, the blossom had faded.

They had thought that they would be at Headley for the rest of their lives ; they had survived the scandal of the early part of their married life together, and even that first winter of the war, when four quite horrid little children from Bermondsey had come to be with them and had metamorphosed the place in the most undesirable manner. Nothing can be worse than this, Edith had constantly said, but things were worse.

In the June of 1940 the Manor House was commandeered, and they were lucky in that they could store most of the furniture. They were both old, William was over seventy, and although they would not admit it, they were alarmed at the dreadful turn the war had taken. They believed that the end of the world was coming, at least William did ; Edith was too confused to Realize what it was all about.

" Thank God I bought the lodge," he said, " we can go there for a time," and as he said it, he could hear the distant rolling of the guns of Dunkirk, and knew that a

gallant army was falling back behind its moat, and that it was quite reasonable to suppose that it might be the end of everything they had ever known as security.

So they came to the lodge.

. . . . . .

William and Edith arrived after a tiring journey. It was horrible to have the roots of their lives cut away, and yet, as Edith kept saying, one couldn't say that the roots were really cut away, whilst Hathorley itself still held them, because the Boyces had always been Hathorley.

They came in the long June days, when at Headley, nearer the coast, the fields were a tangle of wrecked 'planes, and the trains were passing through laden with half-famished yet undefeatable soldiers. William had felt that it was exactly like another world, as he stood at the end of the garden watching.

He was a smart old man, with a white close moustache against his florid face ; he had penetrating blue eyes, and a thick thatch for his years. Still upright, short and stocky, he wore sporting clothes very well, and always looked distinguished in them. Edith had grown very old even though she was really the younger. She was a round little ragbag of a woman, with a skin still clear, and rheumy grey eyes. Her hair grew untidily and she swept it back from time to time, with a particular gesture that often maddened her husband. She did not remember things very clearly these days, and was always afraid that somebody would be angry with her because she forgot. It was all very difficult.

Edith Boyce, eating her first tea at the lodge, glanced at Hannah, the old Hathorley servant, and felt alarmed.

" I'm sorry that I lived to see this," said William, munching Victoria sandwich. " The world has changed a lot since I was young. Undoubtedly everybody ought to have died at the time of the Boer war ; that was the last time that England was comfortable to live in."

Edith said " Yes, dear " evasively. She was a trifle afraid of William because he was so much quicker mentally than she was. Sometimes he snapped at her

when she annoyed him ; she wasn't quick any more, just very stupid at understanding, and she knew that it aggravated him. She did not want to annoy him, and tried to be careful, but the very fact that she had to take care made her more nervous.

" After tea," said William, " let's go out and see what sort of a mess they've made of the place."

" Yes, dear.[55] She always wanted to please him, but with her failing memory and pathetic tactlessness found it difficult. They went out arm in arm across the park. The lakes were just the same, their sides more choked perhaps, but above the path there was the broom out on either bank, growing in bright torches of blossom. " It seems so funny not seeing the house there ; just a hole," said Edith.

William said yes, it did seem funny, and looked impatiently at Edith, wishing that she had not referred to it. She saw the look.

" I only meant that it looked funny,[55] she said helplessly.

The paddock was empty, and the avenue curled round approaching what once had been the East door. The lawns were standing knee-high for hay, but as they came through the gate with the rockeries on either side, looking like a painter's palette in the fullness of their June glory ; they saw that the lawns were tidy. Someone was keeping them clipped, and the rhododendrons had still some flowers. It seemed extraordinary that, in a world grown so topsy turvy, they could still flower in their cabbage heads of pink and pearl. An old deck chair was standing in their shelter.

" Oh, how nice ! " said Edith. " I could come here with my knitting, couldn't I ? "

" Yes, you could. It would be very pleasant for you.[53]

She walked to the water's edge, and stood there looking down at it. "I always loved Hathorley," she said. " Pierrot ought never to have sold it."

" He was a dreadful boy, true son of a dreadful age."

" I miss the cedars."

He wished that she hadn't said that " They were

part and parcel of Hathorley. It doesn't seem right to be without them," then, " There's a fourth one over there, apart from where the others grew."

She turned to it, and saw the young cedar climbing to the sky, tall and straight, with its dark branches, its immense strength, and the wind hardly stirring its plumage. She said, " That must be the one I planted ? "

" You planted ? Now, don't be silly ! "

" Yes, I planted it when I first came here to be with Tee and Piers. I don't think you ever knew."

" You've forgotten," said he, rather scornfully.

" No, dear. No, really I haven't. I did plant it. I know at the time Tee said something clever, only I can't quite remember what it was. I can't remember a lot of things now," and she glanced at him helplessly, with her faded grey eyes.

" Well, we won't quarrel about it."

She knew that he did not believe her, and, for some silly reason, felt that she must convince him. " Really, William, I remember doing it. The boys would tell you, Tee and Piers I mean." Then she stopped, remembering that of course they were dead ; Tee, winning his V.G. in 1917, and Piers in the car smash quite a short time ago. " Oh dear," she said.

In the distance an aeroplane made a noise like a giant bee, and there was the dull thud of an explosion. Neither of them noticed it ; it droned away, rising and falling, with that faint burr which, when it comes near, is so ominous. The summer evening was only faintly disturbed by the sound, and not awed, for the Battle of Britain had not yet started. That horror was to come. Edith's senses were dulled to so many things that she never knew that a 'plane had been in the vicinity. William chose to ignore it.

" This would certainly be a pleasant place for you to sit in," he said. He knew that he had been unkind about the fourth cedar, but she was always imagining things. She had no memory at all, poor old thing, and it was so irksome to live with I

" Nobody would bother me here/' she asked. She had often got quite worried in her garden at Headley by tradesmen passing to the kitchen door, but no tradesmen come to a house which is now a heap of rubble, only memories. In the evening of life, it is sometimes a happy thing to sit alone with memories.

" I could keep my needlework in the old box, where the punt cushions used to be," she said.

" Yes, you could."

They found the old box, still under the may tree the other side of the wall ; the cushions were mildewed, with protruding flock mixing with the spent leaves of last autumn. The may tree had shed its almost insufferable sweetness lately, and atop the lid of the box there was a fading white shroud.

" It's nice," said Edith, as she turned to patter back with her husband across the park, " all so simple and easy ; we've been very lucky, haven't we, really, and I'm sure that we'll be most comfortable here."

William wasn't so sure ; he had an idea that she was being just silly again. Their house at Headley ought never to have been commandeered, but then the war ought never to have happened, and wouldn't have done if there hadn't been a pack of fools in the Government. He thought that we might lose this war if we weren't very careful, and what he'd do with Edith he did not know. He held her arm, and helped her homewards.

" I always loved Hathorley," she said again.

" We all loved it. I'll make Pierrot buy it back and rebuild it."

She said, " Yes, oh, that would be nice. Could we do you think ? "

" If there's any money left; we could try something when this wretched war is over."

" Yes, when the war is over. There's bound to be a lot of money then," but she said it in a disappointed voice, because people talked about after the war much as grown-ups had promised her sweets when she was a child, promising them to-morrow, and then saying that to-

morrow never comes ! Her feeble mind wandered back to the lake again, and the loveliness of the June evening.

" I could take my knitting there/' she insisted, " it would be very nice. Peaceful, you know. Don't you think so ? "

" Yes," said William. " I do."

ONE

GENESIS

An old mind is like a worn gramophone record, it jumps and misses bars, yet harps on other bars and cannot escape them ; it goes back to its beginnings.

Edith had been seriously disturbed by the war. Her weakening faculties had been unable to withstand the shock, and she had gone rapidly down the hill. William had thoroughly enjoyed the outbreak of war, being one of those patriotic old men who hurl themselves zealously into recruiting activities, who hear their own voices and applaud them vociferously. Poor Edith was just bewildered. She knew of course that this was very un-English of her, and hoped that she hid it satisfactorily, priding herself on the tact which, had she only known it, was an unknown quantity in her life. She sat knitting Balaclava helmets, but her mind was not really on Balaclava helmets, her mind was dithering into the most alarming future.

Then the evacuees had arrived ; she had no doubt that they meant very well, but they ran all over the place, most particularly the places where they were told not to run ; they did a deal of damage, were rude, and had most lax attitudes towards the primary decencies of life. Edith had never met with this sort of thing before, and had no idea how to cope with it.

The entry into Holland and Belgium had come ; she

did not understand it, but believed that William did ; he said that now we were really going to start doing something, and teaching the Huns what was what, but, as far as Edith could see (and she admitted that she could never see very far), we didn't start winning the war, on the contrary the Huns started teaching us a lot.

She had long ago learnt to leave these matters to those who understood them (in particular William), so that she tried to put it all out of her mind. Then the noise of Dunkirk sounded in the distance like a giant hive distressed beyond reason, and she knew that she wanted to scream. But she was brave, she believed that Englishwomen did not scream, so held her peace, not without an effort. Now she was glad that the Manor had been commandeered and that she had come away to the lodge. Here she could sink back into herself; she could relax and not worry, just take her knitting into that pleasant garden and forget, or remember. She didn't know which it was that she wanted to do, probably both.

She went to the garden next morning, when William had strutted off to the Home Guard Headquarters to see if he could help with office work. He might be old, but he was game ! William wasn't the kind to sit by and do nothing ; whilst he had a head on his body, and a couple of hands, he intended to do what he could.

It was one of those brilliant June days, which struggle out of a fine mist, and suddenly split it into gold. The park looked immensely long, with the fineness of the mist accentuating the brightness of the day. Like an Indian summer, she thought, and the idea came to her that this was her own Indian summer, a brighter and lovelier summer than any that had preceded it. In the heat the rhododendrons were drooping a little, as she settled herself under their shade on the lawn. The faint scent of hay came from the far end, where an old man was cutting the grass. It wasn't Martin any more. Martin must have died with the last century, poor old thing i Behind her she could almost dream the ghost of the house as though it rose again from that heap of rubble. A moor-hen

peered at her through the reeds, a lark rose exultingly from across the water, and a small rabbit went loping into the flowering shrubs. It was Hathorley again, at its best, and the fourth cedar, the one that she had planted as a girl, was standing sentinel over it.

Edith Boyce sat back in her chair ; it was good to dream, even though the dreams were shadows. To her those shadows became real, for Edith Boyce had come through the full high noon of her life to its evening, and she was a child again.

. . . . . .

She was little Edith Markham, a sober-faced child in a red frock with a white pinny, the only daughter of the Dean of Hinthorpe. Hinthorpe was a busy town and people respected the Dean ; old women curtseyed to the child, and old men pulled a forelock, as was the custom then ; it made her very proud.

The Dean was a pompous man who had been old before he was young. He ruled his house in a masterful way, and his wife was afraid of him, though she never admitted it. In the 'eighties it was right and proper for a man to show that he was master, and right and proper for him to dictate to those who lived with him, and for the women to take a secondary place. Therefore the Dean ruled. Naturally people sympathized with him that his only child was a girl, and the canons' wives, with cherubic or sallow sons of their own, looked askance at the Dean's wife, considering that she had failed in her matrimonial duty.

This sense of failure lay like a mildew on Mrs. Markham's life. She was much younger than her husband, not the assertive type, and she always felt that she was blighted because she had only had one child, and that a girl.

Edith was oblivious of all this. She loved her mother and they would sit under the trees together on the lawn.

"Just we two," Edith would insist.

"Just we two," her mother said. Edith always had the feeling that if only the two of them coald have crept

away alone, it would have been so different. But they couldn't be always alone.

They played hide and seek together in the ruins of the old monastery which stood in a corner of the garden by the mulberry tree. It was dark in the ruins, and smelt of burnt wood ash, dry cement, and, sometimes in the autumn, of fungus. Both of them were afraid, and each tried to bolster up the other's courage.

" Darling, the dark has never yet hurt anybody," said her mother very bravely. " We mustn't be afraid of it. Give me your hand."

Then they would go into the ruins, but all the same it was still frightening, though alarming with that rather pleasant alarm which sets the senses tingling. Or they would sit in the garden, Edith winding wool for her mother's eternal knitting, or on the grass itself, watching the hermit bees in the moss bank.

" It's nice," said her mother.

" So nice," said the child.

They went for walks, and into the town, into the big old-fashioned draper's shop, with its uncarpeted floor, and squat little chairs. There was the first counter where two girls dispensed haberdashery, their little round counter baskets filled with buttons and tapes, set attractively to the fore ; there were woollen stockings hanging down like mourners' bands of black crepe. The next counter had materials, cambric and madrapollam, wincey and nuns'-veiling in great rolls. Last of all came the ribbon counter, and the laces, quite the prettiest! Mr. Weston himself would come strutting towards them, with his large pink face, and his black suit with the funny little tail coat behind which his hands were always folded, with the tails floating gracefully over them. Rather like a robin, was Mr. Weston, bowing low, pirking along.

" And what can we do for you to-day, mam ? " and to the child, " Would little Missie like to see the way we send the money for change to the cashier ? "

Little Missie always liked to see the way they sent for

change. The wire railroad ran overhead, and the big wooden balls opened quite miraculously, accepting bill and money, and then, on the pulling of a single lever, went flying to the pay desk. Edith adored shopping at Mr. Weston's, and wished that her mother would take longer over it.

Sometimes they went upstairs to the holy of holies where Mr. Weston never penetrated, because decency forbade. Here were corsets of grey material, boned stiffly ; here was ladies' underclothing, with a lot of thick cambric embroidery, and fine tucks, and red flannel dressing-gowns stood on wire stands. The buying of underclothing was considered to be indecent, and hurried over, and getting up the stairs, and getting down them again, was undertaken furtively, in case Mr. Weston should see, and guess where they were going.

Once Edith tripped and fell, and Mr. Weston impulsively rushed to save her, then remembered half-way, held himself in check, and turned, blushing furiously, to mop his wet pink face. On the way home her mother was quite angry.

" Really, Edith, you ought to be more careful. You must look where you are going. ~It was so very awkward just then ; I felt quite ashamed.[55]

" I'm sorry, Mother," but of course nothing could change it, she had slipped whilst going upstairs to buy corsets with her mother, and Mr. Weston must have known that they were about to buy something intimate, so that it would be difficult to face him with equanimity again.

Or they drove in the victoria, visiting institutions together. The blind school, or the Union Infirmary, always visited at Christmas, with old moribund wreckage of people hunched in the beds. But the matron and the nurses seemed quite pleased with them, and would stop like proudly affectionate mothers at a bed where some prize patient would mouth in toothless wonder.

Matron would say " Now this is Grannie Adams," or " This is old Grandfer Johnson."

Edith hated the hulks in beds. For weeks afterwards she would dream of their rheumy, blurred eyes, and claw-like hands on which the veins stood up, like aqueducts. One day, driving back, her mother caught at her hand under the thick winter carriage rug. She said, " Oh, I do hope that I don't live to be very old. It's shocking to be old like that," and Edith knew that all along both of them had felt the same way.

In the summer they went to the seaside, staying in respectable rooms there. The Dean seldom found time to get away, so that his wife and daughter went blessedly alone. Edith would paddle, sometimes she bathed from a bathing machine which smelt of brine, and whose sticky floor clung to her feet. She would change into a dark red serge bathing-dress with innumerable frills and skirts, then she would open the door at the back of the machine and peer out. Beyond stretched the sea, blue and sparkling, and inch by inch she climbed into it, clinging to that convenient rope supplied by the proprietor, and fastened to the machine itself. The water was so cold that she screamed, paused, then grew used to it, to go an inch deeper, and scream again as it touched her warm body. It was most enjoyable ! When she got up to her waist she would cling to the rope, and bob up and down, with the surf riding past her.

Once she persuaded her mother to come with her, but only once. Mrs. Markham undressed in the same bathing machine, getting into an even more voluminous costume ; she lowered herself inch by inch, terrified that anyone would see. She also screamed and fluttered at the end of the rope. Once she said " Supposing the man sees me ? " but the man had unhitched his horse, wading back to the shore, and was now busy taking other machines out to sea. He'd return when the regulation half-hour was up, not before.

When the Dean came down for a couple of nights in the middle of the week Edith, amazed at having been able to persuade her mother to bathe tried urging her father. She felt that if only she could get him to risk it

and bob on the end of a rope, he would become almost human. Her impetuosity overcame her discretion.

" Oh, do bathe ! Mother did," she said.

He turned on her mother. " You don't mean to tell me that you, the wife of the Dean, bathed from a public beach?[55]

" There was no harm in it, Alfred.[55]

" Harm ? There was every harm in it I One does not expect a married woman to go bathing. Why, anything might happen ! "

Her mother began to cry, and Edith wandered away, ashamed that she should have brought this trouble about. She went into the aquarium, and watched the cuttle-fish ; she looked at the red mullets, and the octopus in his lone tank, and the mackerel swimming about with their unblinking, silly, lidless eyes. She felt utterly miserable.

. . . . . .

Edith was ten when rumour spoke of another baby coining to the Deanery. A mystery, deepening every hour, lay fast upon the tall Renaissance house. Once, at midsummer, her mother said, " I hope you'll have a brother, Edith. Your father wants a boy so much/'

" Am I to have a brother ? " she asked, " and when ? "

" In September, we hope. We don't know if it is to be a boy or a girl yet.. We shan't know till it comes. You mustn't tell anybody that I told you about it, because I'm sure your father would be very angry if he thought I had said something."

Edith promised and kept her word. That summer her mother was languid, no more games under the trees, no more watching the hermit bees in the moss bank. With late August she rested on the sofa a good deal.

" I'll be better soon," she promised Edith.

" You're not to worry about your poor mother," said Emily, her nurse. There was that distinction " poor mother," from " your father."

Edith did not worry, though it seemed to her that the world was now like the evening before a thunderstorm,

when the air becomes tense, and the trees grotesquely still, as though afraid. She could feel that hush on the earth, and the presentiment that soon a terrific storm must break across it.

The storm broke one morning when she came down to breakfast to find her mother absent. Her father had finished before his time, rushing through family prayers, which was most unusual ; now the storm was here. The child was dismissed to play in the garden, told that her mother was ill because she was " fetching the baby brother." She set her dolls on the moss bank. A purple clematis arched above it, where, in June, dark roses wreathed. It hung in a purple shower of rich colour, and beneath it the ground was spread with a purple pall of scattered petals. There was something funereal in it, and the child, picking up a flower, found that it had no scent and disliked it for that.

She had lunch in the nursery, and all the while the doctor's dogcart stood before the hall door, the horse pawing the ground with impatience. The afternoon died. Toward tea, Emily came across the lawn for her.

" You're going to spend the night with Mrs. Walker," she said, " I'm to take you."

Mrs. Walker was one of the Canons' wives, with three young sons, and two little girls, an untidy, happy-go-lucky family who behaved notoriously badly in the Cathedral, shocking the Dean very much. The thought that she should be going to the Walkers was bewildering.

" I want to see Mother," she said.

" Well, you can't, and that's a fact," announced Emily.

She was taken across the Cathedral Close, into the garden of Mrs. Walker's house, and there was Mrs. Walker, kindly and friendly, a round bundle of a woman, with a large bustle, and lots of frills on it.

" Ah, there you are, dear," she said, " now you come along and play with my little girlies, won't you ? My little girlies will love to have you."

She took Edith's hand, and her own fat one was hot

and moist. Together they went up some stairs to the nursery, a large battered room in a hopeless state of untidiness. The " two little girlies " were putting their dolls to bed, along with a couple of tabby cats dressed in dolls' clothes, and showing active fight. The eldest boy, Ralph, was riding a rocking horse, and blowing a raucous tin trumpet ; two others were fighting over crayons and some old copies of *Punch* on the table. The place was apparently in the throes of a brawl.

Ralph, on the rocking horse, fascinated Edith. She had seen him out for walks, a strapping youngster of about thirteen, with a mop of red hair and little eyes in a large red face. He made the horse rock as never before, it was a piebald horse, with a flowing white tail, stood on large curved rockers and never meant to sustain Ralph's weight.

The nurse, who, apparently, had no control over the children, spoke from the table. " Now then, Master Ralph. You hadn't ought to do that ! What'll your pa say?"

But Master Ralph did not care what his pa would say, and he rode the horse more violently than before. His mother said,

" Be nice to Edith Markham, dears," and left the child.

The little girls looked at her as though she were some new curiosity. Why have you come here ? You don't live here ? But the big boy went on riding, the rockers making a crashing noise that was quite terrifying.

He bawled out in a loud voice, " She's come here because her mother's had a baby, and the baby's dead, and her mother's dead," and at that moment, pressing the horse too hard, it plunged over on to its ears, crashing him into the fire-guard.

There was immediate confusion, everybody running to him, he bleeding from the head and setting up such a howling as never was. His mother came rushing in, and Edith cowered in a corner. In the hubbub nobody realized what Ralph had said, it is doubtful if any of them even recalled that Edith was there. She stood

helplessly in her corner, her hands against the wall, not thinking of the screaming boy, or the horrible sight of blood and broken rocking horse ; not even amused by the dressed-up tabby cats, who saw in this their great moment to stage an escape, and went across the floor tripping up on their dolls' dresses. She just thought, my mother is dead and nobody has told me.

Whilst bowls of water were being brought, and Master Ralph improved the moment by being sick into one of them, she slipped away, and went downstairs. The night was warm. The Cathedral struck the hour with its resonant bell, and she flitted across the Close, sweet with the scent of the second crop of roses, and mingling with them the aroma of wood ash, as though autumn jogged the elbow of summer.

Her feet sounded sharp against the gravel path, like a little pony quickly stepping, and she tiptoed in at the side gate into her own garden. She went into the back hall, and up the tall flight of stairs carpeted with a thready matting which had seen far better days. The little landing led through a baize door on to the big landing, and she opened that door cautiously. She was afraid of being caught, but the big landing was quite deserted. An oil lamp, similar to the ones that hang on church walls, was lit, and smelt with a sickly scent of oil. The child came on to the big landing, moving from slip mat to slip mat to deaden the noise of her feet. She opened the door of her mother's room very quietly, and saw that it was dim, lit by two silver candelabra standing on the writing-table in the bay window, whilst between them rested a deep bowl of flowers. It was so unusual to see flowers in her mother's room that her attention was arrested. Then she saw that a completely strange man was there, and on the bed her mother was lying apparently asleep with a very little baby in her arms. The man turned, made an exclamation of horror, and caught Edith to him.

He said, " There now, she's all right ! You can see that she's all right/[5]

She called " Mother," and then because the man seemed to be kind and smiled tenderly at her, she said appealingly, " Ralph said that she was dead."

He told her, " People don't die, my dear, they go to sleep for a bit, and wake up again in a place where everybody is happy." It was his religion.

Those words walked with her all her life, and she knew that she could believe the man, that he would not deceive her and that her mother really was happy. She could trust him. He carried her gently out of the room.

TWO

RALPH

Mrs. Turner, the cook, and Emily told Edith that her job was to fill her mother's place and make her father happy. Edith never wanted to make her father happy, because she had not liked him. She liked him no better now.

He insisted that she should read the novels of Sir Walter Scott aloud to him in the interminable evenings which succeeded her mother's death. Her education was undertaken by a Miss Ross, who came to teach her lessons, and saw that she gave her attention duly, and spent long hours with her nose to the grindstone. Youth died in the Deanery ; it became grey with the lichen of age ; laughter ceased. The Dean had always been morose, and was now little less than a curmudgeon. Miss Ross had been specially chosen because she was in the early sixties and therefore impregnable. The days of adolescence dragged as only adolescence can drag, fettered with an unending lethargy, something from which there appeared to be no escape.

She thought of it later with horror ! Breakfast in the dining-room with her father, he white-headed and uncom-

municative, hardly speaking, save when he said grace, a voluminous Latin one. Then lessons, all through the rime-frosted mornings of winter, or the bewilderingly lovely mornings of summer when youth beat its frantic wings against the bars of a prison house. Maddening sums, reading French, or practising the piano in the drawing-room. Her father refused to authorize the extravagance of a fire in this room, save once a week, when it only served to emphasize the smell of mildew and decay, and there the girl practised every day. All her life she would remember that intolerable room, with her fingers going blue and gradually ceasing to feel the keys at all as they crawled up and down the piano in those unenterprising scales.

The walks she took with Miss Ross were never interesting as they had been with her mother ; now it was merely the stolid buying of necessities ; life, shorn of its trimmings, became a praiseworthy exercise, no more ! There was tea at five with her father, improving reading until after supper, supper in silence with him, bed.

Night after night, when she had lit her colza oil float, setting it on the washstand, she would take her candle, and walk across the room to bed. The cheval glass reflected her in her stiff nightdress like a surplice, buttoned to the throat and wrists ; firstly, a chubby child ; then, as she grew taller and slighter, almost angular ; finally, a young girl in her middle teens, sweetly rounded. The fair to brown hair was plaited in a couple of pigtails that fell to the waist, and though she still smiled, she had in truth little to smile at.

At eighteen, she put up her hair, discarding the " ankle " skirts for long ones, and knew that the hateful lessons were done with. But Miss Ross still stayed on, because somebody had to stand as female guardian of Edith's youth, there had to be some dragon, a sheep dog, a presence in the home !

Shell NEVER go, thought the girl.

«

The garden at Hathorley was warm with the afternoon

sun, and Edith, fragile with age, nodded in her deck chair. A swan came down the lake white with the rare quality of whiteness that is hoar frost, and beside him there moved a reflection that was equally snowy, yet ribboned with green weed. He stared with haughty discernment from bank to bank as he came. The jays were screaming in the black walnut tree across the water ; Edith was glad that the woodcutters had not hewn down the black walnut, for it was a grand tree, and the old mulberry still stood, though the heart had gone from its hollow decayed trunk. At the head of the lake, three green elms rose with their skittle shapes, and threw dark shadows on the water itself; the swan was making for the quiet of that darkness.

Life at the Deanery had been life in another world, but now it came very near to her Indian summer. There was much that she wanted to forget ; the horror of her mother's death, the long drawn-out life in that schoolroom with Miss Ross, much to forget, but also much that she wanted to remember.

. . . . . .

Having been born in June, she did not " come out " at a ball, but at a garden party that her father gave for her. Mrs. Walker helped him. Her obstreperous children, having now grown up, were less obstreperous ; one of the girls had married very young, one boy was abroad, and Ralph was a soldier on furlough. Edith had always nursed a resentment against Ralph Walker, as he had been the one who had broken the news of her mother's death to her so crudely. She had hardly seen him since, and then only when he was out with a crowd of brothers and sisters, usually entirely out of hand, and being called to order by an exasperated nurse or governess.

He came with his mother to the Deanery the night before the garden party. The caterers were there. Maids were stacking dishes in the marquee, when Mrs. Walker came hustling across the lawn, with Ralph, tall and good-looking, at her heels. The sight of a young man actually in her own garden stirred Edith. Youth

fluttered helplessly again, but the prison bars were not as strong as they had once been ; she was older and realized their weakness, they showed visible signs of collapsing.

" I brought Ralph with me," said Mrs. Walker, " he is on furlough, and I thought you two might like to meet. Show him the garden, dear, whilst I go into the marquee." Off she went, a busy woman who delighted in fussing.

Ralph still had the same warm red hair, though now it was burnished darker, like a horse chestnut in October. His eyes twinkled. " Fancy seeing you again ! " he said, and then, " you've grown up very charming."

" I don't see why ; I've just grown up," but the compliment made her feel uncomfortable.

" And you live here with the ogre ? I've got to confess we always call the Dean the ogre. When we were little and acted charades, we used to put him in as the giant, or the wicked fairy, and once he was the wolf in Red Riding Hood.

She said " Oh," and felt disloyal.

" Now show me the garden ? " said Ralph.

She took him down the side path, and all the time she knew that he was looking at her, and that she felt most uncomfortable about it. Edith's life had been that of a nun, she knew little of men, and certain it is that neither her father nor Miss Ross were likely to tell her anything about them. Within her, nature was dimly struggling to awake, but it was like cutting the ground away from under her feet, and she was afraid.

" You're very pretty," Ralph said, " it's a shame that you've been hiding your light under a bushel like this ! What have you been doing with yourself? "

"I've been doing lessons."

He stopped by the shrubbery, his face animated against the background of glazed laurel leaves. " I'd like to give you other lessons. Lessons in love. You're quite sweet, but you're unawakened."

" Please don't be so silly."

" Silly ? I like that ! You're the silly one, but then

I've got a passion for silly people." He paused a moment, he was proud of his technique and had a reputation for sweeping young women off their feet. " I think you're a darling ! " he said.

" Please don't," and then helplessly, " I'm not used to it, and it frightens me."

" You little goose ! I'll make you used to it. You shan't be frightened for long ; besides, there's nothing to be frightened about."

He held her hand, pressing it hard, and she was thrilled, not because it was Ralph Walker, but because she wanted to be thrilled. Youth had come to a halt before the fountain of life, it was thirsty and asked but to drink. Up came Mrs. Walker, hot and moist in the face, with her bonnet awry, for the caterers had been extremely trying, and, as usual, at the last moment everything was going dead wrong.

" Oh dear, those people ! " she said, " now they haven't got the jellies that I ordered, and what is a garden party without jellies ? " She fussed distractedly. " Ralph, don't stand about looking silly, come along and help," and she linked her arm in his.

" Can't I do something ? " asked Edith.

" Nonsense, of course not ! What docs one keep servants for ? Isn't it annoying when people can't do what they're told ? and your father never says anything, he just looks at me in that quite paralysing fashion of his."

She went fluttering off, her arm in her son's. Edith watched them, dumbfounded by the emotion that she found in herself, surprised to see life (until now a narrow blind alley with dully conventional walls on either side, Miss Ross and her father) now branching out into something that siiowed Elysian fields, happy glades, flowers, with blue skies above. She could not put it into words. Ralph had held her arm, he had murmured tender remarks, " You're sweet," " You're a darling ! " and the whole of her seemed to be quivering. She was a new person, a stranger to herself. As Mrs. Walker disappeared, with Ralph carrying the rose basket that she

had brought, the girl watched them. Oh, happy mother to be in the constant proximity of such a son !

That night she was afraid that her father might notice something strange about her. They finished their supper in the dining-room, and he was extra quiet. He was spending too much money on to-morrow's party, he felt, and to part with money literally hurt the Dean. It was like a painful operation undertaken without the benefit of anaesthesia. Afterwards Edith read aloud to him from *Bleak House,* and all the time her heart was pounding, and she was thinking only of Ralph Walker so that she made mistakes, and the Dean, remarking on it, emphasized that he could not think what was the matter with her.

When she got upstairs to her own room, she could relax. She undressed slowly, folding her things and putting on the tightly buttoned nightdress ; she took the candle to walk to her bed, and saw her reflection in the long cheval glass. It was no longer just going to bed, it was a bridal march. A new world lay before her, an enchanting world, brilliant with love.

Oh, I'm so happy, she thought.

. . . . . .

She put on her new pink muslin for the party. In the garden her father was pacing the lawn with Mrs. Walker. Apparently Ralph had not yet arrived, and when she saw this, she felt agonized. Was he ill ? Had she been too forward ? Was he tired of her already ? Did she bore him ? Her father and Mrs. Walker were having an argument to do with some food that she had insisted was necessary, and which he considered was extravagant, and he said so.

" I only thought you wanted to give a nice party," she was saying, " being the Dean, you wouldn't want to spoil the ship for a ha'porth of tar ! I mean, it's only a detail, and I can send it back, but one would have thought you'd want to have it."

Guests were already arriving. The Bishop and his well-upholstered lady, which sent the Dean into a

fluster, with the result that he was not there to receive the next batch of guests, and Edith had to meet them with Mrs. Walker.

" Take your father's place, dear. He's angry with me, I'm sure I don't know what he does want. He tells me to get things done on a lavish scale, and then is annoyed when it means lavish bills. These things aren't given away, which he won't understand. It's very difficult ! "

The guests were arriving in crowds, but never the one guest that Edith was looking for. Presently she said to Mrs. Walker, " What about Ralph ? Isn't he coming ? "

" Yes, of course. He had toothache all night and went to see the dentist, he'll be along soon. Amy's here." Amy was the married daughter whose presence did not exhilarate Edith at all. She was horrified that Ralph might have been suffering, and felt that she ought to have done something to help him. Her impatience had been inconsiderate. When she saw him coming up the path she threw discretion to the wind, and rushed to him. " Are you better ? " she asked.

" Better ? I haven't been ill."

" Your mother said that you had toothache and had gone to the dentist ? "

He laughed at that. " That's what I told her ; I only tell her what is good for her to know. The truth is that I was out late with Charley Briggs last night."

Charley Briggs was a low young man, as Edith knew ; his people had a shop just beyond the Randolph Tower, and she was taken aback that Ralph should associate with young men of Charley's calibre. It was obvious that they had been out on a carouse, and Ralph had got home late, and was feeling frightful to-day. However he had managed to come here now.

" Let's get away from all these people," he said.

Everybody seemed to be in the garden, walking about, or sitting on small uncomfortable chairs to listen to the band which was doing its energetic best. A crowd was not what Ralph wanted ; he linked his arm in hers

possessively, and went into the Dutch garden. The Dutch garden was empty, because it was situated apart from the rest and you could not hear the band from it.

He said, " I've been thinking about you all night," which was not really true, because he and Charley Briggs had been thinking about nothing but their two selves, when they had been doing their tour of the local pubs.

" I have been thinking about you/' she was too naive to deny it; she had no tricks ; in love she was a novice, and only desired that he should know the truth.

" I want to kiss you."

Shocked, she drew away. " You mustn't."

" Who says I mustn't. You've never been kissed, and it's high time that something like this happened to you."

He drew her closer, laying his cheek against hers. It was an enchanting cheek, with the faint bristles of his fine moustache which thrilled her. Modesty told her to draw herself back, but desire would not allow it. He held her closer so that she thought she would faint. Then lie kissed her on the mouth, exhilaratingly, tumultuously, as though she would collapse ; again and again he kissed her.

It would have been exquisite, save that her father brought the Bishop's wife to see the Dutch garden. He was proud of his miniature trees, which he had bought at great expense (always a pang to his mean mind), and he thought that this was a special opportunity to show them off. They came to the edge of the garden and jooked down upon the love scene. Edith and Ralph were locked in one another's arms in the wholly abandoned embrace of the very young. The Bishop's wife screamed, the Dean went coldly white with fury.

" You," he said to Edith, " can go to your room." To Ralph, " You had better return to your father's house."

The lovely emotion died on the instant. Now she was quite stunned at the humiliation of having been caught. Ralph stood there fingering his tie, and wondering what

the correct procedure should be ; then he said " Fm sorry, sir," and turning went down the garden. It was awkward that his mother should hail him, wanting to introduce him to the nincompoop daughter of the vicar of St. Augustine's ; he shook her off ungallantly, because nothing, he told himself, nothing in this world or the next would ever induce him to come inside that blasted Deanery garden again.

Edith went down the path under the pergola, feeling that her legs would collapse. She went up the back stairs, sinking helplessly on to the bed.

If only she could run away, but where ? Her life had been too much circumscribed by the Cathedral and the Close, so much so that she could not imagine a world beyond it. Then she told herself that of course Ralph would marry her ; no man could involve a girl in a scandal without marrying her, and undoubtedly he adored her.

What she was not to know was that the moment the Dean had rid himself of the Bishop's wife, he had called Ralph back. He had no desire for his daughter to marry one of the Canon's sons, especially when he and Mrs. Walker had already fallen out, but he felt that marriage was the only solution. Ralph returned with an ill grace. Shaking with rage, the Dean said that of course he intended to marry Edith ? Ralph did not intend to marry Edith ; he had merely been amused at the chance of a little fun. He had forgotten how behind the times the Cathedral town was and said so. He had no prospects, said he ; besides, he was too young to saddle himself with a wife. The Dean was the colour of an overboiled suet pudding.

He said, " Surely, sir, you do not intend to behave like a cad to my unfortunate child ? "

But it seemed that Ralph did ! He took himself off home in a fury, found Charley Briggs, went out with him again, and over a couple of pint pots the affair took on a most rakish demeanour, so that they could laugh about it.

The Dean challenged Mrs. Walker, who saw her husband's future wobbling, and she button-holed him on the sly.

" Nonsense, he can't do anything, I'm here for life," said the Canon, \vho never had liked the Dean.

The Bishop's lady told a few close friends in the strictest confidence, and the few close friends told other close friends in confidence, and the whole party swung round bubbling with scandal.

Edith did not reappear. Across the dullness of her blind alley a prison gate had swung to, shutting out that fleeting glimpse of green fields and leafy trees, and of meadows sweet with flowers. What can there be ahead for me, I'm hopelessly compromised ? she thought.

. . . . . .

Edith never forgot Ralph. Joy had died. Her father was for ever reminding her of the unfortunate episode, insisting that since the one lapse she must never be trusted away from a chaperone. Miss Ross accompanied her everywhere. The Cathedral town, trimming the story with the garlands of their own imagination, assumed that she was fast, gave her a bad name, and the grim walls of the Deanery enclosed her.

Time elapsed. Unending years seemed to stretch across her life, routine-ridden years, hemmed in by the drawing of the curtains in winter, the reading aloud of dull books, and in summer by strolling round the garden with her father, criticizing the flowers (never so fine as last year). She stood helplessly still, waiting for youth to spend its energy and enthusiasm on a shallow little garden, or a circumspect room with drawn curtains ; waiting for time to tarnish her ambitions. Spring was shackled to winter, chilled by its snows, held fast in its frost, then one day the door opened.

She was only twenty-two, but she felt a hundred. She had the idea that she would go on like this for ever, that she would never get free. It was an evening in late August, when the days die young. Edith had gone out into the garden in the twilight to get some nicotiana for

her father's study. It had been a hot day and now there was a damp chill about the garden, significant of the hand of autumn. Going back with the flowers she found that Miss Ross (now resident) was sitting in the dining-room with her bead work. She made innumerable hideous bags from the beads spilled on a japanned tray before her. She had grown very old, like some skeleton bird, with a beak nose, and sharply fierce eyes on either side, with a full wet lip below.

" I've nearly finished another one," she said.

" It's nice," said Edith, and secretly thought it vile ! She took the bunch of flowers to the study, tapping on the door ; there was no reply. She went in softly, afraid to anger him, and she saw him sitting with his back to her, his head fallen forward on the blotting pad.

The Dean never recovered from that stroke ; he died some hours later in the heavily-furnished bedroom, and the house went mute. In the sitting-room Miss Ross cried till the beaklike nose glowed ruddy, because now she was afraid that Edith might do without her. That same idea had occurred to the girl.

There was an impressive funeral, the Dean being buried in the Close, with dull paraphernalia of choir and organ, and canonical procession, after which Edith returned for the reading of the will. The solicitor read it laboriously, and there was a good deal of it, for he had seen to that. The disposal of many personal belongings to his friends and old servants was described in detail. But, when analysed, the truth became apparent ; he had left practically nothing. The Dean, over-mean himself, had been cautious in saving, with the result which comes to such men, he had fallen amongst thieves. His money had gone into a penny bank which had broken on him. He had a few pounds to leave, no more.

" What do I do now ? " asked Edith.

The solicitor said that the Deanery furniture could be sold to cover debts ; there were a few of these, for the tradespeople had never pressed for payment in his life-time, knowing it to be " safe."

" It is about yourself/' said the Bishop, who had very kindly come in. " You will have to live, you know."

She hadn't thought of that. " What can I do ? " she asked.

" I will see what employment is possible. It isn't very nice for a young lady to earn her living, of course, but perhaps you could go as a nursery governess, or a companion to somebody ? I have friends, and I'll make enquiries."

To think of herself with circumstances reversed was not inspiring. Herself, now a Miss Ross, a paid servant, grateful for a roof over her head, but free of this blind alley. Everybody sympathized with her, but she wasn't sure that it was not a matter for congratulation. In one sense she was free.

The Deanery was fading out of her life, and she was glad to see it go. Routine was changing at last.

THREE

EMPLOYMENT

The Bishop made some enquiries ; he felt that he could not very well recommend Edith to his more particular friends (he had not forgotten the scandal), but he knew of a family in Norfolk who were not too squeamish, and he wrote to them.

Mrs. Hobbs was the second wife of an oldish man who spoilt her disgracefully. They were a county family, with plenty of money, and Alice Hobbs was young and gay, entirely interested in a sporting life. Recently her younger sister Evie had come home from school to live with her ; Evie was a thorn in Mrs. Hobbs' flesh, being her exact opposite. She was eighteen, a stupid, heavily-built girl, whose sole interest was in an indifferent stamp collection with which she bored everybody. Evie still

needed a governess to polish up her French, and see that she attended to a few studies, and Mrs. Hobbs had written asking the Bishop if he knew of somebody suitable.

Only do suggest somebody whom I am going to like personally. Somebody who would amuse me too. Fm bored in this place, I would like some new blood., and, if possible, a girl modern and keen on sports.

The pith of a woman's letter being in her postscript, she added,

Pve bought myself a bicycle.

The Bishop disapproved of women riding bicycles. There had been a lot of chaff about them, and a good deal of unpleasant comment on cycling knickers, bloomers they were called and rightly ! Dreadful things, thought the Bishop. He felt that if Alice Hobbs could ride a bicycle, she couldn't very well object to the scandal about Edith Markham !

The result of this was that within a month Edith was living at Yarra Hall in Norfolk, and for the first time in her life (save for that brief afternoon with Ralph Walker) discovered that she was actually alive.

Mr. Hobbs spent most of his time with his books, an oldish, grey-haired man, so tall that he gave the impression of being bent, entirely occupied with his library. Evie was a gawk, what was more she was wholly satisfied with herself as a gawk, and did not appear to want a change. Her great hobby was this irritating stamp collecting. If people did not collect and could not supply her with " swops," she had no use for them and said so. She was heavy on the hands, stupid and awkward, but Alice Hobbs was a dear.

On the first day Edith had been taken to see the bicycle in the stable, a large object with enormous branching handlebars. Alice would ride it round the stable yard in triumph to show what it could do.

" Of course everybody will have them in time/[5] she

said glowingly, " they're most useful. You try it, I'll hold you up."

Edith hoisted herself on to the machine, and for one perilous moment wobbled in mid-air, then clung helplessly round Alice's neck.

" You've taken to it marvellously," said Alice with a confidence that Edith did not feel.

In the corner of the stable there was a contraption called a sociable, which Alice had bought earlier. It was the primitive model of the bicycle-made-for-two, in the form of a side-by-side affair. Together, Edith and Alice rode this round the garden. Edith could manage the sociable, heavy though it was, but she could not manage the bicycle. A new world, an entirely different one, offered itself. It was not the romantically glamorous world which she had known for a brief few hours in Ralph Walker's arms, but gaily inconsequent, a life on a sociable with Mrs. Hobbs, pottering round the Norfolk lanes to the dismay of the locals.

Unfortunately Edith did not care for Evie. Evie's life was set only in Cape Triangulars and Penny Blacks. She lost a great deal of fun, of course, bowed over her wretched stamp album, though it did enable the others to get together on the sociable, knowing that she was completely happy at home. Evie was the *raison d'Stre* for Edith being here, and in consequence she had to study up French verbs in bed (the French Miss Ross had taught her leaving much to be desired). She had to read Dumas and Victor Hugo, a good deal more intensively than she would have wished.

At the end of six weeks Stephen Strong came to stay. He was a mill owner who lived on the outskirts of Manchester, a sombre man in the late thirties, who spoke with a strong Lancashire accent. His life had been so fully occupied with the making of money, that he had had little time for gaiety and had become dour. Now, he was in the position of spending rather than saving. Meeting Andrew Hobbs in London, he had had the invitation down here.

" Most Manchester men are dull/' said Alice, as she and Edith pedalled along on the sociable. " I do wish Andrew wouldn't inflict these bores on us, but of course this man might prove to be a suitable husband for Evie. If we could only get her married we should have done our duty."

" I don't believe she's interested."

" It's those stamps. Perhaps Mr. Strong collects them, and that could be the bond ? Do see that she takes a little interest in her clothes whilst he'^s here."

" I'll do my best."

Mrs. Hobbs went on for a bit, then she said, " If only I could get you a bicycle and you could learn to ride it, we could go much farther from home."

"1 doubt if I'd ever learn."

C£ I thought that once, but I managed it. I'll get one of the footmen to hold you up and run you up and down the drive."

" What about Evic whilst I'm learning to bicycle ? "

Alice shrugged her shoulders ignoring that. " If we both had bicycles we could go for a tour together. I've always wanted to tour Wales."

The hilliness of Wales making it a quite unsuitable country for a successful bicycling holiday did not strike them ; both were absorbed in the brilliance of the idea.

" Oh, I *must* learn," said Edith, " I'll start this afternoon."

She did not start that afternoon, however, for Stephen Strong appeared, tall, quiet, with the haltingly earnest manner of one who expects to be criticized. Edith decided that he'd never fall in love and marry Evie, and rather wished that Mrs. Hobbs hadn't mentioned it. He was serious, very shy, and she could not think why he had ever accepted the invitation if the visit here was going to make him feel so desperately uncomfortable.

Evie wore her best frock for dinner, but she had an incipient cold and looked her worst. Afterwards they sat in the drawing-room looking at family albums and Evie's stamp collection, and Edith played a little. Hard

practice in the chilly drawing-room of the Deanery had made her deft. Stephen came across and leant on the grand piano.

" You play very nicely," he said.

" I like music."

" Play Schubert's Serenata ? "

" I don't know it without music, it goes something like this, doesn't it ? " and she extemporized, breaking down at the end of a few bars. " Oh dear, I'm doing it so badly."

" You're doing well, go on." All the time he was watching her in a way that made her feel quite embarrassed.

She forgot it of course the next day when they all went to church together. It was a pleasant morning, and Edith preferred village church service to the one at the Cathedral. Evie and Stephen shared a hymn book ; she wondered if that suggested that the bicycling holiday might be coming nearer ? She'd start learning to-morrow ; it couldn't be really so desperately difficult, she kept telling herself.

As she pretended to pray she was thinking only of the bicycling, and she noticed that Stephen was looking at her again. It was curious that she should be so poignantly aware of it. Along the pew all heads were bent. Mr. Hobbs sitting well forward, clasping his fore-head with his hand. His wife kneeling meekly, her eyes closed, whilst Evie knelt stupidly, staring down at her hands. Then Edith knew that Stephen was watching her between his fingers using them like a lattice. There were eyes behind the spaces of those fingers, and she felt uncomfortable. When they walked home across the park, he was beside her.

" What were you thinking of in church ? " he asked.

" Bicycling ! I'm so stupid about it. I can manage the sociable all right, but Mrs. Hobbs promised me a tour, and I've got to learn a real bicycle somehow or other."

" Perhaps you don't practise enough ? "

She hated admitting how for every afternoon she went

through the shattering experience of being run up and down the avenue by a footman, whilst, do what she would, the front wheel steered an erratic course to right and left, and the footman valiantly floundered beside her. " Really, I do," she said.

" Let's have a go this afternoon ? I've only just learnt myself and find it singularly pleasant."

" But on a Sunday afternoon ? Surely that would be wrong ? There are the servants to think of, you know."

" Yes, of course," and disappointedly he did not press the subject.

They went for their regulation walk that afternoon, Evic rather dumbly, and later there was evensong, and a cold supper to follow, and quiet music of a churchy nature in the drawing-room. All the time Edith had only half a mind on the proceedings, for she was determining that on the morrow she really would make a major effort with the bicycle ; she would achieve a whole yard alone without the propping hand of the footman. She really must !

But next morning Mrs. Hobbs called her at eleven from the schoolroom where she and Evie were reading French.

" Stephen wants to see you," she said, " he's going by the eleven-thirty train, and he wants to say good-bye. He's in the drawing-room."

" I didn't realize that he was leaving so early."

She put down the book, glad to escape if only for a few moments, because reading French with Evie was really very dull. Stephen was standing gravely in the middle of the room, by one of the innumerable occasional tables that over-decorated it. He looked solemn, she thought, almost as though he were about to break the news of a death to her, and she wanted to laugh.

" I hear you are leaving at eleven-thirty ? " she said.

" Yes, and I wanted to speak to you. There is something I particularly wanted to say. I wouldn't have chosen this morning, but, as I am leaving so soon, there is no option![33] He paused a moment, then went on

helplessly, " I have only seen you this week-end, and I formed a most favourable opinion of you."

" Yes ? " she said, not knowing whether he was making fun of her, or not.

" I am asking you if there is any hope for me ? "

" Hope for you ? "

" I appreciate that you hardly know anything about me, and I probably seem to be rather a dull fellow, but I would do my best to make you happy."

It was romance. There flashed through her mind the flood tide of emotion which had caught her in the drabness of that Deanery life. The joy of being in Ralph's arms, and feeling his kisses, and the tide which had risen so overwhelmingly in her heart. There was no rising tide here, just the nervous desire to laugh for no reason ! She said helplessly, " But I don't want to marry."

" Surely that isn't true ? "

" I'm very happy here."

" So you may be now, but you might lose your position and what would happen then ? Besides, Miss Markham, we do not grow younger."

" I'm not so very old yet."

" Every day we grow older," and then rather wistfully, " I would do my best for you."

She knew that he was wealthy, and that the woman who married him would have much, but she did not want to be that woman. At this moment she was thinking to herself that, if only she could mount the bicycle, press hard on the pedal, and give herself a flying start, it might stop the front wheel from wobbling so hopelessly. Then she came to, and was frightened by her own attitude. " Oh no," she said, " I'm very sorry, but please, I really couldn't."

" I'm sorry too," he said ; his manner was that of a spaniel when told that it cannot come out with the guns to-day. She turned quickly and went out of the room. She would never dare admit the enormity of her crime, for Stephen had been thought of as a suitable *parti* for Evie, and instead, his eyes had turned to Evie's governess*

" What did he want ? " asked Alice Hobbs, meeting her at the far end of the hall.

" Only to say good-bye."

She had thrown away a very good chance and knew it. She did not know how she could take it so coolly but she was not thinking any more of Stephen, because she was indulging in the breath-taking effort of being set on her bicycle, and cycling along for a few yards towards the footman at the other end of the path, who was waiting to catch her, before she fell off.

A few days later Alice said, " Andrew has heard from Stephen ; *I* don't think he was impressed by Evie."

" Don't you ? "

" And he says nothing about coming down again. I wonder what happened ? Did he say anything to you ? "

" Nothing." She dared not admit the truth.

. . . . . .

It was pleasant sitting in the morning beside the lake at Hathorley, with the syringa smelling strongly, rather like country wine, so that it almost went to poor old Edith's head. She let her knitting fall into her lap.

As she sat here, she was no longer conscious of failing limbs that were constantly tired, or of a mind that found it difficult to focus and grasp a subject ; of all those little aches and pains, of dimming sight, and hearing that had lost its acuteness. Here she seemed to be one with the full summer of the garden.

She was a girl again and could remember the joys of that bicycle with the air flying past her face, and the exhilaration of her whirling feet. In her Indian summer much that had been imperfect at its origin now lost the imperfection with distance.

She dozed in the kindly deck chair, and smelt the flowers across the water, and saw the wagtails strutting on imperious little feet up and down the lawn. There was the pungent scent of the grass clippings from the corner,, where the old man tilted them out of the hood of the mower, hoping nobody would see. She liked the smell,

for there was something warmly homelike about it. There was something which obliterated the trouble with the evacuees in Kent, the horror of the distant sound of gunfire in the channel, and the 'plane which had dipped low, and had machine-gunned the village street.

None of these things were real ; they were a nightmare from which she had now awakened, thank God, to find herself just where she had always been. That was a dream, but the Indian summer was reality.

She remembered riding a bicycle in Wales that lovely June . . .

. . . . . .

It was unusual for women to go alone on holidays, and much more so if they went on bicycles. But Alice Hobbs was a pioneer. Evie went away to visit some relations, and this was the great opportunity.

" I hope you'll find hotels willing to take in two lady bicyclists," said Andrew the night before their departure, " because Wales isn't as modern as we are, and they may think it rather extraordinary of you."

" I can put up with that," said Alice, and they started. They sat side by side in the train, whilst their bicycles occupied the guard's van, and it took them all day to come to Wales, sweet with the summer's evening. The small station was almost empty when they finally got possession of their bicycles, but immediately little boys appeared from nowhere, nudged one another suspiciously, and they were only too well aware that the porters were laughing at them.

They decided in view of this to wheel the bicycles through tbe village to the hotel where their rooms had been reserved. Some of the populace insisted on accompanying them, half in admiration, half in contempt. There had been two lady bicyclists there earlier in the year, these had been the first that they had seen. Men, yes, but women, no. They had greeted the first pair of cyclists as being freaks, but on the arrival of two more, their confidence in their judgment was undermined.

The bicycles were propped against a rose-hung pergola

outside the hotel, and Edith went inside, whilst Alice guarded them. An amenable Welsh maid met Edith, and hearing her business said that " she would speak to Mrs. Weston but she thought that Mr. and Mrs. Boyce had the rooms." They had arrived this very morning.

Edith was left in the shallow hall, and through the open door she had an impression of Alice warding off small boys, and keeping guard over the bicycles. Mrs. Weston appeared, a small, hirsute woman in the sixties, with a lot of jet about her bodice and a widow's cap perched on the broad parting of her hair.

" I never thought you'd turn up," said Mrs. Weston quite casually, " so I let Mr. and Mrs. Boyce have the rooms."

" But where are we to sleep ? "

" Well, I've got two other bedrooms, but not another sitting-room. It would mean you'd have to share. Still, seeing that you're only here for a week, perhaps you wouldn't mind ? "

" I'll have to see what Mrs. Hobbs says. She's out there with the bicycles. I'm Miss Markham."

" Bicycles ? " Mrs. Weston looked through her astigmatized, peering little eyes behind steel-rimmed glasses. She obviously did not like the word. " Dear me, you haven't come on bicycles ? "

" Yes, we're touring."

This distressed Mrs. Weston, who thought the whole procedure was most unladylike. " Of course if I'd known that at the beginning . . ." she began.

" You let us the rooms, and now have let the sitting-room to somebody else, which is entirely wrong. You cannot object to the bicycles, tell me where we put them ? "

" There's a stable at the back, I'll send the man round for them, but I doubt if he's ever seen a lady's bicycle. The ladies here are ladies, and don't have them."

Edith let that barb miss its mark, and went back to Alice.

" It looks as if we shall have to put up with anything,"

said Alice ; " who'd have thought she'd be so silly ! " She felt very hot and worried, and whilst Edith explained the position to her, a small boy, more intrepid than his companions, came up, tweaked a saddle-bag and said " Baa-a."

They gave the bicycles to the man, who handled them with distrust, and they interviewed Mrs. Weston together in the hall. She had two bedrooms, she said, and they must share the sitting-room with Mr. and Mrs. Boyce, who were charming people, and she emphasized this with a look at Edith, suggesting that this was more than she was. The bedrooms were ordinary, with large Victorian furniture ; but they were comfortable, and Alice felt the beds, deciding that on the whole, the place was suitable. Edith went downstairs first. The sitting-room was on the right of the hall, and she saw a man and his wife (obviously the Boyces) sitting there. She hesitated to intrude on them, feeling most embarrassed and being quite unused to hotels. The man stood looking out of the window towards the lake, the sunshine falling on his fair hair ; he was tall and well-made with broad shoulders and shallow hips which his suit emphasized ; the woman sat at the table with some crochet.

" It's no good, William," she was saying, " you always think you know everything, and the truth of the matter is that you know so little that I shudder for you. I don't know why you take upon yourself to criticize me, and I'd like you to understand that I never pay the slightest attention to anything that you say, and never shall."

" I fully realize that," he replied, and Edith noticed that he had a deeply bass voice, which was most attractive, " but I still insist that you cannot expect to walk up Snowdon. You know quite well that you are far too delicate, and women don't walk up mountains, they take the train."

• " To prove you wrong, here is one who will walk up Snowdon, and you shall give me one of those pert new hats as a reward."

Edith plucked up her courage to walk into the room.

and Mrs. Boyce stared at her resentfully. She was a handsome young woman in a lavender silk frock, with a row of little velvet buttons and loops down the front ; her hair was carefully done with not a curl awry, her eyes hard.

" Fm afraid," said Edith nervously, " that there has been a mistake in Mrs. Weston's bookings ; we were supposed to have had this sitting-room. I do apologize for trespassing on you, but am afraid that I have no option."

" How provoking ! " said Mrs. Boyce peevishly.

" Mrs. Weston has arranged for us to share it."

" But that's nonsensical. I shouldn't like that at all," began Clara Boyce. " William, you must go out and explain to the woman that I can't and won't have that."

" But, my dear . . ."

" I'm extremely sorry," said Edith to William, " but you see what has happened ? "

" I do indeed ; it is nobody's fault, just bad miscalculation on Mrs. Weston's part. We shall be charmed to share such delightful company," he said, " please don't think any more about it."

" William ! " snapped his wife.

" My dear, we couldn't possibly be so ungallant," and then to Edith, " Are you and your friend staying long ? "

" We brought our bicycles here to do a tour."

" Surely that's something new ? " Clara Boyce raised her eyebrows slightly. " Bicycling . . . in bloomers, I suppose ? How droll ! "

" I think it is a good idea," William spoke hurriedly and she noticed that he had flushed. " Of course the day is sure to come when women do everything that men do."

Clara Boyce could not let that pass. " I thought you said that women couldn't walk up Snowdon ? Men do."

Edith felt the tension in the room and was most uncomfortable, and grateful when Alice came in to add her apologies, accepted with a bad grace by Clara Boyce,

who had, however, now decided to tolerate them. It was pathetic how eager her husband was to cover her rudeness. They supped together round the spread table, and the fare was generous. Alice kept up a running chat, talking glibly about her bicycle, and hoping that the good weather had set in to stay. It was her first visit to Wales. William Boyce had spent many holidays of his youth here, and could give them lists of the best places to see, and the easiest roads to take. He knew all the paths. Before they had arrived at the gooseberry pie he was deep in his subject, whilst his wife yawned shamelessly beside him, obviously bored by it all. She had the most unpleasant manner ; it was patronizingly intolerant, rather the air of a grown-up forced to sit with a batch of silly children.

William made copious notes on a sheet of paper which he stuck alongside his plate. " You simply must see the Llan-y-coed Pass. The scenery is marvellous, and it's where they hold the sheepdog trials, which are most interesting. You will have to go out to Cwm-y-llangod, because there's a wonderful view there, and on bright days you can see Man from it. There's a ruined castle by the road, you climb up the stairs ; it's quite breath-taking."

" You ought to guide them," said his wife, and she yawned elaborately.

Alice looked at her. She was rapidly becoming annoyed with Clara Boyce. She said, " You're yawning because of your liver. If you took more exercise it would be better. I found bicycling was an enormous help to me."

" I'm quite content as I am. I'd hate to be a woman bicyclist and the subject of cartoons."

" Clara ! " William's face flushed, he was both annoyed and agitated that she should say such a thing. " Sometimes your remarks are very hurtful. I tell you that, before long, women will be doing everything that men do."

" Have you inside information ? " she asked coldly.

After supper the maid cleared away and they made some further notes under William Boyce's directions. There was so much within easy distance of the little town, which was in the heart of Snowdonia, that they decided they could not have made a wiser choice. " I have always loved it," said William sentimentally.

" I couldn't bear the place for more than a week." and his wife shuddered, " I shall leave as soon as I can, but first I have challenged William to walk up Snowdon ! I shall do it too."

. . . . . .

Edith and Alice found it an ideal place for a holiday. Unfortunately they excited a most uncomfortable interest, so that they had to choose the country roads where the scenery was magnificent, and by-pass the towns. If they wanted to go into a town (as for instance the day they went to Caernarvon), they left the bicycles at a hostelry on the edge of the place, accomplishing the rest of the journey on foot. Clara went on to the lower reaches of Snowdon the first morning after their arrival, and she did not achieve her project. Slipping, she ricked her ankle, and was chained to a sofa for a whole fortnight, with William to carry her to and fro upstairs and down again for meals. He was a most devoted husband, but in spite of this she did nothing but complain.

"It seems to me that all devoted husbands get peevish wives like that," said Alice, in her own room, " I'm sure if he smacked her she'd be a much nicer woman."

Halfway through the week it was so beautiful after supper that Edith went for a walk. There was a ruin to the right, etched against the skyline, standing on a hummock greying with twilight. It was the final memorial to a monastery that had once stood there, and she thought that she would walk to it, but it was farther than she had thought, and she had to turn back. A childish fear of the dark came to her ; she had always had this fear, and it was intensified as she hurried along the dusty road, her skirt brushing the hart's-tongue ferns and crowsfoots. Suddenly with a startling vividness she

remembered going into the room where her mother lay dead.

In the worst throes of this absurd fear, she heard the sound of a man's foot coming towards her, and saw William Boyce's figure loom out of the dusk.

" I came to meet you," he said, " Mrs. Hobbs realized that it would be dark before you got back."

" Oh, I'm so glad to see you."

" Good gracious ! You don't mean to tell me that you were as frightened as all that ? "

" It's silly, but I'm scared of the dark."

" It can't hurt you."

" Perhaps not, but have you never been afraid of things that could not hurt you ? "

" Yes," he said, and then " of course."

As they walked back she told him a little of her life at the Deanery, and in return he mentioned his own life. He had not been happy at school ; too placid, he supposed, and games had not amused him. She glanced at him as he strode along, tall, good looking, with that bright fair hair and aquiline nose, on cither side of which those very blue eyes looked out.

She said, " You were very young to marry ? "

" Young ? Oh, no, I've been married five years. I'm older than I look, I'm twenty-seven."

" You don't look that ! You've got children ? "

" No," he hesitated, then he said, " the child died ; that was what changed Clara so much, she couldn't bear losing it."

" You'll have others," she said.

His silence contradicted it, and she remembered that Mrs. Weston had expressed her surprise that they occupied separate rooms, which she thought little short of disgusting. Mrs. Weston set hard and fast rules for living, and considered that she was most unfortunate this year, what with two young ladies who rode bicycles, and a lady and gentleman who said they were married but slept in separate rooms. Edith felt uncomfortable at having mentioned other children, when on second

thoughts she realized that there never would be any ; it was obvious that the two got on badly, and equally plain that William was unhappy about it. She wished that she could help, but her inexperience was shackling, and she felt modestly shocked and embarrassed.

They walked in silence, and when they reached the village witte its windows pleasantly lit, and the warm glow issuing forth from the hotel, she said " Thank you so much for not laughing at me for being afraid of the dark," and then, haltingly, " And, I'd like you to know that I ... I'm sorry about that other . . ."

He did not pretend that he missed her meaning. He just said " Thank you."

. . . . . .

For a week Alice and Edith cycled about the neighbourhood, with William mapping out routes for them in the evenings. He appeared to be completely happy in this work, even though Clara was constantly complaining about it. Both Alice and Edith were glad that the days took them away from the little hotel, because the constant presence of Clara in the sitting-room would have been most wearing. She was 'gifted in the delicate art of making people uncomfortably aware that they were not wanted, and well versed in the art of polite rudeness. In the evenings she never hesitated to exhibit her prowess in this direction.

" William loves playing with routes," she'd explain, " it's charming of you to keep him so busy. Quite a charity," as though he were an imbecile child, amused by kindly friends. Or, " If you were chained to a sofa with a painful foot, you'd not be so gay ! I envy you the power to enjoy life, I've never really found it enjoyable."

Alice, undressing with the communicating door open in between, said to Edith, " Why do you suppose a nice man like William Boyce married a sickening creature like Clara ? "

" She's very pretty."

" Pretty, but how dull ! "

[u] Perhaps she wasn't dull when they married ? She may have changed."

" I can't imagine that losing a child changed her that much ; I should think Mr. Boyce must have been drunk to propose to her."

But William hadn't been drunk, he had been desperately in love. He had met Clara at a ball, fcn adorable, dazzling creature with a little pearl fan across which she had glanced at him archly, and it had gone to his head. William, the good boy of his family, until then proof against all coquetry, was suddenly swept along in an overwhelming torrent of love that he could not stay. He could not eat ; he could not sleep ; he was only happy when in the presence of the charmer. He had always laughed at his cousin Edward for just such a moocl, and now he was worse than Edward.

Clara had remained composed and sedate, and he had thought of her as being some delicate icicle whom he would melt ; but he hadn't melted Clara. They had had a very smart wedding, and a subsequent honeymoon abroad, but Clara had come into the church for her marriage completely self-controlled, whilst William fidgeted with his tie, and felt desperately ill at ease. Clara had conducted the honeymoon. She had made him feel that he was a clumsy idiot, and, dismayed by her calmness, he had gone about foolishly tongue-tied. She was the unattainable ! The icicle that he had been so sure of melting in the warmth of his passion merely served to freeze him. At the end of a year Clara's hope of a child vanished in a serious illness, and her whole nature changed. Until that illness she had been coldly indifferent, but now she became openly hostile. She never missed a chance to criticize or draw attention to some weak point in his armour. Life was unlivable.

William clung on, hoping for the miracle which he prayed might come. He was the kind which goes on rather than admits a defeat. But now, here in the little Welsh hotel, he realized that he could not continue for the rest of his life this way. He recognized a new angle.

He was too young to put up with a whole sprawling lifetime of Clara's condescensions.

Yet nowadays, when he was away from his wife, William could be very merry ; he seemed to shed years when Clara had been carried off to bed.

As the week was nearly through, Alice made the arrangements for their move towards Aberystwith, and only then did they become aware of the frantic efforts William was making to detain them.

" But we've seen all we want to see," Alice explained, " and we can't be away from home for ever. The country round the Devil's Bridge is beautiful, we've got to get there."

They left one summer's morning, with the clouds coming over Snowdon, and the feeling that the weather was about to break. William came to the station to see them off, helping with the bicycles into the van. It was all over very quickly ; a guard waving a little green flag and William standing, his cap in his hand, rather a pathetic figure staring forlornly after the departing train, knowing how much he would miss them.

" Well, that's that," said Alice.

. . . . . .

The weather had broken, and they were glad enough to get back to Norfolk, where nothing much seemed to have happened. On the Sunday they tea-ed with the rector. Usually he didn't entertain on the Sabbath, considering it to be his busy day, but he sent round an urgent note, stating that he had a mutual friend with him and would the Hobbs' bring Edith to tea ?

The country rectory was small, set well back in the inevitable shrubberies. Under a lone elm on the lawn the rector and his wife sat and, as Edith and Evie approached, they saw that a young man was with them. The fat little rector came towards them ; he was one of those men who can never walk, but always run in panting little steps ; his wife was the scraggy kind, talkative as a hen, and equally hen-minded ; beside her was the visitor. Edith would not have believed that Ralph

could change so much ; the red hair was darker, the pink face had mottled with the claret hue of red cabbage, he had obviously lived life. He had thickened too, no longer the stripling on the verge of a promising maturity, but a man who believed in enjoying himself.

" Nice of you to come," said the rector extending a podgy little hand, damp with heat. " You'll never guess whom I have here. I and his father were curates in the long-forgotten days. Canon Walker. Of course you remember him ! His son is in the army."

Edith saw Ralph watching her, a man who had once been a god in her life, and whom she still loved with that fatal womanish cleaving to the first passion. " I'm sure that you've forgotten me," he said, but his eyes suggested that he remembered everything, and was secretly convinced that she did too.

Not for the world would she have had this happen, though she held out a hand and said " It's always pleasant to meet somebody from home."

" You haven't forgotten me ? "

" Nor the rocking horse."

" The garden party where you came out," he answered.

" No, nor the garden party," but her tone was not encouraging.

They walked across the lawn ; mercifully the rector was talkative, telling them all about his peccadilloes at Cambridge with Canon Walker, which eased a difficult situation that Edith was feeling intensely.

" You've never been back to Hinthorpe ? "

" No, I don't want to go back. I always hated the place."

" I never minded it, but it's different for a man ; I just painted the town red and left it."

" I know."

He was full of himself. "I'm happy as a soldier. I only need a first-class war to be made a colonel. You'd have made a very good colonel's lady."

She wished that she did not colour up ; now she saw in him only a thoroughly undesirable young man ; her

father had been quite right in his prejudice against Ralph Walker, and the fact that he was right was not heartening. Tea was brought out and laid with laborious care on a square green tabls under the tree, and afterwards the rector went to compose himself for evensong, whilst Mrs. Smith took Evie indoors to show her some crochet garments she was making for a mission to Nigeria. Edith and Ralph were alone.

" The last time you and I were in a garden together, quite a lot happened," he said.

" We were much younger, and rather silly."

" I don't see why. I was hoping that we might pick up the threads where we left off."

" That's impossible."

" Why ? I understood that you were quite go-ahead, and went bicycling in Wales ? "

" Yes, I did."

He leant towards her. " Edith, I'm not a flirt really."

" For a novice I should have said that you were extremely promising."

" That's too bad ! You meant a lot to me once."

She stared at him, seeing him as he was, and feeling both disappointed and disgusted with the realization. He had allowed her name to be bandied about with his, and had condemned her to those wretched subsequent years of what was little short of imprisonment. She felt that she would never love any other man again, all that was over, and it was his fault. He put out a detaining hand on the flounces of her frock, but she brushed him aside.

" No," she said, " I must take Evie home. I'm sorry, Ralph, but this time you have made a mistake."

. . . . . .

Ralph had come on leave when the garrison was suffering from a bout of German measles, and he had said nothing about it. To give him his due, he had had no idea that he himself was sickening, but both Edith and Evie went down with the complaint within ten days. Isolated in one of the large rooms at Yarra, in the East wing, Edith was considerably bored by the strain of being

continually with one of the dullest girls that she had ever met. For an interminable three weeks they were stuck there, both loathing one another, and on the very week-end when they were due to be free to mix with their fellows again, Andrew Hobbs became seriously ill. Alice, coming to the garden below the window from which conversation was conducted, called up to them.

" The doctor thinks you ought to take Evie away," she suggested, " he says Great Yarmouth. It's good air there, and we know of some nice rooms, so Fm making the arrangements."

The thought of more time alone with Evie and her stamp album was horror, but Edith could say nothing. Andrew Hobbs had got pneumonia, and they wanted the house to be clear. " Very well," she said, " I'll get the things packed."

She packed with a very heavy heart, and she and Evie were actually on their way to Great Yarmouth before Edith fully realized what was happening. They drove in a landau from the station to the rooms which were situated at the Wellington end ; on the way Evie spied a shop that sold stamps in the Britannia Road, which immediately warmed her towards Yarmouth. Edith could imagine that they would both be living at that shop, and thought it a ghastly prospect.

The rooms were comfortable, a wealth of bamboo, plush and pampas, but old Mrs. Freeman was prepared to do her best for them in a grumbling manner, and it did not seem to be too bad. On still evenings they could hear the band playing on the Wellington pier ; it boded well. The very next morning off went Evie to the stamp shop to make the acquaintance of Mr. Isaacs, the young Jewish man who kept it and who undoubtedly recognized her as an exceedingly promising customer.

They went on to the pier with their sewing after breakfast, and sat on the sands in the afternoon. It was a constant strain trying to get Evie away from visiting the stamp shop, and sticking indoors in the fusty rooms with the stamps and her album after she had bought them.

And all the time the news from Yarra was not propitious. Andrew Hobbs was always a delicate man ; he took no care of himself; being a fatalist, he was unconcerned as to whether he lived or died, with the result that he put up a very poor fight. Alice wrote that he would never be able to winter in England after this, and Edith began to cherish hopes of a period on the Riviera. That would be delightful.

But for the time being Great Yarmouth held her, and she was continually going down to the stamp shop to fetch Evie, poring over the sheets of stamps, and talking to that horrible little Jewish man.

" You shouldn't be so familiar with him," said Edith.

" I like him. There is nothing he doesn't know about stamps. He gave me some brown pennies to sort out for myself, and I'm looking through them to-night."

" Alice would hate your being so friendly with him."

Evie flushed. Her dull face clouded, like a sky before rain. " Alice is a snob," she declared.

You could not argue with her.

One day when they ought to have been sitting like two young ladies of fashion, with their crochet work on the Wellington pier, Edith became indignant, and, taking the tram, went down to the shop to fetch Evie back. The shop was at a corner, wedged in between one where they sold sweets and horrible yellow cakes, and gave refreshments to *bonafide* travellers, and a bucket and spade shop, where gaudily-coloured buckets hung with pictures of the Queen on them, and of Prince Eddie, and the Prince and Princess of Wales and the Yorks all over them. Wooden spades and shrimping nets blew in the wind and beat together like castanets.

Edith saw that the stamp shop was empty. Now where was Evie ? Behind it was a darkish back room, and she stood peering uncertainly into it. She heard Isaacs talking, and, although she did not intend to listen, fonnri that she overheard what was be

" You was made for me," sa
voice replied.

" Hermon, I love you so much ! I do love you."

It was Evie ! She had that rapture in her tone that had once been Edith Markham's. The too full fountain of joy was playing, at which youth longs to slake its thirst, and Evie was feeling for this horrible little man all that Edith had once felt for Ralph Walker.

" We'll elope," said Mr. Isaacs. Naturally he thought that the adventure of marrying a lady meant good-bye to the little shop, you couldn't blame him for that !

" Nobody shall know until we're married," announced Evie.

Then Edith stepped into the room. The breakfast was still scattered on the table, lying on a tin tray ; there was no cloth. Through the open back door there was a glimpse of an untidy yard, with packing cases, and an ash-bin, out of which a smear of grey ash and potato peelings bulged. The paint on the doors of the sheds was a blistered maroon, it was all squalid. Hermon Isaacs had not shaved, and had dark bristles on his chin, beneath which there was no collar. He stared at Edith, not entirely master of the situation, but Evie was quicker, and wheeled sharply.

" Oh, you beast ! You're always spying on me."

Edith did not know what to say ; she put out a hand. " Come away, Evie, we must go back to Mrs. Freeman's."

" I won't come away. I love Hermon, and want to stay here for ever. I shall stay here."

" You can't. You are under age, and anyway it is impossible for you to marry him."

" We could clear off," said Hermon Isaacs sulkily, and he put smoke-stained fingers to his bristles, stroking them affectionately.

Edith pulled at Evie's arms. " Come away, Evie."

" I won't leave him. You and Alice hate me, you hate my stamps, you hate everything about me. He understands me. You just look on me as being a fool."

This was so true that Edith could not deny it ; she felt quite stunned by it. " You're not making me think more of you by behaving this way."

" I shall stay here."

" Then I shall have to go to the police." She couldn't imagine herself running into the Britannia Road to urge a policeman to come and rescue her charge, but it was the only forceful threat that she could think of. Hermon did not appear to be pleased with this idea, and he turned as pink as his sallow complexion would allow.

Sulkily Evie glanced at him, then said, " Oh, all right, but I warn you this isn't going to end here."

As they walked up the Britannia Road, both of them were most uncomfortable ; Evie walked doggedly, with her shoulders hunched and her eyes glaring out of her set face. As they turned on to the esplanade, she said " I suppose you'll tell Alice ? "

" What else can I do ? "

" I don't know. Supposing I promised that I wouldn't run away, would you promise not to worry her ? She's so upset about Andrew."

It was so unusual for her to think for her sister that Edith could hardly believe it. She reminded herself that there is good in everybody ; the affair might have melted some hardness in Evie, disclosing a tender spot. She said, " You'd have to promise not to see Mr. Isaacs again."

" Oh dear, that's going to be hard." . She looked as if she were going to cry, even out here in the street where it would be shocking to be caught crying.

Touched by that fellow feeling, Edith comforted her. " When I was your age, I had an affair too ; I thought I couldn't live without him, but now I know I'd have been miserable if I had married him."

" That was different." Evie put up the eternal defence of youth. All the same, Edith knew that Ralph had been far more presentable than Hermon Isaacs, who she considered was appalling. There came the sound of the sea lapping the sea wall, and the noise of the spade and pail sellers, and the fisher girls with their baskets of shrimps. Nothing would be gained by harshness, thought Edith, much better to treat Evie as she would have liked to be treated herself.

" Supposing I trust you ? " she said.

" Oh Edith, would you ? "

" Nobody trusted me in my affair, I know how much it would have meant if just one person had been kind."

" It would be everything to me."

" You must give me your word of honour that you won't see him again ? "

"Of course."

" And you mustn't write to him ? "

" I must just once, to say good-bye."

That was reasonable. " Yes."

Now Evie seemed to be a much more human person than ever before. " Edith, I can never tell you how grateful I am," she said.

When they got into Mrs. Freeman's, she had a fit of hysterics and had to be fanned and given sal volatile. Much later they went on to the Wellington Pier, where the band was playing *Zampa* with a diligence that was ear-splitting. Edith felt that it would be good for Evie to be distracted from the horrible morning that they had had, and, as they went through the turnstile, she saw a man ahead of them, and felt her own heart suddenly miss a beat, for the man was William Boyce.

. . . . . .

" You ? " said William.

" Indeed, and you ? "

She would not have believed that she could be So pleased tc meet anybody. She had thought little about William until now, but she was thrilled to see him. " What are you doing here in Yarmouth ? " she asked.

Although William did not confess it, he and Clara had had a final quarrel, in which both Alice and Edith had figured, and Clara had taken herself off to the maternal home, whilst William had consigned himself to grass widowerhood. He had come here because he had a boat on the Broads and loved it. He had been in the vicinity a week, just long enough for the charm to pale slightly, and to receive the final letter from Clara announcing that she never intended returning. William had felt suddenly

lonely, suddenly shipwrecked, now he was thrown into Edith's society.

They went towards the bandstand, and William expanded on His history since seeing her. Naturally he did not tell her how disturbing the interim had been, with Clara accusing him of " running after those two awful modern girls on bicycles." He talked to Evie, decided that she was quite unlike her sister, professed an interest in stamps himself, whereupon Evie offered to run home to fetch some of her inevitable swops. Edith thought that this would provide an admirable opportunity of getting in a word alone with William, and the moment Evie had gone, she took him into her confidence.

" I need your advice badly. Something terrible has happened, it was a stroke of fate meeting you like this."

" What's happened ? "

" It's Evie ! She's such a difficult girl, moody in many ways, and her only interest is in this collection."

" I'm a philatelist myself."

" There is a little shop in the Britannia Road, and ever since we came here she has been buying stamps there. It's run by rather an awful little Jew, and they're in love."

" Good heavens ! "

" Yes, they are, they were in the back room when I walked in, and really I clon't know what to do."

Much against his will, William said, " You must leave Great Yarmouth at once."

" I can't do that. Alice Hobbs has her husband dangerously ill with pneumonia, and if she knows about this it'll only add enormously to her anxiety."

" But she's got to know about it."

"Well, has die?"

" My dear Miss Markham, as long as you keep it to yourself, you accept sole responsibility for it, and that's not good. You'll have to go home."

" But I made Evie promise me that she would never see him again."

" Can you trust anybody in love ? "

She remembered her own affair,with Ralph, recalling with some horror that she would have broken any word to be with him. " Oh dear, I don't know what to do."

" You cannot stay. Write and tell Mrs. Hobbs to-night, tell her the truth, and relieve yourself of responsibility."

" I am so distressed."

" Of course ; it was a shocking thing to happen, but then young girls fall in love with anybody and at any time, there is no accounting for what they may do next."

" I know. I once fell in love myself and was blamed for it all the rest of the time that I lived at the Deanery. That's why I want to be kind to Evic about it."

" Yes, but not at the expense of your own better judgment." He looked at her tenderly, and she knew that it stirred her. She did not know why it should, seeing that he had a wife and quite obviously could not be thinking of her in any sentimental way, even though her intuition warned tier that he was.

" Life's very perplexing," she said, " my own has been bewildering enough."

" So has mine. You must have noticed my wife's intolerance ; she wasn't like it when we were married, it came afterwards."

" Poor thing ! "

" I suppose I never understood her ; I thought love warmed people, it doesn't. Not people like Clara. She was bitterly disappointed that Hathorley was not coming to me."

" Hathorley ? "

" It's a largish house in Kent. It belongs to my cousin and he has sons, so it will never come to me. Clara made a bad miscalculation, and I suppose it left a nasty taste in her mouth."

" I'm sorry." There seemed nothing else to say.

" I've thought so much about you and Mrs. Hobbs, I think I enjoyed the week that we met in Wales, more

than any since I married ; when you went, there was quite a gap in my life. We met again because, as you said, it was fate. Friendships are not born to die."

" Of course not," and then, " Evie ought to be back, she has been gone a very long time, let's go and look for her."

The band was now playing an *entr'acte* from Veronique, and they walked down the pier into the road beyond, Edith becoming increasingly anxious. " Do come in with me, Mr. Boyce, I've got on edge that something might happen."

" It only shows how important it is for you to shake off this responsibility."

" Yes, I must do something about it."

In Mrs. Freeman's sitting-room Evie was at the small writing desk, sorting out stamps. " I've been a long time," she said, " because I had to remove some from the album."

The unusualness of this struck Edith, because nothing would persuade Evie to take out a stamp once it had been put in. " But why ? You know how particular you are ? "

Evie said nothing. William Boyce went over and looked at the stamps, going through them with Evie and showing an intelligent interest. They made plans for him to take them on the Broads next morning, arranging to meet at the quayside at ten-thirty.

After he had gone, Edith found a letter from Yarra. The letter was disturbing, for Andrew Hobbs had arrived at that period in his convalescence when he was difficult and touchy ; Alice was worn out with nursing and anxiety, and felt that she had reached breaking point. The two trained nurses, having less to do, had started quarrelling with one another, and telling tales. She wrote in a depressed mood, so that Edith's heart quailed. It seemed so unfair to act on William's advice and to worry Alice even more. What could she do ?

Evie, finishing her stamps, was sitting staring through the window where the sea was slowly being blotted out

by grey *mist.* She said, " It was good of you taking all this the way you did, Edith. I'm grateful."

" It's all over," said Edith, " we'll never speak of it again."

It was a hot sweet morning when they went down to the quay. She hadn't written to Alice, but she believed that Evic's affair was dead ; everything had righted itself in the way things do if left well alone. They walked along the cobbles, picking their way between the salty dripping crans come ashore from the trawlers, and with the sound of the sale proceeding in the sheds behind them, like a turbulent sea crashing in waves. Edith had an impression of it all, just a snapshot. William standing waiting for them, smiling, with his eyes the colour of water, and his hair ruffled by the wind. It was one of those days of which one remembers no detail but has a definite general view of it all.

The loveliness of the water lilies, the ruin of Burgh Castle against the horizon, the reeded creek in which they had lunch, and the sail afterwards in the afternoon sunlight, with the sound of the wind and the hum of the water alongside. During that afternoon, Edith noticed a change in herself, as though her feelings had altered, as though suddenly life was quite unreal, and had a new beauty of its own. She was intensely happy to be here with William, to sit talking, though they only spoke of trivialities ; even those became interesting. They went back to his hotel for tea.

It surprised Edith that, after enjoying herself so much, her head should be aching, so that when eventually she arrived at Mrs. Freeman's, she told Evie that she would have to lie down till supper. It must have been the glare of the sun on the water, the strength of that bracing Norfolk air, and being unused to staying out for so long. She left Evie putting the stamps that William had given her into her album, and Edith curled up on the voluminous bed. She must have fallen asleep, for the next thing she heard was Mrs. Freeman tapping on the door.

" The supper's ready, miss."

" Good heavens ! I must have been asleep all this time."

" Yes, miss, and I can't find Miss Evie."

It was an ordinary remark ; there was nothing significant about it, yet it immediately struck horror in to Edith. She thrust her feet into slippers. " I expect she's in her room," and, hardly pausing to tidy her hair, she went across to Evie's door. The place was in order, but the brush and comb had gone from the dressing-table, her washing things had disappeared from the capacious washstand with the crochet mats. In the centre of the bed, like some dim desert island in a grey sea, lay a letter. Edith saw that it was addressed to her, and of course she knew at once ! She tore it open, although she was cognizant of the contents before she read it. It was terrible.

Dear Edith,

It's no good trying to follow me. I couldn't ham given Herman up, even if I had wanted to, and he and I have gone right away.

Evie.

Even if she had written to Alice last night it would have been too late, but, as William had said, she would have saved herself the onus, she would not have had to carry the full responsibility, Evie must have arranged it when Edith and William were left on the pier ; she had been desperately quick. Edith took up her ulster, and she went straight to William at his hotel, because she felt quite helpless to act alone.

" I shan't be wanting supper yet," she told Mrs. Freeman.

" But, miss, it's chops ? You can't hot up chops."

" I shan't be wanting it."

The hotel was not far away. She was so horrified that she forgot that it was most unusua^l for a giri of her age to be going to visit a man alone in the evening, and that he might be dismayed to find her on his hands. She forgot

everything in an agony of apprehension as to what Alice would say when she knew. William had just come down for dinner, and he saw Edith as she entered through the swing doors.

" Hello ? " he said.

" She's gone." Her heart gave a strange little catch.

" Who's gone ? "

" Evie ! I had a headache and went to lie down, and when I got up, found this." She held out the note. Without a word, he took it and read.

" We must go round to the man's shop at once."

" They'll never have stayed there."

" You can't be sure. I'll get a cab ancl we'll go together," and then glancing at her. " How white you look ! Is your headache still bad ? "

" It's dreadful," she said helplessly.

She had some smelling salts in the pocket of her ulster, and brought these out as they drove down the Esplanade in the cab. The smell was very strong, and stung her nostrils, so that the tears came into her eyes, but it was a pleasant pain as a change from the mental one that she was enduring. The cab stopped outside the dingy little shop, which had its blinds drawn, and was looking forlornly empty.

" We'll go round to the back," said William.

They had difficulty in finding the back, which was in an insalubrious side street, up an alley where grass grew, and old paper bags were thrown in dirty heaps. They opened the gate to the back yard, with its crates, the brimming dust-bin, its coal house (the door broken, and sagging on its hinges), and its sordid appearance. On the back door a note was stuck with a tintack, and it read " Gone away" in an illiterate handwriting. They looked through the hole in the curtain which had been drawn across the window, and saw that the little back room was bereft and hideously dirty.

William said in a Chocked voice, " Surely she can't have gone away with a man like this ? Why, the whole place is dreadful."

" Mr. Isaacs is equally bad. What will the Hobbses say when they know ? It's all my fault."

" You wrote to them ? "

" No. Last night there was a letter from Yarra, and Alice seemed to be so worried that I felt I couldn't add to it. It *is* my fault ! "

He put an arm round her, steadying her. She began to cry, and William took over command of the whole situation. " I shall go to the police at once ; the couple can't have got very far, and there still might be time to stop them at the station. I think it is worth while driving that way."

" I'll do anything you suggest."

But the station was deserted. A train for the North had left half an hour ago, the porter said ; it had been very full and the lady and gentleman might easily have been on it. They went to the police station, but they knew that there was nothing more that could be done. When they got back to the lodgings, Mrs. Freeman was in a rage, for the chops were ruined, and the potatoes soggy. She didn't know what lodgers were coming to, and now here was the young woman (lady she wouldn't call her, because lady she wasn't) coming back with the gentleman again ! There'd be trouble, Mrs. Frceman'd be bound, and him a married gentleman, as the young woman had said.

" The supper's spoilt," she announced, emerging out of the back of the house and sticking her frowstily-capped head through a bead curtain which a sailor lodeer had brought her from Ceylon.

" I'm sorry, Mrs. Freeman," said William Boyce, " but there's been trouble ; the young lady has run away."

" Run away ? " said Mrs. Freeman, " never ! "

She would have thought that Edith was the one who would run away, and with the married gentleman too, after the goings-on she'd seen in her teacup last night. She shook her head.

" I'm afraid Miss Markham's upset," said William, " so if you could manage a nice cup of tea ? "

They went into the sitting-room, and the tea was ultimately brought in a brown pot on a japanned tray, for Mrs. Freeman never worried about niceties. The two of them sat talking.

" This means that I shall lose my job," said Edith.

" If that happens, I'll help you to another. Maybe I could get you to Hathorley ? "

Edith began to cry. " I simply daren't go back to Yarra, and tell them. It's such a dreadful confession to have to make."

" Shall I come with you ? I'm sure Mrs. Hobbs would be broad-rninded over it."

" But who could be broad-minded about such a terrible little man ? It's my fault for trusting Evie," and then, " You're being very kind."

" No, I just want to be helpful." For a moment his hand lingered on hers, a schoolgirlish little hand as he thought, such a tender little hand.

In the kitchen Mrs. Freeman was consulting her tea-leaves, thick and dark in a streak up the side of her cup. She was seeing trouble ! No good would come of two people sitting in there, she told herself, when anybody could see as how they was in love. She wasn't used to people who called themselves quality and then behaved this way. She wasn't used, she kept telling herself.

William and Edith went back to Yarra together. Before they started, he had gone to the police station again, but no news of Evie had been gathered. They had found out something about the man Isaacs, who had originally come from Hoxton, where he had carried on a second-hand business and had been described as being " of undesirable character." This did not make the journey to Yarra any happier. They had to walk from the country station, taking the short cut across the fields, along a dusty track, vivid with sunshine. Once he put out a hand and took hers.

" Please don't be so unhappy ! I'm sure they'll be nice about it."

" But it was my fault."

" Not at all ; you were far too honest to have charge of such a scheming little hussy. That was the real trouble."

They rounded the last bend of the path, coming to the front of the house, seen through a green veil of trees, and here was Alice Hobbs with a couple of dogs, walking towards them on the lawn.

" Good heavens ! " said Alice, " where on earth did you two spring from ? "

Edith had been rehearsing the speech she would make, but they had met too soon and too unpreparedly and all she could do was burst into tears, so that it was William who spoke. " I was staying at Yarmouth and met the girls. Last night Evie behaved queerly, and I thought I could be of some use, so came back with Miss Markham."

" What's Evie been doing. She was always a goose ! "

" She ran away, I'm afraid, not alone."

Edith broke in. " It was those beastly stamps. I never thought this could happen, but she would keep going down to the little shop and buying them, then yesterday I caught them together."

" Who together ? "

" Evie and Mr. Isaacs."

" Then you knew ? "

" I knew they were in love, but she made me promise to say nothing, and swore they'd never meet again."

" But why didn't you bring her straight home ? "

" I know I should have done, but when I got your letter you seemed to be so worried." She stopped short.

Alice turned to William Boyce. " Where is Evie now? "

" We don't know. She left this letter, and the police think they took the train North."

Alice read the letter, then, with horror in her voice said " But this is dated yesterday ? There was last night when they must have been together. How dreadful ! "

They had come to the house, crossing the hall and going into the drawing-room on the far side. The blinds

had been drawn to keep out the hot sun, and the room itself was humid and uncomfortably warm. Alice turned on Edith.

" How could you have allowed this to happen ? I trusted you with her, I never thought you'd neglect her.[55]

" But I didn't neglect her . . ."

" You must have done ; how did she come to visit this man alone and get on these friendly terms with him ? " She turned in horror. " Perhaps, in a sense, it is a good thing that we are going away. Andrew and I could never have lived this down."

She glanced at Edith, and Edith knew what it meant. Even if this hadn't happened, she would probably never have been taken abroad, but it had happened; she was out of a job, and not entitled to a reference. Nobody would give a reference to a woman who allows her charge to elope from under her nose.

She went on quietly crying.

FOUR

LOVE

William helped Edith. He was touched by her frailty, and, although he would not have admitted this, already he was very fond of her. Her gentleness was appealing, and her anguish over the Evie affair very touching, so that it was William who got Edith down to Hathorley.

Old Mrs. Boycc had died recently, and Edward and Louise had come to take up residence with the two boys. Tee was twelve, Piers ten, and destined for the *Britannia.* The boys were opposites, in that Tee was a breakneck youth, and Piers the good boy, doing all the correct things. Miss Pike attended to their holiday tasks, but this summer Miss Pike had got an attack of phlebitis, which took no nay. William, writing to his cousin

Edward, mentioned Edith, and suggested her as part-time governess.

Edward Boyce was one of those men who found his sons a nuisance. William's letter arrived at the very moment that Tee had, discovered the story of the white lady of Hathorley, and was asking ceaseless and undesirable questions about her. Tradition said that the white lady came to signify disaster ; she was a decently behaved ghost, save for her portent of tragedy, but she scared the servants, and annoyed visitors with her gentle Sittings. She had not been seen for some time now, and Edward hoped that she and her rumours had gone for good, so that it was too bad of Tee resurrecting her. The trouble was that the boy had not got enough to do, and the suggestion of a part-time governess appealed.

That evening the Revd. Willy Baker (the incumbent) called with the magazine, and Edward mentioned Edith as being a dean's daughter.

" Not that it means anything to me," said Edward over the port.

The Revd. Willy Baker expanded to Edward in Edith's favour, and he glowed when he got home to his wife Emmeline. He thought that it would be an excellent thing to have a dean's daughter living here, it would give the place tone, and was just the right influence for those two boys who were getting out of hand, Oh, yes, decidedly ! The Revd. Willy Baker lived in a fool's paradise ; he had no experience of affairs like Evie and Hermon Isaacs, and he did not know that Edith was the last person to have any control over boys.

Edward wrote back, and within a week she arrived at Hathorley.

Edith would always remember that summer's evening when she first came to the place. The carriage and pair had met her train at the little station ; she had been assisted into the comfortable victoria by the groom, and they had started off in fine style. The lodge gates had swung open before them, and they had charged in, coming to a full stop with such suddenness that the

horses reared, and were nearly overturned in the shafts. Agonized, Edith had leant forward and peered over the side. A donkey cart was approaching, and in it were two boys with rumpled heads and soiled faces. Tee had, by some miracle, got the donkey spurred to a gallop, and it came head down towards them. The carriage and pair had to stop before it.

" Now then, now then ! " said the coachman testily.

Tee stood up in the donkey cart, his hat off, his fair hair blowing in the wind. " Mokes can't back," yelled Tee, " you're the people who'll have to go back to let us out."

There was a good deal of mumbling from the coachman, then he said, " I'll tell your pa of you, Master Tee, behaving like this 'ere. We've got your new governess inside, what do you think she'll say ? "

" She can't make mokes back, 'cos they can't back," said Tee jubilantly. " Now come on, corne on."

The groom climbed down, backing the pair of horses with some difficulty through the gate, and standing there at their heads saying indescribable things, whilst with a flourish the little donkey cart shot out of the park, and up the road, with the boys in it whipping up the donkey to a further gallop.

" Well, I must say," said the coachman, " they get more out of that there donkey than I ever did, durn 'em ! "

Edith wanted to laugh. Her first impression of Hathorley had amused her tremendously, with the victoria backing. Now they swept down the avenue, crossed the lake and came to the pleasant East side with the ampelopsis turning ruddy against the fagade. Edward was on the lawn ; he looked at the carriage, hoping for a good-looker (not but what he had already guessed that a dean's daughter wouldn't be much). He took one glance, decided that she wasn't his sort, and then went on playing croquet with himself.

The second crop of roses was out, the little polyanthus roses in pink profusion, across the lake where the waterhens nested. The jays were screaming in the black wal-

nut, and Louise received Edith. Louise was a despotic woman, entirely great lady, and determined to make it felt, but she was anxious that somebody should amuse the boys, and keep them from annoying their father.

" I think I ought to be able to do that," said Edith.

Louise took her round the grounds after tea ; the boys having not yet reappeared, they walked through the summer's evening, across the lake, under the shadow of the three cedars.

" They're fine trees," said Edith.

" It is a tradition that the women of Hathorley plant trees. We call the far one Elizabeth Boyce after my mother-in-law, she planted it when she came here as a bride. This one is mine." She paused under the shadow of the nearest and smallest tree ; there were thick fat pine cones on it with a blue bloom, and there came the resinous scent of tar.

" Who planted the middle tree ? "

" I don't know," lied Louise. She wasn't admitting that a village girl called Rose had planted the tree, and afterwards had drowned herself for love of Edward Boyce, lying in the lake, a lovely broken dream with green weed about her, and pink water-flowers. Louise was not telling either, that now a white lady flitted down the stairs of Hathorley under the oriel window, and some said that she signified disaster ! Louise was determined never to admit the white lady of Hathorley, and it had been most annoying that the boys should have rooted up the legend. They must have got it from the servants of course, not Bennett the butler, nor old Nurse, nor Mrs. Prosser, they'd be proof against such stories, but there was a changing stream of housemaids, and undoubtedly one of them had unearthed the ghost story. Piers took it sententiously, as Piers would, but Tee accepted it with the wildest enthusiasm, and occupied his spare moments with what he called " ghost-baiting." (" You wait till I catch her, Mother ! ")

" It's a lovely tree." Edith glanced at the centre one, which, though shorter than Elizabeth Boyce's, was more

fernlike, with daintier spreading fronds. Now the boys were coming towards them, and Louise remembered that she had promised Emmeline Baker to call and see her about opening the church bazaar next week. Louise liked opening church bazaars, she alluded to it as " doing her duty," but her duty was pleasure.

" I'll leave you and the boys to get Acquainted," she said.

Tee could tell Edith much more than his mother about the three cedars. There had been a chatty housemaid recently (a perfect dear, said Tee), and the housemaid had told him the story of Rose Davis, whose father had rented the White Farm, and who had drowned herself in the lake.

" She planted that tree," said Tee, bubbling over with exuberance. " Oh yes, Mother doesn't like it, for Rose drowned herself because she was in love with Father."

" Surely you oughtn't to say such things ? " said Edith.

" That's what I tell him!" Piers, always on the side of law and order, looked down his nose.

" But that's what makes it so much more interesting," said Tee joyfully. " It's no use repeating things you ought to repeat, there's no fun in that. Rose fell in love with Father at his twenty-first birthday party, and now she haunts the house. What's more, Bennett's seen her."

" Surely he didn't tell you so ? "

" No, but I got hold of him and he said I oughtn't to talk about such things. But when I challenged him on the law of the Medes and Persians he couldn't say that he hadn't seen her."

Edith knew that she was going to like Tee. " It wasn't very kind to Bennett," she said, " your mother and father had probably told him not to tell, and then you put him on his honour *to* tell. That isn't really fair."

Tee thought that one over. " No," he agreed, " perhaps it isn't fair, but never mind, I shan't do it again. Anyway I shan't want to, shall I, because I know now."

At the end of twenty-four hours, Edith was hand in

glove with the boys, and Louise sat back and thanked Heaven that the girl whom William had produced was a success. She wasn't pretty enough for Edward to fall in love with, yet she was presentable and one could produce her at mealtimes. Louise was always anticipating that Edward might start one of his affairs in the house, which she didn't think she could tolerate, and therefore she had to scrutinize new servants with additional care. She had an idea that Mrs. Prosser knew of the difficulties, because only the plainest girls ever arrived as domestics in the house. Edith was not plain, but she was certainly not attractive enough for Edward, just a placid, kindly little creature. No more !

Edith had been at Hathorley a week, when she heard William being discussed. Louise was sitting on the terrace talking to her husband, who was mending a fly rod. Edward stood there flicking the rod to and fro, and casting imaginary flies with it, then he said, " If anybody ever picked a tartar, that man was William ! I'm not surprised that they've split. If Clara had been my wife, I'd have killed her."

" But a divorce is so disgraceful."

Edward tried his line again, a large blond man, wearing a little shooting cap with ear flaps on either side, buttoned neatly on top. He said " You're prudish ! In a hundred years everybody will be getting divorces,- then it'll be the thing to do."

" The Queen would never tolerate that."

" The Queen won't be alive in a hundred years, neither shall we for the matter of that ! Whatever the Queen thinks, all men are not Alberts, just as all women are not Victorias," and he muttered something to himself that sounded very much like " Thank God." Louise stared at him frigidly.

Edith was bringing the boys on to the terrace ; she hoped that the Boyces did not realize that she might have overheard, but of course Tee had to upset things. " What is a divorce, Father ? " he asked, " and why doesn't the Queen like them ? "

" There ! " Louise shot him a glance. " Your loose conversation perverts the children. How can you be so casual, Edward ? "

" My loose talk ? I like that ! It isn't loose talk at all, it's common sense. Tee'll know what divorce is, he'll probably be divorced half a dozen times himself, when he grows up it'll be the fashion, divorce *d la* Prince of Wales, so to speak."

Louise arose in majesty ; it was unfortunate that a frill of her frock caught against the bamboo table, and held her back just as she was about to make a haughty exit. She stooped to disentangle it, and she knew that Edward was laughing, and Tee, catching the humour from his father, laughed too. She went indoors.

" Now we've upset your mother," said Edward, " so come and help me with this rod," and to Edith, "You too!"

She had young, strong hands, and he noticed their beauty as she gripped the rod. Edward liked pretty hands, he sat up to take notice. Perhaps there was more in the girl than he had thought ? Edith had no idea how he felt, she merely thought that Edward was being kind to her, and basked in her pleasant fool's paradise. She did not suspect him of peccadilloes, knowing nothing of Kitty who had come here on the afternoon of his mamma's funeral, nor of Florence who had spelt disaster to him in a tangerine grove, whilst on service in Egypt. She knew about Rose, of course, but excused it as a pre-marriage interlude, not knowing that Edward did not allow marriage to make any difference, accepting it only as contributing an added spice to an affair.

He debated on Edith that evening after the children had gone to bed, sitting on the terrace and staring at the trees across the lake. He wondered why old William had introduced Edith here, and if it was worth trying to discover what a dean's daughter had in her. In the shadows Willy Baker came up the pine walk with Emmeline, who had further notes on the opening of the bazaar. Willy stayed talking to Edward.

" How's Miss Markham getting on ? "

" She's all right. Quite a nice girl."

" Admirable, I'm sure. The Dean was a charming man, but untouchable ; so is she, I'm sure."

That naturally whetted Edward's whistle ! Untouchable be damned for a tale ! Life at Hathorley was dull, the routine of the country gentleman allowed small by-play, there was little caviare to the strictly cold mutton and trifle routine of living, and Edward found it boring.

" She's a lady," he said.

" Naturally. The Dean was a great gentleman, but very strict."

" Oh," said Edward, " well, sha doesn't look strict."

" Doesn't she ? She ought to be with those boys."

" Ah," said Edward, but he wasn't thinking of the boys.

Upstairs Edith had seen her charges to bed, going to her own room afterwards. Tee had brought some dark red roses for her to wear, laying them on the dressing-table as a surprise, and she pinned them to the *fichu* of her white frock. She went back to thank him and found him lying there with his arms under his head like wings, staring out at the sky flashed through with salmon in the west.

" It was nice of you, Tee."

" I'm glad you liked them. I like you so much better than Miss Pike. I wish she'd die and then you could stay here for always."

" You oughtn't to say such things."

" Why not ? Miss Pike's good, and she'll be sure to go to Heaven."

" Well., let's hope she'll live to a ripe old age."

" She's that now, and she's got whiskers." He laughed cheerfully up at her.

" Now you go to sleep, and don't worry about Miss Pike and her whiskers." She stooped and kissed him.

She went out on to the gallery which ran round past the oriel window to the stairs, sloping gently down into the panelled hall below. As she stepped on to the landing, she saw a girl in a white dress walking quietly

down before her. The girl walked with her dark head bent, but for a moment the light glimmered on the blue earrings in her ears. Her dress made no sound as it brushed the stairs, and she dipped with every step, unhurried, in a leisurely manner as though she had plenty of time. She crossed the hall. Edith looked at her, wondering who she was, and then the unbelievable happened, for the stranger walked straight through the panelled wall below her, so that now there was nobody on the stairs, only the last bright rays of the dying day, and the faint, sickly smell of the sweet chestnuts blown in through the window.

. . . . . .

At dinner Edith brought the conversation round to the ghost. She wasn't frightened. She had always thought that she would be desperately frightened if she ever saw anything supernatural, but she was quite calm. Louise pooh-poohed the whole thing, pretending that it was nonsense, but Edward was only too ready to talk.

" Oh yes," said he, " there's always been a white lady of Hathorley."

" How can you talk such nonsense ? " from Louise.

" Well, why not ? I've never seen her, but the maids do. She is said to foreshadow disaster. A nice friendly little soul to have about the place, I must say."

" Edward, you are talking rubbish."

" I'd like to know what she looks like," said Edith, " in case I see her, which I don't suppose I shall."

" Of course you won't. Nobody sees her, save people like Bennett and the housemaids. Tee is supposed to have seen her, but he spends his whole time looking for her."

" She wears a white dress ? "

" Yes, and blue earrings." He stopped short, having the grace to blush. " It *is* blue earrings, isn't it, Louise? "

" I don't know. I've never been interested." She brought out her lorgnettes to study a letter she had beside her plate. " It's from William, he's coming here to stay, it'll be nice seeing him, won't it ? "

" Pray God he's not bringing Clara ? "

" No, you know that they've split and that disgraceful divorce is coming,"

Edward 4it a cigar. " I'm thanking God I'll never see her again ; she was like a superior cabinet pudding which was proud of itself for having turned out so well. I couldn't stick her," he said.

FIVE

WILLIAM

Louise considered that William should be cold-shouldered. Divorce wasn't respectable, and he should have hidden his matrimonial mistakes behind suitable curtains, instead of letting the world get a peep at them. It was more irritating that Edward would accept it as a joke. Edward wished that he had the courage to do what William was doing, and make a split, but when you had children growing up, it complicated things. Also there was the estate, and the house, and an example to be set, which did make it more difficult, even for Edward.

After dinner on the first night, he and William confided matrimonial scandals to one another, and got on famously, coming up to bed later on warmed by the pleasant feeling that they were damned good fellows, much of which was undoubtedly owing to the old port with which Bennett had kept supplying them.

Edith met William the following morning in the garden. She and the boys were on the far side of the lake before the day got really hot, and here they met old Martin the gardener, who was weeding the flower beds and not hurrying himself unduly. In his hands was a little cedar tree, a well-formed, straight little tree, about three feet high, and he was setting the branches to rights.

" Hello, Marty, what are you doing with that ? " asked Tee.

Old Martin had fancied the tree for his own garden at home, but he respected the sharpness of Tee's eyes, and his quick brain, and he shuffled out of the awkward dilemma by saying that he was going to set it somewhere, but didn't know where as yet. That gave Tee the idea.

" Come on," said Tee to Edith, " we'll get you to plant it. You shall be a Boyce woman, and set a tree."

" But I'm not a Boyce."

" We'll make you one, you're a blood brother ! It'll be our secret . . ."

" But really, Tee. . . ."

Tee was an enthusiastic child, he had hold of the cedar now, and did not mean to give it up. " You dig a big hole, Marty, a fair walloper, come on, it's the fourth cedar."

Nobody ever succeeded in stopping Tee doing what he wanted, and the little tree was set and clumped with earth round it. It stood not far from the quick hedge, where the delphiniums and lupins grew wild, and where, in spring, the daffodils made splotches of pale colour. The tree sat up in the sunlight, a sturdy enough little thing, with its stiff green arms.

" That makes you a Boyce woman," said Tec, threading his arm in Edith's, and taking her along with him, " and being a Boyce woman is fun. Why, here's Uncle William."

William Boyce had arrived by surprise, and was coming across the lawn, walking with a swing, and he suddenly saw Edith standing there with the sunlight around her, the pattern of leaves behind her, and about her a new charm. It was joy ! She had never been so happy before. " Hello, what are you all doing ? " he asked.

" That's our secret," said Tee, " Piers and I are going to the head of the lake to bathe."

" I'll come too."

They walked away leaving old Marty staring after them and then down at the tree. " It means no good," he thought, " it means no good at all, she isn't a Boyce and h'ain't got no right to be a-planting trees, whatever

Mr. Tee say ! " It would have done far better in his own garden, dang it !

The little party went across the field to the head of the lake where Piers had already gone, standing throwing ducks and drakes, irritated that he had not been included in the secret with Tee. An oak spread out across the water, with a yellow-green shade. William and Edith sat down against its great roots, which rose out of the ground and shaped themselves like grey chair arms. The grass was dry-smelling, and earthy with the lack of water, the loose-strife stood in pink steeples, and Hathorley House peered but dimly out of the heat haze at them. Edith was pleased to meet him again.

" Do you know that I've missed you ? " she said.

" I've got to confess that I missed you so much that I had to come here," he said. " I'm glad to know you missed me a little too, Edith." It was the first time that he had called her by her Christian name, and although she reddened at the sound, she knew that she liked it.

The boys were stripped quickly, and slipped down into the water, Tee making a terrific noise, splashing violently off the prone log which they used as a diving board, whilst Piers went in more soberly, striking out in the stereotyped breast stroke, making every movement perfectly with a praiseworthy effort.

" You're happy here ? " William asked.

" I love it. Just as you said, there really is something vitally real about Hathorley itself."

" You like it as much as we all do ? "

" Yes."

" And the boys ? "

" They're dears," she said.

" I'm glad you came here ; seeing you at Hathorley, I find that you belong. Edith, there is so much that I want to talk about, so much that I've got to tell you. I've found out things about ourselves."

" About me ? "

"Yes. It's funny, but when a man marries and settles down, he believes that he'll go on being settled

down for ever, and it's a jolt when he finds that's a fallacy. Nothing is permanent in life, not even those cedars," and he glanced to where they broke the sky line, dark, in a still cirrus.

She felt the pricking of a nerve in her throat, almost as though she were back with Ralph, yet this time the emotion was not as poignant, it was not the same crazy, hot-headed thrill, but it was love. William was out of her reach, she mustn't think of him as she had once thought of Ralph, yet just for a few minutes she knew that they could sit here under the oak, with the boys splashing in the lake beyond, but it must last no longer than that.

" Please ? " she said.

" I've no right to talk to you, or to make love to you, but, Edith, do hear me out ! It sounds dreadfully dishonourable, but I've got to tell you a little about Clara."

She had always wanted to know about Clara.

William began to talk, and the boys' voices receded as they swam to the other side of the lake, standing in the shallow water to peer into the green bulrushes where the moor-hens nested. William told her how, when he was over-ready to fall in love, he had met Clara at that ball. She had glanced at him, bright-eyed and admiring across her pert little pearl fan. There was a crowd of young men round her, and she was protected by an old sheep-dog of a woman, fat, and encased in creaking stays and bombazine. Later he knew that it was her mother, and she singled William out for her daughter. Clara wore cream with pale yellow flowers trailing on the shoulder, and William, whose arts so far had been merely those of a hand on the bridle and the rod, did not understand the tricks to which a woman may stoop. Within half an hour he had lost his heart, believing himself to be passionately in love. He had pursued the acquaintance with a valentine ; he had called on her mamma and had been received with encouragement. Finally the engagement was announced and they were married at a village church, costing him quite a lot of

money to get the bell-ringers intoxicated, and the choir-boys regaled with sweets, whilst the tenors and basses browsed over a barrel.

The Elysian honeymoon had been with the sweetest little woman in the world, who had cried pathetically at leaving her mamma (poor child !), clinging to her new husband and protesting that he mustn't be rough with her. William touched her much as an alarmed house-maid touches a Dresden china shepherdess whom she is forced to dust.

Within a week all this changed, for it was discovered that Mamma had miscalculated badly, and that William would not inherit Hathorley. Although he was well off, and could keep Clara in style, he would never be head of his family. When Clara discovered this, she had hysterics, flinging herself down on the somewhat plain bed in the seaside apartment where they were spending the Elysian honeymoon, and weeping copiously.

The prospect of a small manor house with " eight potty little bedrooms " in the country horrified her, and William, standing beside the bed, watched her, knowing that every reproach she hurled at him was an agony. The feet of clay showed, the heart of gold was cast iron.

There was little he could say, because marriage is irrevocable, or so he thought at that time. For four years their union jangled from one quarrel to the next, and the loss of the child early in the marriage had been the seal on their mutual unhappiness. She made no pretence of loving him, insisting that he was coarse, that he jarred upon her refinements, so that they lived separate lives. It would go on for ever.

In Wales, he had met Edith and had known that it was l6ve, for the grim lethargy fell from him and he became emotionally interested. After Edith had gone, Clara accused him of caring for her ; she had eyes everywhere, that woman, lovely, wondering eyes, and there was a bitter quarrel. After she had gone home to her mother in a temper, he had met an old schoolfriend, known affectionately as Toady Hogg. Toady Hogg had been

through troubles with William in the knickerbocker years; he had made a disastrous marriage with an ambitious barmaid, who had appeared charm personified the other side of the bar, but a good deal less so when he had her permanently on the other side of his hearth ! He also had met the inevitable second charmer in his career, and now, running the gauntlet of public opinion, Toady Hogg was in the middle of litigation for a divorce.

" Wpll, damn it all, old fellow, do you suppose I'm going to spoil my life by staying tied to old Flossie, when I've got forty-five years before me with any luck ? "

" But nobody'll know you after a divorce ? "

"I'd rather they didn't know me ; who cares a damn about that ? No friends and no Flossie is my motto."

" I don't think I'd like that."

" You bet you would if you knew Flossie. It's different for you, you've made a success of your life, and you've married a lady, who is refined. ..."

" Refined . . . ? " began William, and was surprised to hear himself couple it with a word which gave sure proof of the coarseness of which Clara accused him.

They went to the club together ; they talked confidentially, ensconced in two enormous leather chairs, in the heavy odour of fetid sanctity which is clubland fug. The waiter sped to and fro with drinks, and the more they drank the more confidential they became. In the end, Toady Hogg, proving himself to be the true friend, had talked William into the idea that it was wiser to scuttle the ship of marriage and start again, even if old women did turn up their noses at you, and sporty old gents refused you access to their homes, in case desirable daughters should become contaminated. In a few years' time, said the knowledgeable Toady Hogg, everybody would be getting married and divorced, and thinking damn all of it ; which was probably true.

William wrote to Clara. At this moment she was bitterly resentful of her tragic mistake, because she had met a young peer who was attracted. He had a castle in Scotland, another in the Midlands, and she had repeatedly

seen his picture in fashionable papers, and was dazzled by a handsome *young* man with battlemented towers peering through a background of trees. The peer was not averse to divorce, as long as he himself was not involved in any regrettable publicity. Clara wrote back to William urging him to behave like a gentleman, which she understood from her solicitor was the right thing to do. So he launched himself into a divorce ! It took some arranging, as all the blame had to rest on him, because, as his wife put it, after all it *was* his fault, wasn't it ? Though there might be two views to this question, William agreed, for the sake of peace.

" That's the story," he said.

Across the water the boys were still paddling vigorously, and Tee had a long stick to prod the rushes, determined to evacuate some bird he suspected of being there. " I see," she said.

" If you could think of me ..." said William, and then with that pathetic voice which is born of despair, " I know that 1 have no right ; after all, I'm not free yet, but oh, Edith, we could be so terribly happy together."

" I know," she said.

The walls of a prison were not closing in like last time. This might be a long and difficult path to tread, but it led to supreme happiness at the end.

" Would you trust me, dearest ? " whispered William Boyce gallantly, " would you wait for me, put up with me, stand all the dreadful scandal of the divorce, and then marry me ? "

She said " Yes, William," and clutched at his hand. She heard the wind in the oak leaves rustling like a woman's silk frock, she smelt the scent of water flowers borne from the lake side to her, and knew that his arms were around her. She had been waiting for this aJl these years. Being in love with Ralph had been too delirious an emotion ; loving William was an exquisite one.

" Do we tell them ? " she asked.

" Louise and Edward ? No, I don't think so. Not yet, anyway. Louise would get highty-tighty, Edward

would laugh. But you'll stay on here, Edith, for a while, won't you ? "

" You're terribly thoughtful."

The boys came plunging through the water to the shore again, Tee with his teeth chattering. She had to get up and see after him, rubbing him with a towel so that his body was streaked pink, and gave the effect of being striped. He looked up at her and laughed.

" I look like a sugar stick, a raspberry and peppermint one," he said.

" You must run twice round the field to get warm."

" I'll race Piers."

Piers was dressing methodically ; he didn't want to run round the field, and said so. " Dr. Bartrum said we weren't to. He said we ought to rest after bathing."

" But Tee is so cold."

" Well, it was his fault, he would stay in. I'm not cold. I don't see why I should have to run about because he is."

" Off you go," she said.

William watched them. " Piers will be a pest to this place, it's a good thing he isn't the heir."

" Yes, he's too good to be true."

" I doubt if his virtue gets him far," said William slowly.

. . . . . .

Sitting here in the warm loveliness of that Indian summer, and looking back, the old Edith felt again the spring of her feet (grown newly-elastic) ori the lawn ; the limbs that were not tired, the eyes to the sunlight with the scent of hot leaves, and the strange joy in the heart.

That had been life with love ; without love, there was no life. She had within her the power to command William, and, through that, the power to command the world. There was the delicious ecstasy of knowing that she was no longer alone but walked beside him. The joy of the mood was captured under cover of the rhododendrons, in the dusk coming down the park avenue hidden by trees, or in the pine walk in the mid-afternoon, when

the pines smelt of resin, and the sweet chestnut blossom gushed its essence. I love you, I love you, they all said.

William was so slender yet so strong. He was a miracle. He was supple, with his broad shoulders and slim hips, sometimes she felt that she would faint before his strength, yet from it she drew strength herself.

Darling, I love you, when he came across the lake to the place where she was reading to the boys.

Treasure Island, Coral Island, Last of the Mohicans, whatever the book, it became a love story.

Darling, I love you, when they played their games of croquet with the huge wide hoops, and Tee who would cheat.

Darling, I love you.

Always darling ! I'll always love you.

Now she was an old lady slumped into a chair, with her mushroom hat tilted over her eyes, because—fading—they hurt a little with the too bright sunlight, and—rheumy—they could not see very far. A Spitfire made circles against the brilliant blue of the heavens, leaving a trail of smoke like a long feather behind it. But she was not thinking of Spitfires, and the brilliant disastrous summer of 1940 ; she was back in the summer of 1895 again, a girl, dancing across the lawn entirely unconscious of body, with the boys racing beside her. She was in the throes of a wicked love affair which would have greyed her father had he lived to see it ; but she was happy ! Happy for the first time in her life, radiantly, exultingly happy.

So poignant was that joy that it had the power lo warm her veins again, forty-five yelrs on, so that she vibrated and felt some dim echo of that sheer buoyancy of spirit.

Darling, I love you.

. . . . . .

Edward was sitting under the cedar that Rose Davis had planted, his gun across his knees, waiting to take a pot shot at those foul pigeons who came in from the woods, and ate everything. It was a hot afternoon and he drowsed a little. Into the dreams came the women he

had known. Kitty, with her plaid skirt and tight little coat, and the fur of brown bear round her throat. She had been a high stepper, had Kitty, but a spitfire ! That olive-skinned girl he had met at La Linea in carnival week, with her mature, statuesque beauty, and he, treating hor as a woman, had found her but sixteen. They grow up early, those Spanish maidens, if maidens you can call them. Women made life very pleasant, Edward thought, until you were found out, then they made it hell. Perhaps it was girls that made life heaven, and women that made it hell. He liked the little epigram and chuckled.

Nearby, from the other side of the double syringa bushes, planted so closely in the grass, he heard voices.

" Darling, I love you," said the man.

" Darling, I love you," said the woman.

It was the language that Edward Boyce understood. Somebody was having an illicit affair, and this time it wasn't himself. The pigeons could not keep him awake, but this could ! He sat up listening, there was the scent of cedars and syringas and the voices again.

" My sweet, my own sweet ! "

" Oh William, I can't wait too long."

" You shan't, my darling. The divorce is bound to be through fairly soon now."

Good old William ! thought Edward. It made him feel comfortable to find that he wasn't the only black sheep in the family. Louise was for ever telling him that he was fast, and now he had discovered that William was fast too. Well, of course he had been a fool to marry Clara, who was exactly like a second-class apple pie and had about as much emotion ; like the apple pie she tempted you with first-class pastry, and when you cut through it, you found the fruit was rotten. No, thought Edward, Clara must have been a very bad bet, though he did not know that he had done much better with Louise, masterful little woman ! Still, he had had the sense to stow her away at Hathorley with a couple of sons, leaving himself free to do what he wished.

He had thought all along that William was the kind who lies down mildly under an insult, he'd go on being sweet to Clara ; so that it intrigued Edward very much to find this going on under his nose.

They walked further from him ; he fired off a couple of shots and got a rabbit to justify the afternoon. Old Martin, who had been pottering about with the polyanthus roses, nearly got shot himself, and came up hurriedly, saying, " Don't 'ee do that, sirr, 'ee'll catch oi."

Then Edward strolled homewards.

He crossed the little rustic bridge with the summer-house at one end, and saw a woman's handkerchief fluttered to the ground there; he laughed ! He couldn't blame William, he'd used the place himself, and it made a very good background. Then he saw that Edith was coming round the bend with the boys, returned from the walled-in garden where they had been to see if the peaches were ripe yet. They weren't ! Edward could have told them that, for he'd been out before dawn. He stopped to speak to Edith, and now she had a new attraction for him, seeing that she was somebody else's. Such a quiet, shy little thing ! You wouldn't have thought that she'd have done this.

But William ought to be^warned that if Louise got wind of it, there'd be trouble. And William, being the merest babe in love, would take foolish risks. So, after dinner that night, Edward escorted William on to the terrace for coffee.

He said, " I've been thinking things over, William ; Edith seems to fit into this household with great success."

" Glad you feel that way. She's amenable."

" Old Miss Pike was an awful fool ; quite the wrong sort of person to have with the boys, even though Louise swears by her. I'm trying to arrange for Edith to stay on." He eyed William furtively as he said it. William was far too simple a fellow to hide his emotions.

" By George, Edward, that would be good of you."

" Not at all. Why should it be good of me ? "

William explained. He went red, getting a trifle mixed at first but warming to the story. It was the right evening for disclosures, warmly sweet, with a young moon rising behind the cedars. He told Edward how Edith and he had met, and how he had been drawn to her, and how when they contacted again at Great Yarmouth he had discovered that he was in love. Edward gave him a little wise counsel. Edward thought he should keep quiet, let the divorce go through, and then marry her. They could go to Paris. To Edward, Paris was the mecca of those under a cloud ; there, in little squares, and grand *appartements*, one could live comfortably and without any questioning. And, damn it all, when all your neighbours have skeletons to hide, no individual skeleton looms so large. William did not warm to Paris ; he had the routine mind, a comfortable home as lord of the manor was his idea. It was a new role for Edward to be counsellor-in-chief instead of in the dock ; he enlarged upon it, and went to bed supremely content.

. . . . . .

The summer faded. It was a lovely summer, and Edith was happier than she had ever been before. She understood that she was to stay on, there were many odd jobs that she could do to help Louise, and the boys loved her, in particular, Tee. She had become part and parcel of Hathorley.

The divorce had begun, William went back to London to negotiate with solicitors and counsel across the stuffy tables of undusted legal offices where romance was stripped stark, and treated as so much cold meat. Nobody, or at least he hoped nobody save Edward, knew of the coming marriage.

In the November there was a particularly bad fog, which came clamping down on London as only those pea-soupers of the last part of the nineteenth century could do. William happened to be returning from one of the innumerable legal consultations, and lost his way, spending several hours wandering round a square that he

ought to have known perfectly well. He caught a severe cold, which, being neglected, in the way that men living in clubs do neglect colds, sent him to hospital, where he was extremely ill.

Congestion had set in, and for a week the doctors were dubious as to how the case would go ; after which, he embarked on a tedious recovery. During* that week, Edith had been cast into the depths of the most acute dismay, intensified by the fact that she could do nothing. She did not dare confess to the world that she loved him, and that, without him, life would be an empty affair. She adored him with an almost doglike emotion, yet was terrified that Louise should discover it, Louise who was so haughtily pious and would have been so shocked.

Then she found out that Edward knew about it. It was one evening, when Louise had gone off to bed with what she called a headache, but what was in reality bad temper, and Edith and Edward were left to play Bezique.

Edward said suddenly, " You're worried about William. I'm sure ? "

" Yes," she said, " I'm very worried."

He sat back in his chair looking at her ; his lips twitched slightly, as they always did when he was interested. He said, " I know about you two and you've got all my sympathy."

In a quiet little voice she told him, " I've always loved William," and she believed it, though in Wales she had never actually realized how much she cared.

" He's a grand chap, rather too good a chap for me ; William would never do anything that was indiscreet, and I would. That is the difference between us. At the same time I hate to think of you both being in this mess. What are you going to do about it ? "

" When the divorce comes through we mean to get married."

" But the divorce may be delayed. You know that ? "

" Yes, I know that."

" If you ask me, William's going to be a bit of a crock

after this, and he'll need nursing up. He is coming here the moment that he can, after which he will probably have to go abroad. The doctor doesn't fancy the English spring for him." All the time he was eyeing her. "It will be a long parting for you ? "

" Yes, but what else can we do ? "

" Nothing, unless you chuck up everything and go with him. After all, you're going to be married anyway." He put the Bezique things away in the little black box with the glazed lid, and she watched the reflection of his fingers in it. " Don't forget that you can count on me," he added, " you can always count on me."

" You're very good."

" Yes, but my wife and Emmeline Baker would tell you I'm always good to a young woman."

" You're not trying to flirt with me ? "

" God forbid ! " said Edward, and tipped off his whisky. " Anyway, *ypu* are another's."

They walked out of the library into the hall together. Beyond them in the darker inner hall, the comfortably sloping stairs rose against a panelled wall. Set in the centre of the wall was a round, gaily-painted plaque, connected with the weather vane on the turret, which showed the way the wind was blowing outside. They came into the inner hall. Nobody was about. Through the heavy baize doors dim and far away, they could hear the servants' voices, and from high above them the sound of a wind that disturbed the trees and the dark, strong-smelling ivy which grew on the house. Edith had her foot already on the lower stair, when she happened to look up on the landing.

" Oh look ! " she said suddenly, yet not in alarm, because there was nothing alarming about it.

A girl was walking quietly along the gallery above, in the direction of Louise's room. It might have been one of the maids, but both of them knew that it was not, for she wore an old-fashioned white frock, carrying her head high, and again there was the mere suggestion of blue earrings. Both of them saw her as she went into the

door of the sewing room, opening it without a sound. Edith looked at Edward.

He said uncomfortably, " Be ye sure your sins will find you out,'[3] and then started walking upstairs.

" Aren't you—aren't you——" she asked.

" Frightened ? No. We only think we saw her, she wasn't here really. It's all rot to say she brings bad luck."

Yet when Edith got to her own bedroom door, she was overwhelmingly conscious that her heart was hammering, and that her body had gone tense. Did it mean that William was going to die ? She wished she had not seen the ghost flitting along the gallery into the sewing room. She tried to forget. But the more she tried to forget, the more she remembered. It hurt.

. . . . . .

William came from hospital looking very thin. Clara had taken no notice of his illness, expressing no anxiety on his behalf. Louise had protested to Edward that, if William was really going in for " this too dreadful divorce," she did not want him at Hathorley to convalesce.

'" You're going to have him at Hathorley," retorted Edward, " he's been ill and he's got to recuperate, and I don't want any Emmeline Baker nonsense about it."

It was Emmeline who had got hold of the rumour. Emmeline, confining her attention to working parties and mothers' meetings, managed to glean from them a good deal of small talk. If ever there was anything about, Emmeline could be relied upon to tap the line and get it. And she had told Willy that he ought to do something about it ! Willy Baker was the blundering fool who always stepped in where he would have done far better to keep out ; but, being prodded on by his wife, he came to argue. The Revd. Willy came up the pine walk to tell Louise what Emmeline had heard about William, and ask her to assure him that there was no truth in the rumour so that he could conscientiously contradict it. Louise could not tell him that there was no truth in it,

because she knew that it was true, which was infuriating.

" Well, it's no business of yours, or Baker's," said Edward.

" You always were loose in your morals. You don't mind having a thing like that in the family ; well, I've always been a proud woman, and I do. I don't expect to marry into a decent family and then be dragged into the gutter, just because you can't behave yourselves."

" Meaning by ' yourselves ' ' me ', I suppose," said Edward. " I might have known that I'd be blamed for this sooner or later. Well, blame whom you like, say what you will, but you'll keep out of this divorce, and you'll be courteous to William when he comes to stay."

Louise said nothing.

William arrived looking very pale, and Mrs. Prosser kept a fire going day and night in his room, because she had always felt that the proximity of the lake made the house damp. The lake was enfolded in white mist late in the day and early in the evening, and the mist penetrated into the house. William was given a spare room at the head of the stairs, with a south window that looked into the heart of the Scotch fir which spread its boughs before the house, and which had stood there when Roundheads fought Cavaliers, and puritan maids indulged in unpuritanical distractions with Charles' soldiers. The fire leapt and glowed in the grate, and Edith brought in Christmas roses and stood them in bowls before the bed. When she first saw William she thought that she would faint. He was coining up the stairs on Bennett's arm, his big frame attenuated, his breath coming in little short gasps. She found it so much more horrifying that a strong man should be so frail.

" I was having a p'eep at your room," she said, she hoped casually, because she was not blind to Bennett's presence.

" Good to see you," said William, and his eyes had sunk back into his head, though he looked so yearningly at her.

V Now, take it easy, sir," suggested Bennett.

William slipped gratefully into an easy chair before the fire, letting Mrs. Prosser open his bag and find his slippers.

" There," said Edith, " take it slowly. You mustn't exert yourself too much."

She did not see him alone for two days, because she was unable to find an excuse to go to him, save when someone was with her ; then suddenly he came to the door when she was passing by on the landing, and he asked her to post some letters for him. He sat back in his chair, staring at her. He said " Darling, it is so wonderful to be back here. I feel better if only because I can see you. Do I look better ? "

" Yes, I think you do."

" Edith, don't ever let's be parted again. I don't think I could bear it."

She thought of the journey he would take to Cannes, he would have to take that alone, even though Edward had suggested that she should go too. " This time next year we shall be married," she told him.

" I know. It's that awful year between that seems so long." He put out a hand, touching hers. She had always remembered his hands as being strong and firm ; the flesh was loose on them now, and pale.

" Oh William, I hate to think that you should have been so ill," she said, and she let her head drop and began to sob on his shoulder. The strain had been too much. He kissed her again and again with a lingering, endearing touch.

This is Heaven, she thought.

" We'll never be parted again," he promised her with the fool faith of love that cannot see to-morrow.

. . . . . .

William was a whole month at Hathorley, the bleak, cold month of January. The knowledge that parting must come horrified them, yet he could not possibly face the rawness of the English spring. Tee and Piers had gone back to their prep, school, so that Edith had time to spare on her hands. But, as the days slipped by, and the evenings lengthened, and the jasmine spread itself in

yellow stars, mingling with the red roundness of the japonica flowers outside the front door, she felt more and more dubious about letting William go to Cannes alone.

Easter was so far ahead that she was terribly afraid of the interim, and the night before he was due to start his journey she broke down early in the evening and knew that she could not face dinner. She pleaded a bad sick headache, so that Mrs. Prosser ordered her some fish. She had lain down on the bed not because her head was aching, but because her heart was. She was utterly miserable. She put on the *peignoir* that Louise had given her at Christmas. It was heliotrope silk with quantities of cream lace in waterfalls up the front. It had been a gift to Louise, who had a superstition about heliotrope, which she believed to be unlucky to her, and therefore she refused to wear it. It was Edith's one beautiful garment. All her other clothes had been seriously affected by the Deanery outlook, and although she was clever with her needle, she would never make alterations in any ambitious manner.

She sat up in bed reading, and she heard the others come up one by one. Louise early, as she always did. Edward later, rather noisily, for he never troubled how disturbing his footfalls might be. William and he parted at the stairhead. Edith sat on, because tonight she was fully conscious that she was standing at the parting of the ways, and the parting was terrifying. If only she were strong ; if only she knew what she really wanted. If William went alone to Cannes, other, lovelier women would meet him, and how could she hope that he would return to anyone so simple as herself?

She heard a tap at the door ; it was a furtive sound which might almost have been a mouse scratching in the wainscoting, or the wind pulling at the ivy, but she knew instantly that it was William.

She said " Come in."

Half of her wanted to say " Stay where you are, you can't come in," but the other half, the part that wanted to taste its full of love and joy, said " Come in." He

came in, shutting the door behind him, and he stood there looking at her. How different she was in the heliotrope silk, how lovely with her hair ruffled and untidy, and the waterfalls of cream lace running down the bosom of the *peignoir* \

He said, " I'm terribly ashamed to come like this, but I was so anxious about you. I don't want to go away early to-morrow without seeing you first."

" I'm all right, William. I took some powder,* and my headache is much better." But it wasn't her head at all, it was her heart !

" Might I talk for a few moments ? " He moved towards the sofa, opposite the fire.

" Please." She was conscious of the *peignoir* that had been Louise's, it was the first time he had ever seen her like this, and the hair ruffled too. Tidiness had always been Edith's downfall, and it held up the forbidding hand to advances, but tonight she was lovely and dewy-ey^d ; she was exquisitely untidy, and it was inviting.

" You're miserable about my going away ? " he asked.

" Yes. But however you feel you've got to go, because you must get strong again."

" I wish you could have come with me, but obviously there is no way of managing that."

The stark walls of the Deanery enclosed her again. " No, of course there isn't any way."

" Edith, the time will pass quickly. When I come back it will be late spring, and everything will lie before us. The solicitors assure me that the divorce will be through by October."

" That seems a very long time to me."

" I know, but after that we can be married at once. I'm going down to Kent to live. I've been talking it over with Edward, and there's a manor at a village called Headley, where we ought to be very happy. It's not far from the coast, and whilst I am away Edward is seeing about it for me."

" I shall be happy," she said, " so very happy."

" My dear, it is a catastrophe that we can't be married

here and now. Clara only wants to be rid of me to marry that earl of hers ; I want to marry you. It's a crazy world that we can't be through with it,"

" Yes, but that is the law."

" It makes a lot of completely happy people, or people who could be happy, most miserable. I love you so much."

He turned to her and kissed her. Suddenly the hour quickened ; no longer did prudery hold her back, afraid of what life might ask of them ; life sped them along with it, a river at flood racing for the cataclysm beyond. She could hear the sound as of water breaking over a dangerous weir, throbbing, and falling, or was it her heart ? She didn't know. She realized that there was danger ahead, but deliberately turned to it, because it was an exquisite danger, a sweet adventure. She was back in that afternoon with Ralph Walker, when she had found a new meaning in life ; it was no longer crudely cut-to-pattern Deanery life, but an immense vista spreading itself before her.

" William, you oughtn't to be here at all."

" Yet you want me to stay." He shook her a little, " Say it, dearest ; you want me to stay ? "

" I don't know what I want."

" Shall I go ? "

She buried her face in his shoulder. " No, William ; no darling, you can't leave me now."

He said " No, of course I can't leave you."

. . . . . .

Next morning William was driven to the station *en route* for Dover, and Edith stood in a little group on the step with Edward and Louise, waving him away.

* I'm not really sorry that he has gone," said Louise, as they turned back into the house ; " with all this scandal I consider that he is better away, but then naturally nobody pays any attention to what I wish, or say."

She darted a vituperative glance at Edward.

As she walked on ahead across the hall, Edward looked at Edith and laughed. ," Well," said he, "she may

object, but one thing is certain, Louise will never be the heroine of anybody's scandal."

Time dragged immeasurably.

Edith, picking up the common threads of living, found the days too long. Like a nostalgic schoolgirl she had written out the days that stretched between parting and reunion on a scrap of paper, and crossed one off thankfully every night. The snowdrops would come under the trees, there would be the crocuses, but it all took time, too long a time, and she wanted him with her now.

It happened that things were not as dull as she had thought they might be, for Edward started an affair with the bailiff's niece who came to stay. Nora Hague was as pretty and mischievous a little piece of trouble as ever stepped across the lawns at Hathorley. She came to call with her uncle, glanced at Edward, observed that he had a roving eye, and that was the beginning. Edward niched Nora as being what he would have called a likely starter, and he had an excellent habit of segregating the sheep from the goats in women. No sooner had he niched Nora as being a likely starter, than she started. They rode in the park .together. She was one of those simple little souls, frightened to jump, and nobody had had the patience to teach her. That was Edward's golden opportunity ! He said that it was merely a matter of taking it slowly arid sticking to it, and he took it very slowly, and he stuck.

Edward assumed that fatal give-away demeanour of the man who is up to the neck in an affair ; he was gay, he was spontaneous, he had fresh twinkles, new nerve where life was concerned. He took a great deal of trouble in teaching Nora all manner of things beside jumping. Louise assumed the air of a refrigerator, and with about as much animation. She knew of the Nora affair, because Emmeline Baker had dropped hints.

On the night of the Beckenham ball, Edward was got up in pink, and, at the last minute, Louise refused to go because she was sure that he'd be making a fool of himself with Nora.

" All right," said Edward, " it makes it a lot easier for me if you don't come. I'll take Edith."

" You can take one of the housemaids if you like," said Louise, " you never mind how you let the family down."

Edith knew no one at the ball and was feeling ill ; she had never got over William's departure, and she was shocked at the way that Edward was behaving. She had disliked the scene with Louise just before they started ; it had taken place in the hall, with Mrs. Prosser and Bennett thoughtfully shooing the lesser servants out of the way, in case they heard anything to the family's disadvantage, which goodness knows they might have done. Louise maintained her dignity, Edward didn't care. Then he and Edith drove off to the ball.

He said, " Marriage is a mistake, isn't it ? When I think of all the girls I might have married, but then I suppose most of them would have turned into truculent women. You never know, do you ? "

Edith felt moody and depressed. " I think she may be jealous," she said, " and you've got to admit that you give her cause for it."

Edward never lied. He was shamelessly frank. " Oh yes," said he in that jolly manner of his, " I grant you that; but I'd never be jealous of Louise, I don't care who hangs on to her tail, she might at least remember that."

" Is that a treasonable argument ? "

" It's an argument," he maintained.

The ballroom was hot and crowded, and Nora was there, which meant that Edward flung himself heart and soul into the affair. Edith had a motley of partners with gaps between when she sat on a chair, watching the dancers and smiling inanely into space. But all the time she felt ill, and wished that she had never come here. It hurt her feelings to be watching Edward make a fool of himself; he was too nice to be making himself so cheap.

Once she deliberately cut a dance, going off to the ladies' cloak room, pretending that she had torn a frill, and staying there, because her head throbbed so much,

and there was this sick feeling at the pit of her tummy. She hoped that she wasn't going to be ill. Only when one is a dependent, does one realize how catastrophic such a thing can be.

The interminable evening dragged itself away, and, eventually, here she was beside Edward in the carriage. For him, this was his idea of life, and he felt that he had got the better of Louise. Only when the carriage was coming across the park, running smoothly down the little hill to the lake (now frozen), rising up the other hill where, in summer, the broom was a golden streak, only then did he notice her quietness.

" I just don't feel very well," she confessed.

" If you're starting that new-fangled influenza there'll be trouble in the house," but he stopped chattering, and helped her inside, where Mrs. Prosser had stayed up with hot soup. " Miss Markham isn't well," he said. " Time she went to bed. You see after her, Mrs. Prosser."

He went off to his own room, where he hoped Bennett would have had the good sense to put a nightcap, which, in his opinion, was far more sensible than hot soup. Dear old Mrs. Prosser ! She hadn't a mind beyond tepidity ; still, Bennett understood. Bennett had never failed him yet.

Edith went to bed. She wished that Mrs. Prosser would go away, instead of standing trying to help, in her disturbingly rustling frock, with the neatly-scalloped apron over it. Mrs. Prosser brought a hot-water bottle, then discreetly withdrew.

" I hope you'll be better in the morning, miss," she said.

. . . . . .

Edith was better in the morning. She woke feeling perfectly well. Edward had suspected influenza, which was raging through England and spoken of as the dreaded " grippe." It had been at the prep, school, and Tee had it badly. Both boys returned before middle March to convalesce. This suited Tee down to the ground, especially as he now knew Miss Pike would not return.

" You're a dear to like me so much," said Edith.

" I'm like Father. I like girls, and can't stick old women," said the practical Tee.

" You shouldn't say things like that."

" Is it wrong to think them ? "

" Yes, of course it is."

" Well, I can't stop myself thinking them, so I may as well say them." He sighed. You could never get Tee !

William wrote that he was recovering but intended to stay in Cannes until late April, but he seldom wrote to Edith. He was one of those cautious men who do not believe in putting pen to paper, and felt that if he wrote often, the family might suspect something. She kept the few letters he had written to her locked aw'ay, bringing them out to read when she felt unhappy, and she was feeling intensely unhappy this Spring. Depression lay upon her like a dark cloud. Her limbs seemed to be dulled ; she had lost her elasticity of step. She would not have believed that parting with the man she loved could have made such an appalling difference to her, but she seemed to be completely changed.

In late March Edward saw the Revd. Willy coming up the pine walk. For some time he had expected to be tackled for his own mischievous behaviour, and he thought to himself " Ah, here it is ! " Willy had been sent by Emrneline, always a stickler for his doing his duty whether he wished it or not. He had come to Hathorley, and every step of the journey had hurt, so that he was like a pilgrim doing penance with peas in his shoes. He met Edward half way, who was having a pot at the wood pigeons. He said, " Hello, Baker, come to see after our souls ? " in the voice that he thought was so amusing.

" I came on an unpleasant duty," said the Revd. Willy. (This is it, right enough, thought Edward !)

" Well, bring it up," he suggested.

" It's about Miss Markham."

" Edith ? What's the matter with her ? "

" Well, hadn't you thought ? Emmeline noticed it some time ago, and sent me along. No, it is no use being unkind about Emmeline, she's having her sixth."

" Are you suggesting that it's mine ? "

The Revel. Willy turned very red and moist ; he wished that Edward wouldn't say such things even in fun ; he thought that it was such very bad taste. " Of course not. This is about Miss Markham."

" So you said before. What is it ? "

" She fainted at communion the other morning."

" I know." Edward had emphatic ideas on this. " It's getting up and having no breakfast, some people's insides won't stand it. You'd never catch me making such a fool of myself."

Willy Baker looked at him ; he knew quite well that he'd never catch Edward doing it, " I did not come to discuss that," he said. " I still deplore your attitude towards God, it isn't right."

At this moment Edward saw a wood pigeon and let fly ; the explosion of the gun at such close range frightened the Revd. Willy considerably, and, when he recovered, there was Edward with a dead wood pigeon in his hand, shedding slate-blue feathers on to the pine walk.

" Poor thing ! " said Willy.

" Now supposing you tell me in plain English what it is about Edith ? "

" Emmeline says that she's going to have a baby."

" Who ? Emmeline ? "

" No, no," Willy was impatient, and omitted to notice that Edward had (in most remiss fashion) mentioned his wife's Christian name. " Well, Emmeline is, of course, but I don't mean her. I mean Miss Markharn."

" Edith's going to have a baby ? "

" Emmeline thinks so."

" Well, she'd better think again. The next thing will be that I'm the father, I suppose ? "

" Really, Mr. Boyce, you attribute everything of this sort to yourself."

" No, I don't, but others do. I'm only too well aware of my own limitations." Then he went on. " It's nonsense about Edith. Gad, I wonder you've got the impu-

dence to come up my pine walk and suggest such a bare-faced lie ! "

" I only did my duty."

" And a damned interfering duty it is ! Go and teU your wife that if ever she repeats this lying scandal, I'll do to her what I did to the wood pigeon," and Edward waved its somewhat revolting body in the Revd. Willy's face.

" Oh very well," said he, aggrieved. " I'm sure I only did what I thought to be right," and turning he went home.

Edward walked through the shrubberies towards the house, putting two and two together. Although he had flown at the Revd. Willy for being such a fool, now that he came to think about it, he wasn't so sure of himself Naturally he had had little experience with *enceinte* women, but Edith had been queer lately. He could imagine what might have happened, and he could also imagine what might be going to happen. Blast, said Edward to himself, someone has blundered !

Edith and the boys were fishing for tiddlers in the lake, and as he approached he saw that she looked very ill and pinched. He gave the boys a shilling each to slip down to the village shop for some bulls'-eyes, and suggested that he and Edith should walk to meet them. Then he broached the subject.

" Look here, Edith, I want to be a friend to you, and you've got to trust me. Is anything the matter ? "

" Nothing that I know of. I've been feeling rather dull this spring, but I thought my blood was thinning too quickly. I'm anaemic."

" Ah," said Edward, he had heard that one before ! " It wouldn't be a bad idea if you had a proper overhaul by a doctor. Not Bartrum down here, he's too much the little friend of all the world. I'd like you to come to Town and get a proper diagnosis."

" But why ? There's nothing the matter with me."

" If you're anaemic, there is ! We won't tell Louise a thing, you just go to Town shopping."

" I think I just fretted after William."

" Yes," said Edward, " and we'll get you well for his return." He felt most uneasy about this. A sword of Damocles was hanging over her head, and she was too blind to see it* " You've got to let me think for you. You're coming up to see a doctor friend of mine next Tuesday."

" There really isn't any need."

" Nonsense, William left you in my charge."

They went on the Tuesday by different trains, because Edward was afraid of Louise becoming suspicious. He went up early, and Edith followed by the mid-morning train supposedly to do shopping, and buy the print for her summer frocks. They met at the doctor friend's. Edward had known Roy Morris since he was a boy at school, and he knew that he could trust him. Roy received Edith kindly, was closeted with her for half an hour, then came into the waiting-room to interview Edward.

" She's dressing again, and I thought I'd tell you about it. She is, you know."

" Hell ! " said Edward.

" In September."

" Did you tell her ? "

" I did not say anything very plainly, but implied it and left it to soak in. I thought you'd tell her."

" What a true sportsman ! " said Edward.

" Better get your cousin back."

" I shall cable him from the first post office I pass, and he can tell her. Damn that infernal rectory for getting hold of this ; damn the early service which gives all the women away. I always said it was a snare and delusion. What a blasted curse ! "

" Your cousin will many her at once, I suppose ? "

" Damn it all, old man, he can't. He's got a load of trouble that he's married to, a thing called Clara. I doubt if his divorce will be through in time."

" Oh," said Roy, not helpfully.

Edward collected Edith, who seemed to be palely

bewildered, he packed her into the first hansom cab he could find, and then told the man to drive to his club, calling in to cable first. He settled Edith comfortably but she did not seem to want anything.

" I'm terrified," she said.

" Something the matter ? "

" It's something I never thought of. I know it sounds appalling, but he suggested that I might be going to have a baby."

" Do you think you are ? "

" Yes, I do."

He said, " It's the sort of thing that might happen to anybody," meaning in particular to himself.

" But what shall I do ? "

" I've cabled old William already to come back. He'll stick by you, you know."

" I feel as if I personally had let you all down. I—I never thought this could happen."

Edward put out a hand and took hers. It was queer for him to take a woman's hand in any but a flirtatious clasp, but he held hers as a friend. " It isn't going to be as bad as you think. We've got to keep the locals off it—and Louise. William should be back almost at once and then we'll arrange something."

" Supposing the divorce doesn't come through in time ? "

" It will," said Edward, " of course it will."

He saw her off on the late afternoon train, knowing that her heart was like lead, and wishing that he could have done more, but he couldn't. She sat in the train listening to the droning of the wheels, and feeling that she could not go another step.

At the station the carriage and pair met her, and she was almost afraid to look the coachman and groom in the face. Did they know ? Both were married men whose own wives had had all those symptoms that she had been so blind to in herself. She thought of today, and her other arrival at Hathorley, with the boys in the donkey cart which had made the carriage and pair back for

it. **There was** nothing like that today. No joy. Just despair.

As they drove along the road she saw the three cedars etched against the distant sky. Elizabeth. Rose. Louise. Morbidly she recalled the story of Rose. It must be very easy to die, she thought, easy to slip down into the cold depths of the water, to feel the fight in you go gradually numb ; to lie there, finally falling asleep ! The strange man whom she remembered standing by her mother's bed had said that dying was just going to sleep, and waking somewhere where everybody was happy.

The carriage passed through the lodge gates into the park itself.

" Stop," she said to the coachman, " I'd like to walk the rest of the way," and she got out. They were too well trained to show their disapproval.

Edith walked across the grass to the far side of the lake, and she felt that now she had come to the end of everything. If she slipped down into the water between the reeds, there would be a little mild scandal, a nine-days' wonder, and nobody would ever know the truth. She had never thought of the ecstasy of that sweet night as being sin ; joy had been such a rare bedfellow to Edith that when she met it, she could not persuade herself that it was wrong.

She got through the gap in the hedge, with the spinney to the left, and the lake to the right, white in the March twilight. She wondered, would death hurt ? She stooped down, feeling the water with her hand to find that it was terribly cold, and a shiver of apprehension went through her. Had she got the courage ? She had always supposed that cowards committed suicide, now she knew how tremendously brave a step it was to take ! She began to cry. She heard the sound of footsteps dully like drumming coming through the ragged grass and the fir trees. The branches parted, and Tee was by her side.

" Darling, darling," he cried, and put his arms round her.

" Hello, Tee ! "

" Were you going to paddle ? If so, let me come too."

" No, Tee, I was just feeling how cold the water was."

" It's too cold for us. Come along, let's go in and beg some dripping toast for tea. Come on." He had his arm round her and his eagerly excited face pressed towards her own. It was greened by fir branches, and his hair was ruffled. They walked slowly on, and she saw her cedar standing with the first touch of light green on its fronds. It was Spring !

Today, forty years on, it stood as a lone sentinel over what had once been Hathorley. Her cedar, planted by a Boyce woman, and that day so long ago it had been the tree that had given her the courage to live.

• ••••

William Boyce returned, and was met by Edward in the carriage. They bowled out of the station yard side by side.

" Now what is it ? " asked William. " Is Edith ill ? "

" Yes," said Edward. " That wretched man Baker came up to see me with some cock-and-bull story, and that started me thinking. Last week I took her to see a doctor in Town. Mind you, Louise knows none of this, and she isn't going to if I can help it."

" It's nothing serious ? "

" Edith's going to have a baby."

" Good God ! " said William, taken completely off his guard.

" September, which you must admit is running things pretty close. I had to send for you."

" I can't think how it happened."

" The fact that it did should be sufficient."

"Oh God," said William, " how she must have suffered, poor girl ! How can I ever make amends ? "

" She's very depressed about it."

" Well, who wouldn't be ? "

" Of course, and coming of such a pious family, I suppose she thinks she's in danger of Hell fire. Now whatever you do, William, you mustn't let Clara get

wind of this. She's the sort of spiteful beast who would stop the divorce."

" No, of course she mustn't know." He was dumbfounded by the unexpected news.

" You'd better find Edith and comfort her. I've done my best, but I'm not much good at that sort of thing. She's in the grounds somewhere."

William went into the grounds. He saw her walking alone along the path in the walled-in kitchen garden, where she had been gathering daffodils for the table. Turning, she saw him, and he recognized in her that strange lethargy of limb, that subtle change which is so little, yet so much.

" Darling," he called.

She ran to him like a small bird, not caring at this moment who saw them.

" My own darling, this is dreadful for you."

" Oh William, what are we going to do ? "

" I'm here now. I'll never leave you again. It's going to be all right, my dear, I promise you."

And she believed that the storm was weathered. She believed that at last she had come into a haven ; William would manage something for her.

. . . . . .

Memory jumps and plays tricks. Sitting in Hathorley garden as an old woman, dreaming in the quiet beauty of an Indian summer, Edith forgot the agonies of that other summer. The trip to the Cornish village, where the country folk believed she and William were married. A village, dull with a frugal dullness, and every day the birth of the child coming nearer, and the horror that, for some unknown reason, the law courts might withhold the divorce. The feeling gradually bore down on her that the lovely emotion had lost its first lustre, that William wasn't quite the same, that the brightness was dimming in some way that she couldn't actually analyse.

Then telling herself that it was all silly ; of course it wasn't dimming really, it was just that she felt ill. They

were married three weeks before the boy was born, and they christened him Edward.

Married, and with the confinement over, she had thought that life would take on a new joy. They would move into the manor house at Headley that William had bought, their future was assured. They left the nurse and baby in the country, and went for a fortnight to Hathorley. On Edward's advice, nothing was mentioned about the baby outside the family.

" Keep that dark for a bit," said he, " and people will forget. Arithmetic isn't everybody's strong point."

But, from Louise's manner, it was evident that her arithmetic was not at fault. She left them alone as much as she could.

" She likes to behave like that," said Edward, discussing her with William and Edith after she had gone to bed at night. " Louise likes the grand manner, and making out that I am utterly *bourgeois. I* never know how it was we married, save that my mamma was so anxious for it. When I was a boy, you always did what your mamma wished, and a nice mess you made of your life in consequence ! "

He poured himself out a copious whisky and soda.

" Oh, I don't know about that," said William.

" No, you wouldn't, but I do. You two are lucky. No mammas to tell you what's what. You stand a fair chance."

" Why *did* you marry ? " asked Edith hesitantly. She had always wanted to know the answer to that one.

" She wore a little tippet," the corners of Edward's mouth twitched, " she had plenty of money, and my mamma kept holding her out like a piece of toast 011 a toasting-fork. That was how it happened." He had had a great respect for his mamma, and had not found it difficult to fall in love. " But we change as all things change here, nothing in this world can last," he ended brightly. " You two stick to love, it's devilishly important ! "

" We've got over the first nasty hurdle, and now we can make a clear start," said William.

In her bedroom Louise was consulting Mrs. Prosser about to-morrow's menus ; menus were always brought to her in the evening, when it was obviously too late to make any alterations, for the food had already been ordered. This had never occurred to Louise, who had never altered a dish in her life, and never would. She had very little brain, as Mrs. Prosser knew. Mrs. Prosser explained that to-morrow night Mr. and Mrs. Baker would be dining here.

" I never asked them," said Louise, dismayed.

" No, ma'am, Colonel Boyce told me."

" But," said Louise, jolted out of her usual reserve, " they don't know that Mr. William and his wife are here."

" No, ma'arn," said Mrs. Prosser, looking down her nose. She knew all about the scandal of course, and had been, figuratively speaking, in on the early doors with it, suspecting the worst from Edith's first bilious attack. Mrs. Prosser disapproved. Not but what now they were married, she supposed it was all right, and the child not really a love child at all, but if they'd been poor folks it would have worked out very different, she told herself.

Louise told Mrs. Prosser that the Bakers would not be dining here to-morrow night, and she laid in wait for Edward when he passed her door to his room two hours later. Edward was in a comfortable mood, not actually drunk but amiable with it. He knew that when he saw Louise's door open, this was an omen, unless it was the ghost ! But it wasn't the ghost, it was Louise !

" I want a word with you," said she, and beckoned him into the holy of holies. Edward came inside. He knew of course that it wasn't going to be a pleasant conversation and rushed his fences.

" Now what's the matter ? " said Edward.

" I understand you've asked the Bakers to dine here to-morrow night ? "

" Certainly I have."

" You realize that with the divorce they won't want to

meet William and Edith ? It's against the rules of the Church."

" Well, they shouldn't make such damned silly rules. After all, boys will be boys." He was in that mood, and it made Louise compress her lips.

" It would be most uncomfortable, and I'm sending them a note explaining the mistake and excusing them,"

" You'll do nothing of the sort," said Edward. " I'll be master in my own house for a change, and the Bakers will dine here to-morrow night."

" Then as I shall not be present, perhaps you'll arrange the matter with Mrs. Prosser."

" I shall do nothing of the sort, that's your business, and you'll do it ! " said he, and he marched off.

The following evening Louise, having had to climb down to Mrs. Prosser and being very angry about it, went to bed with a sick headache, which everybody could see through ! Edward felt most uncomfortable, because he knew that in the main she was right, and wasn't going to admit it. He took William into his confidence, and William was all for cancelling the dinner, whereas Edward was all for facing it out.

" We've got to make a success of this evening," said he, " just to show Louise that she doesn't know what she's talking about." And he meant it.

When the Bakers arrived, the Revd. Willy was alone. Emmeline had thought of the sick headache too.

" They must be infectious," said Edward gaily, which was a mistake, because it made the Revd. Willy all the more uncomfortable.

The dinner passed off in a series of pauses which Edith found very difficult. She had now arrived at the pitch when she really had got a headache, but felt that she couldn't be the third woman to plead it. William was gauche and awkward ; he had none of Edward's manner of turning a difficult situation into a joke, Edward was quite at ease, though furious at heart.

" We'll have coffee in the library," he said, " you wait for us there, Edith."

She waited a very long time. Bennett changed the coffee pot twice, and eventually the door opened, and Edward came in followed by William, who looked like a schoolboy who had done something wrong.

" Where's Mr. Baker ? " asked Edith.

" He's gone home." Now she knew that Edward was really very angry. " If you ask me it's a damned good job. All this blasted bobbery about the divorce, well, he got the length of my tongue."

" I thought you said too much," said William mistakenly.

" What ? In your defence ? My God ! You sat there like a stuck pig, going red, and did nothing, I wasn't going to let old Willy Baker get away with that tale. Now he knows what I think, and if he's got any pride he'll resign the living."

" Emmeline will never let him do that."

Edith poured out the coffee, not knowing what to do. " I've brought such dreadful trouble to Hathorley," she said. " It makes me so bitterly ashamed. I suppose he thinks I'm a bad lot ? "

" I don't care what he thinks. I know what I think of him," said Edward.

" I'm not really bad," she said tragically.

Edward sat up. He said, " Now you two take it from me, you're up against something. You've got to face the trouble and the only thing to do is to get on to the old hind legs and let people know what you think of them. You've chosen, and you've got to abide by your choice, not go guilty about it."

She felt little and helpless. " I do feel guilty," she said.

" We're in the wrong, of course," admitted William.

" In the wrong ! What rubbish ! Go about and if people are rude break their ruddy necks ! Damn it, this coffee's cold, what does Bennett mean by serving it like this ? " He went across to the library fireplace and clashed the bell.

six

MARRIAGE

By Christmas, the furniture was set in the Manor House at Headley, gardeners were working in the garden, and Edith and William—with little Edward reposing in his high pram with its four ridiculous wheels—had moved in.

" Well, here we are," said William, at their first breakfast.

" We seem now to be out of the wood." Edith congratulated herself that this was the clean sheet ! They ought to be all right.

They were still in love, though perhaps the first glamour had gone ; the time in Cornwall had been trying to live through ; their emotion had been too fraught with anxiety, but their companionship was still pleasant. The house was comfortable and capacious. Woods was an excellent butler, Mrs. Fortescue an able cook. Here in the Manor House was peace and quiet in which a man and his wife might forget previous difficulties.

" People will start calling," said Edith, " I feel quite flustered about that, so afraid they won't like me."

" They'll love you," said William.

She told herself that it was nonsense, for there was nothing to be afraid of any more. None of these people knew anything about their trouble, they had come here as two young married folks with their first baby. That was all !

As she went for a walk with the nurse and the pram, she looked apprehensively at the people whom she saw walk* ing in the village street. The country folk were on their several businesses ; farm men pulled forelocks, large-hipped cottage women curtseyed. She learnt a little of the people who lived in the big houses, Mr. Maidstone the vicar, a bluntly honest creature who lived up to his faith, and Mrs. Maidstone, a woman like a snake, who was always having babies, all girls. Then there was Dr.

Robinson, a man who looked like Father Christmas and drove about in a victoria ; they had him to little Edward one day. Edith decided that he was a nice old gentleman, probably because she had complete faith in old doctors who looked like Father Christmases. She understood that his wife was the Honble. Mrs. Robinson, who would undoubtedly be calling soon.

Then, in the post office, she met Mrs. Robinson. Edith was buying stamps, space was congested, and the postmistress a dear, but one who knew nothing of her job and got easily flustered. There was a large raw-boned woman ahead of Edith, who bought a postal order, which, in transit, fluttered to the ground ; stooping Edith picked it up, and handed it back to her.

" Oh, thank you," said the raw-boned woman, then, looking closer at Edith, she turned red and said " Thanks," in a curt voice, the inference of which could not be mistaken.

Edith was hurt and did not understand it. She hung back for a moment by the little ledge where telegrams were written out, and notices about gun licences and such things hung. The woman was uncomfortable, and she bustled out of the post office, purposely avoiding looking at Edith again.

Edith did not tell William about it ; he had a bad throat, and the doctor had to be called in ten days before Christmas. When Edith saw Dr. Robinson to the door, she said timorously, " I think I saw your wife in the post office the other day ? "

" I expect you did," said the doctor, " she's often there."

" She seemed very nice," said Edith helplessly, though it was the last thing that Mrs. Robinson had seemed to be. " She'll probably be calling on me soon ? " she suggested, The doctor said probably, and took his hat, and went. All the time there was an atmosphere, something that Edith could not analyse.

The matter came to a head a few days before Christinas. William had contributed handsomely towards the child-

ren's tea, and the party for old people in the parish. He and Edith occupied a front pew at church, which a verger had shown them into the first time. Then, three days before Christmas, Mr. Maidstone sent William a letter.

William came into the dining-room where his wife was sitting with her tatting ; it was a Christmassy evening, with a general air of festivity about the place, although the evergreens were not yet above the pictures. The log fire was piled. William helped himself from the decanter set alongside his chair and stood there, his brows knit.

" What's the matter ? " she asked.

" I've had a letter from Mr. Maidstone."

" What does he say ? "

No good beating about the bush, thought William, this thing would have to be admitted. " He explained that he did not want us to go to Communion on Christmas day."

" Not go to Communion ? " She could feel a pulse pricking in her throat. " What can he mean ? What do you think he means ? "

" I suppose he has some confused idea of duty ; somehow or other he has found out about the divorce, and says that he cannot countenance it. In his eyes we are unmarried, and " (bitterly) " I suppose the boy's illegitimate."

The colour slowly ebbed from her face ; she sat staring dully at him ; she wanted to say something, but the words slid away from her like a tide past a drowning person.

" I'll make the damned fellow eat his words."

" No, William, don't do anything so foolish. He is only acting according to his own lights ; we've got to be fair."

" But it's libel ! I shan't stand for it, and I shall communicate with his bishop."

" No, William, please, please don't. I couldn't bear a scandal." She began to cry. She sat there with her cheeks shiny, and her eyes wet, whilst William stormed. He would raise Cain, he would go and see the Bishop in

the morning and get this damnfool letter explained. She tried to stop him.

" Darling, if you make too much of a fuss, how can we go on living here ? I couldn't bear every man's hand to be against us."

" You don't suggest that I sit down under it ? "

" If the man thinks it is right, what else can he do ? "

" But it isn't right ; it's wrong, and it's unchristian. I'm not going to allow him to do it."

Her mind, going rapidly in circles, warned her that this might have been the reason why Mrs. Robinson had looked so queer. " Of course you know best, William dear, and I won't try to stop you, but I do implore you to think it over seriously." The old fear was enclosing her. It seemed that whatever she did in life she could not escape fear. It set a wall round her like the one round the Deanery garden ; there was no escape.

. . . . . .

William acted according to his own lights. Ignoring Mr. Maidstone's letter, he went over his head, and next morning he drove over to see the Bishop. Providentially the Bishop lived but seven miles away. He was most loath to see William, whom he suspected of evil intentions. Usually when unknown people came to visit the Bishop out of the blue, they boded ill. He was a mild old gentleman who detested a row, and ambushed himself behind the argument that charity was Christian and uncharitableness pagan, but, for all his good intentions, people had at him. He was not mistaken in the conjecture that William would be a disturber of his peace.

The Bishop sat there fingering his large cross, looking reproachfully at William, who had placed Mr. Maidstone's letter before him. The Bishop realized that it was a most regrettable letter, though obviously provoked by the scruples of an over-religious man, but privately he knew that it ought never to have been written. Some months ago, when William Boyce had originally bought the manor, the Bishop had had a few words with Maidstone, meeting at a cereiponial where church bells were being

dedicated, with tea afterwards on a rectorial lawn. Then Mr. Maidstone had confided the depth of his feelings on the subject of divorce, and the Bishop had urged discretion. Even then, he had realized that Mr. Maidstone would probably do something to make it difficult for everyone ! The man had no tact.

" You have the power to insist that he withdraws this letter," said William, in a temper in every way worthy of Edward Boyce.

" Unfortunately, my dear sir, I have no such power. I cannot force him to give Communion to those whom he considers to be unsuitable."

This unfortunate remark only agitated William more. He said, " I don't intend to let it rest here. I will not have my wife upset, and my child's name smirched."

" Perhaps," said the Bishop with dignity, " you should have thought of the possibility of all this before you married." He himself was a tactless man, arid always in trouble owing to a foolish tongue.

" I shall take it to the press," William was warming to his campaign. " It's high time somebody fought this out."

The press would be a most regrettable step ! Only a month ago a candid weekly had got hold of a most unsavoury case in the diocese, and, taking the Bishop's good name, had trampled it in the mud. The Bishop had been galled, had consulted his solicitor and had found that the paper had taken the precaution of making the case watertight, and had made no slip in the choice of words. There was no redress save to write the editor the pained letter of an injured party, expressing the pious wish that God would forgive him. And after the letter was posted, the Bishop had been convinced that the editor was one of those godless old men who really did not care if he were forgiven or not ! The last thing the Bishop wanted was for the same paper to get hold of his name again.

He said, " Surely, my dear sir, we could compromise ? Now, do you know Mr. Reckitts ? "

" Never heard of him," said William, tersely.

Mr. Reckitts was a jolly little parson in the adjacent parish whose boundary ran conveniently along William's garden. The Bishop knew that he could rely on Reckitts, who had a big heart, and would not quibble over the points that appeared to hurt Maidstone's susceptibilities. Reckitts would accept any black sheep, and talk about prodigal sons, and the ninety-and-ninth-sheep-that-gave-so-much-joy. His elastic conscience was an inspiration to the Bishop, attached as it was to a positive monument of tact. Here was daylight. " You're in Reckitts' parish almost ? " said the Bishop.

" Almost, but not quite. I wish to attend my own parish church."

" Yes, but Newton is so close ? "

" I'm not going to Newton, nor letting this slur on my wife and myself pass."

" Naturally I realize that you're upset," said the Bishop, fingering his cross, " but do let me try to smooth matters out, and arrange things so that nobody else is hurt."

The Bishop, having talked for an hour, went when William left to a lunch for which he had very little appetite. That afternoon he drove over to see Mr. Reckitts. Reckitts was amenable, and said that he would go round 10 the Boyces' at once (what he called " pouring oil on troubled waters "), and was only sorry that he had no wife he could take along too. A woman's presence at such a time would have been helpful.

Leaving Mr. Reckitts to do his best, the Bishop went along to Headley and asked for Mr. Maidstone.

The Maidstone *manage* was flustered, because the fifth was about to arrive. The four others, all very juvenile, were crying noisily as they missed their mother. Their mother was being ministered to by a trained nurse who had appeared, and the father, torn between anxiety for his wife, and irritation over the crying children, was trying to arrange his Christmas sermon, on the singularly appropriate if premature text " Unto Us a Son is Born.'*

He really did hope that it would be a son this time; four girls shrieking in the nursery and another one in his bedroom would be too much. In the midst of it all, a flummoxed maid put her head round the door.

" It's the Bishop," she said.

This was the last straw ! Mr. Maidstone interviewed the Bishop in the chill of his study. The stipend was poor, and four children take some keeping, so he economized on firing. When there was a hard frost, they lit a paraffin stove which smelt the study out, but, for the moment, there was no frost, just that mixed blessing, the green Christmas ; the study was chilly with a dampness that struck to the marrow.

The Bishop sat himself beside a home made *prie-Dieu* and explained the case. He was disappointed with Maidstone's handling of the situation, which he thought had been clumsy, and, at this time of year, when goodwill was the password, such poor churchmanship ! He wanted Mr. Maidstone to go to the manor to-night and wish the Boyces every happiness.

" I can do that with a clear conscience," said Mr. Maidstone, pale, composed, and extremely obstinate. " But I will not receive them to Communion."

The Bishop argued. He talked for an hour, during which time Mrs. Maidstone was safely delivered of a fifth daughter in the bedroom above, and Mr. Maidstone budged not one iota from his letter to William Boyce. He stood there prating adultery, and when the Bishop left, he felt that it served Maidstone very well right that he had yet another daughter. It was all very fine being so meticulous over dogma, but it was stirring up a lot of trouble. William Boyce had influence, because several of the gifts of Kentish livings were in the hands of his cousin Edward, and, if there were further difficulties, undoubtedly Edward would become objectionable. As the Bishop knew from personal experience, Edward was never objectionable by half measures. The horror that that dreadful paper might still come into the argu-

ment was still with him. He only hoped that Reckitts would pour oil on the troubled waters.

Mr. Reckitts arrived at the Manor between tea and dinner. The house was in the process of being decorated for Christmas, with Woods and a step ladder in close collaboration, and holly being threaded through the wrought ironwork of banister and lamp standards. Mr. Reckitts was shown into the drawing-room, where Edith was sitting with the baby in her lap ; he had been brought down to spend ten minutes with his parents before going to bed. Edith would have refused to meet Mr. Reckitts had she known that he was here, but he was shown in, and she looked across the baby's downy head at him and had the horrifying feeling that she was a spinster clasping an illegitimate child.

" What a fine little baby ! " said Mr. Reckitts coming across the room, and he took the child into his arms. Just recently, for some reason known only to himself, young Edward had shown a distaste for strangers, but not so with Mr. Reckitts. He blew a couple of rather messy bubbles, and grinned. " That's it," said Mr. Reckitts.

William rose majestically. " Do I understand that you have come from the Bishop ? "

" Not exactly from the Bishop. Do you mind if I sit down ? No, let me keep the baby, I like children, I've got all the bachelor's love of them," and he sat down with the boy on his knee. " I came because I wanted to meet you. You're almost in my parish, you know."

" But not quite." William was so deeply hurt that he spoke sharply. " I know what you've come to discuss, and you can imagine how we feel."

" Yes, of course. Maidstone always blunders and it is very difficult for anyone else to put it right. You think I've come here to help the Bishop ? I've come because I'm very sorry that such a thing should have happened. The Church'II have to come into line with modern feeling, there's no doubt about it. The present situation is entirely the fault of the times we live in."

The baby blew more bubbles, and chortled. Desolately Edith said, " You can't imagine how I feel."

" I should feel like it myself. It's terrible, and I only wish that I could help you more. My church door is open to you, of course, because I would not think it right to close it on anybody. That, surely, is Christianity ? Only, I can imagine that you don't want to come to my church at all, and I'm very sorry."

He emitted a warm friendliness which made them, in turn, feel sorry for him. " It isn't that we don't want to come," said William; " it is that we both feel deeply humiliated by Maidstone's attitude."

" Naturally."

" You see," said Edith, " nobody has called. Not a soul ! Not even the doctor's wife, and he came to attend the baby."

Mr. Reckitts had heard about this from another source, because the Honble. Mrs. Robinson had been most definite in her opinions. He said, " Do keep a brave heart. I can only extend you my most sincere friendship. It's worth very little, I'm afraid. I can offer you my ritual and ministrations. You will be very welcome to accept any of these things, but I appreciate that you may not want to accept them."

" Ought we," asked William, " to go away to another neighbourhood ? "

" I'm afraid the same trouble might start there. The courageous thing to do is to fight it here. In time, personality and courage are bound to win through, but it will take time. Meanwhile you lay yourselves open to an ostracism that is very difficult to bear, and more particularly for a woman."

"It is the child," said Edith.

" People may have become more sensible by the time he is old enough to realize it. It is the present moment that is going to be the most difficult ; the next year or so, I'm afraid."

The door opened and the nurse came in for the baby, taking him from Mr. Reckitts. William asked the parson

to stay to dinner, but he couldn't, because he had to get back for carol practice ; he had only come now because it was his duty ; and again on the doorstep he expressed the wish that lie would see them at Communion on Christmas morning.

When he had gone, Edith looked at William. " Of course he was terribly kind," she said.

" He's what I call a real man ! Very different from that sanctimonious prig, Maidstone."

On the Christmas morning, the two of them communicated at Mr. Reckitts's church.

SEVEN

PROGRESS

The Boyces attended Newton church every Sunday morning, and a pew was set apart for them well to the fore, and another, well to the back, for five maids in black bonnets, marshalled by Woods, clasping a litle pot hat in his hand. In this manner they went to and from the church.

But nobody called at the Manor. Every afternoon Edith would look apprehensively towards the door, hoping for the first sign of the turn in the tide, the first trio of pasteboards on the silver tray, set in the hall ready for them ; but nothing happened. By March, she knew that she was pregnant again.

She was not well, and Dr. Robinson was constantly at the house. William had nursed a grudge against the doctor, and one day he button-holed him, taking him into the morning room, where William faced him.

" Why hasn't your wife called on mine ? " he asked, coming straight to the point.

The doctor rubbed his glasses and mumbled something in his beard. " My wife doesn't call very much ; she has so many friends, she can't call on everybody."

" In a village it is usual to call on the Manor. Is the divorce the objection ? "

" Divorce is extraordinary," said the doctor, drawing himself up.

" Understand," said William, becoming angry, " that I am a paying patient, and. that I am not prepared to employ a doctor whose wife refuses to know me."

Unaccustomed to a pistol being held at his head, Dr. Robinson announced that it would be so unorthodox for William to change his medical adviser that he doubted if anybody else would attend him. William was now furious. He opened the door.

He said, " That is my ultimatum, Dr. Robinson. Either you know us socially, or we do not employ you professionally. I leave the choice to you. Good afternoon."

The next day Dr. Robinson did not come to see Edith, who had now developed a temperature. William did not want to run the risk of sending for him and meeting with refusal, so he drove into the adjacent town, and called on a certain Dr. Forster there ; he point-blank refused to accept somebody else's patient. Returning, William felt like a man trapped. He met Mr. Reckitts going round the parish on his bicycle, and because the little man had proved to be such a sheet anchor before, he stopped him and told him the story. It was only what Mr. Reckitts had anticipated, but he promised that he would go and see Dr. Robinson, and did. Late in the afternoon the doctor's carriage drove up to the gate, and he saw Edith.

Mr. Reckitts had done his work so well that, a week later, at a convenient moment when they were out, Mrs. Robinson dropped three slips of pasteboard through the letter-box, and disappeared again. William felt that those three slips of pasteboard were a triumph ! Edith was nervous. She twiddled them for eight days, knowing quite well that, before the tenth, she must make a courteous return. On the ninth day, looking out of the window, she saw Mrs. Robinson drive past in the dogcart,

and thought that this would provide the admirable opportunity for returning the call, with no danger of meeting the doctor's wife in person. She hurriedly went upstairs, got out her best hat, and mantle, and white gloves, and, armed with the mother-of-pearl cardcase, bustled off. She did not slip cards through the letter-box as Mrs. Robinson had done, but rang the bell, asking if the lady were at home, confident that she was not. She was dismayed to find that Mrs. Robinson had returned, and the maid, an untrained village girl, was prepared to show her in !

Mrs. Robinson was equally dismayed, for she had instructed the servants to say that she was out if Mrs. Boyce called, therefore it was all the more horrifying to find that Mrs. Boyce was being shown into the dining-roorn, which to start with was an immense disadvantage, for the fire ought to have been lit in the drawing-room. So flustered was she that she said, " Oh, so it's you ! "

Edith, equally horrified because she had been quite sure that Mrs. Robinson was out, said, " I ought to have called before."

" Not at all," said Mrs. Robinson, and then stiffly. " Do please sit down." She was recovering, and she skimmed the first hurdle nobly with, " We are huddled into tliis room because the drawing-room chimney is being swept."

This Edith knew to be untrue, as the only chimney sweep in the neighbourhood had been at the Manor all day, but she accepted it stoically. She macle a fatuous remark about the weather ; Mrs. Robinson replied with one about the similar weather last year, which closed that subject. Edith remarked on the quietness of the neighbourhood ; Mrs. Robinson replied that she found it delightful because of course she knew everybody, inferring that Mrs. Boyce didn't, which finished another subject disastrously for Edith. The whole visit became a nightmare, and when she walked out into the weak Spring sunshine, she felt that it was a definite concrete pain.

She was being terribly punished for a life that seemed

always to cheat her. She did not know what to do about it.

Nobody else called and Mrs. Robinson made no further move in their direction. Under this friction William became irritable, quicker to take offence, ready to look for slights, and accepting them as being there even if they were not meant.

They spent a fortnight of that forlorn summer at Hatliorley. One evening, on the terrace with their coffee, Edward said, " Why don't you go and fight one of them, William ? I'd at least have the satisfaction of smashing somebody's face in."

" But I've got to live in the place. I bought the damned Manor."

" You could always sell it ? "

" Yes, only to start again somewhere else with the same old trouble. I might have guessed that it was hopeless when Willy-Baker started his insults."

" Oh, I've gagged him," said Edward carelessly. " Docked all his subscription lists, and that soon brought him into line. I wasn't going to have him talking."

But Edward could do these things ; he could bluster through amazing situations. He was having a flirtation with a girl across the fields, and he talked about it airily even before Louise, who sat austere and composed.

" I shall never be a good boy," said Edward, " but then who wants a good boy ? Whilst there is a Hatliorley there'll always be a bad lad living here."

" Are you suggesting that Tee is like you ? " askecl William.

" Well, he is, isn't he ? Piers is a different story, but he'll never get very far because of it. It's the bad boys who made England.

It was horribly true.

. . . . . .

Arnold was born next Christmas, entirely Boyce, with Edward's happy-go-luckiness. He attracted his mother more than little Edward had ever done. From the first she liked the twinkles in his kitten-blue eyes, the way he

flung out his fists, and the first crooked smile that he gave her.

Two years went by. The century was dying. The Boer war had come and the Queen was getting very old. But the doors of human hearts were locked fast against the Boyces, it was a barrier they could not pass, and in some measure it reacted on their affection one for the other.

" Oh William, nothing is the same," she said once. " Who would have believed that things could change so?"

" It isn't really a change. All married people have to settle down to the mundane."

She had wanted to be in love with him for ever, to thrill at the sight of him, at the touch of his hand, at the sound of his voice. She had wanted to stay close, with the precious intimacy of new-born love, and could not bear that the first joy should dim. " Oh William, if only we could have kept the lamp warm ! "

" It is warm, my darling ; everybody outstrips the first ecstasy ; we couldn't hope to have kept that."

" But why not ? "

" Because it burns out ; it changes."

And, although she rebelled against it, she knew that it was true.

Both she and Louise became pregnant again in 1899. Both longed for daughters. On the third of January in the new twentieth century, Louise gave birth to little Margaret, and Edward thrilled. Nobody had evet-thought that he would have another baby, but in truth Edward had fits of repentance that sent him back to Louise. The repentant mood never lasted very long, and nobody had been more surprised than himself to find that a child was to be born of one of those passing moments. But little Mee was born early in January, and a fortnight later Edith gave birth to a daughter at Hcadley.

We are calling her Margaret too, because she looks like a daisy,

wrote William, becoming romantic over his girl-child.

Both men warmed to the children, and the moment that Edith was well enough, William took them all to Hathorley for a double christening in the little church. However, there was Willy Baker to be reckoned with !

Emmeline protested to her husband. " That child of William Boyce's," said she, " is really illegitimate, because her parents aren't properly married. I'm very surprised that you should want to baptize it."

" How can I refuse baptism ? It is one of the sacraments necessary to salvation," he reminded her.

" Marriage is the rule of good society," she said, looking down her nose, " and you ought to explain to Edward."

Willy Baker had had enough of explaining things to Edward since that afternoon in the pine walk, and he said so ; he'd far rather baptize the child, and have done with it, even though it might jeopardize his immortal soul. Emmeline tried to organize a first class row, but Willy was most reluctant to launch himself into proceedings, which he always found distressing. It was unfortunate that Emmeline should meet Edith and her children in the pine walk the Saturday before the baptism. The little boys were helping their mother with the pram, for the nurse was ill. Edith was laughing at Arnold, and did not see Ernmeline approaching; it irritated Emmeline to see the " scarlet woman " so happy with three children who, she kept telling herself, " ought never to have been."

" Oh, good morning," said Edith when at last she saw Emmeline, " a Happy New Year, and a happy new century too."

Emmeline wouldn't say " And the same to you." She said " Is that the new baby ? "

" Yes, she's to be christened tomorrow."

" So I understand," and she said it nastily.

" Do you object ? " asked Edith, who was nettled by the tone.

" It's no business of mine, but seeing how things are . . ."

" Why do you say ' how things are ' ? I'm married to William ; that's the law of the land."

" There is always the eye of God," remarked Emmeline. " I'm just surprised, that's all ! Such a shocking example, and those three poor little children,"

At this moment, Arnold, who had been scraping up the remnants of some snow out of the long grass, made it into a clumsy ball, and flung it playfully at Emmeline Baker with surprisingly accurate aim. His mother wanted to laugh. Dear Arnie ! He was the clever one. Emmeline was annoyed, and wiping the snow from her face said " You see ? " though what she was supposed to see, Edith didn't know.

" I'm sorry you bear such malice," said Edith, and she pushed the pram and went away.

Arnie said " Don't cwy, Mummy ! Bwave mummies don't cwy."

" I'm not a very brave mummy, Arnie."

" When I gwow up I'll fight for you, Mummy."

" And Edward too ? "

Edward (the milder of the two) said, " I don't like fighting ; peoples get hurt fighting, and I get hurt," which seemed to be a logical reason for keeping out of it !

Suddenly Edward Boyce came round the corner, marching along with a shooting stick, and whistling *Dolly Gray* to himself. He said " Hello, what's the matter here ? What's made you cry ? "

Arnie, true Boyce, told him : Tee and Edward himself would never die whilst Arnie lived !

" What did she say ? " asked Edward, and he got it out of Edith, then off he went ; his tune changed to *Soldiers of the Queen,* striding through the fairy dell, and up the other side again. He was almost at the gate when he sighted Emmeline, who was going slowly, having little idea of the awful nemesis behind her. He had her by the arm.

" Mrs. Baker," said Edward, " have you ever heard of the law of defamation of character ? "

" Let go my arm, Mr. Boyce, you have no right to accost me," said Emmeline, trying to shake him off.

" I'm hardly likely to do that," said Edward with brutal candour. " You, I understand, suggest that Edith's baby is illegitimate ? "

" In the eyes of God, she isn't married."

" That's a slander. In the eyes of the law she is."

" I have a right to my own opinion," said Emmeline, drawing herself up righteously but going rather red in the face.

Edward tightened his grip on her arm. He said, " Now I give, you your choice. Either you come back with me, and apologize, or I go to the Bench and take out an order against you. Being a magistrate, I know exactly what I can do."

Emmeline did not know what he could do, but she knew that Willy had implored her to be tactful. She tried standing her ground. " You know perfectly well that I was within my rights."

" Very well, we'll prove it before the magistrates."

She let him go on for half a dozen yards, then she called him back. " Stop ! " called Emmeline. She loathed him for this, and would willingly have murdered him. " I'm sorry if you have misunderstood what I said."

" I misunderstood nothing, I know what you said, and it's no good appealing to me. You can come back and tell Edith that you're sorry."

" I have a perfect right to my personal opinion."

" All right then, abide by it." He started walking again, but her face puckered. It was just damned funny !

She said, " You wouldn't publicize it ? "

" By God I would ! " said Edward.

Then she gave in utterly and completely. She snivelled into a handkerchief, and he had to escort her the length of the pine walk. Never had it seemed longer. Edith was giving the children their tea in the library. It was a domestic scene, with Arnie and Edward buttoned into feeders, the baby lying on a cushion whilst her mother

sat before the tea pot. Turning, she saw the triumphant Edward, and the sniveling Emmeline.

" She's come to apologize," said he.

" I did not intend to be unkind," said Emmeline.

" Oh please," from Edith.

" I'm sincerely sorry,"

" We'll dismiss you with a caution," said Edward, handling the situation as he might have done in the orderly room of old. He took her to the door, and came back to the library where the little family sat. " By Jove, I wouldn't have missed that for the world ! Lord, it was funny ! "

Edith said nothing.

. . . . . .

The baptism passed off satisfactorily, and later in the library the two fathers sat and conversed. Recently the war news had not been so good, and everybody was talking about it. They had been so sure that they could make hay of the Boers, and instead of making hay of them, the damned guerillas were making hay of our own men ! The flower of England, which for some time had been itching for a war, had gone out there thinking of it as a grand chance for fun abroad, and had found that it was working out as something a good deal more serious than that. The casualty lists had been surprising. Only yesterday a neighbouring family had lost a son, the eldest and the best naturally ; always the best die.. For a long time Edward had been playing with the idea of the war, and to-night he suddenly felt the urge closer than ever.

" I think you and I ought to volunteer," he told William, " the hats would suit us."

" I never thought of that," William remarked. " Volunteering, I mean, not the hats ! "

" The old country needs us." Edward was waxing sentimental over his late mamma's best port. " We won't tell the women, because you know what women are ! Let's go along and see if they really do want us. We could go over there for a short time, it's bound to be a short time, it would be fun."

The idea of a brief commission abroad dazzled him, " We ought to go into the pros and cons," said William, always the more matter-of-fact and likely to hang back,

Edward became impassioned. Did the country go into the pros and cons ? What about the poor old Queen? In the evensong of her life she needed every brave man and true, and here were two brave men and true doing damn all. " Come on, where's your courage ? " said Edward. William was visibly stirred. They sat drinking over the log fire very late indeed, and they accounted for a good deal more of the port than Bennett thought advisable, so that when they got up to go to bed, they shook hands solemnly, for virtually speaking they were already soldiers of the Queen, going forth on Her Majesty's business.

Edith was asleep, or William might have mentioned something about it. Edward, in his celibate room, tapped another vintage and dreamt dreams of campaigns, cutting the throats of various rascals, arid doing deeds of valour. Next morning he kept William up to scratch (William having shown signs of withdrawing), and they went off to the recruiting office unbeknownst to their women. They were gone an unconscionable time. Bennett served lunch, but the gentlemen did not return until three in the afternoon, and then in very different moods.

Edward had been refused. Edward's liver and lungs, which he had always assured everybody were " like lead," had proved their weight, and he had been turned down. He had tried bribing the medical officer, to no avail. William, who had never had quite the same anxiety to get out there as had his cousin, had been accepted. At this stage William realized to his horror that the whole campaign had been born of last night's port and Edward's restless desire to uproot himself (he was never the man for roots) and go on the spree to the Orange Free State. If William could have backed out now, he would have done so, but he couldn't. Not with honour. He had been lured into it and he could not possibly get out. It had to be broken to Edith. Edith

and Louise were sewing in the library when they got back. Louise said " You've been up to something ? " because, having been married the longer, she knew the symptoms. Out it came ! Edward expatiated on how the country was going down, and here he was sound in wind and limb, yet they had had the effrontery to refuse him.

" And," said he bitterly, " they're taking William. It would not have been so bad if they had refused him too, but they're taking him ! God, it makes me sick ! "

Edith let her sewing drop, because this was something she had never anticipated. " William, you're not leaving me ? "

" It's my duty," said he, tutored by his cousin. " After all, somebody must fight for the country."

" But you know how horrible it is at Headley. I could not possibly bear it alone ! I tell you I couldn't bear it."

" You'll get to know people in time."

" But William, you couldn't leave me like this ? "

William wanted to get out of it himself but could see no honourable escape. Edith, coming across the room, flung her arms round him, protesting, and already he felt himself to be a hero. " I can't bear it," wailed Edith.

" Now look what you've done ! " said Louise. " I never saw such selfishness ! I'll warrant Edward was the one who thought of this."

" William chose for himself," said Edward, though of course he knew quite well that it had been his own idea. Last night they had waxed over-patriotic, and the thought of the poor old Queen in her twilight had been too much for them.

" William, go and tell them that you can't do it."

" Oh, he's got to go now," said Edward. " I wish to God that I were going. It's going to be pretty good hell kicking my heels round here whilst William does deeds of gallantry, and I'm itching to be in at the kill."

" I cannot think," said Louise rising, " what you two men thought you were doing. Going off like a couple of raw recruits."

" That was the idea, my pet."

" A very poor idea," and she sailed out of the room. It was the grim irony of fate that they had accepted William when she would have given much for them to have taken Edward. She went upstairs majestically. What will they do next ? she thought.

. . . . . .

William went off with the Volunteers, feeling torn in his own mind between keen appreciation of himself arid regrets at leaving home. Appreciation won the day. All men are boys at heart, seeing that all have once been boys. It was adventure.

William sailed in a trooper, and found for the first time that, in spite of his forebodings, he was happy. He had been a dreamy youth, a sentimental boy who had married Clara and had suffered disillusion. The breach, even though he had wanted it, had at one time seemed to be intolerable, then he had fallen in love with Edith. But although he did not think she quite realized it, the emotion had not endured. Sometimes he was very dubious as to whether, if there had not been the child, he would have married Edith in the long run. She had always been so much more in love with him than he had ever been with her.

He knew that he would stay married to Edith until the end of time ; he would probably have other children ; he would settle down to country squireship, and be interested in tenants, and fat stock and local hunting, but for the moment he was young for these things.

Edward had been quite right that night over the port, when patriotism had fired him. William knew this when he went off in the trooper, and eventually came to that lovely cape where the Table Mountain rises with a cloth spread on its summit. William had all the Englishman's egotistical outlook on England, " my England." He had travelled a little, but had always returned with the feeling that England was the only country really on the map. Therefore it was surprising to him to see Cape Town lovely in the vigorous sunshine.

He had a very pleasant time there, bought presents for his wife and children, dispatching them home, and then went inland in search of adventure.

It was the one thing that so far he had always managed to miss. Now he was developing. He was a new man, and a fire burnt in him. Surprisingly he made an exceptionally good soldier ; he made friends with the type of people who are men's friends, and who would never have been accepted at home in the insular coolness of the family drawing-room, with the ormolu silver tea service and the Sevres china. But these men showed him their hearts, and they were fighting hearts.

Headley, Hathorley, Edith and the children, all seemed to recede a great way off. He had thought that he would have a nostalgic longing for them, but once he had got here he had no nostalgic longing. The present adventure absorbed all his activities, physical and mental. William was consciously alive for the first time in his life.

. . . . . .

Edith spent her time between Hathorley and Headley, and she was most unhappy. Edward had become pre-occupied with his little girl—she called herself Little Mee—and he changed into a doting father. Edith's three children were very different one from another. Edward, the good boy, amenable and placid as his mother; Daisy, a solid little girl, quite serene but would never supply the brains of the family ; Arnie was the brains, Arnic was the Leader in everything, the devoted admirer of Tea, the faithful copy of Edward the elder.

Time went on. Edith was disappointed that William was happy in the Orange Free State, although she did not grudge him happiness, but she wanted him to yearn to be back with her. It was curious how time came and went in waves ; it dragged terribly, or it spurted on ahead. She could not believe that the little girls were two.

In the late Spring she had been going to Hathorley with the children, when there came a telegram delaying her. Edward wired that little Mee was ill. Edith wrote

a polite letter about it, and kept the things packed, because she thought that it was quite likely they'd all be setting off on their travels with a mere couple of days' delay. Children get ill and well again so quickly. Then a week later, she got another telegram :

Margaret died today. Louise.

She couldn't believe it. She sat staring at the telegram, and thinking it-might-have-been-Daisy. It-might-quite-easily-have-been-Daisy. Out in the garden Daisy was playing with her brothers ; a fat little girl with her hair cut in a straight fringe like the Cherry Ripe picture which had given Edith the idea. She wondered what Edward would do, for he had doted on the child, and she realized that she ought to go to him.

Edward had been very good to her over her own trouble, and she would never forget the debt that she owed to him. She caught the next train, feeling that this was something in the nature of an adventure, for she was such a simple person that she seldom went anywhere without planning previously.

It was queer that she half expected to be met at the station, even though she knew that nobody knew she was coming. She had got the idea that they might have some premonition. But the station was empty, the station-master touched his cap, and the porter, who had been dropped as a baby and who had never fully recovered, ambled with her into the station yard as though he thought the carriage would be there.

" I shall walk," she said.

" Aye, ma'am," he said.

At first she walked smartly, but her long skirts hampered her and the afternoon was so much warmer than she had thought it would be. The August heat is always overwhelming. She was grateful to turn at the lodge gates into the greenness of the park. It lay before her, with the great house settled squatly like a broody hen with the lake beside it, and the long even lawns ; she saw with horror the closed eyes of the house, significant of death, and now she felt panicky.

Edward would be so desperately upset and she wouldn't know what to say to him. Her own foolishness was alarming.

She took the short cut across the head of the lake where once she had lingered in her wretchedness and had thought of Rose, and where Tee had come to her, and had held her hand, and (although he hadn't realized it) had shown her the way back to life. She turned on to the grass, which smelt of sun and dry earth, and she got through the hole in the hedge that the boys had made. This further side of the lake was planted with so many flowering shrubs and young cupressus that it was almost difficult to find the way. As she walked she heard voices, and recognized Edward's.

" Sweet of you to come, my love," he was saying cheerfully. " After this we'll go up to Town and I'll buy you something pretty. What's it to be ? One of those glittering bracelets girls love ? Or a Kruger mascot ? "

Then a girl's voice, it must be that horrible girl Tooty ! " You're a darling ! I knew you'd be just the same. Why were you so cold to me lately ? "

" I'll be warm enough now."

" Edward ! "

Edith halted. It wasn't the conversation that she had expected, and she was deeply shocked by it. Edward, who had so loved the child, and yet here, within a few hours of her death, he was behaving this way. She peered through the vivid boughs of a wigelia still in pink blossom ; Edward was sitting on a green painted seat, his arm entwined round Tooty. Edith saw that Edward looked different, he wasn't as he had been when she had last come here to stay, and for a moment she could not isolate the difference ; then she knew that the fairness of his hair had been replaced by iron greyness. It must have happened remarkably swiftly. For a moment she hesitated as to whether to make herself known or not, then overhearing another chance (far too chance) remark, felt that she could never forgive him. Making a wide detour of the garden seat, she rounded the

lake, arriving at the white facade of the house. Bennett let her in.

She said, " I came to see if I could help . . . ? "

His face looked swollen, almost as though he had been crying. " It's good of you, ma'am. I'm sure Mrs. Boyce'll be glad to have you with her. I'll tell her that you're here,"

" What happened, Bennett ? "

" It was the fever ; we had a new maid, Lucy Grey, and Miss Margaret caught it from her,"

" How awful ! "

" The Colonel was deeply affected ; he has shut himself in his room, he hasn't had anything to eat."

She couldn't explain that Edward was sitting on the other side of the lake flirting with that dreadful girl ! She was aghast that he should have made such a good impression on Bennett, when he was behaving so vilely. She waved him away. " If you'd please tell Mrs. Boyce."

Bennett left her in the library, and went upstairs, returning to usher her up to the boudoir, where Louise was lying on the sofa with Prossy fussing round her. She did not look at all changed, though she fluttered an embroidered handkerchief, putting it occasionally to her eyes.

" So good of you to come, Edith."

" It was the only thing I could do. Oh Louise, I am so sorry."

" What is to be, will be. It is the Lord's will," said Louise heroically. She had never cared much for any of her children, save perhaps Tee. She had always felt that she did not care enough for her husband to love the children that he gave her, and she had been irritated that she should have had one which was more like a grandchild. Now she believed that the Lord knew best. She liked to believe that religion was her prop, arid that she was a very good woman, even though her husband did laugh at her for it. Louise would derive immense satisfaction from the funeral service, and the belief that

little Mee was safe in the arms of the Almighty. But she knew that none of this would help Edward.

" You're very brave, Louise," said Edith humbly, and she knew that she could never be brave like that. Louise smiled wanly with no hint of tears. She wanted people to think of her as being brave. She wanted people to congratulate her on her courage, because it made her loss so much easier. The fact that she was behaving with fortitude was exhilarating.

Edith went downstairs again, and had some belated tea, after which she went out into the garden once more, trying to find Edward. She went through the rhododendrons, and she saw him coming towards her, walking like a man dazed. It was as though she had never seen or heard the episode on the garden seq»t, as though the couple she had seen there had been ghosts ; no more ! This man had grown suddenly old ; his eyes receding into his head made his chin appear to be more prominent ; the thick grey hair was flat against his skull, and there were dark shadows under his eyes. Yet he turned and grinned at her, with a frantic effort to be his old self.

‘' Edward, somehow I thought you'd want me ? "

‘' I went for a walk."

‘' I came to meet you."

‘' You haven't brought Daisy ? "

‘' No."

He stopped short for a moment, pulling the leaves from a willow twig that he was carrying, and avoiding her eyes. " I couldn't bear that. The boys, yes, but not the girl ! I don't want to see a little girl here again."

" No, of course not. I do understand, dear Edward."

She linked her arm in his ; quite politely he disengaged himself and walked on alone. She could not understand his behaviour on the seat and now this strange bitterness. He walked ahead of her, and was first into the house, then he said, " It was good of you, and don't think that I haven't appreciated it, I have," but he walked into his own room and shut the door.

Because of Edward's aversion to the thought of Daisy being at Hathorley, Edith stayed at Headley that summer, thankful to know that William would be back before the winter. She and Mr. Reckitts were fast friends. Mrs. Robinson bowed when she drove by in her phaeton ; the Maidstones shuffled down side streets when they saw Edith coming, but, if brought actually face to face, bowed with an aloofness as though they thought she might inflict them with a pox.

It was curious how life went in patches.

Sitting here in the Indian summer she saw it as a series of pictures, tightening up, becoming closer as life went on. For it is only youth that drags, only adolescence that the days make so lazy.

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Ever since the retired bank manager had left, " Greenbanks "—the house next door to the Manor—had been empty, but at Easter a Mrs. Allington took it, and her furniture was moved in on the wettest and stormiest day that Edith could remember. She felt for the newcomer in a place where she herself had met so little friendliness, and waiving etiquette, went to ask if Mrs. Allington would care to come in and take tea with her. Mrs. Allington, exhausted by the move, was only too thankful. She was a friendly little woman, bright-eyed like a hedgesparrow, much like a hedgesparrow herself, in her brown silk frock, and she had resigned herself to her position on a big oak chest in the hall, directing where the furniture was to be stacked.

" Surely the maids could do that for you ? " said Edith.

" Yes, they could."

They shared an umbrella down the path, and went in to the Manor to tea. Mrs. Allington was very pleasant. Her father had been a solicitor at Egham, she said, and she was entirely strange to the neighbourhood. No, her husband was not with her yet, he had been in hospital for some time after a severe operation, and she hoped that he would be coming down here soon. He wasn't anything in particular ; they had travelled a good deal

and he wrote occasional travel books. No, the books weren't at all well known, or anything like that, she said. The children came in after tea ; Arnie so much like his Hathorley cousin, dominantly gay ; Edward, the good boy ; Daisy a little dumpling like her mother, placidly unruffled, who sat there sucking her thumb, and doing what she was told.

The Allingtons were obviously going to be an asset. Edith was glad that she had waived convention, and had asked her in to tea like this. It had taken some will power, for Edith was self-conscious with strangers, the more so these days when she felt so much under a cloud, but now she promised herself some friendly reward. Later she remembered that Mrs. Allirigton would very soon discover that there was a shadow over the Manor, and people did not call, as Edith was not " accepted." She wondered if she ought to say something now, then was afraid and ashamed. How could she explain what had happened to her ? She could do nothing.

She saw that people called only too readily on the Allingtons, for, within a fortnight, all the neighbourhood came trooping up the garden alongside, leaving pasteboards on the Benares tray in the hall. It was uncomfortable for Edith to be sitting here, knowing that one of these days Mrs. Allington would be bound to hear the truth ; but, even if she did hear something to Edith's disadvantage, there was no sign on Mrs. Allington's part. The friendship developed pleasantly.

One day, a few weeks later, Mrs. Allington came in to play croquet, and, pausing between strokes, said, " How do you tolerate this place ? Don't you find the people very objectionable."

" I really don't know them well enough," Edith confessed.

" How stupid of me ! I didn't mean to say that. I just meant that I think most of them are horrible, just busybodies, and they make me very angry."

This was a leading remark, and Edith followed the lead. " I expect you heard dreadful things about me ? "

" I never listen, and anyway I don't care." Susan Allington hit the ball quite viciously, cannoned off the red, and made the hoop. It was one of those fluke shots that set them both twittering.

After that, the position was much pasier with Susan Allington. Later, when it was autumn and only a few weeks before William was due to be home, Mr. Allington returned from hospital. He was a quiet, reserved man, who looked very bent over a couple of sticks, with apprehension looking out of his grey eyes which never stayed still.

" He really has been very bad," explained his wife, " and you must forgive him if he seems strange, it's his nerves."

" Of course," said Edith.

She thought it dreadful that anyone should be so frail, more particularly a man who had once been strong. He was guarded in his conversation, seldom saying more than yes or no, and she felt that he did not care about her society. She was disappointed in him, because she had liked Susan Allington so much, and the best of friendships are brought to a stop if one does not care for the husband. Mr. Allington did not appear to be the sort of man with whom one could ever become friendly. He had what she privately called a shut-the-door-in-your-face manner, which was impossible to get past.

But William would be coming home soon and that would be joy. William had cabled from Cape Town that he had started. It would be the happiest moment of Edith's life meeting William again, and she thought of him now more as lover than husband ; they might even have another baby. It would be such a pity if the family were to end with little Daisy, they most certainly ought to have another baby.

What a Christmas this would be, the first Christmas of peace, and oh how wonderful she would feel having dear William home again !

It was in this mood that she set out to meet him.

EIGHT

PEACE

William had enjoyed himself awaiting embarkation in Cape Town. The war had changed him and he was becoming more and more aware of it. He had gone out to South Africa against his will, nursing a grievance, because he considered that Edward had played a mean trick on him. Edward, himself so anxious to get back into uniform and away from Louise, had led William with him to the recruiting office, and then had been overlooked, whilst it was William who had had to set out on Her Majesty's lawful occasions.

Fighting the South African war was the first real job that William had ever had. He had gone out to it—chafing against his fate—in the trooper. How that tub had rolled ! He had ultimately joined in the games much against his own inclinations, because he thought they would think badly of him if he held back. Draughts. Poker. Chess with the brainy ones. Rummy, Slippery Sam and Coon-Can with the others. Finally he had discovered—and it was for the first time in his life—how intensely interesting men were as companions, and how infinitely preferable to women. He landed at Table Bay, wholly and completely a man's man.

Up country there were sand flies and no shade ; there were all the pestilential horrors of semi-tropical life, and the gruelling demands of fighting, but there was also the glory, and the glory was satisfying. William had never drunk the full joy of victory. It came to him the day when a Boer guerilla ambushed him, and he set his teeth and went for them. Three of them came down. A fourth turned and ran, and William set his spurs into the horse's flanks and was after him. The Boer saw the upspurt of sand beside him like a dun fountain, as William's bullet missed ; he ran in enormous strides for a prickly pear and ducked behind its spiked blades.

William's bullet went over his head, and turning, he zipped out the answer. William felt his wrist turning red-hot, his left wrist mercifully ; if it had been the right it would have meant the end. He raised his rifle and took careful aim. Courage was demanded not to hurry that aim, to be cool, to be certain ; he had only got the one chance, he knew, and he mustn't lose it. The shot echoed !

Something like a sprawling violet shadow lay on the veldt. It might have been the shadow of the prickly pear, only it wasn't ; it was a man.

William would never have believed that he could kill anybody, yet here he was, quite glad that he had done it. He had almost forgotten about the pain in the wrist, until it dripped sticky red in big blobs to his shorts. Blast ! said William, and made a rough tourniquet from his neckerchief, worn to keep the sweat from rolling down his spine.

He had complained bitterly about coming here, making sure that it would be loathsome, and yet he found that he was actually enjoying it. The rough life was fun, he liked the companionship, he liked the chase, and it all had to end awaiting a trooper in Cape Town, to take him back to England.

He paraded the streets. There were women who looked at him with ogling eyes, but William's heart was not with women. He was sick because he knew that he would not care so much for Edith after this. His horizon had lifted, his vision had widened ; he was no longer a little man hemmed in by a little home, he was a bigger man in a very wide world and he realized it. Family matters do not mean much to men like William; he had derived no special satisfaction from his children, and he gathered that his cousin Edward felt much the same way. The emotional assault on love may intrigue a man, but the fruit of that assault comes long after his ardour has waned. His thirst once slackened, he grows restless, and looks elsewhere. As far as he coulfl remember, Edith was a comfortable creature who never bothered too much and

who could be rather dull. There were the children too. He would have preferred to stay on in South Africa and not go back to the humdrumness of Headley, where he recalled acidly that the people had not wanted to know them.

He bought some things for the children in George Street, wishing that he could analyse himself better, and that he had not awakened to the real bigness of living too late. William had made two mistakes. In the first place he had believed himself to be a gentle creature of scholarly persuasion ; in the second he had married Clara because she prinked at him from behind a fan, and physically he could not resist her coquetry. When marriage failed him, he had turned to Clara's opposite, the first gentle girl that he had met. To his horror he knew now that he doubted if he would ever have married Edith on his return from Cannes, save that honour had forced him into it. Swayed entirely by emotions, he had made mistake after mistake. Even now, he had not the courage to stay where he was, and start all over again, because a man cannot make three new starts in life, which was what such behaviour would amount to. Clara the first start, Edith the second, and Cape Town not to be the third. So William marched on board the trooper, feeling that this might be joy for some, but that it was far from joy for him. The band blaring out *Home Sweet Home,* frankly horrified him.

The nearer he got to England the more apprehensive he became. So much so that, at the final port of call, he cabled to Edith asking her not to meet the ship at Southampton. He had had a sudden presentiment that she might do this, and felt that he could not bear it.

She had thought of it (it would be such a surprise), but she was relieved to receive the cable forbidding her. Edith was not used to journeys, and it would have been quite an adventure travelling all the way to Southampton. Much nicer to welcome her husband here at home, she thought, and sat back comfortably awaiting his arrival.

To William, Southampton looked a good deal dingier

than he had expected, probably because the sun had lost the metallic brightness of South Africa. He took a train to London, and it seemed to him that he was a stranger in a strange land. People stared appraisingly at his uniform, they were full of admiration for those soldiers of the Queen who had set forth so gallantly to win her war. He went into the club that he had once thought to be the hallmark of good breeding, where he and old Toady had made such friends. Now it struck him that tfle leather chairs were pock-marked, the men in it were frowsty, and the atmosphere that hung about the place, unpleasantly stuffy. He longed for a good gulp of the veldt again, with its clean sweet air. And the sun, where was the sun? He stared out of the grey window at the dim street below. It had begun to rain, that dirty fine rain of London, and appetite for more was in the wind, blown across the Green Park. He was aware of the most disturbing home-sickness for South Africa.

He took the train down to Kent,

The fields were familiar, the little towns looked as they had always done, and he felt that his relationship to them was not disturbed as it had been to London. The morning was sunny, which was one thing to be thankful for. As the train neared home, he felt ill at ease, and all the more so when he recalled that none of the other troops would be feeling quite the same way. They had been anxious to see wife and children again, and he wasn't in the least anxious.

Nearing the home station, he put his head out of the window as he felt to be only right. He saw them from afar, standing in a well-organized little group on the platform. Edith had grown a good deal plumper, and was now distinctly matronly, with her two sons, tall and gawky, on either side, having outstripped their babyhood where he had left them. There was a fat pudding of a little girl, whom he presumed must be Daisy "left as an infant.

He had come back to this for life, and there was literally no escape. Oh God, he groaned to himself.

The little group was smugly ordered ; they were a desirable family with a gentle mother who would say nay to nothing and no one. But this meant that the strong lights of South Africa were smothered, and the wilful passions he had enjoyed there, softened into mere nothingness. Life in England would be extraordinarily dull, it bad no spirit of adventure behind it. He saw that now.

Yet he pulled himself together to jump out, and say " Hello, my love ? " with some semblance of enthusiasm.

It wasn't how he was really feeling !

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Edith had bought a new frock and hat in which to greet her husband, believing that the occasion deserved this much. The boys had been groomed and polished, and when quite ready, and coming to the carriage to drive with her, Arnie had fallen down, and had grazed his knee, and had to have a second washing. She had been quite angry with him, as angry as she could ever be with Arnie, her favourite child. Daisy wore a white muslin hat, which practically obscured her. She was a good child, always obedient, and could be relied upon to behave as a little lady ; so they grouped themselves to greet the train.

It was tlie birthday of her life, Edith thought, never had she been more wildly in love with William, even on that one exquisite night at Hathorley ; that had been nothing compared to this meeting with the war over. He was her lover, and she yearned for his arms about her, for his kisses. He would woo her all over again, she thought.

She saw him leaning out of the train, and noticed how brown he looked, and how handsome ! Then he leapt down, quite unashamed, and cried " Hello, my love ? " clasping her to him. Edith could have wept with pride !

" Oh, my dear, how beautiful it is to see you again ! " she said.

" The children ? How they've grown ! "

Daisy was standing, thumb in mouth, staring at her

father. " It's your Daddy, darling," said Edith, reprovingly.

" It's a man," said Daisy.

Edward asked, " Shall I carry your things, Father ? " in a stereotyped, polite manner, but it was Arnie who knew the truth about them all.

Arnie said, " Everybody is scared. Mother's been pulling at her gloves,"

" Oh Arnie, I haven't."

William linked his arm in Edith's, and they walked out to the carriage which was waiting in the station yard, highly polished, with the horses pawing the ground. He helped Edith into it, and as he did so, Dr. and the Honble. Mrs. Robinson drove up to meet the train. William could hardly recall Dr. Robinson, so many other things had filled his mind ; he glanced at the doctor, and said " Well, by George ! Fancy meeting you first thing ! " He saw Mrs. Robinson draw her cape round her, and walk by with a most offhand acknowledgement, hardly looking, and he felt his wife draw back, almost as though she had been hit in the face. He'd almost forgotten the ridiculous *tabu !* As though they hadn't suffered enough ! " Surely they're not still keeping that up ? " he asked, as he settled himself in the carriage beside Edith. Out there, with blood and death and sand everywhere, it hadn't seemed to be possible that such a small thing should mean so much.

" Yes, they are ! But there are some quite nice people who have taken ' Greenbanks' next door. I think I wrote about them, the Allingtons. They're very friendly."

" Yes, of course. I remember." But he hadn't. He was eyeing Daisy. Surely the child was too fat ? Edith too, she looked years older ; she hadn't had that bust when he had last seen her, or had he forgotten ? He had thought of things staying still ; after all, two years isn't such a long time really, yet, when you have to live it, it seems that they can be a definite hallmark.

Even the house was different; small trees had grown

up and looked large, and the shrubberies had spread. The whole place looked to be opulently comfortable, and he was lucky to have such a home, such a wife and such children, and ashamed that his heart had ever doubted them. The children were dismissed to their nursery, and he and Edith sat down to tea in the dining-room, arranging themselves on either side of a table weighed down with good things. He knew that she was now nervously agitated, and he himself felt apprehensive.

" It's lovely having you back," she said.

" Yes. Now we shall have to go on just where we left off, I suppose ? "

" Of course, dear."

He wished she wouldn't be so affectionate, so obviously waiting to be fondled. He knew that he couldn't fondle her. In his heart he had never been a lady's man, in spite of the muddles into which he had got himself, and life out there had finally divorced him from the sort of married existence at home that Edith seemed to expect. He said " I'm sleeping very badly these days, the war affected me that way."

" You never said so in your letters ? "

" I didn't want to worry you. I was ill for a time, and this is the legacy, I suppose." Then cautiously, " I shall be using my dressing-room ; it would hardly be fair on you if I didn't."

" Oh, but I don't mind, really I don't mind at all."

She looked at him nervously. She was naturally bitterly disappointed, yet half relieved, and, because she was a simple person, she did not attempt to sort out the two emotions. William was a stranger to her, though of course she would soon get over that, it was just the shock of meeting him anew, and not realizing that the two years had made a difference. She felt dismayed that he wanted to sleep in his dressing-room. After all though, she told herself, marriage was very intimate and a little breathing space would give her time to get used to him. It was really better this way, very much better.

" I thought you'd understand," he said, looking at her

again, and thinking once more what a plump little partridge she had become.

" I asked the Allingtons to come in this evening," she said. At the time that Susan had suggested it, she had been anxious lest William would feel that the first evening ought to be unbrokenly theirs ; now she was relieved, because the presence of the AJlingtons would ease the tension.

He was relieved too. " Good ! " said he.

When the visitors arrived, Edith knew immediately that William didn't like them, which, in itself, was disappointing. She had not thought that he could possibly dislike such a pleasant woman, and had felt that, because he and she were husband and wife, it was inevitable that they would see eye to eye. The conversation jerked ; always a reserved man, Mr. Ailing!on went over quiet. It transpired that he had originated from a part of Wales that William knew intimately, and, by his manner, it seemed that Mr. AJlingtori almost resented this. It struck Edith that it made him angry.

Afterwards, when they had gone, William came back into the dining-room for a drink and he stood by the sideboard, the glass in his hand. He said, " There's something queer about that chap, almost as though he were holding something back from us. It surprised me that you could be friendly with them."

" But they're so kind, and she's a darling ! "

" I feel that they are not the sort of people we ought to know. I thought they'd be different."

He went up to bed with (hat expression ringing in his ears. In point of fact he had thought that everything would be different. Home, with a girl wife, and the babies that he had left behind him, instead of finding children who were growing up (Edward and Arnie had already got opinions of their own, and Daisy was the plainest little girl he had seen for a long time). He was considerably disappointed in them all.

As to the Allingtons, he wouldn't have thought they were suitable friends for Edith. But then of course it

must be that the loneliness had driven her hard, that was where everything had gone wrong, curse it ! That abominable *tabu* on them for being divorced, which had turned out to be something that they could not live down, though, God knew, they had tried enough.

He went to the window and stared out into the night ; it was freshly cool, with that freshness which is not of the veldt. In the sky, the stars were smaller, their background less velvety ; the moon not yet risen. WiJliam Boyce told himself that he was stalling all over again, and alone. Most grimly alone.

. . . . . .

Daisy developed measles, which meant that the boys would perforce follow suit, so William left Edith with them and paid a flying visit to Hathorley. Hatborlcy would not change, he knew. He walked *up* the pine walk from the village, and it looked much as it had always done. The flowering shrubs were over, Spring had left the garden some time, and the flowers were the dark warm flowers of August, deep reds, strong blues, bold yellows. He heard a cockerel crow as he climbed the little hill beyond the fairy dell, and came into sight of the lake flashing like a silver thread in and out of the green tapestry that the trees made. This, he thought, is home !

He met Louise walking towards him, with Tee, and both looked surprised to sec him. Two years had turned Tee into a young man, and Louise had wrinkled ; she had changed, and it struck William that she was a trifle bent as she leaned on Tee's arm. Only a trifle, but he noticed it. He would not have believed that two years could make such a difference to the world that he had thought stood still.

Tee had not changed in manner, he was like his father, and had lots to say. Tee, when his mother had gone indoors, explained that his father was out with a girl called Tooty.

" You know what Father is," said young Tee.

In some ways William was smug, he did not want to admit that he knew what Edward was, much less to his

son. He said " Nonsense, I don't understand you, he means nothing by it."

" No, he means nothing, but it has the same effect as if he did," said Tee carelessly. They were walking under the cedars, and he flipped a branch from the middle tree. " She's been hopping about again," he said.

" She ? Whom do you mean ? "

" The ghost. Rose thingummy ! The one that drowned herself for love of my old man on his twenty-first."

" Tee, you oughtn't to say such things. It's most disrespectful."

" I know, but it's true." He paused again. " What a muck people make of their lives, Uncle William. I do hope that I shan't."

William looked at him severely. " I should think that you're more likely to make a muck of your life than most people."

" Should you ? I bet I shall have more fun than Piers, anyway. He is sure to live the right kind of life in the right way. I shan't, but I'll have more fun out of it."

" I don't doubt it," said William, still very coldly.

When Edward came he noticed that he also had changed, turning so very grey ; Edith had warned him of this, it had happened when little Mee died, she said, but somehow William had forgotten it. Edward had put on weight, but he did not mention the child that he had lost. Only once, when William said that Daisy was ill, Edward looked at him hurriedly, as though in deep agitation, and he had said. " Aren't you worried as to how she is getting on ? "

And William said that she'd be all right; after all, every child had measles at some time or another.

" Oh God ! " said Edward, but it was the way that he said it.

When William went to bed, he looked out at the lake, and the three cedars which stood for permanence, and he told himself that these things would not change but would stand firm, it was hearts that changed. Between him anjd

Edith there was a barrier, something that he could not destroy. Between him and life there was a bar, and he could not tear that down either. It was horrible to be so fully conscious of this, and yet unable to do anything about it.

But the cedars across the lake were etched as though in fine indian ink against the night sky, pale with a full moon. And the lake was like a lake of milk, with a smudge of reeds and rushes against the bank, and the old Scotch fir which had seen indescribable events in the history of this country, flicked in the occasional wind with ragged branches, showing signs of its advancing years. These things stood still.

. . . . . .

Edward and Daisy recovered from measles easily, but it was Arnie who was so ill.

Sitting in the Hathorley gardens, when the house had fallen into rubble, and all the things that were supposed to stand for permanence had gone into decay and ruin, old Edith remembered the agony of those nights, and her innate thankfulness that William was away, and that she was facing this crisis alone. She had suffered more for Arnie than for any of the others, and she went on suffering. Sitting up with him night and day, she leaned tenderly over the hot little bed. The pain in her neck came with the acute stiffness born of lack of sleep ; there was the feeling that she could not sit there for another moment, yet having to sit there because he needed her so much. His voice had grown fretted and frayed like old silk.

" Another drink, Mummy."

" All right, Arnie. You'll be better soon."

" Will I ? I feel so ill. So hot ! "

" Darling, it will be better."

She appealed desperately to Dr. Robinson, who was calm. He said that it was nothing, the moment the fever abated the child would feel different, and she was fussing herself unnecessarily over it. He spoke with an ironic smile of the fussy mother, and poor Edith watched him with distress in her eyes, and bewilderment in her heart.

Then Arnie started with a dreadful pain in his ear one tea-time ; she found herself fluttering to and fro with all the old-fashioned remedies, the Ellimans, the hot salt bag, the boiled onion. But the pain was very bad. Finally Mrs. Allington came in. Mrs. Allington came into the nursery where Daisy and Edward were convalescent though still rather pale ; and to Edith, who was troubled beyond reason, Susan appeared like an angel of mercy.

" I don't like the pain in that child's ear," said Susan " it isn't right."

" Dr. Robinson says that lots of children get earache as the aftermath of measles." Poor Edith was trying to comfort herself with quoting from the doctor, only somehow the words sounded shallow, even to herself.

" Had you thought of getting in another opinion ? "

" No, of course not." She believed that one abided by what the doctor said. One didn't question it. Undoubtedly Dr. Robinson knew, and she stood there quite shocked at the mere idea.

Susan Allington approached the nursery table. She said " You know, Edith, you ought to get another opinion. It isn't right to let this rest. Children have died from this kind of thing, and because Dr. Robinson is out of date, I would not abide by what he says."

" But he promised me that Arnie would be all right ? "

Susan ignored that. " Hammcrton is a good man. Let's get him down. He's my cousin, and I know he would help if I wired for him to come."

" But surely that is against all medical etiquette ? "

Susan took Edith's arm. " Listen, you are hiding your head in the sand like the ostrich, and it won't do. Does etiquette matter when it is a case of life and death ? Of course it doesn't."

" Don't frighten me," begged Edith, and began to cry.

She couldn't do anything tonight. She couldn't be jostled into anything now. By the morning the earache might have passed off, and Arnie be feeling quite different, but whatever Susan said, she would do nothing tonight.

It was a dreadful night. Arnie whimpered, and at times he screamed with the pain. They laid little bags of hot salt under the ear ; Nanny turned him this way and that, and all the time hib temperature rose. At dawn, Edith went downstairs, and knew that she herself felt frantically ill. She knew that she could not bear a moment longer of it, for she was already .worn to a shadow. The sound of Arnie's crying rang in her ears, the heat of that tossed and tumbled bed seemed to have penetrated into her own life, and the knowledge that this most certainly could not be the ordinary earache that the doctor declared it was.

She paced the drawing-room, looking queerly ghostly in the cruel light of heartless dawn. She went up the stairs again, and heard Arnie still whimpering, and then she remembered how Edward Boyce had lost his favourite child, and the agony that he had walked through. She felt terrible. This was Gethscmane, and she knew it.

Before she would take any food, or even wash, she went into " Greenbanks " next door, running across the grass still heavy with dew. Susan came down to see her, in a wrapper. Edith spoke quickly.

"Get your cousin ! Do get your cousin here as soon as ever you can."

" Arnie's worse ? '"

She nodded. She couldn't bring herself to say the word, feeling superstitious that it might hasten disaster.

" I'll get him," said Susan quietly.

At eleven she came in to say that her cousin was now in the train on his way here, and Edith had better tell Dr. Robinson. Half an hour later, Dr. Robinson arrived for his morning visit, driving up in his carriage and looking more like Father Christmas than ever. Edith fluttered helplessly. She was sick for the want of sleep, her neck ached, she felt as though she was somebody who had for a time been transferred to another world. " You arc not anxious about Arnie ? " she asked the doctor.

" Of course not. Why should I be ? This is unfortunate but it is quite a usual course."

She said " I was very anxious and I want another opinion."

" Had I thought that necessary I would have suggested it, Mrs. Boyce."

She ought to be feeling reproved, instead she just looked at him. " Dr. Hammerton is on his way here now ; he will be at the house within twenty minutes."

" Hammerton ? "

" He is a cousin of Mrs. Allington's, a children's specialist."

" *That* woman ? "

Edith was stung to some reply. " That woman is my friend, Dr. Robinson. I have not been satisfied about Arnie, and I am not prepared to let it rest here. I presume that you will meet Dr. Hammerton ? "

For three-quarters of an hour the doctor waited until the great man came. He walked up the garden path with him. He was a little dark man, with a close-clipped, pointed beard, rather like the Prince of Wales to look at. He came in at the door and went straight upstairs to see the boy. Outside, on the capacious landing, Edith hovered, but her heart was making noises, restlessly heaving, and she felt that she was standing on some high point and turning slightly dizzy. She had hold of Susan's hand, and knew now that she could not have gone on without that hand. In a swirling world, the hand alone stood still. Keep calm, the hand insisted, and held ; it held fast. It was queer that she didn't think of William in this emergency, but William was somebody in another sphere, and a stranger; in the agony of Gethsemane she wanted no strangers.

Then she was face to face with Dr. Hammerton. " I am going to operate," he said. No more.

" Operate ? "

" Certainly. Dr. Robinson knows of a nurse. It is a mastoid and must be opened at once."

"Oh," said Edith. Just "Oh." Then the hand seemed to disappear, and the top of the height was dizzier than ever. It was a steeple top, high above the

world, or was it a pit into which she had been fixing down ? She didn't know. She had fainted.

. . . . . .

But Dr. Hammerton saved Arnie's life. He or Susan, Edith never knew which. She owed Susan this enormous debt, and one day perhaps she would be able to repay it. because if the specialist had not come now, it would have been too late. They sat in the dining-room during the operation, listening, yet fearing that they might hear something. Two hours later, Edith was standing looking down at her son, who lay there still unconscious, his head swathed in bandages, but she knew now that he was going to be all right.

" How about your husband ? " asked Susan.

" I'll let him know now. Now that it's all over."

" It was very plucky of you saving him the anxiety."[5]

She said, " No, you mustn't think that. It wasn't that." It hadn't been that, it had been that she would have loathed a stranger being with her, and William was nothing more nor less than a stranger.

Dr. Robinson refused to speak to her, but sent a formal letter to William. He was unused to having his dignity disturbed and his opinion challenged, and, although it was quite obvious that, left to him, the boy would have died, Dr. Robinson demanded an apology for their behaviour which he remarked was the most extraordinary that he had ever met.

William came home from Hathorley to find the Manor House in turmoil. After the excitement was past, and Edith knew that Arnie would live, she had been horrified at the forcefulness of her own action, and the repercussions it might have on the village. She knew that it was unthinkable that anyone should flout medical etiquette, yet, unless she had flouted it, Arnie would have died.

William considered that she had made the most foolish move. " Of course Dr. Robinson would have realized his mistake and done something," said he, reprovingly.

" He was doing nothing, and time was running out. Dr. Hammerton said that if he had not operated when he did, Arnie would have died."

" He was possibly jealous ! Doctors never agree," and she felt his cold disapproval.

" William, dear ; dear William, please don't be angry with me ? "

" I'm not in the least angry, I'm only saying that there is almost sure to be some repercussion from the village. They admire and respect Robinson."

Edith went to him, and stood there, her hand in his, in a pathetic attempt to bridge the gulf. " I have at least got the Allingtons to back me up."

" I daresay, but you know that I disapprove of them as your friends. I have the feeling that there is something queer about them."

" Nonsense ! Susan is wonderful. I should have died without her." She thought of the hand that had held hers. That forceful, controlling hand, when the whole world spun. " Really, William, she was so good to me."

" Yes, but it was only to get something out of you."

" What was there for her to get out of me ? "

" A job for her cousin. My dear, you really are a little blind." Men have this straightforward, point-blank method of handling a situation ; if they dislike anybody, that person can do nothing right. She wanted to force William to like Susan Allington, and now realized how futile was such a hope !

" William, since you came back, there has always seemed to be such a desperate barrier between us,"

"We're older, that's all." He looked at her with unmoved eyes. Once they had been the eyes of a lover, now the lover had passed by. She wanted him to take her into his arms and kiss her, but pride held her back from asking. She called it modesty, but really it was pride. She supposed this barrier came to all married people, but its prevalence did not make it hurt less.

" You never kiss me now ? " she said.

" That's soon remedied, my love," and he kissed her.

But it was all different. His lips did not linger, it was a kiss of the quality that she might have given the Dean in the old days, or the children, or Louise. It had no meaning behind it. It was a kiss stripped of its trimmings, a kiss that wasn't true ; she knew that it made her want to cry.

. . . . . .

She took Arnie away to the seaside for a fortnight; perhaps it was the happiest fortnight of her life. She was alone with him, the beloved child, at St. Margaret's Bay. The place was little known at that time, and the rooms they had engaged were quiet enough, standing in the proximity of the *Green Man,* on a lawn, and with a scarlet creeper about the porch. The heat haze hung above the Channel, and the Ostend boat ploughing past them reminded her of her youth, and the bathing machine with her mother. There was old Jim, who let out boats, and rowed them on the sea on still days ; then there were the evenings when they went for long walks to the Lighthouse along the chalk-white paths which zigzagged all over that flat green cliff top. Or to Martin Mill. Then she and Arnie would prawn together, round the far cliff, amongst the little rocks which smelt of weed and brine. The days were never long enough. She'd always remember Arnie lying with his face to the shingle, staring out to sea between the lattice of his fingers as Stephen Strong had done in church.

" What's it like to be grown up, Mummy ? Is it fun?"

" No, darling., not really." Because all the real fun had been back in the bathing machine of her youth, when she had believed that to grow up was to walk into Heaven.

'" Supposing we run away to a desert island. Mummy, you and me ? "

" We couldn't."

" Oh." He was still young enough to accept her word as being final. Then, " Mummy, do you really love Daddy, or is it just a pretend ? I think it's just a pretend."

" Of course not darling," with indignation. " I love him."

Then, after a pause, during which the sea fog crept ominously round the Fall. " If you saw the house on fire, and could save me, or Daddy, but not both of us, which would you save, Mummy ? "

" Oh Arnie, don't ask such awful questions ! Look, the fog's coming down, we'll have to go home."

" But which *would* you save, Mummy ? "

" Both of you somehow." Desperately she tried to stick to her point. She got up and began collecting things.

" But if you *couldrfty* Mummy . . ."

Oh heavens !

. . . . . .

William wrote a discursive letter giving details of the health of Edward and Daisy, telling her that Louise had written from Hathorley to say that Edward was making a fool of himself and she must have some support, and would he go there for the night ? His postscript said,

Fve discovered something about the Allingtons. I was quite right in all that I thought. After this you can never speak to them again.

By the same post there came a letter from Susan giving the news of the village quite gaily, expressing the hope that Arnie was really picking up. Susan was frankly open-hearted ; whatever William had discovered Edith had no intention of losing the friendship, she only hoped that she wasn't going to be torn two ways, between loyalty to husband and friend.

" Something worrying you, Mummy ? "

" No, Arnie, of course not."

He sidled closer. " You can't cheat me. I sort of know. It's Daddy, isn't it ? "

" No, Arnie, it's *not* Daddy."

" I just thought it was. Daddy's funny, he isn't really like us. You and me are different." Arnie never included the other children in their affections. Daisy didn't matter, Edward didn't matter, and he knew it.

If the house had been on fire, it was Arnie Edith would have saved.

He knew that too !

" Come out and prawn. Mummy, and don't worry."

" I'm too old."

" But you aren't old." He got her out, and they sat on the rocks, he popping seaweeds and sucking them.

" Arnie, you shouldn't eat those frightful things."

" They're lovely. I call them oysters."

" But they're not oysters."

He put out a grubby little hand and held hers. " If you pretend anything, it comes true," he said.

But did it ? She couldn't pretend about William any more. That was a dream that would never come true. He still slept in the dressing-room, and she knew that he always would. She wondered what the servants thought about two beds in different rooms, and she got dreadfully depressed, because in some way it was a slur on her. No more babies. No more love. No more thrill. Nothing.

" Smile, Mummy," begged Arnie.

She'd got Arnie anyway !

" We'll never part," he said contentedly, and, hitching up his breeches, paddled out with the prawning net. " And if we could go off to a desert island, Mummy, what fun it would be ! "

Exquisite fun ; almost the same fun as bathing from the old bathing machine with her mother, as watching the hermit bees at Hinthorpe. Almost ! Nothing is ever quite as much fun as youth. Never quite ! That's life.

. . . . . .

The last night at St. Margaret's she laid awake, watching Arnie sleeping beside her, with that unruffled breathing of childhood. He looked faintly flushed, and there was the light healthy tan of sunburn on his cheeks. Whatever happened she had got him. She'd try to win William back, when she got home she'd try to speak to him. She attempted to convince herself that perhaps he was shy, and had got hold of the idea that she didn't really

care for him ; she must be sweet to him. She couldn't lose her love this way ! She'd say " William darling, I've not understood you very well." She'd say " William, do let's try to be like we used to be. I still love you, you know. . . ." Or, was that immodest ? Perhaps better to say " William, I'm not very happy ! "

Yet, when she got home, she knew that she would never be able to speak to him after all. They met at dinner, solemn everyday dinner, ox tail soup, roast beef and vegetables, a souffle with a savoury to follow. Cook always remembered that William liked anchovies, but also forgot that Edith hated them. Cooks have a habit of remembering the master's foibles, but ignore the mistress's. Woods waited like an automaton, cleared the savoury, and put the big bowl of orchard apples in its place, with the port, and the codec before Edith. Then he withdrew. Woods never left, he always withdrew ; he was a presence.

William said, as soon as the door shut, " About the Allingtons. One thing is quite clear, everything I ever felt about them is correct. They have got to be cut off our visiting list."

" They have . . . ? " Her hand jarred against the coffee cup, as she thought of that other hand which had upheld her in Gethscmanc. And then " What have they done ? "

" All that story about his being in hospital wasn't true. Their name isn't Allington at all, it's Andrews ! I found that out through a friend who knew them before the fuss. He ran a penny bank, and I am not yet sure that it wasn't the one in which your father lost everything. Possibly it was the same one. Anyway he got convicted for embezzlement."

" What did you say ? "

" Alfred Andrews was convicted of embezzlement, and he richly deserved the five years that he got. No wonder that he resented my knowing where he came from ! "

She stared at William over the epergne with its brave

show of salvias and ferns ; sbe watched him paring an apple with that irritating carefulness, and knew that she hated him for the fact that he felt so triumphant. " That can't be true," she said.

" I thought you'd get out of it that way. It is extraordinary what a poor stomach women have for the truth. I brought this newspaper with me, I thought you'd like to read about it."

lie handed it across the table to her with a flourish, William had been embittered by the fact that the neighbourhood bad refused to know him ; he had in some curious manner been piqued that, in his absence, Edith had become friendly with people, and it was, she knew, a victory to him to be able to undermine that friendship. Now he was not the only person whom others would not know ; somebody even more unwonhy lived at " Greenbanks."

Edith read the case slowly, Alfred Andrews had been involved in a penny bank, and the address was familiar. The judge had been bard about it. There was the photograph of Mr. Allingtcm when he was much younger, and she realized that prison had set an ageing seal upon his lip-corners and eyes. But the picture and the man next door were the same ; she could riot deny that. An immense pity for Susan came to her, Susan who must have stood behind him in all this. She handed the paper gravely back across the epergne. " Yes, it is dreadful, but I don't see that it alters my friendship with Susan."

" I forbid you to be friendly with the wife of a felon."

Usually William frightened her, but not now. " She saved Ainie's life, she gave me something to live for ; whatever her husband did, she is not to blame,"

" Of course she was mixed up in it too."

" Why ? "

" Do you realize that this man may have ruined your father ? "

Truthfully she said, " I never liked my father."

" It was very uafilial of you ; this Andrews man was

the reason why you had to take that position as companion, the start of all your trouble, and you wish to be friendly with him."

" No," said Edith, and she did not waver for a moment, " I did not find it ignominious being a companion, I was quite happy ; far happier than at Hinthorpe, where everybody haled me. I hold no grudge against Mr. Allington for that."

" I forbid this friendship."

" I couldn't be unkind to Susan."

" I have the right to give orders in my own house, and to my own wife."

" Only I'm not your wife now," she reminded him, At St. Margaret's she had told herself that she must stay calm to talk to him. Then she had thought it would persuade him to come back to her, now it was only in defence of her friend. " You seem to have forgotten that," she went on. " Something happened to you in the Orange Free State, William., and you've come back so different that it hurts."

" It hurts me that you should behave like this," he replied, " people ought to know about the Allingtons."

" It's not our duty to tell them."

The parlour-maid fluttered in at her door, her cap strings swinging. She said, " If you'll excuse me, ma'am, Mr. Reckitts is in the drawing-room."

" What does he want ? " snapped William.

Edith rose. " I think perhaps he is the orie'to help us ; I feel sure that he'll understand," and she led the way, William following with a bad grace.

Mr. Reckitts was sitting there, with a copy of the parish magazine in his lap. He was not inspiring, just an amiable friendly little parson, with shabby trousers to which the clips still adhered, and a waistcoat down which much of his breakfast was spattered. He rose quickly, assuring them that he had already supped, and explaining that he had only called to bring the magazine with him. Edith flung herself into the story.

" You must help us," she urged, " please say what I

ought to do ? " and she explained what William had discovered.

" Oh dear me !" said Mr. Reckitts, " how very unfortunate ! Not at all what one would have expected, is it ? So difficult."

" ,' say," said William pompously, " that they cannot expect me to allow my wife to stay friendly with them."

" ,' say," she insisted, " that Susan has always been a very dear friend, and that it was entirely due to her that Arnie's life was saved."

" I understand how your husband feels, and you too. She was so good to you." He looked apprehensively at William. " Forgiveness is a very great quality."

" It also can be a very silly one," said William. " No man wants the criminal class in his home."

" But are the AJlingtons the criminal class ? Whatever he did, surely he has atoned ? "

" But can one atone ? "

Edith cried, " William, how hard you are, how cruel. I've never known you like this before. Whatever Mr. Allington has done, Susan had no part in it."

" I think people ought to know about it," said William.

" But surely all your troubles came through busy-bodies thinking somebody else ought to know ? It was unjust of them, and you wouldn't want to pass that injustice on ? "

Edith began to cry. She cried because until now she had always been weak, but suddenly she found herself strong with a dogged obstinacy that terrified her, because it was something she had never expected in herself. She refused to leave Susan Allington. Whatever William said, she solidly refused to be unfriendly.

She went to her room and she knew that Mr. Reckitts stayed on talking to William, but she never discovered what was said. She felt dazed. Late that night she slipped out of her bed and, bracing her nerves, went to William's room. He was lying in bed with the window wide open, and the moonlight drifting in. Moonlight had always made her feel eerie, it affected her much as

the dark, and she was alarmed at its chilliness. William turned to look at her. He for his part was thinking, " What does she want corning here ? Is this to be another row ? Oh God, why can't she leave me alone ? "

" William, William dear,"

" What is it ? "

" I hate your being so angry with me. I know I'm stupid, but I don't want to try your patience."

" That's all right."

" It isn't all right. I know you're angry about something, and it's the Allingtons,"

" I don't want to talk about them any more."

" William, you're so very cold to me."

" Don't be silly, Edith. You're just talking nonsense ! Of course I'm riot cold to you."

" I mean—you sleeping here, and . . ,"

" I snore abominably, and don't want to disturb your nights."

" I'd risk that, William dear."

" I'm not as selfish as all that." He sat up in bed, arms round the hummock of his knees. " You go back to your room, it's chilly with the window so wide open, and you've got nothing on."

For a moment she lingered. " William ? " wishing that she were eloquent, arid could tell him all that was in her heart, but somehow the words would not come. He made no response so she flitted out of the room, much like the Hathorley ghost, and as lost.

Crossing the landing, she peeped into the boys' room. Edward and Arnie were lying there, but Arnie was not quite asleep. Stooping she gathered him into her arms, carrying him as she had done when he was a baby, into her own room. She lay down beside him, his hand in hers.

" Mummy, why are you crying ? "

" I'm not, Arnie, I'm not,"

" Then why is your face wet ? "

" You're dreaming it, darling."

He said, " When I grow up *you* shan't ever cry any more You'll be my sweetheart,"

" Yes." she promised, " I'll be your sweetheart."

Life wasn't turning out quite as she had thought it would, but Arnie was adorable. His warmth suffused her own body, she held his hand closely. At least she had Arnie, even if she had lost William. They'd be sweethearts.

She kept the friendship with Susan Allington.

William considered that this was a lowering of their standards, and refused to meet Susan, but Edith clung to the tattered banner of her belief in a friend.

William could not understand it. Now it seemed to be an eternity since he had been a man amongst men fighting for the Queen. Everything was changing in the world. Edward was on the throne.

Now William openly admitted thai Edith bored him. Her attraction had been the ecstasy of that one night, the sympathy and gentleness of understanding that she had given him, but she hadn't any brain, and at times he was inclined to snap at her. He was ashamed of himself for doing this, but the steady treadmill of life was wearing him down too. Brought up in the narrow path, William ought never to have contemplated a divorce. It was a harness that still grated, and rubbed a constant sore into his bearr. It was not something that he could fling aside.

Because at times he turned on her, Edith, worried by his irritability, was afraid of him. She wrapped herself up more and more in her friend Susan, and the children. Edward at his prep, school, Arnie going next term. Stodgy little Daisy with her mother's gentleness.

Life couldn't be really over for her, Edith thought. Why, she was but thirty-hve, and she felt quite young. Too young ! She couldn't shut everything behind her, surely ? A Prince Charming must come out of the wilderness, she argued. But no Prince Charming comes. The fairy story is but an illusion, living is a tragic truth. There was the isolation at Hcadley, and the friendship with Susan, strong, serene, and durable ; there were the children. But there was to be nothing more.

NINE

MIDSUMMER YEARS

It is curious how, in looking back, the early days are so clear and move so slowly. The buoyancy of spirit, the exhilaration and joy, all paint them in with a brush of fadeless colour. Edith could remember the details clearly, so well that they might almost have been today ; it was the middle years that gained speed, and in them the detail dimmed. Only youth runs slowly, and now she found her own mind running beside them.

Piers Boyce who had married so well, and Tee who had married so badly, a girl called Trixie, the other half of a sister act. Edward and William had been furious that he should have made such a fool of himself. Once Edith, feeling a besetting loyalty to Tee, said, " But surely Edward isn't the one to speak about making a fool of himself?"

William looked at her severely. " Edward never married them," he reproached her.

Piers' son was born at Hathorley accompanied by tragedy and the white lady. It was that very night that Louise had a stroke, the whole affair being shrouded in mystery, out of which William gathered that his cousin had done something peculiar with a shot gun. Louise died that autumn.

" She was never the right wife for him," said William after the funeral. " The Boyce men pick their wives badly," and he glanced uncomfortably at Edith.

Of course he might be alluding to Clara, she hoped devoutly that he did mean Clara, but couldn't be sure. Now she supposed that Edward would remarry that awful Tooty Plaistow who was running after him so disgracefully. Until then Olivia, Piers' wife, kept house for him.

Hathorley would remain undisturbed. Its dark cedars would stand fast against the sky, as monuments to three

dead women ; but a fourth woman lived. And now, when she looked out of the library window, she could see rising above the ilex and the double syringas, a little dark point of a tree, with a finger to the sky. Her secret shared only with Tee and old Marty. Old Marty was dead. The planting of that tree had made her so much more a Boyce woman than William's placing of a ring on her finger. That hadn't mattered, all that had passed, the ring was significant of nothing at all today, but the cedar across the lake stood for permanence.

Sitting here, in the eventide of her life, she could see how immensely tall it had grown. Now, having risen to a height, its lower branches were spreading out as the other three had done. Soon there would be cones, plumply made of bluish green upon it. It was her tree.

. . . . . .

Her mind skipped a period of time.

She was thinking of the war suddenly rolling across the world, of everything changing, and being swept into its open maw. Posters, Kitchener wants YOU. Your King and your country call you. White feathers. . . . Piers was at sea, Tee was abroad and fighting courageously. Edward was dealing with food committees, so was William ! William had suddenly become quite important in the neighbourhood. The war had opened their doors on village society. The unexpected had obliterated the infringement of social laws ; the bonds that she had never believed could be broken, suddenly burst, just when she had given up hope, and she was accepted.

A nation stands together in a war. The peril of a greater evil uproots the smaller ills. The Honble. Mrs. Robinson was the first person to come round in the full sense of the word. Edith was amazed to see her actually walking up the little drive in person one morning, with a pile of books under her arm. Mrs. Robinson was shown into the drawing-room, where she began her story. One would almost have thought it had no preface ; she skipped the years behind her, and said that she thought the ladies

of the village ought to found a war committee, and every big house give up a room to the Red Cross. Edith was in agreement. She could allocate this room, Mrs, Maidstone was the next ptnon in on the scene, with no hint of previous disapproval in her manner. The extraordinary thing was that this strangely assorted committee worked in the fullest harmony. There was the shirt-making class every Friday, when everybody stitched with their servants and the village women, and told stories and exchanged &mall talk. There was the bandage-rolling class, where the little girls came in to help, Daisy at fourteen was most proficient !

Edward joined up immediately as a Tommy In the R.F.A., wearing the most astonishing boots, and tripping himself up with his spurs, He did it on impulse and discovered that he ought to have waited for die O.T.C. Arnie, who looked young for his years, tried to flip himself past the recruiting sergeant, but was refused ; he was sent back, to his indignation, and was still at Eton, Secretly, Edith was delighted, because she knew that she could riot have borne it if Arnic had had to go. By the time he was old enough the war would be over. It couldn't possibly last long, as everybody knew. What with the weighr of arms, there weren't the men in the world to stand up to it. Then there would be the Russians with their steam-roller movement, which would finish the whole thing. The Allies would be in Berlin by Easter (if not bcfout) ; everybody said so. Really Edith was rather enjoying it. It was a dreadful thing that all those young men weie getting killed (quite a lot of the people they knew had already lost relatives), but the war had so altered her own system of living that she was, in one sense, almost grateful to it.

She and William did not irritate one another as much as they had done previously, because now each was occupied in his own groove. Life held new meaning and lots of occupation. It might not be the Prince Chaiming that Edith, in her foolish dreams, had always hoped w'ould come round the corner, but it \Vas the next best thing.

In this, the greatest calamity of the early part of the twentieth century, she was almost happy.

For a couple of years the monotony went on, a monotony fraught with the knowledge that every step was being marched towards glorious victory in the war to end wars.

The body of Edward Boyce was taken down the Pine Walk, lying silent on a farm wagon, drawn by his great dray horses. At the time Edith had been ill with congestion of the lungs, and could not go to Hathorley, but the thought of Edward's death aflected her deeply. She could not imagine the world being quite the same without Edward in it. He was so gaily remiss, always erring, always spoiling for a fight, yet so ready to champion anyone. Olivia was at Hathorley, Piers at sea, but Olivia with her two children was capable of keeping up the tradition. She was gently unassuming, and scrupulously fair. She would stay there now until after the war, when Tee and his wife came back. Edith wondered what would happen then. But Tee didn't come back.

Olivia rang her up one afternoon. " Aunt Edith, we've had a message from die War Office about Tee."

" He's not wounded ? "

" I'm afraid it's more than that . . '"

" You don't mean . . . ? " She clutched at the telephone receiver, and for a moment imagined his face when as a boy he had taken her wet hand, and had drawn her away from the lakeside, that March afternoon before Edward was born. Without Tee she might have died then. Tee, arid the tree they had planted together. Blood brother ! Something that death could not destroy. Tee saying " Piers will be an Admiral in his Gunroom, you'll see. I know it's never been done before, but Piers'll do ii ! "

" I'm afraid he's gone, Aunt Edith. He died gloriously. Tee "—very emotionally—" has won the Victoria Cross."

So like Tee ! Tie *would* die gloriously, he wouldn't care. Tee would charge in on death, taking it all in his stride, laughing *with* that funny little three-core ered grin

of his. Edith felt paralysed that the world should change so quickly. In the merest handful of years Louise had gone, Edward, and now Tee. The older couple had taken it in their turn, but it wasn't Tee's turn. Tee should have lived for years yet, the best of a long life should still have sprawled before him.

" I'm getting his wife here," said Olivia, who was the kindest person and would think of that. " I'm doing all I can, and I wanted you to know. You loved him, too."

Edith said mechanically, " Yes, I loved him, too," and hung up the receiver. Tee had meant more to her than her own Edward, she had loved him dearly. She went automatically into the drawing-room, and sitting there began to roll up more bandages, quite unconscious of the movements of her hands. When William came in from the food office and she told him, she knew that the actual words hurt her.

He said ' Tee dead ? That sounds Extraordinary. Poor old fellow, yet perhaps it was the best thing that could happen ; I don't see how he could expect to be happy after he had married that awful girl."

" I don't understand why you say she was an awful girl. She had to earn her living, she couldn't help that."

" No, but to be part of a sister act ! Besides, her father was a dreadful man, he made bicycles in Coventry or something."

She said nothing. Surely there must be some people who weren't dreadful, and yet who made bicycles in Coventry ? Surely ? Was the world changing, and she with it, and was William sticking to the old regime ? She didn't know. But William must be right ; she must not go against him for he was her lord and master, and even if they didn't love one another any more (at least not in the same way) they had got to go on. Perhaps that was the most difficult part of life, the systematic continuation, a blind alley with no going back. Or perhaps, she thought suddenly, life is like the donkey cart the two boys were driving on the first day that she had come to Hathorley ? The donkey cart that couldn't go backwards, and the

people in life the donkeys. Perhaps. And, as she thought of it, she could see Tee's face again, impertinent, with the rumpled hair and the laughing eyes. Just as though for an instant the face popped over a hedge, and laughed at her. A hand that waved. Goodbye, the picture said. Goodbye, Aunt Edith.

Goodbye, Tee. Darling Tee. Then she began to cry.

. . . . . .

Early in 1915 Edward Boyce joined the O.T.C. He was a good-looking, quiet young man, with his father's fresh complexion and blue eyes, and his yellow-brown hair. Edward was the scholastic type, unusual in a Boyce, for, whilst Piers had craved after knowledge, he had never had the capacity to absorb it and had always been bottom of his term at Dartmouth. But Edward had inherited much in this way from the old Dean ; he liked learning and it came easily to him. He had done well at Eton. He did well now in the O.T.C.

Edward Boyce, all credit to him, disliked fighting. In his heart he had leanings towards conscientious objection, because he did not believe that eternal peace could be won by fighting for it, and considered it more likely that it would come through not fighting for it, but, in a war-ridden world, so frenzied with war-anguish, Edward did not feel that he could assert himself. He was all on the side of law and order.

All his life Edward had fostered resentment against life, having the feeling that he was odd man out in his family. Edward had a very good opinion of himself; he knew that he was a good son and brother, he knew that he was eldest and the heir, and that, in most families, the first-born has prior right to the family affections. But he also knew quite well that his mother loved Arnie more than she did her firstborn. His father he found unapproachable, though he had to admit that he had never .really tried to break down the barrier between them. He did not understand either of his parents, and, as he grew older, considered that it was their job to understand him, and that they had failed miserably in this. Highly sensitive,

he nursed a morbid inferiority complex and nursed it hard, turning his attentions to book work as an outlet, which probably accounted for the way that he passed all his examinations. His masters admired his prowess, but disliked his personality. Wherever he turned he met with disapproval.

In the early teens, he put two and two together, employing a little elementary arithmetic as to his birthday and his mother's wedding day (always hoped to be forgotten in the Manor House), and so discovered what had really happened. This was a shock to him. Like most children he expected scrupulous morality from his parents, and was remorselessly unforgiving over the other thing. He knew that his father had been divorced, this fact had been brought home to him forcefully at a children's party once, where Willy Baker's two eldest had been rudely obstreperous. Edward considered that divorce was in the same category as murder, and wondered morbidly why his father and mother had not been hanged.

At Eton, some of the boys had divorced parents, and, although most of them looked upon it as ordinary, and some as a joke, Edward could never adopt this attitude towards it. He wished that he could conquer this sententiousness but it was not easy to overcome and he continued to think that divorce was dreadful.

In his heart he was conscious of a gaunt loneliness. He was not in the same category as Arnie and Daisy, and knew it. He ached to reach the kindliness of his mother's affection, but failed ever to touch it. She was vague at times, and he was shocked at her stupidity. He could see that she was afraid of his father, and she got agitated when he talked to her. In her agitation her memory slipped occasional cogs ; she was quite helpless. He wished that she would change, but of course she wouldn't. What he did not understand was that she couldn't.

Edward was stationed not very far from Hinthorpe. One Saturday he made an excursion to the cathedral city, going there in the 'bus, and feeling that this anyway

would be a change from the usual routine of his life. His mother had always been reserved about her youth ; he gathered that she had not liked Hinthorpe, and was not proud of the very man she ought (in Edward's eyes) to be proud of, the old Dean.

It was August and the roses were out ; the cathedral close was sweet with the scent of them, faintly dusty, and in the elms, here and there, were little flecks of yellow, showing which way the summer trended. Edward walked in at the gateway under the Randolph Tower, and he saw the Deanery standing in its corner, a house with an impressive facade, and the unimportant side door which poor little Edith Markham had scuttled through, the night that her mother had died ! He saw the cloisters and turned into them, his footsteps echoing as he walked. In the centre was a square of smoothly shaved green, almost like material, and the light falling through a stone mullion lit up a red granite cross.

To the glory of God, and
memory of
ROBERT MARKHAM. D.D.
for twenty-five years Dean of Hinthorpe
who
Passed to greater glory , . .

He stood looking at it, a nerve working in his throat. Edward was deeply impressed. Suddenly he found a close relationship between himself and the red granite cross sprawled on the shaved green. Here was a friend ! Edward went into the cathedra] where evensong was in progress. He stood listening, with folded arms, to the boys' voices singing the psalm for the day. He watched the procession coming down the aisle, and moving in stately fashion towards the chapter house. A cross led them. He saw the ancient canon lumbering along (he was hurrying, because he hoped very much that there would be something substantial for his tea, lunch had been sausages, and wax-time sausages left him cold !)

Edward saw the procession trail round the corner, and heard the final Amen stir the echoes.

Edward was young and lonely. Here in Hinthorpe Cathedral he realized that he had suffered intensely for what he believed to be the sins of other people. The tragic irony was that here his mother as a young girl had realized the same thing, and yet between the two of them was a void they could not cross.

Edward went out into the sunshine, passing down the little street leading from the Randolph Tower. It was a faded street, with old leaning houses, a street where retired ladies made impecunious livings out of small shops. Outside one of them a bronze kettle swung, creaking in the light wind of summer. Over the bottle glass window, was a board bearing the name " Miss Mattie's Parlour." It was an itsy-bitsy little shop, obviously run by gentlewomen, impoverished, but with no business capacity. There was a tray of rock cakes, an iced orange cake and some home-made bread. Then, in a corner, a few raffia bags, an ornate kettle holder in velvet, and a few pieces of rather soiled Georgian silver displayed on a cushion. Inside, he could see an oldish woman, faithful adherent to tweed skirt and shirt blouse, at a time when greying temples and spreading hips should have forbidden it. A young girl doled out tea trays.

Edward went in, sitting down in a somewhat uncomfortable olde-worlde chair, at a table which had one leg disastrously shorter than the other three. The girl came for his order, a pinkly flushed girl, with a quiet voice.

" Yes, Joanna ? " called the woman, who was now fishing with a toasting fork over the short blind for rock buns, out of the window tray.

The shop being empty (it was too early for tea) he talked to the girl and found that her aunt ran the shop, and was Miss Montagu. Joanna had come here from school to help. In a simple way she was quite pretty, with her bracken-brown hair and eyes, and a cinnamon frock that matched them. He told her that his grand-

father used to live at the Deanery, and Miss Montagu came over from her job of spiking rock buns over a brass rail. Yes, she did remember Dean Markham, and had always thought him a very charming man. In truth she had once suffered a passion for him, though naturally she did not mention this. His wife had died under very sad circumstances, she said, adopting a suitable expression ; he had had a daughter.

" My mother," said Edward, mistakenly.

He knew it was a mistake instantly, for Miss Montagu looked at him, and went rather red, saying " Indeed ! " and then going back to the subject of what a good man the Dean had been. Edward realized that something was wrong, but did not know what it was. It was unthinkable that these people should know of the divorce, it couldn't be that.

Joanna stayed talking to him when customers had called her aunt back to bun-spiking activities. It was interesting to tell somebody about his life, and he did not know when he had been happier. All the way jogging home in the 'bus his heart was in Hinthorpe, thinking what an enviable position it was to be a clergyman, to climb up and up, and finally to have six-foot-by-two of shaved green with a red granite cross atop, and on it To the Glory of God and in memory of . . . (this time it was Edward Boyce) . . . for twenty-five years Dean of Hinthorpe.

The idea was taking shape.

Then he realized that already he was in canonical robes, and, curiously enough, Joanna was in the rectory ; he had never thought much about girls before, always believing them to be rather silly, but Joanna wasn't silly. He wondered if today was a start in his life, a new beginning. He rather thought it was. That night he wrote home to his father,

After the war, I think 1 shall take orders,

At Headley nobody bothered about the remark, they considered it to be just a phase through which the boy was passing. Neither William nor Edith mentioned it

when they wrote back, and Edward felt it discourteous of them and was annoyed.

The idea of taking orders grew ; every week he went to Hinthorpe, mouching about the Cloisters and staring at the red granite cross, and at the Deanery. Naturally he always tea-ed at Miss Mattie's Parlour, and got to know more of Miss Montagu and Joanna.

One day he got into conversation in the Cloisters with with one of the canons, a rubicund old gentleman, with a natural tonsure in which he rook the greatest pride. Edward mentioned his grandfather, and the Canon recalling hirn, said that he had been a charming man} had lost his wife rather sadly, and had had a daughter ! A look crossed the Canon's face, and Edward winced at that look. Tfye closer his intimacy with Hinthorpe developed, the more aware he became of the fact that whilst living there Edith must have done something most extraordinary. This cloister of her youth was a high wall built brick upon britk between them.

By early autumn the affair with Joanna had progressed into love. In the desert of Edward's life (and he morbidly magnified it into a desert), there were but two oases, Joanna and Hinthorpe. He hung about the little itsy-bitsy shop, he itched for the time when he could start on the road towards the Church, and throw off these shackles of soldiering, for soldiering had never been in his line. Towards the end of the summer he asked Joanna how she felt about it. She told him that she felt as he did, and was immensely proud that he was grandson of the Dean. They kissed rather solemnly. Later in the evening they celebrated their engagement with inferior sherry, and the cakes left over from the day's sales, in the back parlour with Miss Montagu. She was delighted. She thought this was the besi thing that could possibly have happened. They were cut out for one another, and she felt sure that Edward would follow in grandfather's footsteps, and be just such another Dean. Which, alas, looked highly probable !

Driving home in the last 'bus, Edward realized that he

had now cut himself adrift from his own family. Hinthorpe had taught him one thing ; if he was to live in peace he must cut himself away from his mother, who had donfe something dreadful. The jaundiced view of youth nursing a grievance,, intensified everything. But now his feet were on the road to glory, with Joanna by his side. The 'bus, lit by a filthily-smelling tallow dip, jogged campwards. At the road corner, a Couple of drunks got in. That was the army ! But none of this could last for ever, it would pass and Edward would be part of the procession trailing down the aisle, through the cloisters to the chapter house. The final amen would be sung. He could see himself removing his stole, pompously, unhurried. He could sec himself, grandiose, and respected ; it was joy.

Edward was suddenly moved Northwards to a most undesirable part of the country, returned at Christmas, and married Joanna. Being as yet not twenty-one, he had to get his father's permission, withheld for some time, because William thought it madness, and himself strongly disapproved of " Miss Mattie's Parlour," which he insisted on alluding to as " that abominable shop," though really no decent shop^ would have claimed relationship to it. However, it was Edith who urged that the permission should be given.

" If he were killed, dear, we should feel so terrible in having denied him this little joy," she urged.

She would have gone to the wedding, but Edward was mysterious about it ; he wrote that he wanted nobody to be there, and gave no actual date. He was behaving queerly, but he had always been rather a queer boy, which hurt her. She sent him twenty-five pounds as a personal present, and to Joanna a string of turquoise matrix (the engagement ring having been turquoise, she felt that this might possibly be a favourite stone). She was deeply hurt by the coolness of the gratitude.

" They don't seem very anxious to be friendly," she told William.

" I should think Edward's rather ashamed marrying a shopgirl like that," said William.

Although they were asked to come to Headley on the honeymoon, they wrote that leave was too short. With the war, everything was difficult, and, although Edith felt it all wrong to have a daughter-in-law whom she had never seen, she could do nothing about it.

" If you ask me," said Arnie, " it's a good job you haven't seen her ! Can't you imagine the sort of girl Edward would marry ? "

" She's your sister-in-law," Edith warned him, trying not to laugh.

A few weeks after his marriage Edward was sent to Simla for the rest of the war.

. . . . . .

Arnie was a different project.

Arnie had made a gallant attempt to join when Edward did, but, as he put it, he was " pipped on the post" by a sergeant with the most magnificent moustachios. (" You could have used them as handlebars on a bike, Mummy.") Arnie went back to school, to another inglorious term, during which he tried to grow a moustache like it, to make himself look more of a man of the world. He had a cherubic face like Tee, one of those angelic faces with a non-angelic grin permanently fixed there. He had an appearance that made a housemaster walk warily. Arnie looked a good boy, and wasn't ; Edward looked a good boy and was ; yet Arnie was worth forty Edwards !

The following holidays he did manage to slip the chains, and enlisted.

" Oh, my poor lamb ! " said Edith, quite horrified.

Arnie became a common soldier, living in a common tent with eight other extremely common young men. He spent the time in drinking, in playing suspicious card games, and discussing the affairs of the heart in no measured or censored terms. One of his friends was in private life an ambitious pickpocket, and the excellent practice that he had been building up, had been ruthlessly cut into by this war. His mother was torn with anxiety. If she got Arnie out, and away from this sort

of thing which was so very bad for him, he would become a Sub. She knew that the chances of getting a Sub alive out of France were remote. Arnie was safer as he was without a doubt, but terribly uncomfortable. She need not have worried, Arnie was a chameleon who adapted himself to conditions and got the best out of life that way. He thought it was fun.

In a very short space of time the regiment was ordered overseas, and the next place where he found himself was Egypt.

This is just a bit of jam, wrote Arnie home. Edith cried herself to sleep at night, realizing that her darling had gone for the duration. She did not know how she would have lived through that bad patch, had it not been for Mr. Reckitts. He was extraordinarily comforting, telling her that the boys were far safer than they could have been in France, and she really ought to thank Heaven for the mercy ! A boy in India, and one in Egypt, would have made most mothers envious.

At the time that Arnie wrote back about the jam, he had not come into contact with the crawling pests that absorb the desert. He had been landed at a desirable town with oleanders blossoming in the streets, with ilexes, and dark eyes which ogled him over yashmaks ; on days off he hired himself a donkey, and went about on it. Shopping was easy, the wine was good, the women desirable. It was jam on a large scale, but unfortunately the jam did not last. They were transferred into the desert, to a thing called an oasis, which was no oasis to young Arnie. The pickpocket friend was with him, and they were now buddies in a big way. They scrounged. The thing to do was to note doWn a native compound, where chickens were kept. Then, in the dim evening, one of them would go to the main door, getting the owner into conversation, whilst the other did business at the back, in the hen pens. If you were quick, you could snaffle three or four. It generally ended in a sprint for it, but they were good runners (they had to be) and would make a detour for the camp. They would fly into

the camp, scrap violently in the sand, and bury the fowls they'd got so that when the owner (and some of them were very objectionable) came round with a complaint, not one incriminating feather was to be found. Twenty-four hours later, when the fuss had blown over, they'd vdig up the booty, and have a feast.

There were, of course, times when these expeditions did not run true to form. There was the night when a native, who did not stick to the Queensberry rules, unleashed a couple of most unpleasant-looking dogs. With the dogs pressing a good deal harder than was desirable, Arnie and the pickpocket had to take to the river, with three dead fowls stuffed inside their tunics. Whatever happened they weren't giving those up. As they swam, the pickpocket had to make matters worse by suggesting that perhaps there were crocodiles in the water !

All the same, it was a grand life. It was the sort of life that Arnie could have revelled in if it hadn't been for that accursed dysentery. If there is one thing to knock a fellow flat, it's dysentery !

He became half conscious, and w[r]oke up to find himself in a palace of comfort, with clean sheets and pillows and an angel from Heaven presiding over him. The angel ol Heaven was a girl who, living ahead of her time, had discovered the major use of peroxide. Such golden blonde hair ! Such pink and white cheeks ! Such blue and gold ! Oh shade of Botticelli! No wonder that Arnie fell for it in a big way.

The angel came from Australia, and could talk wide open spaces, which were enormously appealing to Arnie. So was the comfort and cleanliness, for until now he had not realized how much he had missed it.

Before very long the letters home gave him away.

Darling Mummy,

Ton wouldn't believe what is happening to me. Her name is Hyacinth, have you ever heard that name before ? I haven't. And she's just like the ones that grow in the Spring garden at HeadUy. Tou'd adore her, as I do. Fve always

laughed at chaps falling in love and thought that you were my first and last love. Now this has happened . . .

A pang thrust through Edith's heart ! He had always been her boy.

" He'll meet a dozen loves before he marries, I shouldn't worry about that," said William.

Darling Mummy,

It was too good to last. Of course all the chaps are after her, and ifs no good. Pm leaving hospital tomorrow, and 1 hope I get killed. There is some talk of trouble in the Dardanelles. Pm in the state of mind when Mespot would be a joy. Isn't it hell? She's got her eye on a young captain, can't blame her. you know, he's the chap to blame. Sorry this is such a moan, but it's sickening when the girl you love don't love you. Then perhaps you don't know what that feels like . . .

Edith cabled sympathy, reply paid. The reply came weeks after, when he had quite forgotten the letter, and had no idea what she was sympathizing with.

As William said, one suffered much unnecessary anguish over the children, and yet they muddled through without any expenditure of emotion. The thing to do was to let them alone.

Arnie had gone back to his pocket-picking friend, and they had spent the next leave together in Alexandria. They had ventured the first night into a most insalubrious quarter, with a guide who was engaged on the principle of " I-show-you-very-good-all-right-lady." The whole point being that the lady was neither good, nor all right ! They had stood outside an ancient building in the moonlight, shaped like a mosque, with a vine climbing up it, and a long wrought-iron bell-pull at the side. This, when pulled, caused a grating to be scratched back, and one eye, rather a wicked eye, peered over a yashmak'

" So ? " said a gin-in-a-fog voice.

" Mother Harris," explained the guide, " her shop," and thai entered into parley.

This was quite a different shop from the one his father objected to, where Edward had had an affair. There was nothing of " Miss Mattie's Parlour" about this. Ultimately, with some show of reluctance, all part of the stock-in-trade, the door opened a couple of inches, showing a chink of jaundiced light, and a curl of stone staircase. Mother Harris finally showed herself, large and voluminous, in a seedy blanket, with a soiled yashmak.

" God, what a bint ! " said the pocket-picker.

Mother Harris did not usually admit common soldiers, her *clientele* being the nobility, she explained. The guide said that he would hold further parley, and the soldiers had better go upstairs. Upstairs they went. An unseen hand reached over a stone balustrade, and whisked away a couple of caps. That started it. The game of hide and seek on singularly grown-up lines developed. Never had Master Arnie enjoyed himself more. It was one chase from room to room, through crowds of glorious girls, pale coffee colour, pure white, or soft and rosy. Kicking, biting and fighting girls ; amorous, cuddly-up girls. Gee, what a night !

When he got his cap back, it wasn't worth having, but then what is a cap ? Next morning, with a very thick head, he sent his mother a postcard of the Sphinx, writing it in a street cafe, with the pocket-picker slumped in a chair beside him, and looking like death. He didn't know what they'd been drinking, it had been all right whilst it lasted, but the point was that it didn't last.

On the postcard Arnie wrote :

What a city in which to drown one's sorrow !

He only hoped it made sense.

• • • • •

Back to the desert again. More scrounges. More fuss. Anything to break the monotony of sand, and flies, and camel dung, A difficult situation arose out of his getting inside somebody's harem, and the somebody not taking it kindly. The bother an old tub of a man could make about three tubs of old women made him sick!

All the time through this serial story of crazy patchwork life, he was remembering Hyacinth. Then, at the end of six months, he went down with dysentery again. He had no idea that he could feel quite so awful. Once more the ambulance rolled him off to hospital, and he woke up in cleanliness and comfort, and with the strangeness of fate, the same face looked down at him.

He wasn't going to miss the boat another time, not if he knew it. Whilst he lay there, his commission came through, brought about by Edith's intensive work at home. Mothers are the people who can burst the bonds, and break the gates of brass, as he knew. A mother stakes her chances of getting her own way, by making a fuss. No man can ever make such a first-class fuss as a woman can. Arnie knew that Edith must have literally fought her way to get that commission, and she had won. It was the end of desert scrounging, and of harem-busting. He didn't suppose that now he would be calling back on Mother Harris, although she catered for the nobility. But what Arnie had got to admit was that the Sam Browne has a miracle effect on women folk. Every woman is razzled by a few pips, and they adore a brass hat. One of these days, if Edith kept it up, perhaps he'd be a red tab ! That ought to take him far.

Going out to the pyramids one night on donkeys, he confided his love to Hyacinth. It was the age-old background which never jades. Hyacinth had already had one husband, of whom she had been thankful to rid herself. She owned a large sheep farm in Australia, and wanted to get back to it. She told Arnie quite plainly that she would never consent to life in England, with its little pocket-handkerchief fields, and its cramped lanes. She meant to go back to Australia, with the wide open spaces arid the sheep farm. She was rich. Hyacinth could support Arnie in the luxury to which he was quite unaccustomed. He hated that idea but he longed for the wide open spaces. More letters came to Headley.

It's all marvellous. Mummy.

It had been written at dawn in the courtyard with the

cicadas chirruping in the ilexes, and the scent of the stephanotis in waves.

Ifs the sort of thing that I would never have believed could happen to me. She's a dream. We aren't going to be tied by any routine life, on a potty little English estate. I"m going to Australia, with thousands of sheep, and I'll adore it. You'll have to come out to us there. It is to be the most glorious life. Australia, Alummy, Wattle. All that sort of thing.

and then a postscript :

Her ime oughtn't to be Hyacinth. It ought to be Heaven.

Staring out of her lonely bedroom at Hcadley, Edith felt that something in her died ! She had loved him so much, the beloved child, the only one who mattered.

" What's it like to grow up, Mummy, Is it fun ? "

" Not fun at all, my darling," her heart said, "just pain and anguish. Just fear ! "

" Supposing we ran away to a desert island. Mummy, you and me ? "

If only they could have done ! If only a woman did not grow old and tired, if only a young man did not fall in love ! If only their paths did not fall apart !

His voice again, the beloved child's voice. " You can't cheat me. I sort of know. . . ."

She stared out at the autumn with yellowing leaves on thready trees, whose dark loom of twigs showed through. There was a light fog above the willows. In the drawing-room one of the all too temporary maids was singing.

I don't want to get well
I doc't want to get well
I'm in love with a beautiful nurse. , , ,

The song was a surgical operation on her heart ; she rang for Woods to stop it, Woods, older, stiffer, with a Derby band on his arm.

She sat tbere in the silence, horribly aware of the

tarnished marriage which held her, and of the one hope now for ever blighted. Arnie was going ! Life was going. Leaves were slipping from an autumn tree.

Oh God, I'm so unhappy, she sobbed.

TEN

SPURIOUS PEACE

Everybody had staked their faith on the peace, but, when it came, it did not stir Hcadley very closely.

" Now we settle down for the rest of our lives," said William, believing himself to be rather glad that the committees were done with. He could now give his time fully to the Bench. Just recently he had been made aJ.P.

" Yes," said Edith.

She didn't contradict William, she daron't.

She was nearly fifty, though she felt surprisingly young and hated the youth which stirred in her, arid still made Springtime deir.ands on a body in its first autumn. Minds do not age, alas. It is true that sometimes her memory tricked her, it was because when William became annoyed wirh her, she got frightened. He had such a challenging manner ; he was always so direct, and somehow she was easily alarmed by directness.

Mr. Allingtori dying immediately after the war, eased the situation a good deal, because William did not object so heartily to Susan Allington, and in time even came to tolerate her. Edith was supremely happy in this friendship. It was the one emotional bond that had not broken on her.

Edward, sent back immediately from Simla, went to take a divinity course at Cambridge, and Joanna was in rooms in the Trumpington Road. They did not come to Headley. It seemed quite unreasonable to Edith to have

two daughters-in-law, neither of whom she had seen, though of course Hyacinth being in Australia, it was excusable in her case. Arnie went directly out there with her, sending exultant cables home' Then came an avalanche of photographs, the bungalow, the farm, the bush, the wattle trees. Arnie in shorts. Arnie on a pony, bigger, heftier, obviously happy ! She thanked Heaven for that. Then came the photo of Arriie with the baby, named Edith after Grandmother (she was glad that Arnie's child was the first to give her that title). Arnie thought the baby was like Grandma, arid the photo showed a boss-eyed, fat blubber of a baby like nobody in particular.

"I shouldn't be flattered at *THAT!"* said William contemptuously, when he looked at it.

Now, with the war finished, and with peace ahead, Edith tried to concentrate and get some joy from her daughter. But Daisy had always been rather colourless. She was one of those children who agree with everything that is said, who have no personality and do not attempt to develop one.

At twenty-two Daisy was a compact girl, who had no interests outside the village. When most girls were thinking of young men, Daisy just lived the village life. She visited the poor, she took magazines round for Mr. Reckitts (now very old arid frail), she played her rather sickening violin at village concerts. Both Edith and Susan felt that Daisy's life was so much waste, and that she ought to have done better. She had darkish hair like her mother, and the Boyce blue eyes, with their fresh complexion.

"She'd be pietty if she woke up," Susan said, " but she never will wake up, and she's getting old for it now."

Olivia at Hathorlcy offered to give Daisy a season in London ; Daisy did not like the idea.

" I'm happier here at home, Mother."

" But, darling, you'll want to marry ? "

" Oh no I shan't."

" Every girl wants to marry."

Curiously enough Daisy was speaking the truth, and she did not want to niarry. Edith wished that she could spur William on to take some interest in paternal duties, but the Bench now absorbed him wholly. He was always certifying lunatics, or remanding poachers, or saying a few well-chosen words to people who drove to the public danger. Long ago Edith and marriage had slid out of his life, and he had reorganized himself to deal with public services. Edith wished that Edward were still at Hathorley ; she could have appealed to him. If little Mee had lived, the two girls could have been together, and she could not imagine that any daughter of Edward's would have behaved this way.

She'll be an old maid, thought Edith.

Daisy wore awful clothes ; she had no interest in her personal appearance. Wheedling or wrangling made no difference to her, she didn't care. Edith hovered helplessly on the fringe of maternal frenzy over it, but she could do nothing. Edward was now so far approaching the royai route to the Deanery, that he had become a curate at Wakefield, which wasn't at all his idea. Arnie was growing rather fat in Australia, and coming home on leave next summer. But it was always next summer. She believed that she would not be able to bear the ecstasy when he did come.

Left to herself Edith took up Bridge. She played bad Bridge, but. she thoroughly enjoyed it ; she had a couple of afternoons a week, set apart irrefutably for the game ; she had her own little clique of lady friends (Susan amongst them) who came in to play with her, or she went out to play with them. Three tables were arranged in the drawing-room, there was tea with fancy cakes, and a few coppers changing hands over the *post mortems* when the afternoon wUs over.

It was life to Edith.

Looking back, one wouldn't have thought that all those years were crammed into such a few memories. Nothing happening, just the Bridge. That time when she had grand-slammed Mrs. Robinson's Royal Spades f

That other lime when Susan had gone three hearts, and ought never to have considered it for a moment. No, she must not recall those moments. . . .

In 1927 there was the trouble with Daisy.

. . . . . .

Daisy lived an open-air life, and looked like it. On Sundays she sang in the choir for Mr. Reckitts. The Maidstones had gone, and there was a new man in his place. Mrs. Maidstone had died in a heart attack, which, rumour said, had been induced by a soldier who, on receiving one of her home-knitted Balaclava helmets with text, and her name and address stitched to it, had had the gumption to send it back, saying that he didn't wear bed socks !

Daisy had a clear, fresh voice, and she sang pleasantly, if without imagination. Mr. Reckitts had a new organist, a man called Evan Willis, delicate, rather affected, the son of a coal miner. Evan had struggled for a musical education against distressing difficulties and had eventually attained this post. He was a great improvement on old Mr. Clarke, who had had two strokes, one in the organ loft in the middle of *Jesus Christ is risen today^* and flopped on to the *Vox humana* v,'itb a most penetrating result. Daisy never noticed men. She wouldn't have known if it were old Mr. Clarke who dribbled down his beard, or dark-eyed Welsh Evan Willis, even though Evan Willis had already noticed Daisy.

Edith was in the swirl of Bridge afternoons and the getting of fancy cakes to vie with other ladies' fancy cakes (if possible to be slightly superior, but not so noticeably so as to strike a vulgar note), and William was wholly J.P. Nobody noticed that anything was afoot. They may have remarked on the fact that Daisy looked brighter-eyed, and she gave up wearing those awful old flannel trousers for haymaking (they had once been Arnie's, and he had worn them out years ago), and that her jumpers were not quite so home-made. It always made Edith uncomfortable that Daisy should have outgrown the stage when her mother could take her into a corner,

lick a handkerchief and go over the child's face rather like a cat.

Nobody knew what happened, but, in late September, when the roses were drooping in the first frosts, and the harvest was carried, Daisy said at breakfast [4] Fra marrying Evan Willis this afternoon.[1]"

William had been getting through his honeycomb and brown bread (dicteriui interested him), and Edith haJ been planning a Bridge afternoon in her mind for a couple of weeks ahead. Both looked up.

" What ? " they said together.

" I'm getting married."

" Don't be silly,'[5] said William, " he's a miner's son."

" He is marrying me," explained Daisy.

" But, darling . . ." from Edith.

William shot her a look over the honeycomb, which said you-leave-this-to-me ! " Daisy, what has come over you ? The man is beneath you, you're a lady, and he is a miner's son. He hasn't even got the income to support you."

" I love him," she averred.

" Rubbish," said William, as though that settled it. " Love is a transitory emotion, it doesn't last."

How horribly true ! thought poor Edith, fingering the coffee pot ! Yet it lasts in a woman's heart. You can't uproot it, for the thing won't die, and it hurts desperately that it should go on living. She'd always love William, and couldn't tell him so. Even if he didn't want her, even if he had gone to the Orange Free State leaving her so bitterly alone at Headlcy, even if he were all J.P ' she'd always love him.

" I'm of age," said Daisy.

" If you *marry* him, you never cross this threshold again," announced William, and he meant it.

Eclith cried. " Oh, we mustn't be hard ! Surely the war taught us not to be hard . . . ? " and she covered her eyes with her hands. She had lost Edward, she never quite knew how- only that he didn't want to have aay more to do with her; Arak had good aeroo the

seas ; she couldn't lose Daisy too. Even if she didn't really want Daisy, she still couldn't lose her.

" It's my house," said William.

" It's Daisy's home."

Daisy said, " Don't fuss, Mother, I've never liked the place, and shan't mind a bit, but I am marrying Evan this afternoon whatever Father says."

" I forbid it," said William.

Edith went round the table to Daisy's chair ; she stood there, a little round middle-aged woman, holding Daisy's hand. She looked absurd as the maternal breast swelled, and there were tears in her eyes, and the hands still lovely (that once he had so admired) held Daisy's closely. " I'll stand by you., darling," said Edith, she hoped heroically.

" You're making a fool of yourself," said William.

For a moment the idea of going away with Daisy flashed through her brain, then she knew that she hadn't got the strength ; she hadn't even got the will to fight this thing out properly, but went back to her chair, and began to cry. Because William was so right ; with a man, love did not last !

The argument between father and daughter raged about the table, strewn with William's diet, honeycomb, prunes, bran and brown bread. Daisy refused to lose her temper and was quite dignified, Edith almost admired her. When it was over, Daisy arose and went upstairs to pack.

" We shall never live this down," said William furiously. " I'll go and see Evan Willis. Til give him a piece of my mind."

Out he stalked.

Edith could not understand how any of it had happened but, had she only known it, it had been too easy. It was at choir practice, with Daisy's solo of *Come, Holy Ghost, our souls inspire.* One Whit morning, scarlet and white, with the scent of guelder roses in the church and the flaunting scarlet pennants of the oriental poppies on the altar. The same glory of that early Communion which

had betrayed her mother, had betrayed Daisy, and coming home she had walked with Evan Willis, and he had talked of his early life.

He had talked movingly of the little town of slate-roofed ugly houses in a vale that should have been verdant. Of the grime and grit in the air, of the cage that brought men up to the daylight. She was more moved by it than by anything she had ever heard before, and that afternoon, sitting in the garden, she had kept thinking of Evan Willis, and the cage that brought men up to freedom. Of herself, too. Very naturally of herself!

Another time, they had walked home when the fields were seeding for hay. There were marguerites, her name flower, blossoming amongst them, strong-smelling, she had never quite liked the scent of them, but Evan told her that to him they always seemed to be purely white and frankly open-eyed, like herself. The name took on fresh meaning.

Love swept Daisy along in a way that she had never believed could be possible. Oh, so lovely summer ! Evan singing *Land of my fathers,* his hand on hers. Who would have thought that the touch of a hand could change an entire world ?

" It won't last, Daisy, it never docs." Her mother was beating frantically on the locked bedroom door. " Don't throw away everything for a man who hasn't been brought up as you have been. Do listen to your father."

" I'm asking for no advice."

Edith went downstairs again, panicking. The new Bridge scoring blocks had come ; the nice ones with the little thingummy at the top that you turned round, to show what trumps were. That was an innovation that would surprise the ladies. Mrs. Robinson had beaten her with fancy cakes last time, and now this would surprise Mrs. Robinson. Only she hadn't got any heart left, she couldn't even remember what you called the thingummy ! William would be very angry with her if

she couldn't remember, because he hated her memory missing cogs and thought it a foolishness she could control if only she would try.

What shall I do ? she thought,

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There was nothing anybody could do, for Daisy went. Edith had never thought that it could be so soon. She was sitting over lunch waiting for Daisy to come downstairs, and looking out through the window, saw the elm trees blown together, and Daisy walking up the path carrying her suitcase like a little baby across her heart. At the gate stood a ramshackle motor car, a two-seater with a hood that was tattered, and a dicky with broken springs. She saw Daisy open the gate to walk out.

I can't let her go like this, thought Edith, and got up. She was a little too fat to move quickly. She wanted to spring to the door as she had done when she was a girl, but her body was grown too cumbersome, A surprised rnaid stared at her as she crossed the hall, and she was out of the front door, trying to bundle herself down the path.

Daisy did not see her.

Daisy had got into the car beside Evan Willis, and the thing started, back-firing violently. Back-firing had always frightened Edith, she put her fingers in her ears, but she stuck to her course heroically. They never saw her. She stood at the gate, not knowing what to do next.

William, coming from the village, came behind her, and said acidly, " Well, there's no need to advertise what's happened, is there ? "

" I wasn't, William,"

" They've done it, and that's the end ! She never comes inside my house again, she understands that."

" Oh William, aren't you being hard ?"

" As people make their beds they've got to lie in them. Blast the girl ! "

" You shan't swear at the child."

" If you'd kept a proper eye on her, she would never have got herself into this mesa. Half of it is your fault,"

She walked limply up the path before him. " I don't want any lunch," she said miserably.

" Well, it's no good starving yourself out of spite ! Don't be silly."

She had the pride to walk past him up the stairs. She went into her bedroom, the room where Daisy had been born. She remembered lying here, and hoping it would be a girl, the pains coming and going. Surely the baby would be born with the next one ! Then Dr. Robinson saying " It's a lovely little girl." She had been a lovely little girl too, with very pink toes.

Edith would always remember the pinkness of her toes !

She sat forlornly on the ottoman, where she kept the spare blankets. She felt terrible. The most awful part was that she was hungry, and wanted her lunch quite dreadfully. Pride held her back. She had told William that she didn't want any lunch, and because of that she wouldn't have it. But it was maddening to think of him eating that beautiful steak and kidney pudding alone, and to know that she was left out of it. Maddening. She didn't know what to do.

. . . . . .

The pattern of living is a strange one.

In her Indian summer, she saw all these things, but through a shaded glass. The miseries were not so intense, the joys a little gayer. Memory does that ! In our minds, all days are sunshiny ones, we do not recall when it rains. Life supplies an excellent blotting pad to unkindnesses.

Now she knew that memory was blurring. It was queer, because all these were recent incidents, she would have expected to remember them so much more easily than the things that had gone before.

The deadly sijence from Daisy.

That summer when Arnie was coming home, and how she had looked forward to it with a love that almost burnt her up. Arnie had understood her, his presence would make everything so tremendously different for her ; yet she dreaded the visit because she would be so unhappy

when he left again. That frightened her. Arnie would be amused at William's dealings with lunatics, and poachers, and affiliation orders.

She recalled the day when he came to the station, and she went to meet him all a-flutter, her heart making queer noises, her hands twitching. She'd spent ages deciding which hat to wear, and when she got on to the station platform she was quite sure that, in spite of all her care, it was the wrong one. She hovered, a little round bee of a woman, pacing the summer platform with the country flowers in the border. Arnie was coming back. Her Arnie. She'd be afraid of Hyacinth, but perhaps not for long. Hyacinth loved him too. Then there would be little Edith, the child named after her, her own granddaughter, and so like her, they said. Much more like her, and dearer, than Daisy had ever been.

The train was coming in, and she could hardly bear it. Overwhelming love submerged her, overwhelming desire to tell him everything, to get him to share the bogeys and isolationist horror of life.

That's the trouble with life, it's so lonely. So grimly lonely.

Then she saw a completely strange man, with an enormous and fierce moustache, getting out of the train, and, although she told herself it was only the Australian clothes that he was wearing, she wasn't sure in her heart. How he would have laughed at the clothes in the old days ! (Oh Mummy, look at those awful trowbockers !)

There was a complacent woman with him, who looked like the wife of a sheep farmer, and not in the least like a hyacinth ; there was a fat little girl, a little like Daisy, yet not a bit like Daisy, in the evasive manner of children. Edith rushed to him and he held her to him, but it was a stranger ! It wasn't Arnie.

The real Arnie had ceased to be, when he no longer snuggled into her arms at dawn, and whispered outrageous confidences into her too-willing ear. Arnie had gone.

Life is so lonely !

Then there was lunch with William and these three strange people, and all the time a void in her heart, a panic, and a despair that almost raddled her. Arnie was intensely interested in his father's magisterial experiences, William was all-important, none of them had very much time for her. She wanted to cry. She sat there looking down at the trifle on her plate, a mound of it, particularly chosen because it was Arnie's favourite sweet. He did not notice it now. The trifle days had been left behind with the little boy who had snuggled to her in bed.

" Is it fun growing up, Mummy . . . ? "

" No, darling, it's hell," she wanted to say.

. . . . . .

They went into the garden afterwards.

" How small it all looks, Mother, I suppose it's after Australia ? You must come there some day. And now tell me all your secrets ? "

She had no secrets to tell.

It was just the same as it had been at the Deanery in her youth, looking at the flowers, never so fine as last year. An inspection of the premises with awkward pauses in the conversation. She'd be rather glad when the time came to take up the candle, and walk past the tall cheval glass to the bed, with the colza oil float alight behind her. And one day, she thought rather tragically, she would walk for the last time, from the colza float to the bed. Leaving the little light behind her. . . .

Arnie stayed for a month, getting on enormously well with his father. He showed them innumerable pictures of the sheep farm and the country, and of himself on a pony, and himself off a pony ; and of the child on a pony, and off a pony. They'd nicknamed the child Snippets ! Edith felt outraged, and knew that it was nonsensical. She'd been so proud that he should call his only child Edith, and now just to be Snippets !

But it wasn't any good worrying. It was her Bridge afternoon, and she was hovering between sardine sandwiches, or paste ones, or both ? Or were both a little vulgar ? She was not sure.

At the end of a month Arnie and his wife disappeared to visit her people in the North. Edith had thought that this would be the end of the pattern of living, but it wasn't. At the station she looked into his eyes.

" Goodbye, Arnie."

" We'll be back again, Mummy. This isn't goodbye."

" No dear, of course not. Goodbye, Hyacinth, take care of him, and Snippets too. Goodbye."

The heart had gone dumb inside her. Suddenly dumb. Cold. Quite cold.

She was glad when they had gone, and she could get back to the Bridge afternoons without any outside worries. It had never really been Arnie, but a stranger. She had been afraid of Hyacinth who, being a trained sister, had a certain alarming masterfulness. Snippets had been one of those I-want children, wanting a good smacking most of all.

No, life was happier as Susan said, running smoothly, if in the lonely rut. William back on the Bench and she with her Bridge afternoons, and the garden, and the quiet evenings, and the *post mortems.* Even the *post mortems* were quite interesting.

. . . . . .

Edward became a priest, and William thought they ought to go for the ceremony, but Edith had to stay because she got an attack of shingles. William enjoyed being away, and came back and said that Edward's whole ambition was staked on ultimately becoming Dean of Hinthorpe, and he thought it very praiseworthy of him.

Edith wanted to laugh.

Edward had nurtured his inhibition against his mother. He knew all about Ralph these days, and the flirtation (much magnified), and her ultimate episode with " a married man " (his father). He was determined never to go home again. In some sense, Edith had realized this, and she ceased to worry or concern herself about him. It was queer how the children had dropped out of her life. At one time she had thought that they would always occupy the most prominent positions, but they

didn't. They gradually became background, then not even that.

In 1935, Daisy suddenly appeared at home. She was older, plumper, and had grown very much like her mother. Still serviceable, she did not look as if she had had a bath for some time, which horrified Edith. Her baby had died, and she sat on the sofa telling her mother about it, and how Evan had got a post at a North country cathedral as organist, and was doing quite well.

" For you romance *has* lasted," said Edith, justifiably proud. She wanted the best for her children.

" Oh, not that sort of thing. That doesn't last ; it isn't true. Love is a fallacy we're brought up with, it's like Father Christmas, nobody expects it to be true in their hearts. But Evan and I are very happy. I'm so interested in my big garden and I keep a roadside stall supplied from it."

Edith knew nothing of roadside stalls beyond that it was quite a common way of earning your living. She said " Oh yes," vaguely.

Susan came in walking stiffly; her rheumatism had been difficult this last year, it was arthritis, the doctor said, and at times she found it very annoying. She knew something of roadside stalls and listened to Daisy's chatter about her garden and the white currant jam that she had made, and the new method of manuring carrots. AH this left Edith bewildered. She kept on wondering what William would say when he found the prodigal daughter sitting here. Undoubtedly William would blame her mother. Ed';ti could see this row coming straight for her, and was horrified at the prospect.

However, William said little. He had had a very successful afternoon, saying a few reproving words to a first offender. ' The first offender had thanked him kindly, assuring him that he was a real gentleman, and his fellow magistrates had congratulated him on the impression that he had made. Flattered, William had returned in the best of good tempers, so that Edith need not have worried about what he would say.

" Good Heavens ! It's Daisy," he exclaimed.

" Dear Father," said Daisy.

All the good resolutions had suddenly crashed. He held out a hand. After all, it was much nicer if people could be friends. So much better if they got on comfortably, rather than arguing and fighting and making one another miserable.

And, she thought, recurring to the subject uppermost in her bewildered mind, if one did have paste sandwiches with sardines, they simply must be meat and not fish. It would never do if there were two sorts of fish sandwiches, people would not think her at all discerning if she had two kinds of fish.

She must make a mental note of that.

Potted meat.

. . . . . .

Politics seemed to have come to the forefront of the world, and secretly Edith felt them outside a woman's province even if she did have the vote, which she herself had never wanted and certainly would never use. She prided herself on that.

William said that of course there'd never be another war with Germany, she wouldn't dare when it came to it. He thought that all this aggression was sheer bluff, a facade that would crumble, no nation in its senses would go to war at this stage in our civilization. It never occurred to him that Germany might not be in her senses.

When Munich rang an alarm bell Edward wrote from Surrey to reassure them. We had had our fright, wrote Edward, and now we knew. The whole letter was along the terms of Who's afraid of the big bad wolf? Arnie wrote from Australia, an amusing note, expressing the same opinions couched in Australian terms.

Of course they knew.

Edith still harboured the idea that men always knew, whilst women in their fatuous ignorance could not be expected to know so much. She did not concentrate upon European politics, because she had never even

mastered home ones, and anyway she felt that they were outside her ken. Besides, she was worried about Hathorley.

Piers had been killed in a motor smash ; it had been obvious for some time that he and Olivia were not getting on too well ; he was impossible, she was gentle and sweet; for the children's sake she had stayed with him longer than she should, but quite suddenly she took a flat in London. Then there was the car accident, and the inquest and all the additional horrors. Pierrot, Pier's only son, was a happy-go-lucky lad, with not a mind outside the inside of a motor car. He had never cared for Hathorley in the true Boyce spirit. When William heard that the place was up for sale, he raved and ranted, chiefly because he personally had not got the money to buy it, and certainly not to keep it up. For the last few years it had been growing shabbier. Income tax and death duties had eaten into the pockets. William played with the idea of turning it into a hotel or letting it as a prep, school or doing something of that sort with it, then he knew that it was hopeless. England, as the men of his generation had known it, was changing. One by one the big estates disappeared into their twilight. Tradition was changing too. That was the horrible part of it.

" Oh, not tradition," said little old Edith, staring helplessly at him.

" You know nothing about it," he assured her.

So true ! She didn't. She hoped he wouldn't upset her too much, for it was Bridge this afternoon at Susan's, and if she cried her eyes came up puffy so that everybody knew ; she didn't like people knowing that she'd been crying.

" I shall buy'the lodge," said William.

" But what shall we do with it, dear ? "

Then suddenly she remembered the gates swinging open and the donkey cart coming hell-for-leather towards them. Two grubby faces, two rumpled heads. Burn their eyes, from the coachman. Her own laugh, a young

laugh, not as it sounded these days. Quite, quite different.

" I don't think I'd like the lodge," she told William.

" I love everything that is Hathorley," he answered rather grimly.

And he bought it.

. . . . . .

Susan Allington died in the midsummer of 1939 ; she had a seizure in her sleep, and when the old maid brought her the early morning tea, there she was lying on her side, with her face turned to the greater dawn than the one peeping in at the open window. Edith didn't understand it. Somehow she had always thought that Susan would be there for eternity. She couldn't realize that Susan would go, and she felt peculiarly alone.

William took her to the seaside to get over it. They stayed there some time, but the hotel life did not amuse Edith, who was afraid of a crowd. Today everybody was talking war and it frightened her very much. She hoped that William was right when he said that it wouldn't really happen. She hoped very much that he was right.

She didn't think that she could roll bandages now, and although of course she would do her duty as would all brave Englishwomen, the thought of what that duty might be alarmed her. If there were a war it would be difficult to get her Bridge, and she did so enjoy her Bridge. Oh, she hoped there wasn't going to be anything difficult.

Then it came. One week of darkening suspense, going into Maidstone and buying yards of blackout material ; she did not really understand why, it seemed to be such a silly thing to buy, but necessary. Most vitally necessary, William said. In the garden the gardeners were digging out a huge pit called an air-raid shelter. She only hoped she would never have to go into the horrible place, because it smelt like a grave, and she felt that it would be her grave if she stepped into it.

They fitted her for a gas mask. It was all very unnerving.

" It's all right, dear," said William, surprisingly kind

about it all. The common horror seemed to bring him closer. She turned and looked at him with rheumy blue eyes glazed with tears. If he said so, and if he held her hand, then of course it was all right. She still loved him with that loyal, clinging love that prayed for kindness. Dear William. The best husband in all the world, she told herself. The dearest husband.

Then suddenly on the top of the war, they were billeted. Miss Murphy came in at the gate shepherding five rather plain children, with gas masks swinging from their shoulders, and grubby faces. They came from Bermondsey.

" This is your new home," said Miss Murphy, and ticked them off on a list as she manoeuvred them into the front door. Herbert Briggs and his brother Desmond, Ethel, Lilian, and Heather Adams.

" It will be nice to hear children in the garden again," said William, who believed that these sentiments were patriotic.

Within half an hour the house was the children's, and poor little Edith realized that she was a back number. The children had never lived in a proper home before, apparently, and the thing that interested them most was the plumbing. Drains were speedily stopped up. The bath they treated as a joke. They did not wash. Their clothes were shameful, and when the little boxes were opened, they contained not the regulation change of things, but a few old newspapers folded neatly to give body to the illusion.

Heather Adams' head was alive. Florence the parlourmaid went over it with a toothcomb and got her shins kicked for her pains. The children were then escorted to a special department hastily extemporized by the local authorities, the need being so pressing, where heads were treated. Herbert and Desmond ran away, and the prayers of the Boyces went up that they might remain undiscovered, but they were found all too soon and returned.

That was the beginning of the horror.

Edith had thought that bombs would fall and the place be shattered by shot and shell ; the conversation of the more punitive old gentleman in the seaside hotel had led her to believe all this ; instead she found her shot and shell consisted of five diabolical children. She just couldn't bear it. If only Susan had been here to fly to ! If only . . . !

William was far kinder than he had been ; he was incensed that his life should be so disrupted ; he loathed the children, even more than they loathed him. To their immense relief, in February the Adams' felt lonely in Bermondsey and asked that their offspring should be returned. Exit Ethel, Lilian and Heather. Only when things became suddenly increasingly difficult in France did Herbert and Desmond finally go.

Then Edith did not quite know what happened . . .

. . . . . .

A Spitfire flew low down the village street ; she went out to wave to it, thinking that it would encourage the pilot; one ought to encourage the dear boys, every one of whom was a mother's son, or she supposed so. But the pilot did not wave back, he turned a machine gun on to the street, and she saw a swastika on his wings. Edith crouched by the gate in a clump of irises, her face pressed to the earth ; she couldn't bear it. It was William who fetched her in later on, who washed her face tenderly as a woman, who gave her brandy.

" We'll go away, dear, we'll go to the Lodge until it's over."

" But will it ever be over, William ? "

" Yes of course, and we shall win."

It was so comforting that William knew. William wouldn't let them do that sort of thing again. William would stop it.

" Let's go away quickly, William ? "

" Yes, dear, tomorrow," he promised.

And so they came to the Lodge.

It was so peaceful in the garden here. She let her

knitting drop into her lap. Just as it used to be, and she'd forget the rubble of the old house behind her, and the gaps where the three cedars used to stretch dark boughs against the pale night sky. It wasn't such a pale sky tonight, for a thunderstorm was corning up. Edith hated thunderstorms, they always made her heart beat too fast, but yesterday's storm had only threatened, and this one might do the same and pass. Anyway it couldn't hurt her. It was so pleasant to realize that, after crouching in the irises by the gate, and that horrid black aeroplane hurtling up the village street spitting fire.

Tomorrow she'd write to Daisy, and to Arnie. Arnie was coming over here with the Australians he had said in his last letter ; she'd see him again. Darling Arnie.

" Is it fun being grown up, Mummy ? "

Yes, of course it's fun. There are bad stages, but they don't really matter. They pass. It was quite fun sitting here in the garden with the lake lapping the reeds and the moor-hens making their funny noise, and the wind stirring the dark rhododendron leaves. She nodded a trifle. Time for a short nap. It was so very warm. She looked out at the familiar scene sleepily. A great white butterfly hovered for a moment, she did not know when she had seen such a great white butterfly. Sleepily she remembered that the workmen pulling down the house had said that the biggest butterfly ever had flitted out of the chimney. She thought this must be it. The great white butterfly hovered over the pink water flowers, hesitated a moment, and when she looked again she saw something strange. A girl in a white frock with little blue earrings in her ears was going towards the reedy bank, into the water.

Oh well, it was a very pleasant evening for a bathe !

She felt her eyes closing. Just forty minutes and then she'd be all nice and fresh for supper. Just forty minutes.

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Half an hour later the thunderstorm broke. It broke with a vivid zigzag of forked lightning which split the

sky, and in that one moment struck the fourth cedar which had pointed to Heaven. But Edith Boyce never heard it. She had died very peacefully, a quarter of an hour before the first large drops of rain began to fall.

THE END