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FOUR COUNTRIES

FOUR COUNTRIES

Stories by the author of *The Child of Queen Victoria*, *The Invaders*, etc.

William Plomer's special gift as a story-teller has been to bring unfamiliar scenes and people to glowing life. He tells, for instance, what happened when an American business man, full of self-esteem and Turkish delight, fainted near the Acropolis; or when a determined lady novelist gate-crashed an English country house. He shows an African native losing his innocence in the gold-mines of Johannesburg; or a Japanese seer foreshadowing the atomic explosion at Hiroshima many years before it happened.

His concern is with human pleasures and predicaments in this age of 'dislocation, disorientation and exile'. Equally conscious of the humanity that unites us and of the passions or conventions that divide us, whether tragically or comically, he is chiefly interested, as a short-story writer, in encounters between persons of different races or classes.

Partly because of his versatility in prose and verse, and partly because of his independence of schools and trends, Plomer stands somewhat apart from most of his contemporaries. These stories, chosen from those he has published during the last twenty years, are among the most effective of his writings.

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&c.

FOUR COUNTRIES

by

WILLIAM PLOMER



. . . and life delights in life'

BLAKE

JONATHAN CAPE
THIRTY BEDFORD SQUARE
LONDON

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CONTENTS

PREFACE	7
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STORIES OF AFRICA

ULA MASONDO	17
BLACK PERIL	55
THE CHILD OF QUEEN VICTORIA	65
WHEN THE SARDINES CAME	108

STORIES OF JAPAN

A PIECE OF GOOD LUCK	123
THE PORTRAIT OF AN EMPEROR	181
THE SLEEPING HUSBAND	194
THY NEIGHBOUR'S CREED	218

STORIES OF GREECE

NAUSICAA	231
THE CRISIS	253
THE ISLAND	266
LOCAL COLOUR	274

CONTENTS
STORIES OF ENGLAND

NO GHOSTS	287
EVER SUCH A NICE BOY	297
THE NIGHT BEFORE THE WAR	301
A WEDDING GUEST	311

P R E F A C E

AFTER I had selected and arranged these stories, their present publisher asked me to provide some kind of introduction to them. If they were now making their first appearance I might have recoiled from this invitation, but they have all been printed and some reprinted, and have therefore been through a period of probation. Whatever I may say about them now cannot alter what has been said by others, and can hardly increase or lessen the likelihood of their being read — that must depend on the stories themselves.

I cannot pretend that when I began writing fiction I had any cut-and-dried theory about the nature and art of the short story. It seemed to me then, as it seems to me now, that the genesis of a good story may be not unlike that of a poem, and that a good story must have, above all things, cogency and point. In recent years there has been a cult of the short story, and some of its devotees have been solemnly self-conscious; some, indeed, have tried to fob off on us the feeblest trifles, mere notes and sketches that leave the reader none the happier and none the wiser, that leave him in fact quite unmoved, except to mild exasperation or a yawn. We rightly expect a story to have a point, and this generally means that we expect it to be dramatic. A short story must let us into the secrets of other people's lives, and unless it lets us into their lives at a moment of crisis, it is unlikely to have much point or to be dramatic. The crisis may be a small one, but a crisis there must be. This crisis must engage the reader's imagination, and it must illuminate some new or unfamiliar aspect of the human predicament, or some familiar aspect in a new way. As for the manner in which this is done, there are infinite possibilities, but it must be adroit.

P R E F A C E

Some exact and enlightening observations on the short story are to be found in the essay prefixed by Elizabeth Bowen to her anthology, *The Faber Book of Modern Stories*. She stresses the need for a short story to have a 'poetic tautness and clarity' and that amazement and awe which are part of poetry. It should have, she says, 'the valid central emotion and inner spontaneity of the lyric'; it should be 'as visual as a picture'; and she rightly believes that it can 'measure man by his aspirations and dreads and place him alone on that stage which, inwardly, every man is conscious of occupying alone'.

It will be seen that these stories are grouped geographically; each group represents and is an outcome of a phase of the writer's experience. This does not mean that the order is strictly chronological. *Thy Neighbour's Creed*, for example, was written long after the three stories with which it is here printed and with which it is linked, and long after those which follow it. It is often necessary for some time to elapse before an experience or an idea can become a story and not a mere piece of reporting. It may be like a photographic film awaiting a particular catalyst before it can be developed, or like a negative requiring a particular strong light before it can be printed. It may have to go through a process of maturing or transmutation, and I have found the length of time needed for this process extremely variable: in the case of *Thy Neighbour's Creed*, the situation it describes sprang suddenly into focus after nineteen years.

Looking over these stories, it occurs to me that few of my writing contemporaries were so far-flung at so early an age: I think I was twenty-two when I wrote *Ula Masondo*, which I certainly could not have written unless I had already spent some of my early years in Africa, and unless my father before me had done the same and had been professionally occupied with African natives. From Africa I went straight to Japan — an unusual transition: I will not say it was made at a still impressionable age, for a writer had better be impressionable at any age.

P R E F A C E

When I returned to England I did not see it with the same eyes as if I had been there all the time. I had to re-adapt myself, and felt almost as if I had returned from another planet or from the dead. In the midst of this strange experience, I was absent for some time in Greece.

Let it be said that I was lucky to live when young in these different, distant and oddly assorted places. Perhaps I was; but, luck apart, it does seem to me that my transplantations have been not uncharacteristic of this age of dislocation, disorientation and exile, this age of the Displaced Person. In their way I think most of my stories reflect the age by isolating some crisis caused by a change of environment or by the sudden and sometimes startling confrontation of members of different races and classes. It is not uncommon nowadays to hear people say that they have 'no roots'; but for a writer to be effective in the present age it seems to me needful for him to be thoroughly conscious of his origin and at the same time adaptable enough to strike new roots as often as may be necessary. Displacement may be only necessary once, or it may not be necessary at all, but one cannot help noticing how many admired writers of the present century have either lived in exile from their native countries, or have divided their allegiance, or have adopted a new country, or have been made fruitful by travel or residence abroad. If fear and aggression, and the misery and stringency that result from them, do not do away with all freedom and all zest, it may be hoped that in time it will be nothing out of the ordinary for a man to get to know life in several different countries while he is still young enough to make the most of it.

Another thing that strikes me about these stories is that each group of them has more or less its own underlying theme. The African stories all touch more or less directly upon that conflict between white and black, which was, and is, and is going to be the most important of all human concerns in many parts of Africa. *Ula Masondo* treats particularly of the impact of indus-

PREFACE

trialism (or whatever you like to call it) upon a detribalized native. The theme of detribalization and of transition from a village community to a great town, where the individual is apt to be exploited, recurs in the Japanese stories; and they are set in a whole civilization which had, so to speak, gone to town and lost its balance, retaining however a militant nationalism, the subjection of women, and other barbaric survivals.

The Greek stories are concerned with the pursuit of pleasure in spheres frugal, lazy and corrupt, haunted by the consciousness of ancient glory, and charged with vitality. They date from days when the Greeks were in general no less obsessed with politics than usual but when the obsession was less openly ferocious than it has often been since that time, and when the powerful charm of the national character was far more conspicuous (to me at least) than its less amiable aspects. In three of these stories, I notice, there is a chance impingement upon a Greek scene of individuals from ostensibly more sophisticated levels of civilization, and these sophisticates tend to appear ludicrous, for they lack the dignity, the freedom from fussiness, of the uninhibited and unprivileged persons with whom they come in touch.

The English stories are concerned, almost inevitably, with the comedy of class distinctions, and the two last of them give, I hope, a hint of that aura of slight craziness that may surround an individual at a time of national or general convulsion.

For the stories in the first three groups I can at least claim that intelligent natives of the three countries have felt that essentials had been seized upon and newly illuminated.

In case it is of interest, I may say that, to the best of my belief, the only two short-story writers who strongly affected me as a young man were Maupassant and Bunin. I do not think I should have written *A Piece of Good Luck* if I had not known the *Histoire d'une Fille de Ferme*. As for Bunin, *The Gentleman from San Francisco* came to me with the force of a revelation; it electrified me, and until I read it I had not known how much the

P R E F A C E

short story could do; it still seems to me the best short story written in this century. If my own stories have any clarity of outline, it may be largely due to an early acquaintance with these two masters.

W. P.

NOTE

SOME of these stories are taken from *I Speak of Africa* (1927), *Paper Houses* (1929), and *The Child of Queen Victoria* (1933). To Mr. Leonard Woolf and the Hogarth Press, which published the first two of these books, I tender thanks for permission to reprint stories from them here.

The other stories have appeared in periodicals, and certain of them also in anthologies, but they have not hitherto been collected together. Acknowledgments are made to the editors of the *Listener*, the *New Statesman and Nation* and *Penguin New Writing*.

STORIES OF AFRICA

ULA MASONDO

§ 1

THE white storekeeper who sold Ula Masondo a blanket was a jovial-looking man. The morning had begun well, he thought, counting the money into the till: twenty-five shillings before breakfast.

'Good-bye,' he said cordially when the native turned to go.

'Ja, baas, stay in peace.'

The white man wondered 'what that boy wanted with such an expensive blanket', for he fancied himself a little as a psychologist. He could not find a satisfactory reason, so he consoled himself with the thought that 'those Masondos are all alike, extravagant, improvident, but you can't help liking them all the same'.

It was breakfast-time. He took the keys off a hook and closed the door and locked it, and began to whistle and to rub his hands, which were not cold, thinking of steak-and-eggs, the steak underdone, like the one in the story of the clergyman who asked for a 'bloody steak'. The storekeeper chuckled.

'Yes,' he said musingly to his wife, 'those Masondos. That young Ula was in this morning for a twenty-five-bob blanket. At this time of the morning! And what does he want with that, I should like to know? What I like about that family is, they're not afraid to spend a bit of money, and they're so united. It's the old mother who keeps them all together, a fine old girl she is! Five strapping sons and four handsome daughters, and the old man not dead yet! The sons go out to work, and the daughters get married, but they all keep in touch with the old people. And so they'll go on, generation after generation. Ula's life'll be just

STORIES OF AFRICA

like his father's. What is there to change? Except that the natives are getting to want more and more every year, and by and by little Freddy will be able to start a second Harrods here in Lembuland. Yes, they always come back to the old people, and you'll come back too when you're big, won't you, Freddy?'

And he patted the curly head of a child at his knee, a little blue-eyed boy with a bib under his chin.

§ 2

Away down the mountain path Ula Masondo was trying on his blanket in the sun, opening it, turning it, waving it, fluttering it. He held it up to the light. He ran his long straight well-bred hands across the glowing circles of black and rose and scarlet with which it was enflamed, as if with his slender and inquiring fingers he should find a flaw. Shifted by the wind, the brown paper in which the blanket had been wrapped rustled away over the long dry grass.

The whole valley was full of sunlight, and Ula Masondo's walk became a dance. For every three steps he took forward he took one back, and stamped his hard black feet in the soft brown dust. He began to hum a monotonous song, and soon the sound of his voice was drumming and vibrating, twisting and turning like a sombre serpent of sound. Out of his very nerves the hymn of the darkness of his happiness uncurled and uncoiled itself like a black and flexible snake.

Down he continued through the mealie field, where the last dry stalks, stripped of their cobs, scraped their bleached and pallid leaves in the wind, leaves and stalks bone-white like sticks and shavings in the sunlight. From the kraal his sister watched him coming down, stamping his feet, shuddering and jerking his spine and his hips and his shoulders with ecstatic movements swinging with circles of rose and scarlet and black.

She called out with astonishment, and others of the Masondos

ULA MASONDO

appeared to receive their splendid son. She snatched the blanket, and as she stretched her fat black arms there were dimples at the elbows. She swung it round her, and began, in the well-trodden open space between the huts, domes woven of grass, a grotesque dance. She threw herself about with the energy of a contortionist. It seemed that the blanket itself, furred and tigerish, was a skin to the supple and animated flesh with which it wobbled and wagged.

The voice of a herdsman from the next hill-top called out from the height and the distance:

'Wé, Ula, have you come back?'

'Ehé, I have come back!'

'You have got a red blanket!'

'Ehé, it is red!'

'It is very red!'

'Yes, like the blood of a white man!'

'Is it true?'

'Come down here.'

As the herdsman was descending, others joined in the dance. Four casual naked brats clapped their hands, and nodded their round blunt heads, and capered on tiny legs, their stomachs tight and shiny, distended with food. A youth was playing a mouth-organ, and a young girl played a jews' harp, with a tinkling of ornaments at her wrist. Two young married sisters-in-law of Ula Masondo got excited, jogging the babies on their backs, while all the loose fringes of beads at their wrists and hips made a chugging, swishing noise which could be heard between the thudding of many feet.

Even the old mother came out and waved her hands. No one noticed her, and she at once lost herself in the rhythm of the dance.

The blanket passed from body to body, and the herdsman arrived, with a pair of sticks in his hand, and cried:

'Oyoyoyi!'

STORIES OF AFRICA

His cattle could be seen drifting along the flank of the hill, as clouds go drifting across the sky.

§ 3

The thorn trees in the valley covered their shadows like cocks of fine plumage treading black hens, the bright branches extended like wings and quivering in the heat. Down near the stream the father of Ula Masondo was sitting, carefully combing his beard, picking his teeth, and pausing to take snuff out of a long spoon of horn. He could hear the dancing at the kraal, and he could hear the water running in the rocks.

He no longer works.

He will never go out again at dawn to work in strange places (as Ula Masondo will go to-morrow); he has his cattle, his cares, his tradition, his dignity, his gossip, his children, his grandchildren, his beer, his snuff, his old wife. A person of importance, he sits in the sun.

It is long since he went calling after his father's cattle. It is long since the rinderpest year, when the air stank with ruin. It is long since, with face daubed white, he suffered the proud privations of fasting and exposure and circumcision. It is long since he fought, in time of war or in time of peace, and was wounded and gave wounds. It is long since he went running to beer-drinks in the full moonlight, his feet beating faster than his heart.

It is long since he sat in the firelight of his second home, inside the hut, after work, with his young wife made a mother. He seems to see her again, stooping to bring for him a gourd of sour milk, he seems to know again the clicking of the thick swathes of small white beads at her ankles, the flapping of a skin loincloth at her thighs, and her familiar feminine smell.

He remembers her singing when her voice was young and tender; he remembers her small hands with pointed nails long,

ULA MASONDO

long ago beating a tune with a reed on a wire, on a wire with a reed in the sun . . .

He went back to the family, and took the blanket. In a hubbub of conversation he solemnly held it up against the sun, while the lean brown hands of men and women and children began feeling all over its soft red surface, feeling sensuously, inquiringly, easily, slowly, nervously, fingers thick, fingers thin, fingers and thumbs.

A child stood apart, holding a mealie cob in one hand, and with the other scratching in its hair for lice with capable fingers.

§ 4

The train was crowded, and it took two days and two nights to get to Johannesburg from Lembuland.

In the excitement of the first day Ula Masondo and his fellow-passengers called out all sorts of pleasantries to the native people at the stations. And it was quite a long time before he forgot a girl he saw, whose figure was only half-developed; who smiled and said nothing, unlike her noisy companions; whose eyes were large and luminous like the eyes of a female antelope; and whose thin garments were waving in a fresh morning breeze.

After a time they ceased to call out, these travellers. They were benumbed by alternating sensations of heat and cold, and bewildered by the monotony of the journey. Often they fell asleep, sitting upright in their places. Sometimes they woke up with a start, sometimes they seemed to refuse to wake up even when shaken, their sleepy heads nodding almost as if their necks were broken.

It was the second day, and the train ran on through the cold bright air of a highveld afternoon. Quite suddenly appeared in the distance the first mine-dumps, sticking up beyond the horizon like the summits of snow-mountains. The passengers crowded to the window to see these peaks, on which the sun shone as

STORIES OF AFRICA

it does on distant ships between a dark sky and a dark sea, and from round them, as from ships, stood out faint fumes of smoke, faint fumes in space. From the opposite window was visible a dump as big as a hill, quite near, rising sheer and white from the ground, with tiny trucks running along the top, against the afternoon sky. And on the other side of it the steel and iron and stone of the mine buildings stood drab and stern, bitter citadels of unreasoning industry.

The thin brown grass of the veld had already given way to dust. Natives stood about in groups, some in sordid rags, others in gaudy blankets. Or they could be seen walking singly or in pairs, with a confident but abstracted air, like followers of some unknown religion. They were all used to Johannesburg, but among their compatriots in the train was the silence of apprehension.

The train was now running parallel with the Great Reef Road, along which hurried an incessant traffic of cars, bicycles and pedestrians. Whole streets came into view, shacks of corrugated iron, varied with dingy plantations of gum trees, whose blue-grey leaves were powdered with red dust, and straggling hedges.

Some washing was hanging on a fence, flapping idly in a casual breeze. Dirty children were playing in a donga; they could be heard stirring with a stick among old tins in an ashpit. Some women were drinking tea on a veranda, and a fat old man with a very red face stood in his shirt-sleeves leaning against a gate. He was smoking a pipe, and his white trousers were braced up so high that the tabs on his brown boots were visible.

A native was playing a concertina. A dog lifted its leg against a lamp-post. A clanging tram hurried across an open space, and, although the sun had not set, all its lights were burning.

Rows of gaudy posters on a hoarding ran past as if on wheels, and a large white building was swinging into view with the easy grace of an acrobat. Trams, buildings, shops, many voices, and

ULA MASONDO

the train stopped in the great terminus like a cavern, like a nightmare, like a dread.

They were all hustled out. Jostling and unguided, as if they were sheep, they made their uncertain way down the platform, and the air was full of a strange and foreign newness.

'Here's an omen,' said Ula Masondo, who knew what he felt but not what he meant.

§ 5

As though he had lived through it all before, as though he would live through it all again, he suffered and never forgot the routine of work and rest at the Simeon and Steck Amalgamated, the sight of shivering groups standing in a darkening or a brightening air and waiting to descend at the skips, the voice of the shift-boss, the dampness and darkness below, the sensation in one's ears at the deeper levels, the dimness, and the moving lights, the hum of work in subterranean stillness, the stale fumes of gelignite and acetylene, and in the narrow stopes the loud staccato stutterings of the compressed-air drills, which men held in their hands like powerful animals that wanted to get away, jerked by a mechanical lust to fang the rock with steel.

When one came off shift at midday the sky was dusty grey like the pelt of a donkey, and the air was full of the perennial roar of the stamps rising and falling and roaring on revolving cams in the battery, whose walls were like cliffs scored with the sorrows of time; always roaring and shaking the ground, as the ground trembles to a war-dance of warriors, or summer thunder in the mountains of Lembuland.

When Ula Masondo came up out of the mine on a still, calm afternoon of winter he noticed, passing the engine-house on his way to the compound, the subdued and powerful humming of armatures, and saw a grey motor-car gliding down an avenue of gum trees to the manager's offices, and catching the sun

STORIES OF AFRICA

between the shadows. A white borzoi dog was sitting at the back, and its long snout gave it a stupid and puzzled expression. As the car went past, Ula Masondo could hear its fat tyres treading richly on the gravel.

When he came up at evening the twin steel wheels of the head-gear were spinning in an icy sky, and newly lighted fires were flickering in the dusk.

§ 6

Women were not allowed in the compound, a bleak building that was always being cleaned.

Ula Masondo, from the time he was born, had never slept by himself, so when he was found lying one night with a friend for warmth and company he was told that he was risking a flogging for sodomy. So he lay alone, and for a long time was afraid: the air was thick with ghostly visitors.

On Sunday afternoons life improved. One could, for example, put off the blanket and wear clothes instead: and the wearing of clothes was a permanent adventure for one who had been naked for the first decade of his life.

It was possible to get about and show off, or to do nothing, as one felt inclined. One had money, and ceasing to be a novice and assuming the airs of a man, one could have a good time.

The leisure of Ula Masondo was controlled by a man ten years older than himself, a moody and unprincipled *skebenga* who stood six and a half feet tall, and whose name was Vilakazi. It was he who directed how and where their time should be spent. As Sunday only occurs once a week he believed it should be spent in going recklessly from one debauch to another. It is a not illogical belief for a man who has no freedom for six days in the week.

If the two wanted drink, as they always did, Vilakazi knew

ULA MASONDO

where to get it, sometimes from an Australian-German-Jew with a game leg who was generally in gaol, sometimes from a stout old Irishwoman who had come down in the world, and who, smiling gaily, was beginning to rise again behind the law by retailing methylated spirit at the price of French brandy.

If they wanted the fine fever of gambling Vilakazi arranged behind some obscure shanty a three-card-trick party.

On occasions of dispute Vilakazi gave blows where they were necessary, while Ula Masondo, loud with encouragement, danced at his elbow, and only took part when the scrap went against them.

When they wanted a woman, an appointment was arranged with Lu, a slightly coloured woman who existed for the arranging of appointments, or with Emma, a good-humoured young native woman, very smart with her tongue, who lived with a white man during the week and supported him by her earnings from black men on Sundays.

Vilakazi, in return for his great usefulness, expected a willing audience for his long speeches of advice and anecdote, companionship and constant flattery. He and Ula Masondo were always together.

§ 7

'Wé, Vilakazi,' said the younger man, 'I have a letter.'

'Where is it from, that letter?'

'From my home.'

'What does it say?'

'This letter? It says I am the chief of my father's people.'

'What!'

'It says I am the king of the white people.'

'What!'

'It says you must give me money. It says only ten shillings.'

STORIES OF AFRICA

'You are cheating me, my friend.'

'It is true. Read my letter.'

Vilakazi took the letter and looked at it vaguely, as though it did not matter whether one read it or not. It was addressed in the difficult and showy calligraphy of one who felt that the ability to write is the highest good of education. On the back was a hieroglyphic drawing of a train.

Slowly Vilakazi read the letter through to himself. Translated, it was as follows :

Greeting,

my child it is far to talk how can people talk when you are far. There is no rain, the Great-great one is unwilling to send rain, it is the same in every place, we are dead as to our stomachs, there is no food. It is the same at Ovuzane and Ovuzanyana, above and at the rivers, it is the same here. The children are crying, there is no money for food, there is no money to buy food. We are telling that you must send money to buy food for us, even if it is a pound only, or only two pounds. There is tax to pay, we shall hope to get money for tax, but if we get money for tax we shall be crying as to our stomachs. How is it my boy are you well? As for me I am old I am done for I am a husk that is chewed and spat out and I cannot sleep always always I am coughing and your father has fever he is sick and all the people send greetings but they are dead as to their stomachs send if it is a pound only o my child my beloved

greeting from your mother.

'Where does it come from, this letter?' asked Vilakazi without disclosing its contents.

'I am asking you.'

'You see this letter? It is the letter of a fool.'

'How is that?'

Ula Masondo stared at the letter, but it meant nothing to him; he could not even read his own name. The writing seemed to

ULA MASONDO

crawl across the page, a laborious puzzle with some significance hidden from himself.

'It is the letter of a fool,' Vilakazi repeated. 'It is only greetings.'

'Only?'

'Only.'

'But I want to hear. Read it.'

And Vilakazi read, pretending to spell out the words with great difficulty:

Greeting,

my child it is far to talk how can people talk when you are far. Here it is raining, the Great-great one has sent rain, it is the same in every place, the people are very glad, we have plenty of grain for food and beer. It is the same at Ovuzane and Ovuzanyana, above and at the rivers, it is the same here. I think you are glad, I see you are glad, my boy. We do not want money now stay and earn money for yourself in the mines. How is it my boy are you well? We are all well my child my beloved and all the people send greetings and there are greetings from your mother.

'It is finished,' said Vilakazi.

'Is that all?'

'That is all. Yes, it is only greetings. Can greetings fill a person's stomach? You are the child of a fool.'

'O, silence,' said Ula Masondo. 'Give me the letter.'

'What! You tell me to keep silence! Do you think I am a liar, that you tell me to keep silence, my boy? Here, I will put your letter in my pocket. If you have it you will lose it, and it is safe with me. Some day we shall answer it; I will tell you when.'

Ula Masondo made no answer. It was Sunday afternoon, and he wanted an excitement of the blood, he wanted to drink and shout, to drink and forget.

STORIES OF AFRICA

§ 8

Ula Masondo put a cigarette in his mouth, and Vilakazi, with the gesture of a man who is sure of his power, held out to him a lighted match. A puff, two puffs of blue smoke rose in the windless air, and the two men turned to go.

Ula Masondo was wearing a red-brown suit: the short, close-fitting coat was fastened with a single button, and the trousers were cut with exaggerated fullness, drooping over silk socks and 'ox-blood' shoes with high heels. Round his waist was a cord of pink wool with swinging tassels. In the band of his hat was stuck a cigarette-picture of an American film star in her bathing dress. In his ears were gilt ear-rings, he had three brooches in his tie, and a silk shirt. For these adornments he owed several pounds at a store.

Emma was waiting at the usual place. She did not see the approach of her friends, being engaged in an exchange of repartee with a stranger on the other side of a wall.

Vilakazi pinched her plump arm, which was visible through a filmy blouse of lilac silk, cut low back and front to show an open-work camisole. Alternately pouting and using violent rhetoric she made out that she was offended. Ula Masondo took off his hat in the European manner, and there was a strong smell of pomade.

Finally the three went off arm in arm. Emma's heels were as high as those of Ula Masondo, and she walked with an easy abandon, swinging her hips. Round her neck she wore a string of metallized beads like swollen and tarnished pearls, and her ear-rings were flashing in the sun. As she walked, every nerve and muscle came into play, and even her clothes seemed part of her.

The three of them began to laugh. They were remarkably handsome, showing their teeth in a laughter that was not amusement.

ULA MASONDO

§ 9

Before long Vilakazi induced the younger man to surrender to him all his wages, and answered any protest by telling Ula Masondo that he was a boy and did not understand the use of money. Ula Masondo wanted to pay off some of his debt at the store, where the white man was beginning to threaten him.

'Let him wait,' said Vilakazi, 'that little white man.'

They began to play a new card game, very intricate, which Vilakazi learnt from an acquaintance, one Stefan, who belonged to a gang of *amaleita* and was always boasting of his exploits. At first they won steadily, and then continued to lose until they were several pounds in debt. Stefan suggested that they should join his friends, who knew a good way of making money, their custom being to station themselves on a lonely road behind the kopjes near the Simeon and Steck, and to lie in wait for solitary cyclists and pedestrians, on whom they would rush out with a volley of sticks and stones. After the assault there was robbery, and after the robbery there was flight. The scene of these operations had lately been changed, so there was little danger of arrest.

In a series of conversations Stefan became eloquent on the glories of crime. He related how certain ordeals were necessary for a full initiation into the *amaleita*; what punishments resulted from cowardice, disobedience or want of secrecy; the special honours due to those who succeeded, single-handed, in robbing a man or raping a woman; and how by committing a murder and evading detection one became qualified for leadership.

He went into the technique of housebreaking, and disclosed the methods of detectives and policemen. Having himself served three terms in gaol he was able to give an extremely graphic account of those secret prison-gangs which are far more cruel than the *amaleita*. They consist of criminals, of all ages and of different tribes and races, who have been mostly transferred from

STORIES OF AFRICA

that condition of unnatural celibacy, in which most natives are obliged to work, to one of closer confinement, in which by force of example they become abandoned, and by habit devoted, to the cultivation of various vices.

'There was a Chinese,' said Stefan, assuming an air of indifference, and speaking in a rich and modulated voice, 'who —'

And, at the history of the Chinaman, Ula Masondo laughed incredulously.

Finally, Stefan gave a generalized description of the character of the white race, a description so penetrating and analytical that it would have put to shame many of those pretentious Europeans who mix science with politics and hypocrisy with everything, pretending to be clean, and riding so smugly every morning to their classrooms and laboratories on the top of a tram, a newspaper in the hand, a cigar in the mouth, a pince-nez on the nose, and a worm in the brain.

Such a speech as Stefan's could only have been made by a native who understood the arts of conversation and oratory. Where there is intuition, what is the use of psycho-analysis? Where is the white man who can hide his character from a Kaffir?

Ula Masondo began to feel in himself, as the *leita* intended him to feel, slow stirrings of unreasoning resentment, the blending and brooding of deep agitations.

As for Vilakazi, he had been previously associated for a short time with other *amaleita*, and his brain, lately fuddled with excesses, was only waiting for some direct outside suggestion, like this of Stefan's, to become dominated once more by the idea of plunder.

And so, on a Sunday afternoon, when there was a sound of mission bells in the distance, when under a universe of clouds an angry and expanded sun was touching the horizon's rim, they walked back to the barrack-like compound with their hearts thudding in apprehension of dangers to come.

ULA MASONDO

§ 10

In spare time Vilakazi and Ula Masondo now had nearly always the company of Stefan, the *leita* man-of-the-world, and also that of Emma, now unattached to her white man, lately convicted of forgery. She took to coming with a friend, called Smile by Europeans, and by his own people Isimayili.

It became the custom of these five to meet in a thicket of steenvrugte bushes on an unfrequented part of the kopje near the mine. Here, unseen by the rest of the world, they had a view of the road below them in the valley, and beyond, among the hills, a prospect of the roofs and dumps of the inner suburbs of Johannesburg.

Ula Masondo, youngest and most ingenuous of the five, now lived in a constant excitement, almost willingly giving up his money to buy drink, cigarettes and the goodwill of his elders, and quite willingly giving up all his attention to their talk. He had never felt so important, and was trying at the same time to flatter the giant Vilakazi, to imitate Stefan, and to make an impression on Emma, when he was completely distracted by the novelty of Smile.

Smile, short and powerful, never stopped smiling when sober, but when drunk he tried to bite. He had already at different times bitten a horse, a postman and a missionary, and when, on one occasion, he suddenly fastened his teeth in the arm of Emma, she uttered shriek after shriek as if her soul was leaving her body, and attracted the attention of a native policeman, who blew his whistle so near at hand, so unexpectedly, that Smile, drunk as he was, at once withdrew his incisive caress. The five of them lay flat on their bellies under the bushes, and Emma put her fist in her mouth to stop herself screaming, and nearly choked in consequence with pain, hysterics and anxiety. They could hear the policeman panting past them on his way up the hill. He stumbled, rummaging among the rocks, and even stopped to

STORIES OF AFRICA

beat the tops of the very bushes in which the party lay breathlessly hidden. When it was safe to speak again, Smile had begun to snore in a drunken stupor, and Emma was nursing her bleeding arm. The tears gushed down her face, and in future, as soon as Smile began to drink, she always sat as far away from him as possible, in order to avoid his sadistic attentions.

To his masters Smile appeared simply as a cheerful houseboy. He worked in a respectable slum for two small semi-detached houses that shared one kitchen. One of his masters was a solitary old bachelor, a retired sergeant-major with waxed moustaches. The other was a Flemish carpenter who had formerly been in the Congo and was so tolerant of Smile that he was ready to treat him almost as one of the family, but his wife, a Danish-Swiss, a lazy woman with a grudge against life, treated her husband like a child, her children like servants, and Smile like a dog.

On Sunday mornings Smile wore a black coat, and carried in his pocket a Lembu Bible, for he belonged to one of those innumerable native sects that make of Christianity an exciting cult, and quote the Scriptures to their own purposes. In the afternoons he still had the Bible with him, and used also to carry a little cane, which he would wave like a wand, saying of somebody he disliked, in a tone of the utmost contempt:

'Hau ! He's just a heathen !'

or, describing something he liked:

'Truly, this tobacco is Christian !'

There was in his character a considerable strength. With little persuasion Emma would have allowed him to chew her into rags. As for Ula Masondo, he even got the permission of Vilakazi to buy a little cane, which he began to wave adroitly in imitation of Smile.

§ 11

As for Ula Masondo, fascinated by the daring and sinister insouciance of Stefan, obsessed with the Christian dandyism of

ULA MASONDO

Smile, and infatuated with the over-ripe charms of Emma, he began to feel more independent than usual of his first patron and worldly guide. He and Vilakazi were, in fact, heading for a quarrel, when, in reviewing their debts, they found that some must be paid. Money they must have. While financial adversity kept them together, Smile, with a barbaric and original smile in which there was more naïvety than cunning, unexpectedly hinted at a sum that he supposed to be not less than £50.

It appeared that the carpenter and his family had decided to spend the next week-end visiting friends in the country, and Smile had already been told that he would be expected to guard the house.

'As if I was a watch-dog,' he explained. But if only his other, ex-military master could be temporarily transferred from one house to the other, the money would be theirs.

Vilakazi had lately been thinking more of getting Emma than of getting money, but now he sat up, stretched his arms and began to take notice.

'What money?' Stefan was asking with an air of tired dignity.

'The money we want!' said Smile, smiling.

'Where is it, this money of yours?'

'You say it's mine? The money of Shortlegs!'

'Who is Shortlegs?'

'My baas!'

'One of your baascs, you mean. Where does he hide this money?'

'Under his bed.'

'Shades of my fathers! How do you know?'

'I've seen him.'

'What did you see?'

'I saw him put money in a box under his bed.'

'How much?'

'A lot! Pounds and pounds!'

'Fifty pounds?'

'Do I know?'

STORIES OF AFRICA

'Where were you, then?'

'Looking through the window.'

'Is it a big box?'

'No, small. So big.'

'Is Shortlegs married?'

'No.'

'Has he got a girl?'

'Do I know? Sometimes he goes out at nights. Do I know where he goes?'

'It is plain what we must do.'

'How, then?'

'Early on Sunday afternoon you, Isimayili, will be sitting in your outhouse talking to Emma. Then you will go and make a big fire of papers and sticks on the back stoep of the carpenter's house and start shouting: "Fire! Fire!" Emma will run through the kitchen and call to Shortlegs that the house is on fire. He will see that she is a fine girl and will come running with her to see what is the matter —'

'No!' said Emma vigorously, 'I don't want that!'

'What do you want, then? It is your work, I say, to bring Shortlegs out of his house.'

'I don't want! I don't want!'

'Shut up!' said Stefan. 'When Emma and Shortlegs come through the kitchen you, Isimayili, will be shouting and beating out the fire — make as much smoke as you can! — then Vilakazi will run into the kitchen to stop Shortlegs if he tries to come back. Meanwhile, I will run in for the box, and I'll throw it over the wall to you, Masondo, who will catch it on the other side. Then you must run. I shall run just after you, and Vilakazi must run after me. But each of us three must run a different way, and we will meet here afterwards. You, Isimayili, will stay in your outhouse with Emma and say you know nothing about anything.'

Ula Masondo was amazed at the ingenuity of this plan.

When the time came, after many preliminary thrills, Ula Masondo heard a crackle of sticks and Smile's voice crying 'Fire!' and peeped over the wall just in time to see Emma leaping out of the back door with a jingle of jewellery, followed immediately by the ex-soldier, who had just been to sleep. With a scarlet face and moustaches like hat-pins, this veteran was trying to make haste slowly like an officer and a gentleman, though his beery eyes were goggling with panic. As soon as he had dashed into the kitchen, Vilakazi followed, and Stefan sprang out from behind a water-tank and darted into the house.

There was at once a smell of smoke, and sounds could be heard of excited voices, pattering feet and water hissing and sizzling.

Back came Stefan, hurdling over the wall, with the box under his arm. He threw it to Ula Masondo, and hearing a scuffle in the kitchen they both made off as fast as they could.

They were already crouching in the bushes, and trying to force open the box, when Vilakazi arrived panting and drenched with sweat.

'How was it, Vilakazi?'

'*Hau!* Isimayili put out the fire too quickly, and Shortlegs came back too soon. He isn't Shortlegs, he is Satane! He kicked like the devil and screamed like a pig. Can a person hold a screaming pig with a devil inside? There you are, I threw him under the table, and there you are, I have come!'

He wiped the sweat from his face with a handkerchief of magenta silk, and then lay down on his back to recover his wind, but Stefan succeeding at that moment in bursting open the lid of the box, he at once sat up again. The money only amounted to £23, and the three spent the rest of the afternoon in the frantic exhilaration of deciding how it was to be divided.

STORIES OF AFRICA

§ 13

Several times, during the week that followed, Ula Masondo felt uneasy at his work. The routine of the mine was becoming intolerable to him. He had a craving to go up and lie in the sun for days on end, doing nothing, saying nothing, nothing, nothing —

‘Here, you!’ said the shift-boss. ‘What’s up with you to-day? Get on with it!’

And as Ula Masondo turned his head, his teeth were even whiter than the whites of his eyes.

He suddenly wanted to provoke admiration, so he related to a man who was working on the same shift how a certain white man called Shortlegs had been thrown under a table and killed, and when they were going to put him in his coffin they found he had feathers in his brains, and also that he had a tail.

‘You are lying,’ said the man.

‘Can I lie?’

‘Can it be true?’

‘I swear it’s true!’

‘There’s an omen!’

‘Yes,’ said Ula Masondo, ‘and then they found a doctor who had tried to cut it off when Shortlegs was alive, but every time he cut it off it grew again, and he always heard afterwards that one of his relations had died the same day.’

‘No, no, no!’

But Ula Masondo felt confused and irritated, sick in his head, and fell silent.

§ 14

For the Sunday after the theft a party had been planned for the drinking of *skokiaan*. A quantity of that violent liquor had been prepared and hidden by Stefan in the bushes, and when Sunday came it was well fermented.

The five, reunited once more, settled down in their lair, and

ULA MASONDO

prepared to enjoy themselves, but the air was sullen and oppressive with foreboding. A thunderstorm was accumulating in the sky, and the hot blue clouds were collecting a sultry shadow over all the earth.

'I am going,' Emma said suddenly.

'What!'

'Why?'

'Not now! We are just going to drink,' said Stefan, whose breath was already thick with methyated fumes.

'I am going home to Lembuland.'

'When?'

'Soon.'

'To Lembuland!' exclaimed Ula Masondo. 'Is that your home?'

'Yes; didn't you know that?'

It turned out that she lived on the side of Aucampstroom remote from the home of Ula Masondo, and within two days' journey on foot from there.

'My time will soon be up,' said Ula Masondo. 'Wait, and we will travel together.'

'What!' said Emma. 'Shall I travel with a boy?'

'You will not go home, Ula,' said Vilakazi emphatically, 'when your time is up. You will stay here.'

'Are you both heathens,' said Smile, with a sarcastic and superior smile, 'that you should wish to return to such a place? It is more Christian here.'

'There is no money in Lembuland,' said Stefan. 'All the white people there are policemen or missionaries. How can you get money in such a place?' And he put to his lips the tin of *skokiaan*, and took a long and solemn drink. When the tin was passed round Vilakazi drank the most, because, as he pointed out, he was the largest.

'It is a drink for Christians,' said Smile, with a thirsty and Christian smile.

STORIES OF AFRICA

Stefan lighted his pipe. There was *dagga* mixed with the tobacco, and he puffed in silence, while there began to circulate dully in his veins the smoky blood of hallucination.

'I tell you, Ula, you will stay,' said Vilakazi, leaning forward aggressively. Ula Masondo felt too giddy to answer, so he put in his mouth a red steenvrugte, sucked its pink flesh and spat out the stone with deliberate vehemence.

'And you, too, Emma, you will stay.' Emma stared at him with intoxicated eyes, and made no answer.

'I am your baas.' Vilakazi laid a possessive hand on her knee. She made no move.

'I am your baas. You do what I tell you. You belong to Vilakazi.'

Emma seemed to gather herself together, like a cat that is going to spring.

'You damn fool, you boy, you bloody nigger,' she said, in the European manner.

She stood up, resting her hands on her hips. Below the waist she was in shadow, but Vilakazi, looking up, saw her eyes flashing, and the tawdry jewellery that glittered with the heaving of her bosom. He reached out a great hand and grasped her firmly by the ankle. As quick as thought she kicked him in the face with the other foot, sprang out of the bushes, and began to make her way, angry and graceful, down the hill.

Ula Masondo watched her stepping from rock to rock. Her short skirt was swinging from her hips, and her fat shapely legs curved down with the smoothest of curves to the smallest of ankles. He felt that so long as Emma stayed in Johannesburg he would be unable to return to Lembuland.

Vilakazi, slowly recovering from a stupor of surprise, got up and lurched after her, calling out clumsy threats and the most original personal remarks. Emma, still without hurrying, turned round, put out her tongue, spat copiously and proceeded.

Half-way down Vilakazi stumbled and fell. He got up cursing,

ULA MASONDO

and went lumbering on. There were several people in the road, and two natives, standing together, were watching his approach. When Emma reached the road they asked her a question, and seeming hardly to wait for an answer, rushed forward and closed on Vilakazi.

Ula Masondo wanted to make a move, but he was afraid of betraying the hiding-place. About to start up, he was restrained by the sight of Smile and Stefan lying face downwards, sodden and unconscious. He kept still.

When he looked down again, Vilakazi was standing between the two men. He held himself erect, his broad chest heaving, very dignified, although his pink shirt was torn and handcuffs were shining like silver bracelets on his wrists. The two detectives knew that others besides Vilakazi were concerned in last week's theft, and they looked up the hill, and seemed to be staring at the steenvrugte bushes. But apparently they thought better than to come and search, and turned to march away with their captive.

Emma, frightened out of her wits, could be seen running far along the road, escaping on her splendid legs.

At this moment there was a roll of thunder. The storm, which had been working up all the afternoon, was about to break.

Ula Masondo, full of lonely dread at the arrest of Vilakazi, began to try and rouse his companions.

§ 15

In the mine next day there was a fall of rock. In a narrow stoep Ula Masondo found himself cut off from the world. Only by a few feet did he escape immediate destruction.

As it was he found himself confined in a small space without light, or air, or any sound save that of his blood singing thickly in his ears. A lonely terror, increasing every moment, confused his thoughts.

STORIES OF AFRICA

'I am dead,' he told himself at last; and to death he prepared to resign himself.

But after a time he was still breathing; after a time he could hardly breathe, his lungs seemed to be full of earth, he could see nothing, think nothing, feel nothing, know nothing . . .

But he could distinctly hear the voice of his brother, telling him that a cow was lost, and they must go up into the Mountain of the Bushmen to look for it.

'No,' said Ula Masondo, 'I am afraid of Bushmen.'

'There are no Bushmen there now,' said his brother.

'No,' said Ula Masondo, 'but I am not going.'

He could hear the voice of his father ordering him to go.

'Go, boy! The mother of my father was the daughter of a Bushman. The spirit of her father is calling you to find our cow.'

'There's an omen,' said Ula Masondo, who knew what he felt, but not what it meant.

'We shall see the pictures,' said his brother.

'What pictures?'

'The pictures of hunting. The cave-paintings of the Bushmen.'

Ula Masondo was afraid. He shuddered with apprehension, and struggled, breath by breath by breath, to breathe an air that was dying.

§ 16

The accident had hardly taken place when a rescue-party was at work. Light shone on sweating backs and driving arms, and the silence staggered with the echoing shocks of assault made on the entombing rock. The shift-boss himself, who had once been rescued from death in a Mexican silver mine, worked like a madman to dig out Ula Masondo, now with his brother, searching in the Mountain of the Bushmen for a cow that was lost.

ULA MASONDO

It was in a krans titanic
Of that berg volcanic
That a dark cave was hidden
Where no foot could have trodden.

There the leopard and snake
And tawny partridge
Prey and are preyed on,
Unstartled by cartridge,
Where never a gun
Echoing shocks
The listening rocks:
Where in winter
When the flinty crags
Receive the sun,
Far down, far down,
In the sombre forest,
Under thin ice
The waters splinter
In flakes of fire,
And in shallow pools
The shadow of a hawk
(Tense above the tree-tops)
Quivers like a fish
Among the shadows
Of basking fishes.

When those parapets shimmer
In the morning in summer
The antelope turns
From the heat of the height
To a stream in the ferns,
Bounding unhurried
From sun to shadow.

STORIES OF AFRICA

There the lory wings scarlet
His way at noon; twilight
Flutters with bats;
And at dawn the cliff
Is crowned with eagles.
There the wild cats
Crouch and tremble,
And await the screams
Of the haunted jackal.
Has no foot trodden
Where the dark cave is hidden
In leaves and branches?

Not for centuries now
Cataracts, avalanches,
Have ruined the steep.
The cavern can keep
Its secrets in stillness,
In darkness, enfolded
In the wild fig trees,
Whose sinews are moulded
To the curves of the stone,
And whose roots are thrust
In a crevice of dust,
Clinging tightly within
To the nerves of the quartz,
And fed on the secret
And bitter, untasted
Dews of the desert;
While their leaves, unshaken
By wandering airs,
Are stirred by lizards,
A refuge for spiders,
An harbour for birds,

ULA MASONDO

That gouge the soft fruit,
And swoop into space
With thin stabs of music
In a hollow of silence.
Has no foot trodden
Where the dark cave is hidden?

On windless nights
When it is deserted
By the last baboon
The shafted radiance
Of the risen moon
Illumines like a lamp
The vaulted roof,
Where the moss is damp
And beaded with black
Dews bled from the rock;
Illumines like the ray
White and deific
Of an enormous Eye
This tongueless place
With light terrific.

In the flare and the hush
Appear the painted
Walls that were frescoed
When the floor was last trodden
Of this cavern hidden.

Now the air is tainted
With a sudden whiff
Of distant carrion,
And the silence shrills
With the urgent quills

STORIES OF AFRICA

Of vultures soaring
From the soaring cliff.

But silence returns
And moonlight floats,
And the Eye returns
To men before men
In time before time,
Whose love and hunting
Are calcined in a blaze
Of light like chalk.
Life was their god,
And their god is transfigured.

Far down, far down,
Where are the savage
Cities of the future?

Where is steel? Here is stone.
What are tombs? Here's a bone.
What is science? Declare,
Does it beat still, your heart?
What is life? Here is art.
What are you? Here is splendour.
O traffic and travel and trade,
Here rolls the thunder,
Ula Masondo,
Of hoofs and of hearts and of honour!

When these colours fade
And lichens hang in their places,
When these forms lose their graces,
When these lines are not lines,
Blighted and bitten
By the secret acid

ULA MASONDO

Of rhythmic ages,
O up then and out
And over the placid
And fiery sky of midday
Will take their way
These gymnosoph hunters
With their slow-stepping women
Stained with rose ochre
Proudly proceeding
In prancing procession
With the eland and the gnu,
While each coloured
Courser canters
With the zebra and emu,
While the vulture
Waves them on like a banner,
Hunters and hunted
Flying forlorn,
Faint, faded and few,
To find fervour anew
Far ahead, far along
In the tranced and timeless blue.

What are you doing,
Ula Masondo?
Do you follow the Bushmen?
Do you travel to the valley
This side of the city?

Travelling to the valley, he found it was full of waving fields, green woods and flowering orchards. Beyond it there were hills, and beyond the hills there was a city deserted by its inhabitants, and beyond the city was the sky, where the sun was a flaming and a throbbing embryo.

STORIES OF AFRICA

The plantations of trees in the valley were threaded with the smoke of occasional trains, with telegraph wires and with random voices. And the houses of men of property were concealed in the trees, and even among the trees could be seen occasionally the movements of people of fashion, messengers on bicycles, or the fauna escaped from the cave.

In the orchards the women of the Bushmen were helping themselves to fruit, to *naartjes* and *perskies*; to the *pamplemoes* and the *spanspek*; to persimmons, pawpaws and pomegranates.

There were also gardens of zinnias and marigolds, with ferns and palms and plaster fountains; the air-plant, the egg-plant and the ice-plant; and lilies and orchids; the blood-flower, the eye-flower and moon-flowers of the dead-white datura, supernatural flowers that Ula Masondo dare not touch, for they were crying to him with maddening voices, and wanted to possess his nerves.

And among the trees and gardens were sun-wonderful spaces where humming motor-cars, shining and powerful, travelled over the grass with the men of property. Sometimes these men could be seen on stoeps in the shade sipping tea and beer and blood and water; or sprawling stoutly in unbuttoned ease at gluttonous picnics; smoking pipes of leisure but not pipes of peace, while the days and hours turned over like tremendous wheels, unhurried and colossal and compelling, dripping with the opulent waters of time, turning the hidden machinery of the Cosmos, and the revolving words of God.

And at both ends of the valley rose dry and sandy hills to heights of granite and basalt, steep and rocky and veined with unsuspected ores; hills where the red wind carried the sound of itself and its heat from desolate hill-top to hill-top, day and night, year after year after year, and carried the stink and bleat of shaggy goats mouthing for herblets in the broken kranses, goats with coarse hair matted with burrs and their eyes bulging with starvation.

The red wind carried and lost the groans of pregnant women

ULA MASONDO

mounting and marching along the long and devastated pathways of parching precipices; with earthen urns of water on their heads; water drawn cold, but bitter and tepid before the bearers could get to the summit, their feet burning on the trodden grit and bruised with purple pebbles.

Horrent with thorns, the aloe, the snake-apple, the poison cactus and the century plant clutch the dry earth with tortured roots, withering and sprouting and multiplying in the burning waste, while on cool and distant beaches the sea-wind unwinds a smoking iris from the spray, and somewhere gilded roofs vibrate and vanish in a soothing or a harrowing triumph of complaining pipes and prattling strings.

Here, in gullies and ravines, on arid flats, in scorched and sullen places, on chill and barren ridges, and in damp and noisome lairs, are human homes, coops of sticks that sag with dry-rot and choke with fungus, hatching vermin. Here the valley-dwellers never come, fearing infection of some hideous plague, ulcered out of such filth. They stay safe in their green retreats and suck stout through their moustaches, and marvel how these beasts can exist like *dassies* in their crannies, these human vermin, starved and swinking, scratching with hoes the scarlet sand, and sowing seeds that sprout as willingly as stones.

Let the valley-dwellers condemn their drudges to a life of deaths, but the soul screams out, and every sinew cracks.

Another whisky-and-soda? Thanks, I don't mind if I do.

Out of the strong comes forth sweetness, out of injury comes forth power, and out of torture comes forth mercy.

Out of silence rise the songs of the oppressed, who fear not thunder and lightning, for whom the sun has no warmth, the rain not tears enough of pity, for whom the moon is a drug, a promise, an echo, an Eye and a voice.

The phoenix flies, and fades, and only the wind is red, a tornado in the Kalahari of sleep, a stormburst in the Stormberg of patience!

STORIES OF AFRICA

Patience! patience! most dangerous of qualities, amplifier of the unknowable, tube of the trumpeting of a God tattooed with ten thousand moons!

A patient boy argues in the temple, and its foundations crumble.

The sun is an egg, and an egg is patient; the moon is an eye, and an eye is patient.

Woe to them who awake too early, when all others are still asleep!

Woe to them who sleep, when one is awake!

Woe to the dreamer, but disaster to the enemies of his dreams!

A voice, and it shall be inherited, and the prodigal father shall never return!

'The edict is writing in African blood,' announced the prophet, and the breath went out of his body.

'Europe cannot satisfy us,' announced the prophetess, and the breath went out of her body.

The toad, the rat and the scorpion howled with laughter, until they were driven to dance with death.

The pig and the spider grew fat, grew fat, until they were stabbed with the snake-tooth of a fountain-pen, from which outflowed as from a black storm-cloud the jetting poison of ink, and so they died.

And at their funeral was the frightful Cloacina, the squinting, the whey-blooded, who hunted for a husband till her elbows came through her skin, and she was left gorgoning gauntly in the Garden of Nunquam.

Death is sweet and transitory, and a dead face sometimes wears a smile, as if it knew a delightful secret.

A smile, a smile! Isimayili is smiling, Stefan is asleep, Vilakazi is bound, Emma is mine . . .

'Emma!'

'Here, look here!' exclaimed the shift-boss, flashing a light.

ULA MASONDO

'Here he is! My God, he's smiling! I hope he's not out of his mind. All right, all right, boy, stop shouting!'

But Ula Masondo had swooned at the inrush of air, and heard nothing. He was removed to the hospital.

§ 17

Ten days later he walked out of the hospital with his hat cocked over one eye, and the other blinking in the sun. Although he moved with something of the natural style of his race, and although he was trying now to walk jauntily in the manner he most admired, an injury still obliged him to limp: it had been caused by an almost crushing weight that had lain on his leg while he was walled up in the mine.

The mine doctor had, as usual, entered particulars of his patient in the records: *Name, Date admitted, Symptoms, Treatment, Recovery*. He always enjoyed filling in the various details. He was still a young man, but he liked to be considered methodical. When he came to the section *Remarks* he paused a moment, the fountain-pen gleaming between his bloodless, soap-bleached fingers. Then he bit his lip with vexation, for he had almost forgotten his position so far as to write: *This boy's a bit queer*.

He was astonished at himself. He laid down his pen for a few seconds, and looked out of the window, from which he could see a cloud of red dust being blown along the Great Reef Road, obscuring and revealing the traffic like a dry and swirling fog.

The doctor left blank the space called *Remarks*, and turned over the page. In the evening he said to his wife:

'Such a strange thing happened this morning. We discharged a boy who wasn't quite right in the head. Partly shock, perhaps, and he was half suffocated. Fished out of that fall of rock Monday week. Lucky for him. Near thing. But he'll get over it. I actually found myself on the point of writing down in the records, under *Remarks*: *This boy's a bit queer!*'

STORIES OF AFRICA

'Well,' said she, 'I suppose the world wouldn't have come to an end if you had, so why worry? Shall we have coffee here or on the veranda?'

Discharged from the hospital, Ula Masondo, his time up on the mine, received his wages, paid his debts and went straight to Emma. She was in the family way, and did not know for certain who was the father of her child, but felt inclined to give birth to it at home; and having received letters from her relations urging her return, she was on the point of leaving for Lembuland. When Ula Masondo proposed to go with her she assented with an ungracious fondness that he found at once attractive and exasperating.

So after a few days they found themselves at the station, waiting for the train called the Kaffir Mail.

Ula Masondo was wearing as many of his best clothes as he could. The rest were contained in a suitcase of plum-coloured cardboard embossed to look like leather, which he carried in a hand resplendent with cheap rings. He was perched on high-heeled shoes which made him look as if he was standing on tip-toe. He wore voluminous tweed trousers fastened at the ankle with a buckle, and a wide scarf of purple silk under his coat.

Emma wore salmon-coloured silk stockings which cunningly suggested, at a close inspection, the blackness of her legs. Her underwear was visible through a thin silk dress, and its white mesh could be seen back and front against the blackness of her skin. She had made it herself with a crochet hook, as she had the two pillow-cases in her hand. These were stuffed with all her possessions, and both of them were worked with patterns of words in elaborate lace. The motto of one was *God is Love*; the other, *Forget-me-not*.

From her mouth dangled the ends of a pair of white silk shoelaces, which she presently bent down to insert in her shoes.

Her movement provoked a salvo of interested comment from a group of her returning fellow-countrymen, who were standing

ULA MASONDO

in the background; they were clad in blankets; tall and statuesque, like figures in a fresco.

Still with one shoe-lace in her mouth, fat and breathless she watched her interlocutors between her legs, and although her face was upside-down they could see her handsome eyes glinting with the sparks of incipient repartee.

As soon as she stood up she flung round and struck a martial attitude. The speakers had the pleasure of bathing in a fountain of facetious abuse. When the fountain had played, it was succeeded by a captivating pout which at once gave way in the most disarming and feminine of smiles. But receiving, with a chorus of pleasantries, no less than three simultaneous proposals of free love, Emma fixed her face in a sneer. When she sneered there was a contraction of the muscles in the small of her back.

At this moment the train came in.

'Come along, my boy,' said Emma, and, with the complicated gait of a prodigal Bantu dandy, Ula Masondo, on high unsteady heels, followed her into the train.

§ 18

News travels quickly in Lembuland, and although Ula Masondo had sent no word to his relations they all knew of his return. His mother took on herself the task of meeting him, and on the day of his arrival set off for Aucampstroom before there was light in the sky. She was accompanied by a younger woman, a daughter-in-law with a baby on her back.

At first the long grass was wet with dew, but it rapidly dried as the sun rose in a cloudless sky. The old woman soon began to feel the heat. She was walking with a staff, and her steps became laboured. The travellers rested for some time near a stream, in the cool shade of some *umhlambamasi* trees, whose glossy leaves made a green and over-arching canopy. It was noon before they arrived at Aucampstroom.

STORIES OF AFRICA

The train was due and the station was crowded. The two women withdrew a little way, and sat down on the ground in the sun. The old woman took snuff. Her wrinkled face was eager with the rare exaltation of the aged. As for the countenance of the younger woman, it was calm with the rich calmness of early maturity. The child at her back was asleep. She sat like an image, heavy-lidded and smiling in stone, with worshippers a thousand years dust in the desert, but warm and brown and coming to life with a flow of refflorescent energy, warm and coming to life like a goddess that wakes on a carved and sunlit crag above the snow in Turkestan.

A screaming whistle grew louder, the rushing train was black, and its opening side broke into many moving forms of noisy and emerging humanity.

The mother of Ula Masondo saw him directly he got out of the train, and ran towards him through the crowd, clapping her hands excitedly against her scrawny thighs. She pushed her head forward and peered up into his face.

He looked down at her, recognized her, looked away without making any sign, and turned to Emma, flashy with jewellery.

'Let's go, let's go!' he said impatiently. The mother laid her hands on his arm.

'My boy, you have come back,' she said, nodding her head.

Ula Masondo turned on her.

'Who are you? What do you want?'

'What?' said the old woman slowly. 'Are you coming, my boy?'

She clutched at his coat, but he shook himself free.

'Who are you? Leave me alone,' he said, 'you bloody heathen.'

His mother saw him walk away with Emma, then she went back, quite stupefied, to her daughter-in-law, whose face was almost expressionless.

Ula Masondo and Emma went to an eating-house and bought food, which they sat down to eat on a crowded veranda. After-

ULA MASONDO

wards, somebody played a desperate syncopated twangling tune on a zither, and Ula Masondo began to dance on his high heels, limply, slackly, clapping solemnly, suddenly, the upturned soles of his shoes, one-two, with the palms of his hands. His ear-rings were swinging and the streamers of pink wool at his wrist were describing flying curves in the air. There was a rash on one side of his face: it came into view as he turned in the dance.

When he had finished, he lighted a cigarette, and started off with Emma in the direction of her home.

The leaves of the station trees were applied in relief against a blank bright sky, and on the deserted platform the young woman sat impassively watching the mother of Ula Masondo beating the ground with her hands, nodding and nodding her withered head, her rheumy eyes screwed up in her dusty skin; refusing and refusing a consolation that was not offered; and crying again and again in a high small voice:

'Mayé, mayé, mayé, mayé.'

But after a time she was silent, like a bird ensnared, that gives up its crying and fluttering and lies quite still, knowing it cannot escape; its eyes set in a glassy stare and its stillness the still-palpitating annihilation of terror.

§ 19

The storekeeper, who had once sold Ula Masondo a blanket, was sitting at supper.

'You know those Masondos?' he said to his wife.

'Yes.'

'A shocking thing has happened. That boy Ula — used to be such a decent boy — came back from the mines about a week ago. Well, the old woman went down to meet him, and he refused to recognize her —'

'What!'

'Yes, refused to recognize her, his own mother, and told her

STORIES OF AFRICA

that she was only a heathen. They say she came home in a terrible state, and they all thought she'd gone out of her mind. Two of the sons at once went off to see this Ula (the father refused to go) and found him at a kraal right on the other side of Aucampstroom, with some girl that he picked up in Jo'burg. He told his brothers that he wasn't coming home, and they couldn't persuade him, they couldn't do anything. Meanwhile the old woman surprised everybody by becoming unaccountably cheerful. They say she was laughing at everything for two or three days. Yes, and the day before yesterday, during a heavy down-pour of rain that deadened all sounds, she hanged herself in an empty hut.'

'O, *Fred*! Hanged herself?'

'*Hanged* herself! Mind you, it's only the second time I've ever heard of a native committing suicide. By Jove, there's an example for you, of a boy going away quite all right, and coming back with all this Christian dandy business that I can't stand at any price. Give me the raw nigger any day, is what I have always maintained.'

'O, go on, *Fred*, you're the one that's always talking about increasing their wants, and getting the trade built up for little *Freddy*—'

'Yes, that's all very well, but if that Ula Masondo ever comes here again, won't I give him a piece of my mind!'

BLACK PERIL

§ 1

A CAR stood outside one of the large white houses in the residential quarter of Dunnsport. It belonged to the doctor, who was making his third visit in twelve hours.

'Calm yourself,' he said irritably to the frantic husband of the young woman. 'I insist on your behaving calmly. Think of your wife.'

'Think of her! I can think of nothing else!'

'She won't recover from the shock unless you control yourself. Listen.'

He could hear his wife's voice. She was lying in the next room in a state of delirium.

'I want Charlie!' she was moaning in an unnatural voice.

The door opened, and a nurse came out. Her white clothes were slightly starched, and rustled as she moved. She beckoned to the doctor and they whispered together. The glare of the sun outside was reflected on the white walls of the room. The young man felt wounded by so much whiteness, the white suit of the doctor, the white veil of the nurse, the thought of his wife's white face on the pillow. In great anguish he heard again the unnatural sound of her voice, and covered his face with his hands.

'Come now,' said the doctor, 'she will recover from the shock.'

§ 2

In the dark bedroom the raving young woman, Vera Cornelissen, opened her eyes. She saw a view of the town as if she

STORIES OF AFRICA

had been standing on the flat roof of the house. It is a winter's afternoon, she can see the pale cubes and masses of square, modern buildings, the colour of sand and stone, under the faint blue of the sunny sky. Far away down there, their flat walls peppered with windows, they seem of archaic simplicity, awaiting or surviving events, unreal yet too real, like the buildings in a dream. On several pinnacles tiny flags can be seen flying at half-mast, for somebody is dead. On this fine, still, winter afternoon these are the buildings of Egypt, or the ruined cities of Asia.

It is night. She is two years old. They are staying at a farm in the summer. Her sister is dead, and she can hear her mother and her father weeping. The night air is full of the noise of frogs. There is a full moon. Her bath stands under the window and the surface of the water wavers in the moonlight. She is frightened and begins to cry. Suddenly the moonlight disappears, as if a curtain had been drawn. It is the black nursemaid who has come to see what is the matter. Her hands are hot, her voice is soft, she has a strange, friendly smell.

When the child sits at meals a native man moves noiselessly behind her chair. He wears loose white clothes that smell of soap and flap coolly against his warm, dark skin. When she looks up at his face she can see a rose-brown flush that suffuses his cheeks. The palms of his hands are pink.

At Dunnsport, sitting on the beach, she sees a woman pouring cold tea out of a dark-green bottle.

'O, he's devoted to Trixie and Stanley,' she is saying. 'Just look at him now.'

A native man is caressing the feet of her child. He smiles, showing his primitive white teeth.

'I was glad I got rid of that other boy I had. You remember that boy Isaac I had, eh? He was only fourteen, and do you know before he'd been with the kiddies a week they began to come out with the most shocking language. You wouldn't believe the expressions they came out with. I tell you, Mrs. Dawcock, really,

BLACK PERIL

my ears were burning. And the habits Trixie and Stanley learnt from that Isaac! I haven't got them out of them yet. Precocious little monkey he was, that Isaac of mine.'

There is a smell of straw. When she was twelve years old Vera Corneliussen was found in the loft with a native boy four years older than herself, and he was nearly flogged to death. Yes, of course, she is on the farm again. Smiling Morn is the name of the farm, but she remembers best the afternoons, the Sunday afternoons in winter. The long grass is dry and yellow, there is a low mud-house at the top of the slope above the river, whose bed is almost dry, with flat rocks under the silver-poplar trees which are only just losing their leaves, and in whose shade there is a damp, pungent smell. Somewhere the notes of a concertina are repeating over and over again a monotonous tune which makes her feel her heart could break, her heart could break in sobs, could break out sobbing, sobbing, sobbing.

And then, on the coast, she sees the train tunnelling through the feverish brilliance and glossy profusion of the foliage, and afterwards people walking along the line. All the trees are quivering in a hot steam of mist, all listening, all the nerves of trees listening to the funeral tom-toms of the Indians at the compound, all day, all night, quite slow, dead and dull, at intervals, like hammers thudding, tom-toms in the head, thud, tom-toms in the heart, thud. A young man of the Indians was beautiful. They called him the Jewel of Asia.

Tin bungalows in the hot, dry, dirty, loose sand full of bones, tins, papers, sticks, and the droppings of animals. Some towels are hung out to dry on the veranda. Inside, the furniture is yellowish, the food tastes like metal, the conversation is like stale beer. A pimply clerk gets out of the train. He lives next door. His wife, like a bedraggled cockatoo, runs down to meet him.

A tired actress, who travels with a concert party, is staggering back through the sand after bathing. She is still wearing her

STORIES OF AFRICA

bathing-dress (to which some sand is sticking as if it had been thrown there); it fits tightly to her skin, and is wrinkled on her massive legs.

Vera Corneliussen feels herself travelling along the coast. As she goes she sees cape after cape, lagoon after lagoon, and the long horizontal seas combing in wave after wave. Inland, the slender curving bamboos, always waving in the air with gentle unvarying gestures, are like fishing-rods that have waited so long for a catch that they have long since broken into leaf, and yet they continue in every wind to wave with a forlorn, despairing hope. And there are groves of wild bananas everywhere, which on still days are green, but which on windy days are blown back so that they show their silvery undersides, like dead fish floating in a whirlpool, floating belly upwards in mockery of the lashed and straining bamboos.

Inland, there is a venerable old Arab storekeeper whose body is like biscuit-coloured marble. He has a white beard, and wears a coat of purple silk and a skull-cap embroidered with threads of silver tinsel. His son, they say, is on a pilgrimage to Mecca; he has a Zulu concubine; he has few customers; he lies on a couch and spits where he pleases.

After the banana plantation and the mango orchard there is a small tin house, painted pale blue, from which proceeds domestic smoke with an aromatic smell. It is raining softly, a steam of smoke is everywhere, and she can hear a baby crying. Under the trees with large leaves white and speckled fowls stand huddled together while drops of rain run down their tail-feathers.

Then there is a ploughed field with a path across it, and then a cemetery. In the warm tropical rain stands a group of natives round a shiny wet coffin, and an old German missionary in black is holding up with one hand a large black umbrella with a thick, knobbly handle, while the other supports a hymn-book. There is a nasal sound of singing. A black woman, under a wet white

BLACK PERIL

lace parasol, is wearing a pink dress which the rain has already spoilt: it runs with two colours, dark pink and light pink, in streaks.

Vera Corneliussen hears a motor-car, whirring with passionate and ecstatic compression like the respiration of some tremendous animal.

'It's a car! Mind you don't get run over!'

A cold sweat runs down her forehead, and the sun is sinking behind the hill. She can hear again the voice of the woman on the beach at Dunnsport:

'We took some bananas in a paper bag, but they weren't ripe, and a bottle of cold tea. There was a dead fly in it, and she had a shooting pain in her hip. It was very hot that day, and Steve's friend came, him that's been living with us, though time and again I've said to mother: "Let him go out and work, Steve has to go out and work," but he just stays on. Well, I said to Steve's friend: "Look here, my lad, don't think I'm going to let you get funny with me. O yes, I give him something to think about. Yes, trying to get funny, he was.'

§ 3

In Dunnsport Vera Corneliussen used sometimes to go and stay with her aunt Judith, a rich old maid, who lived in a house of which all the windows were sealed, and devoted herself to promoting the interests of the Fresh Air Fund. The house had a prickly garden, spiny with pointing palms as poisonous as fish-bones, and in house and garden there was a deafening and hostile silence, and that air of secure and perpetual calm in which storms are born, in which they thunder and breed and die.

When Vera went out of Dunnsport it was nearly always to stay at New Havana, the home of her aunt Judith's brother, and once the centre of the social life of the commercial aristocracy of the coast. But even when she first went there times had changed.

STORIES OF AFRICA

The old white house was rotting in the bush. The road that once led to the old mill, through fields of coffee and arrowroot, was now a swamp, the building itself a roofless ruin. The vacant windows on the land side are full of branches tied and knotted to the walls and to each other by lianas thicker than ropes; the vacant windows on the shore side, like the lids of sightless eyes, are lighted by an upthrown glare from the dazzling white sand of the shore. From the beach, with savage constancy, comes the sound of the sea-waves pounding and sliding on an expanse of sand. In the tree-tops of the bush clatters the derisive laughter of monkey-birds. So perished the first glory of the Wesleyan conquistadors.

Now their fortunes are in plantations of sugar-cane that cover all the inland hills, which look in the distance like grassy downs. Yet near at hand the cane is tall and dry and sharp, deadly dry to every sense, dry green, dry leaves, papery metal rustling or grating, leaf against leaf, all those jointed stems full of hot, sweet sap.

In the canefields there are long, straight, earthy roads for fire-breaks, with the cane higher than her head on both sides extending out of sight with stiff and rustling monotony. At her feet a snake lies warming itself in the sun. There, in the distance, is an avenue of gum trees of a torrid greyness. Isolated *umdoni* trees, some dead and some leafy, are sticking up out of the cane: and occasional euphorbias, dark and fleshy and knotted and rigid, like many arms petrified in a moment of unanimous supplication to an unknown god.

At the new mill, as vast as a cathedral, the cane goes up and up in an endless everlasting elevator. She can hear the crunching sound of greedy and relentless jaws, and out runs the sap in astonishing quantities, as bright as vitriol and with the profusion of water. At the mill there are men running up and down steel staircases, men with red faces, men with brown bodies running along galleries, black men watching steaming vats with fumes of

BLACK PERIL

sulphur hovering over their surfaces, men pushing trucks, men feeding furnaces, men obeying machinery, machines obeying men, the inhabitants of a vast and noisy universe of sweat.

§ 4

It was at New Havana House that she first met George Corneliusen; it was there that she got engaged to him, it was there that they spent their honeymoon. This later house, which already has an air of slightly faded prosperity, is only thirty years old, and yet is completely hidden by the garden planted after it was built. It is at once forbidding and inviting, in a dark and ordered wilderness of firs and palms and eucalyptuses and flowering shrubs, and groves and groves of orange trees weighed down by masses of ripening fruit, that falls and rots with a rich and morbid odour in the damp shade, under firmaments and firmaments of hanging oranges. The house seems to be in a cave of permanent shadow, the sun is shining in some other world.

There is a dance. People are coming out from Dunnsport. It is dusk. She can see quiet and luxurious motor-cars following one another up the approach, with sombre regularity, like deadly thoughts succeeding one another in an unconscious brain. In the middle of the dance she is sitting out with George. He is smoking a cigarette. The trees are swaying in a wash of moonlight. A native servant comes to them with a tray and glasses.

'Here you!' It is the voice of George. 'What's your name? What? Charlie, you say?'

She can see the moonlight on his teeth and on the whites of his eyes.

She is going with George to the mill. It is just before they are married. The clerk in the office is rather fallow. He goes out of the room. She asks George:

'Is he white or coloured?'

'Hush, he's what they call a Coast European.'

STORIES OF AFRICA

Just at that minute the man comes in again: he must have heard what they were saying.

'After all,' she says afterwards to George, 'I suppose it isn't a sin to be coloured.'

'But it's a sin to look coloured,' he says in his pleasant voice. He is so kind and amiable, almost a boy, and he looks so delightful on a pony, his shirt open at the neck. He rides so well, and plays the gramophone so nicely.

'Quite enough people are touched with the tar-brush,' he says; 'we don't want any more. Just think, for instance, there's another of these Coast Europeans, also working in the mill, who can either go and have a drink in the European bar or in the Indian bar as he pleases. He's white enough for one, and dark enough for the other.'

'Dark enough, dark enough,' she repeats the words to herself.

It is the morning after her wedding-day. She is the first to wake. She is surprised to see that George's hair, always so smooth, so neatly parted, is all ruffled on the pillow. George, with his hair ruffled! It makes her laugh, but although the whole bed shakes with her laughing George does not wake up. She can hear the siren at the mill. It is seven o'clock.

After six months they are again staying at New Havana. She is always awake when the siren sounds at the mill. She is always the first down to breakfast. The servant Charlie waits on her at the table. He is taller and broader than George, and more graceful in his movements. His voice is deeper and more harmonious, his temper is better, he evidently has more character. Besides, he is magnetic. One morning she touches his hand as if by accident. He has an electric skin.

§ 5

She has been married two years. There is no child. The man Charlie has left New Havana and is working for her in Dunns-

BLACK PERIL

port. George is away. She has quarrelled with him for being irreproachable. She is satisfied that it is a good reason for a quarrel. George has gone away for the week-end to play golf. He tried to pretend that he was going to a woman, but he knew that she knew his pretence.

'You are content to leave me alone in the house?' she had asked him in the hall, as a servant was carrying his bag of golf-clubs out to the car.

'You aren't obliged to stay here. You can go to a hotel.'

At night, when she was in her bedroom, she rang the bell. There was only one servant in the house that night. She had arranged it. Charlie is standing in the doorway.

It is seven o'clock; she can hear a siren. It is afternoon, the light of the sun is pale. It is before dawn; there is lightning in the sky and frost on the ground.

§ 6

George Corneliussen takes his hands away from his eyes. It is midday. There is a cry in the bedroom. He opens the door. Vera has twisted her body out of the bed. Her head is hanging downwards, so that her ear-rings are hanging upside-down. The nurse runs forward, the husband runs forward, but the woman is dead.

Frightful Outrage in Town, Society Woman Victim, Dies of Shock, said the posters the next morning.

'What a shocking case,' people said, opening their newspapers on trams, trains and breakfast tables.

'Yes, these black brutes are all alike.'

'Have they caught him?'

'He'll be hung.'

'He ought to be lynched.'

'I remember once —'

'I must really buy you a revolver.'

STORIES OF AFRICA

Everywhere the same remarks were to be heard, but in an hour the outrage would be forgotten, and the wind would blow one of the posters into the gutter, where a half-caste peanut-seller, by shifting his feet, would, without knowing, partly obliterate the printed words.

THE CHILD OF QUEEN VICTORIA

§ I

A FORD car, rattling its way up a rough road in Lembuland in the most brilliant sunshine, carried two very different people — a hard-bitten colonial of Scotch descent, a trader, MacGavin by name, nearer thirty than forty, with a sour red face, and a young Englishman called Frant who had just left school. It was really very awkward. They did not know what to say to each other. MacGavin thought his passenger was despising him simply for being what he was, and Frant, feeling foolish and useless in contrast with this sunburnt, capable man, made a painful effort to be hearty, and looked inquiringly at the country. The road wound in and out, climbing through grassy hills, with patches of virgin forest here and there, especially in the hollows. There were outcrops of rock, and small tilled fields of red earth, and any number of beehive-shaped huts perched here and there in twos and threes. And there were always natives in sight, with herds of bony cattle and ragged goats. It did not need a specially acute eye to see that the landscape, though picturesque, was overcrowded, and that the whites, coveting the lowlands for sugarcane, had gradually squeezed the natives up into these heights which were poor in soil, coarse in pasturage, and too full of ups and downs to afford space for any proper attempts at cultivation. Frant looked at the natives, naturally, with some curiosity. He wondered what they were like when you got to know them, and then he wondered if he couldn't say something suitable to MacGavin about them. At last he said:

'It seems a pity that the natives haven't got a higher standard

STORIES OF AFRICA

of living, then there would be so much more money to be made out of them.'

MacGavin looked at him with the savage expression sometimes to be seen on the faces of the ignorant when confronted with what seems to them a new and difficult and rather mad idea.

'The black bastards !' he exclaimed. 'There's bloody little to be made out of *them*, as you'll pretty soon find out.'

And he violently changed gear. As the car began to strain its way up a steep hill, Frant, vibrating by his side, was glad that the noise of the engine destroyed what would have been a painful silence.

Sons of the 'new poor', young wasters, retrenched civil servants or Indian Army officers, and other mostly misguided wretches, they went to settle overseas — one even heard of suicides, because not everybody is tough enough to stand an absolute change of environment, or frightful isolation in some magnificent landscape. And Frant, lured by advertisements, driven by enterprise, encouraged by supposedly responsible persons, went out like them, only fresh from a public school.

His incipient relationship with MacGavin was not made easier by the practical basis on which it rested, for Frant came to him neither as a partner, nor as a servant, nor as a guest, nor had he paid one penny by way of premium. A committee in London had picked out MacGavin's name as that of a person who had declared himself willing to give a young Englishman free board and lodging and two or three years' training in the art of trading with the Lembus in exchange for nothing but that young stranger's 'services'. MacGavin was in some ways a practical man, and the chance of obtaining a responsible white servant who need be paid no wages seemed to him a good one. Frant had been brought up to be eager to oblige. And that was how they started.

Frant was young — so young that, bumping adventurously along into the heart of Lembuland, he could not help thinking of

THE CHILD OF QUEEN VICTORIA

his former schoolfellows and of how they would have envied him if they could have seen him at that moment. A fatal eagerness possessed him. He was flying in the face of the world, as the young are apt to do, with the finest of ambitions. For some of us when young it does not seem so important that we should be successful in a worldly sense and at once enjoy money and comfort, as that we should try and become our true selves. We want to blossom out and fulfil our real natures. The process is complex, and is obviously conditioned by our approaches to the work we mean to do or have to do in life, by the way our heredity and upbringing make us react to our environment, and especially by our relations with other people. In the long run this affair of becoming a grown-up person, a real person (for that is what it amounts to) is, for most of us, an affair of the heart. We hear a great deal about sex nowadays; it is possible to overestimate its importance, because there are always people who pay it little attention or who apparently manage, like Sir Isaac Newton, to get along, without giving it a thought. But Frant came of a susceptible family. He arrived in Lembuland with a pretty appetite for life, and little knew what he was letting himself in for.

§ 2

The trading station at Madumbi occupied the top of a slope a little back from the road, or track rather, and consisted of two main buildings, the store and the house, about fifty yards apart, and a number of ramshackle outhouses. In front, there had been some attempt at a garden — not much of an attempt, for cows and chickens always roamed about in it, and it was now and then invaded by monkeys. At the back, there was some rough grazing land and a patch of forest that went with the place. The buildings themselves were made of corrugated iron, painted khaki and lined with deal boards, looking out, curiously hideous, on the land which sloped away from them on all sides with streams, and

STORIES OF AFRICA

clumps of trees, and grassy spaces like a well-planned park. But Mr. and Mrs. MacGavin, in settling at Madumbi, had been little influenced by the scenery.

The store itself was lighted only by two small windows and the open door, and as you came in from the strong sunlight it was at first difficult to get your bearings. The place was so crowded with goods that it looked like a cave crowded with all sorts of plunder. Your head bumping against a suspended trek-chain or storm-lantern, you looked up and saw that the ceiling was almost entirely hidden in festoons of kettles and baskets, hanks of Berlin wool, enormous bouquets of handkerchiefs of all sizes and colours, bunches of tunics and trousers interspersed with camisoles, frying-pans, wreaths of artificial forget-me-nots, hatchets and matchets, necklaces and ploughshares. As for the shelves, they were entirely crammed with different kinds of goods, for the production of which a hundred factories had smoked and roared in four continents. All kinds of shoddy clothing and showy piece-goods, brittle ironmongery and china-ware, the most worthless patent medicines, the gaudiest cheap jewellery, the coarsest groceries, bibles, needles, pipes, celluloid collars, soup tureens, hair-oil, notebooks, biscuits and lace curtains rose in tiers and patterns on every side. Certain shelves were full of refuse left over from the war — grey cotton socks made in Chicago for American recruits who had never enlisted, khaki tunics and breeches, puttees, Balaclava helmets and so forth, all ugly and serviceable, made and carried by machinery to contribute to a scene of universal murder, produced in too great quantities, by contract instead of by necessity or impulse, and at last deposited here, so that a profit might be made out of the pleasure these things, by their novelty, gave to the blacks. The whole world seemed to have conspired to make a profit on this lonely Lembu hilltop.

Two doors at the back of the store itself gave access to two other rooms. One was large, and was used for storing reserves

THE CHILD OF QUEEN VICTORIA

of bulky goods — sacks of salt, sugar and grain; ironware; boxes of sweets and soap; besides a profusion of bunches of Swazi tobacco leaves, at least two feet long, their fragrance preserved by an occasional sprinkling with water. It was the custom to give away a leaf or two of tobacco to each adult shopper, and to the young a handful of the cheapest sweets, their virulent pinks and greens and acid chemical flavours promising a quick decay to strong white teeth. The other and smaller room was used as an office, and contained a table, a chair, a safe, and a great accumulation of MacGavin's papers. The window, which received the afternoon sun, would not open, and was always buzzing with flies and hornets in various stages of fatigue. A flea-bitten dog was usually asleep on a pile of unpaid bills in the corner, while the ink, from standing so much in the sun, was always evaporating, so that when one had occasion to write one had to use a pencil.

But all that was only the background. The space before the counter was often thronged with Lembus of all ages and both sexes. The noise was overpowering. They would all be talking at once, some laughing, some arguing, some gossiping, some bargaining, while all the time a peculiarly strident gramophone was playing records of Caruso and Clara Butt. Sometimes an old black woman, nearly blind and nearly naked, her last peppercorns of hair grizzled to a pepper-and-salt colour, and her dry old dugs so long that she could comfortably tuck the ends of them into her belt, might be seen listening to it, with her head on one side, for the first time, uttering occasional exclamations of incredulity (*'Abantu! Inkosi yami! Maye babo!'*) and slapping her scrawny thighs, as she demanded whether the voice was the voice of a spirit.

In another part of the room the only vacant space on the wall was occupied by a pier-glass, before which a group of very fat girls were fond of comparing their charms, to the accompaniment of shrieks of delight. Their main wish was to observe the reflection of their bottoms, partly out of pure curiosity and partly with

STORIES OF AFRICA

a view to interesting the men present. Standing among the older customers there were always some children, patiently awaiting their turn to be served with threepennyworths of this and that. Some brought eggs or wild fruit to trade, which they carried in small bowl-shaped baskets on their heads. One might have a fowl under her arm, and a little boy of seven would perhaps bring an enormous scarlet lily, complete with leaves and root.

To say that all this was strange to Frant would be an understatement. It was a new world. Into this exotic atmosphere he was plunged; this was where he had to work; this was what he had to learn. What is called adaptability is little more than freshness and keenness and readiness to learn, and Frant, who had been brought up to obey, made himself completely and at first willingly subservient to MacGavin's instructions. He didn't like MacGavin, and it was plain that he never would do so, but it was also plain that MacGavin knew his business, and Frant's presence at Madumbi was, in theory, a business matter. So he rose early and retired late, working hours that no trade union would approve at a job that needed endless patience and good humour, with diligence and imagination as well. He struggled with a strange language, did accounts, avoided cheating or being cheated (he had been brought up to be honest) and toiled morning, noon and night, without haste, without rest, never for a moment questioning what he conceived to be his duty. And MacGavin, finding that he had to do with an honest and docile and responsible person, confided to his wife that the plan was succeeding beyond his hopes. Very soon, he felt, he would be able to leave Frant in entire charge of the proceedings, while he himself attended to other money-making operations out of doors. Mrs. MacGavin was pleased too, because she found she was less often required to help in the store, and could spend more time in the house. Though God knows the store was the pleasanter building of the two.

THE CHILD OF QUEEN VICTORIA

On his very first afternoon Frant had been given tea on the veranda of the house, in order to afford Mrs. MacGavin an early chance of sizing him up, but after that his tea was always sent over to the store. Apart from that he had meals in the house, and he slept in it, and spent part of his Sunday leisure in it as well. There were only four rooms. Frant's own room, nine feet by seven, was oppressively hot, was never properly cleaned, and had a disagreeable smell. The living-room, not large in itself, was so crammed with furniture that one person could with difficulty turn round in it, whereas three people were supposed to eat and sleep and rest in it, quite in addition to the fact that, the house lacking either hall or passage, it had to serve as both. Thus the pattern on the linoleum was in places quite worn away, and behind the front door was a rack bulging with hats, coats and mackintoshes, which gave off a greenish odour of stale sweat, cheap rubber and mildew. The middle of the room was occupied by a large table covered with a khaki mohair table-cloth with bobbles round the edges, and in the middle of that stood a large oil-lamp with a shade of crinkly pink paper. A sideboard held a load of worthless ornaments, and on the walls faded wedding-groups in bamboo Oxford frames alternated with dusty paper fans, cuckoo clocks and fretwork brackets supporting electro-plated vases containing dusty everlasting flowers in process of perishing from dry-rot. With difficulty it was possible to make one's way to a small bookcase which stood beneath a reproduction of a problem picture, showing a woman in evening dress in the fashion of 1907 kneeling on the floor before a man in a dinner-jacket, the whole suffused in a red glow from a very hot-looking fire in the background, and called 'The Confession'. Among the books were several by Marie Corelli, a brochure on the diseases of cattle, and a girlish album of Mrs. MacGavin's, in which her friends had written or attempted to draw personal tributes and pleasantries. Had this album been a little more vulgar, it might have been almost a curiosity, but the common-

STORIES OF AFRICA

ness of colonial schoolgirls in the second decade of this century has scarcely even a period interest. It must be admitted, however, that one contributor had written the following very appropriate wisecrack:

Roses are red and violets blue,
Pickles are sour and so are you.

'Fond of reading?' MacGavin, in an expansive moment, once asked Frant. 'No time myself.'

'Yes and no,' said Frant, who was trying to make up for his education and had a copy of *The Brothers Karamazov* in his bedroom. 'It depends.'

On the table in that front room there was nearly always a fly-haunted still-life consisting of a teapot and some dirty cups, for Mrs. MacGavin drank very strong tea seven times daily, a habit which no doubt accounted partly for the state of her complexion. But all day long and most evenings the double doors on to the veranda were open, and there was the view. As the trading station was on the top of a hill and partly surrounded with groves of mimosa trees, the outlook was very fine. Beyond the trees, it could be seen that every depression in the landscape had its rivulet and patch of forest, and that in every sheltered and elevated place there was a kraal of beehive-shaped huts with small fields of grain and roots; cattle were grazing here and there; and in the distance rose range upon range of blue mountains. At first sight it seemed, like so many African landscapes, a happy mixture of the pastoral and the magnificent, but those who lived under its influence came to feel gradually a mingled sense of uneasiness and sorrow, so that what at first seemed grand became indifferent or menacing, what at first seemed peaceful was felt to be brooding, and stillness and quietness seemed to be an accumulation of repressed and troubled forces, like the thunderclouds that often hung over the horizon of an afternoon. Those sunny hills seemed to be possessed by a spirit that nursed a grievance.

THE CHILD OF QUEEN VICTORIA

§ 3

Frant's approach to the natives was complicated by his character and education, which in some ways helped and in some ways hindered him. As a polite person, he treated them with a good-humoured consideration which they were quite unused to receiving from the whites, but then the whites in Lembuland are an unusually discouraging lot—the way they behave to one another is proof of that. A natural quick sympathy and warmth in his character immediately attracted the natives, who are uncannily quick at character, but at the same time they found a certain reserve in him. It was not that he stood on his dignity with them, but simply that he was a little too conscientious. There were certain vague ideas about the white man's prestige and so on which made him rather careful in his behaviour. He imagined that if he let himself go at all he might in some way damage MacGavin's standing and do harm to the trade, and of course MacGavin, in teaching him the trade, was careful to try and instil various principles about treating the natives firmly. And to MacGavin's credit it may be added that he insisted on the natives being treated as fairly as possible, though this was a matter of business rather than principle with him. And after all, there was no need to tell Frant to be fair—it was clear that though a trifle priggish, he was no swindler. This priggishness of his was easy to account for. It was partly in his nature, but also he had been brought up with certain rigid English ideas about being a gentleman, playing the game, and all that sort of thing, and until now he had had no reason to doubt that they were right. The effect of being abruptly transferred to a completely new environment; of being cut off from those familiar companions and surroundings which had enabled his principles to be taken for granted; and of associating with Mr. and Mrs. MacGavin, was not to make him doubt those principles but to convince him that they were right. And to be all by oneself and to think oneself

STORIES OF AFRICA

right is really rather fatal, especially if one naturally tends to be both straightforward and severe. Already he would receive some of the opinions of MacGavin and his wife in a silence that was even stronger in its effect than the quiet and smiling 'Oh, I'm afraid I can't quite agree with you' which he often had to use in conversation with them.

'He always thinks he's right,' MacGavin remarked to his wife, 'but it doesn't matter about that. What's more important is that the niggers like him. There's a slight improvement in the takings this month, and I shouldn't be surprised if it's partly due to him. He does what he's told for the most part, and I shouldn't be surprised if he turns out a good salesman when he knows the lingo a bit better.'

The Lembu language presents no great difficulties, and it is surprising what good use one can make of a language as soon as one has a small working vocabulary and a few colloquial turns of phrase. Frant enjoyed speaking it, because it is one of those Bantu languages which, to be spoken well, have to be spoken with gusto, and it can be both sonorous and elegant. His progress in the language naturally made his work more easy and pleasant, but it had other effects — it drew him closer into sympathy with the Lembus, and showed him how little they liked the whites. In fact, he began to realize that the remains of the white man's prestige, in Lembuland at least, rested mainly on fear — fear of the white man's money, his mechanical genius and his ruthless and largely joyless energy — and not on love or respect. And since he himself had very little money, no mechanical genius and a certain joyful vitality, he felt that there must be something rather 'un-white' about himself. This discovery acted directly upon his pride — it made him resolve to treat the natives with as much kindness and dignity as were consonant with his odd position (the ruling race behind the counter!), as if to show that there were still white men who knew how to behave humanely. This made him think himself better than MacGavin and the few other

THE CHILD OF QUEEN VICTORIA

white, with whom he came in touch, and shut him up in a small cell of his own (as it were) closely barred with high principles.

He did not pretend to himself that the Lembus were paragons of virtue. The very fact that as customers in a shop they had a certain right to order the shopkeepers about, added to the fact that these shopkeepers were nominally their 'superiors', was a temptation to some of the natives to be tiresome, cheeky or even insolent, and that was one reason why a great deal of persevering good temper was needed in dealing with them. By the time they had convinced themselves that Frant was both patient and cheerful he had already begun to get a good name amongst them. They were used to MacGavin, whom they thought of as a beast, but a just beast, and finding Frant just without being a beast, and youthful and personable as well, they undoubtedly began to come to Madumbi in greater numbers.

At first he had been much struck by the extreme suspiciousness and diffidence of the customers. They never entered the place with that air of cheerful confidence which, in the dreams of good shopkeepers, is found on every customer's face. On the contrary, they always seemed to come in expecting the worst. Many an old, wild woman, skirted in skins, smeared with fat and ochre, hung with charms, a bladder or an antelope's horn suspended at her neck, her hair dressed high and stuck with bone ornaments, a snuff-box at her waist, perhaps having about her too a couple of pounds, every penny of which she meant to spend, would pause in the doorway with a roving eye and an expression of extreme disillusionment and contempt, as though she found herself there unwillingly and by chance. After some time she would perhaps help herself to a cupful of water from a tank that stood at the door, and would then sit down in the shade and take a lot of snuff with immense deliberation, the expression on her face seeming to say, 'Well, here I am, and I don't give a damn for anybody. I haven't lived all these years for nothing. Experience has taught me to expect the worst of every

STORIES OF AFRICA

situation and every person, particularly if he or she happens to be white. If I condescend to do any shopping here, I mean to see everything, and to have exactly what I want or nothing at all. Don't think you can swindle me, because you can't. However, I shall proceed on the assumption that you mean to try, that all your goods are damaged, that you're a cunning profiteer, and that you think I'm a fool.' And when at last she deigned to enter the store, she would proceed accordingly.

But it was not only old women who were so much on their guard. Many and many a customer would show the same symptoms of a deep and cynical mistrust, walking in as if they were threading their way among mantraps all carefully set for them. Even children would show plainly how they had been forewarned, repeating innocently the last parental injunctions, and carefully counting their change from sixpence. And all this was not due to MacGavin but to the reputation which the white overlords of Lembuland had managed, in the course of two or three decades, to build up for themselves.

If for Frant this unpleasant relationship between the two races was one of his earliest and most enduring impressions, even stronger was that of the immediate physical presence of the Lembus. So many more or less naked bodies of men and women, coloured a warm brown, smooth-skinned and mostly graceful, with white teeth, straight backs and easy manners, do not leave one, when one is young and susceptible and unfamiliar with them, exactly indifferent.

'Don't worry about the stink,' MacGavin had said. 'You'll get used to it.'

Stink? The whites always say that the blacks have a bad smell. Well, there at Madumbi was a confined space usually tightly packed with natives, but although the weather was hot and the air sometimes scarcely moving, it could not have been said that the smell was much more than strange, though to Frant it was heady, like the very smell of life itself, and excited him with a

THE CHILD OF QUEEN VICTORIA

promise of joys not yet tasted. The wholesome smell of an out-of-door race cannot in any case seem unpleasant, except to diseased nerves, and the lightly clad or unclad bodies of the Lembus are continually exposed to sun, air and water, while they are almost as vegetarian as their flocks and herds. If some of the old women were a little inclined to accumulate several layers of ochre and fat all over them by way of skin treatment, they were quite amusing enough in their manners and conversation, and had quite enough natural style, to make up for it. At Madumbi there was a far more oppressive smell than that of the natives, and that was the combined aroma of the dressing that stiffened the calicoes of Osaka and Manchester into a dishonest stoutness, and, to speak figuratively, of the sand in the sugar.

§ 4

In places like Madumbi, time seems more of a thief and enemy than in crowded cities or even in circles where the months are frittered away in useless leisure. In that part of Lembuland the changing of the seasons is less marked than in the highlands, and at Madumbi life was a packed routine; work began at half-past five or six in the morning; fatigue often precluded thought; and the tired eyes, turning towards clock or calendar, would close in sleep. Sometimes all sense of chronological sequence was lost; sometimes it seemed almost as if time were going backwards; and now and again Frant would realize with a shock how many weeks or months had slipped by since this or that trifling break in his existence. But he was not discontented, for he was interested in his work, not so much for its own sake as for the close contact with some of the realities of human nature into which it brought him.

There were certain things which he could never sell without a smile. Now and then a young Lembu would come in and say rather furtively, '*Amafuta wemvubu akona na?*' That is to say,

STORIES OF AFRICA

'Have you got any hippopotamus fat?' Whereupon Frant used to go to the small showcase in which the medicines were kept, and produce a small bottle with a label bearing a Lembu inscription, and underneath, in very small letters, PEDERSEN'S GENUINE HIPPO FAT. This commodity looked like ordinary lard probably was ordinary lard, was put up by a Norwegian chemist in Dunnsport, and sold for a shilling a bottle. It was used for a love philtre, and helped the manufacturer to maintain his son at a theological seminary in Oslo. But other 'lines' were more lucrative than hippo fat. Love philtres, after all, were usually only required by the young and romantically inclined, whereas PEDERSEN'S BLUE WONDERS, as another Lembu inscription testified, were indispensable to both young and old. Certainly they were always in demand. Pills as large as peas and the colour of gun-metal, they were not merely an infallible, but a powerful aphrodisiac. When MacGavin happened to be asked for either of these medicines, he would never sell them without a clumsy pleasantry, a habit which had resulted in a falling-off of the sales of the hippo fat, for the younger natives, though their morals, according to some standards, were not above reproach, had their finer feelings. However, his misplaced humour did not much affect the demand for Blue Wonders, which were usually bought by customers of a coarser fibre. Mrs. MacGavin herself came to lend a hand in the store when business was brisk, and it would sometimes happen that she would be called upon to serve a customer with these things, which she would do with the grimmest face in the world — her expression might well have suggested a subject for an allegorical picture, 'Avarice overcoming Chastity'. But still, out of all the hotchpotch that the store contained, there was one kind of goods which she would neither buy nor sell. The male natives of those parts were in the habit of using a peculiar kind of *cache-sexe* made of the leaves of the wild banana. At Madumbi these were made, in assorted sizes, by an old vagabond of a native who sold them to MacGavin at whole-

THE CHILD OF QUEEN VICTORIA

sale prices. When he came to the store it was always at some odd time, when there was nobody else about, either on a very hot afternoon or just after the store had been locked up, or at dawn, or when the moon was rising. If he saw MacGavin, the business was soon settled. If he encountered Mrs. MacGavin, he would wave his bundle of unmentionables right under her nose, saluting her with his free hand and uttering all sorts of high-flown and wholly ironical compliments before crying the virtues of his wares. Nothing annoyed her more, as he very well knew. She always told him rudely to wait for her husband. If it was Frant he chanced to find, he would say with real politeness, 'Sa' ubona, umtwana ka Kwini Victoli!' Greetings, child of Queen Victoria! This became shortened later to 'Child of the Queen' and at last simply to 'Child'. The very first time he had seen Frant he had said, 'Ah, I can see you're a real Englishman from *over there*,' and since England suggested Queen Victoria to him more than anything else it was not hard to account for the complimentary title. The old man, to whom Frant always gave an extra large leaf or two of tobacco, was also fond of saying that the *amaBhunu*, the Boers, were 'no good', which was partly his real opinion and meant partly as a piece of indirect flattery, though as Frant had not had anything to do with any Dutch people it was not particularly effectual.

'How can you allow that dirty old swine to call you "child"!' exclaimed MacGavin.

'Why, he's old enough to be my grandfather!' Frant retorted.

Frant's point of view seemed so fantastic to MacGavin that he laughed a short, harsh laugh.

'My advice is, don't stand any cheek from any nigger,' he said.

'He isn't cheeky to *me*,' said Frant. 'Only friendly.'

And with an irritable grunt from MacGavin the conversation was closed. It seemed extraordinary how full of prejudice the trader was. He was fond of generalizations about the natives which were not even remotely true, such as that they were

STORIES OF AFRICA

incapable of gratitude (as if they had such a lot to be grateful for!) and he seemed to have a fixed idea that every black is determined to try and score off every white, under any conditions whatsoever. And when, as occasionally happened, a native addressed him politely in English, it made him so furious that he was no longer master of himself — it seemed to him a suggested assumption of equality between the races!

The MacGavins were amazed at Frant's continued progress, and if they welcomed his popularity with the natives as being good for trade, they resented a little that a stranger and a *rooinek*¹ should be able to beat them at their own game. As to what went on in his mind, they knew and cared nothing. They neither knew nor cared that neither work nor fatigue could prevent him from feeling at times an overwhelming loneliness and an intolerable hunger for experiences which his youth, the climate and the glorious suggestiveness of his surroundings did everything to sharpen, while its satisfaction was firmly forbidden by circumstances — or so it seemed to Frant. Already esteemed by the natives, he valued their good opinion of him too much to take chances with it, and in the background of his thoughts, in spite of the MacGavins, or perhaps because of them, there still presided that tyrannical spectre, the 'white man's prestige'. What it is to be an ex-prefect of an English public school!

§ 5

It was bound to happen that sooner or later his attention would become centred in some individual out of the hundreds he had to do with in the course of a week. One drowsy afternoon, when he was alone behind the counter and there was nobody in the store but a couple of gossips and a child, a young woman came in rather shyly and stood near the door, hesitating to speak. He couldn't see her very well because of the bright sunshine behind

¹ 'Red neck.' Dutch nickname for Englishman.

THE CHILD OF QUEEN VICTORIA

her, but he asked her what she wanted and she made a small purchase.

'Do you remember me?' she asked suddenly in a very quiet voice, looking at him gravely while she spoke.

He was surprised. He didn't remember ever having seen her before, but not wishing to offend her, he said in a slightly ironical tone of voice:

'Oh, when I've once seen people, *just once*, I never forget them.'

'Well!' she exclaimed, and uttered a little peal of laughter, partly because she was surprised at his ready answer and amused at his white man's accent; partly because, as a Lembu, she could appreciate irony; and partly because it made her happy that he should talk to her. But as soon as she had uttered that little laugh she grew shamefaced and cast down her eyes with the incomparable grace of a young woman with whom modesty is natural, and not a mere device of coquetry. There was more sadness than usual in her expression, because she had at once understood that he did not remember her, and no woman likes to be forgotten by any young man. She had moved now, and the diffused radiance reflected from the sunburnt hilltop outside shone full upon her through the open door. Her hair was dressed in a cylinder on the crown of her head, stained with red ochre, and stuck with a long bone pin at the broad end of which was a minute incised design; she wore no ornament but a flat necklace of very small blue beads and a few thin bangles and anklets of silver and copper wire. She was dressed in a single piece of dark red stuff which was supported by her pointed young breasts and fastened under the arms — it fell in straight, classical folds almost to her feet, and at the sides it did not quite join but revealed a little her soft flanks. From bearing weights on her head from early childhood she carried herself very erect; she was slender, and an awareness of her graceful nubility gave every movement the value of nature perfectly controlled by art. The fineness of her appearance may have been due to some remote Arab strain in her blood, for

STORIES OF AFRICA

though unmistakably negroid, her features were in no sense exaggerated. Her nose, for example, though the nostrils were broad, was very slightly aquiline; her skin was unusually light in tone; and the modelling of her cheeks and temples could only be described as delicate. Her mouth was good-humoured, her eyes were lustrous, and though one side of her face was marked with a long scar, this only drew closer attention to its beauty.

'You don't come here very often, do you?' said Frant, leaning on the counter, partly because he did not want their conversation to be overheard by anybody else, and partly because he felt somehow weak in the legs. He was in the grip of an unaccustomed shyness, he felt unsure of himself, and so excited that his heart was beating very quickly.

'No,' she said, avoiding his eyes. 'I don't live very near.'

'Where do you live?'

'Down there — down in the valley,' she said, extending an exquisite arm and looking out through the open doorway with a vague and dreamy air. He noticed the light colour of the insides of her hands. 'Near the river,' she said.

'That's not very far away,' he said.

'You've been there, then?' she said. 'You know the place?'

'No, but I don't think it's very far.'

'The hill is long and steep,' she said.

Frant suddenly remembered two lines of verse —

Does the road wind uphill all the way?

Yes, to the very end.

'I don't know your name,' he said.

She looked at him quickly and uttered an exclamation of surprise.

'What's the matter?' he said.

THE CHILD OF QUEEN VICTORIA

'Why do you want to know my name?' she asked anxiously, for the use of names is important in witchcraft.

'I'm just asking. I just want to know it.'

'My name is Seraphina,' she said, with a mixture of modesty and seductiveness.

'What?'

'Seraphina.'

'How on earth did you get a name like that? It's not a Lembu name! You're not a Christian, are you?'

She laughed, as though the idea of her being a Christian was absolutely ridiculous — which indeed it was.

'No!' she said. 'A missionary gave it to me when I was a child. He made magic water on my head and said that Christ wanted me to be called Seraphina.'

This time Frant laughed.

'Christ chose well,' he said. 'But none of your family are Christians, are they?'

'No, it just happened like that.'

He laughed again.

'You don't know my name,' he said.

'Yes, I do,' she said, and pronounced it 'Front', and they both laughed.

Just then some noisy customers arrived, and he had to leave her. Suddenly bold, he said:

'Good-bye, go in peace. Please come again. I like talking with you.'

He couldn't possibly have dared to speak so directly of his feelings in English, but somehow in Lembu it was easier. Besides, he was stirred as he had never been stirred before.

'Good-bye,' she said, smiling. 'Stay in peace.'

She turned to go, and looked like some virgin in an archaic frieze saying farewell to the world. As for Frant, his hands were trembling, and there was a wild gladness in his heart.

STORIES OF AFRICA

§ 6

His tortures now began in earnest. His dreams and waking thoughts were haunted by the image of the black girl, tantalizing and yet infinitely remote. As his desire for her increased, so did its fulfilment seem to recede. He knew little or nothing of her; he knew little enough of her language and nothing at all of her situation in life. He had been so busy learning to make a profit out of the natives that he had had little chance of learning much about their customs, the way they lived and thought. Supposing, he said to himself, for the sake of argument, this girl were to become my mistress? First of all, is it possible? I am certain that to some extent she reciprocates my feelings, but to what extent? What would she expect of me? What would her family think of her? How would the affair be possible in any case? How am I to communicate with her? And then the MacGavins — presumably his success in his trading depends to some extent on the fact that he is not one of these white men who get mixed up with the natives; and if I were to become the lover of Seraphina, should I not damage his livelihood, besides ruining my own? Whatever happened, everybody would know about it, of course. And how could we live together? Are we to meet furtively in the forest? And have I the right to take this black girl? How can I pretend to myself that I love her? Is it not simply that I want to sleep with her, to touch, kiss, embrace and caress her? He found no answers to his questions, but the very fact that he could ask them was significant. His loneliness and his difficulties had taught him one of the very things that his education had been evolved to prevent — the habit of introspection. He was being Hamletized by circumstances.

Of the numerous forms of anguish which Providence has designed for her creatures few can be more intense than the state of mind and body of a man who is young, sensual by nature and sexually repressed; and who, instead of yielding to the volup-

THE CHILD OF QUEEN VICTORIA

tuous provocations of his surroundings, tries to exorcize them with the public-school spirit. When he might well have acted with boldness, he found himself filled with doubts, scruples and equivocations, in addition to the ordinary fears of a lover. And he had nobody to turn to, there was nobody who would say to him what so much needed to be said, 'Well, go ahead and have the woman. You will have your pleasure and she will have hers, and you will both be a bit the wiser and possibly the happier for the experience.' You will treat her with consideration, because it is your nature to be considerate. You are in no danger of "going native", because you aren't the sort of person who goes native. And as for worrying about the MacGavins, do you imagine they worry at all about you, or are likely to do so as long as you rake in the bawbees for them? Be a man! *Carpe diem*, etc.' Lacking such an adviser, Frant continued to torment himself.

Each day he got up with Seraphina in his thoughts. Day followed day, and Seraphina did not appear. Round the trading station, meanwhile, Africa unrolled her splendours and her cruelties. The seasons did not assert themselves overmuch. One waited for the rains to stop, or one suddenly noticed buds among thorns. One was aware, all too aware, of the spring, the season of trouble, when more people die, in all countries, than at any other time of the year. The sap was troubled, and the heart with it. All the mimosa trees at Madumbi broke into pollenous clouds of blossom, creaming in a light wind against the cobalt morning sky. Glossy toucans with scarlet bills nested in them, swooping among the boughs, and uttering the most touching mating-cries. Fireflies went through their luminous rites under a coral-tree; crested hoopoes, the colour of cinnamon, pursued their fitful flight across the clear green of dawn; on long, sultry afternoons a group of turkey-bustards, as grave as senators, would plod grumbling across some grassy plateau, looking carefully for the snakes which they could kill at a blow; raindrops pattered down on leaves as large as tables, magenta-veined; and on dry,

STORIES OF AFRICA

tranquil afternoons, when the days were still short and some solitary voice was singing far away, an aromatic smell of burning sweet-grass sometimes drifted through the air, the clear light, and the music, and the odour all playing together on the nerves, and inducing an emotion inexpressibly painful and delicious.

When he was free, Frant could not bear to stay near the house: but in roaming about, which became his habit, he was none the less a prisoner. Fettered by scruples and afflicted with a kind of moral impotence, he wandered in a lovely world from which he was barred almost as effectually as if he were literally in a steel cage on wheels. His troubled eyes turned to the natural scenes around him but found no rest in them, and his repression might just have gone on increasing in morbidity had not a number of unexpected things happened.

Now the arrival of Frant at Madumbi had put a check on certain of MacGavin's habits. At one time, when the Scotchman was alone in the store, in the afternoons for instance, when the weather was hot or wet and business slack, or when his wife was busy in the house, he had not been disinclined for a little amusement at the expense of some of the coarser Lembu girls who came to deal with him. Joking with them in order to try and convert their apprehensive titters into abandoned fits of giggling, he had sometimes gone so far as to pinch their breasts and slap their behinds in order to win their confidence. The bolder ones had quickly taken advantage of his susceptibilities in order to try and get something for nothing, and pointing to this or that, had copied the horseleech's daughters and cried, 'Give, give!' When MacGavin so far overcame his sense of commercial fitness as to give them a string of beads or a damaged jews' harp, they immediately asked for more, determined to lose nothing for the want of asking. He would then refuse, but they would not go away, leaning on the counter and repeating their requests over and over again in a whining voice until he began to fear that his wife might come in. Whereupon he would suddenly fly into a

THE CHILD OF QUEEN VICTORIA

raging temper. Purple in the face and trembling with anger, he would hammer on the counter with his fists and utter violent threats and abuse, and if that did not frighten the young women away he would hustle them out. One or two in particular loved to provoke him to the utmost, and then fly screaming with laughter down the road, their large naked breasts wobbling and flapping and tears running out of their eyes. But he had grown tired of these scenes, and even before Frant's arrival had abstained from inducing them. With the arrival of Frant he determined to behave himself, at least in Frant's presence, as he wanted the young man to concentrate on business and not begin his stay by getting obsessed with black women. But now that he had found Frant what he would have called 'steady', he was about to revert to his old habits, and it cannot be said that his wife, that freckled virago, with her ever-increasing indigestion and her less and less amiable moods, acted exactly as a strong deterrent.

But the first time Frant saw MacGavin behaving familiarly with a gross fat girl it gave him a shock — not because he was prudish by nature, but because it was something he was not used to, and the discovery that MacGavin did not always practise what he preached seemed likely to modify his own behaviour. The thought immediately occurred to him that MacGavin might abuse the modesty of Seraphina, and the idea that the trader's bloodshot and slightly protuberant eye might focus itself upon her natural elegance produced in him a most violent reaction. He said nothing. After MacGavin's wench had departed he came up to Frant and said:

'You'll excuse my saying so, Frant, but don't you feel you want a woman sometimes?'

The effect of this remark upon the young man was extraordinary.

'I do,' he answered at once in a quiet voice, 'but not a black one.'

And he launched into a flood of abuse! He said that he would

STORIES OF AFRICA

rather do anything than touch a black woman; he said that they were dirty, that they stank, that they were no better than animals; he said that the blacks and whites were in his opinion races apart, and that on no account should they mix in any way; he said that white men ought to be respected by black ones, and that that could only be possible if they treated them as inferiors, absolute inferiors. He grew white with passion and the heat of his denunciation. His words almost choked him.

MacGavin was astonished beyond measure. He did not know whether to take it all as an attack on himself, or whether Frant had not gone a little out of his mind.

'Well, you do surprise me,' he said, in what was meant to be a sarcastic tone of voice. 'You've always given me the impression of being a bit too fond of the niggers, and treating them a bit too much as if they were really human beings.'

'I get a bit sick of the sight of them at times,' said Frant in a much quieter voice, not in the least meaning and indeed hardly knowing what he said. Then he turned away, and the incident was closed, except that MacGavin confided to his wife that he thought Frant was getting a bit restless, and perhaps needed a change or a holiday.

'He can surely wait till Christmas,' she said in an aggrieved whisper, for the walls of the house were thin. 'We could take him away with us then for a couple of days. But if you ask me, he's unsociable and disagreeable by nature.'

'Don't forget that the takings showed another increase last month,' said MacGavin.

'That's just why I don't want him to go away now,' she said.

It was a brilliant moonlight night, as quiet as the grave, and in his little room Frant was asking himself what on earth could have made him say a whole lot of things he did not mean, what on earth had made him lose control of himself. He felt he had come to the end of everything, that he could not bear this impossible kind of life any longer, and would have to go away.

THE CHILD OF QUEEN VICTORIA

His head was hot, he could not sleep, and he rolled uneasily on his bed. Suddenly, somewhere in a tree, a galago began to scream. Its screams filled the naked air and the heavy silence, the African silence; scream after scream, like prophecies of endless and unthinkable supernatural horrors, uttered by a furred and furtive little creature, hidden large-eyed among moon-drenched branches. Frant got up from his bed and drew back the curtains on a world chalk-white like the face of a clown or pierrot, silent and heartless, and with a sense of terror, of madness almost, let them fall back again.

And the next day Scraphina appeared.

§ 7

There she stood, balancing on her head a light bundle tied with grass. Her arms hung by her side, and when she turned her head authority and resignation, patience and sensibility were in the movement.

Nowhere but here did ever meet
Sweetness so sad, sadness so sweet.

Before the coming of the white man the Lembus lived under a system of strict discipline and formality, which did not, however, fail to allow various channels for the various passions of the Lembu heart. It was a system which recognized that some of life's best rewards are best appreciated by those who have not been able to win them too easily. In those days they were all warriors under a mad military autocrat, who believed that too easy an access to heterosexual pleasures might impair the morale and efficiency of his regiments; he trammelled them with a hundred taboos and would not allow them to marry young, while adultery was punished by pushing the guilty parties over

STORIES OF AFRICA

separate cliffs of no small height. As for the girls and women, they had a most clearly prescribed course of life, and each stage in their development was made to conform to strict rules. The later relaxation of tribal ethics, for which the white man offered little substitute but calico drawers and hymns A. and M., rapidly weakened the fibre of the race. But it still happened that there were members of it who managed to live lives not wholly devoid of order and dignity, there were still families 'of the old school' who from the force of heredity or a kind of good breeding managed to do homage to the ghosts of the beliefs of their forefathers. And such a family was Seraphina's. Both its ancient pride and its present obscurity had gone to the making of her features, and its vigour and vitality as well.

They were alone together in the space before the counter.

'Greeting, Seraphina.'

'Greeting, my white-man.'

Frant could hardly speak, he was so agitated. His heart seemed to fill the whole of his breast with its leaping, and he could scarcely recognize the sound of his own voice as he asked:

'Why have you been so long returning?'

'Do I know?' she said. 'Perhaps I was afraid.'

She had reason to be afraid — of gossip, of her family, of herself, of Frant, of consequences. With an unhurried movement she took down the bundle from her head and laid it on the floor without bending her knees. Then she untied the grass ropes that held it together and began to open it.

'A snakeskin!' said Frant.

It was a broad snakeskin, and crackled stiffly as it was unrolled. She put her foot on the tail to hold it down while Frant unrolled it. Fully opened, it was at least fifteen feet long, and a great part of it was quite two feet in width. It was the skin of a python, and there were two large rents in the middle of the back as if a spear had killed it. It was not often that the natives traded such things.

THE CHILD OF QUEEN VICTORIA

'How much are you asking for it?' said Frant in a caressing voice most unsuitable for a commercial transaction.

'I am not selling it,' said Seraphina without looking at him. 'I am giving it.'

'Giving it! To me?'

'To you.'

'I thank you very much indeed,' he said. In Lembu the same word means to thank and to praise.

There was a pause, then he said:

'Where did it come from? Who killed it?'

'I was hoeing in a maize-field near the river, and it disturbed me. Besides, two of the children were with me. So I killed it.'

'You killed it! What with?'

'With my hoe.'

When he had got over his astonishment he said, his face shining with admiration:

'But you mustn't give it to me. I must give you some money for it.'

'I don't want money,' she said, and looked at him with troubled, almost angry eyes.

'I thank you very much,' he said again, with the humility and the pride of a lover, and hardly knowing what he was doing he caught hold of her and kissed her on the mouth.

She uttered a cry of surprise and sprang away from him. She simply did not understand him, and was afraid. Natives do not make love as we do. She laughed, just a trifle hysterically.

'What are you doing?' she said.

'What's the matter?' said Frant, approaching again. 'I won't hurt you.'

'How do I know?' she said.

And he would have answered 'Because I love you' (which would have been so hard to say in English and was so easy in Lembu) had they not just at that moment been interrupted.

'Come again soon,' Frant said hurriedly. 'I want to see you.'

STORIES OF AFRICA

And he stooped down and rolled up his snakeskin. When he had finished she was gone.

In the evening he nailed up the skin on the walls of his bedroom. It was so long that it took up the whole of two sides. And very late, before putting out his light, he lay in bed looking at it. Like a banner it hung there to celebrate the intensity of his happiness; it hung like a trophy — the skin of the dragon of his misery, killed by Seraphina as she hoed her father's field of maize.

The next day at noon Mrs. MacGavin said:

'Oh, Mr. Frant, that skin in your room — it gave me such a nasty turn when I went in there this morning!'

'Isn't it a beauty? You don't mind my putting it up, I suppose?'

'Oh, I don't mind,' she said, 'though I couldn't bear to have such a thing over *my* bed. If there's one thing I can't stand it's snakes, alive or dead.'

It was nearly Christmas time and the MacGavins told Frant they thought a holiday would do him good, and that they would take him with them to the nearest town. The trading station would be closed for three days, and would be quite safe in the care of the servants. They were extremely surprised when he refused — not because he wanted to help to guard their property, but because the nearest town, of which he had had a few glimpses, did not attract him, and because he had other plans in mind. He felt no inclination to attend the gymkhana or the dance at which, in an atmosphere of false bonhomie and commonplace revelry, the white inhabitants tried annually to forget for a time all about the white man's burden. The MacGavins thought him almost mad for refusing.

'Whatever will you do with yourself?' they said.

'I shall be quite happy,' he said.

They felt that something was amiss.

'What, are you "going native" or something?' cried MacGavin. 'You need a change, you know.'

He always did his work well, and on account of his natural

THE CHILD OF QUEEN VICTORIA

air of independence they both respected and feared him a little. They gave up trying to argue with him and murmured to each other instead. Then on Christmas Eve the Ford car, newly washed, went rattling away, leaving behind it a cloud of blue smoke and a stink, both of which soon vanished. After the Mac-Gavins had gone Frant felt greatly relieved. It was such a blessing to be free to see and hear what was going on round him instead of being haunted by those harsh stupid voices, that sour red face and that pasty drab one, which had already got on his nerves. Unlike most white men alone in native territories, he had neither a gun nor alcohol in his possession. He did not feel the want of them. For the first time in his life he was to spend Christmas by himself. There would be no exchange of presents; no heavy meals; no forced gaiety; no stuck-up relations. His time, for once, was his own.

§ 8

On Christmas morning he stood on the veranda and stretched his arms, filled with a delicious sense of anticipation. Then he felt in his pocket for a cigarette, and failing to find one took a key and went to fetch a packet from the store. The atmosphere in that building, so closely shuttered at holiday times, was more than oppressive. It was a brilliant morning, and the heat of the sun on the corrugated-iron roof made the interior like an oven. He found some cigarettes, and paused a moment in the doorway to look round at the place where his days were spent. He shuddered slightly, then went out, locking the door behind him. Enjoying his cigarette, and the sun, and the shade, and the peacefulness of not having to look at *those faces*, of not having to listen to *those voices*, he took a path which led through a deserted garden, on the site of the first settlement at Madumbi, towards the forest. In the old garden the foundations of the earlier house remained, but the whole place was now a tangle of vegetation. The hardier growths had survived, and some still withstood the wildings

STORIES OF AFRICA

that struggled to oust them. Thickets of ragged junipers and berberis made a forbidding fence which few ever sought to penetrate, and indeed the natives thought the place haunted. Snake apples, those cruel trees, with every bud a barb, and every fruit an ugly bulb filled with dry and poisonous powder, extended their angry foliage over crumbling brickwork. Rankly growing mimosas split with their coarse-grained roots what had once been a path, and month by month in the summer raised their smooth bark and feathery foliage perceptibly higher into the air. A solitary yucca, survivor of several, had produced a single spire thickly hung with white bells, which the mountain wind shook together as if they were made of paper. Tendrils of Christ-thorn put out here and there a few sticky scarlet flowers, and passion flowers hung in unexpected places, in the grass or high up among the junipers, together with the oval, dented granadillas into which they too would change.

Leaving the garden, Frant followed the path to the forest. Then, forcing his way through the undergrowth, parting lianas and monkey-ropes, breaking cobwebs so thick that their breaking was audible, being scratched by thorns, sinking up to the ankles in leaf-mould, he reached a glade he had been to before in times of unhappiness. In the middle of the glade there was a shallow stream of very clear water gliding over sand, and it was sheltered by the vast indigenous trees from the heat of the day.

Here, as he had done before, he threw himself on the breast of earth, surrendering himself to the trees, the water and the quietness. He lay on his back and looked up through half-closed eyes at the topmost branches, watching the fall of a leaf, hearing the call of a bird, the lapse of water, and the thin cries of insects. Under his hand lay a skeleton leaf, over his head a few epiphytic orchids lolled their greenish mouths open over the ancient, rotting bough that gave them life, and at times the wind brought a hint of the perfume of a hidden syringa or laurustinus. A clump of clivia lilies were blooming in deep

THE CHILD OF QUEEN VICTORIA

shadow — they were living and dying in secret, without argument, and untroubled by eyes and voices. A humming-bird appeared from nowhere, and poising itself on the wing before every open flower, whirred there like a moth, gleamed like a jewel, darting its thin curved beak, as sharp as a needle, into each for honey. Nature is inevitable — this stone lies on that one, because it must; fronds uncurl from the hairy trunk of a tree-fern; each new growth and decay seems spontaneous and impersonal; there is a kind of harmony of conflict, and it may have been some sense of that harmony that brought Frant to a decision he might, had he not been so solitary, have taken long before. He was roused. He would act boldly. He would give up caution, discretion, doubt, hesitation, he would forget all about the Mac-Gavins, the trade, the future, he would give up all fear of gossip, of crisis, of reputation, he would break through the bars of his prison. He would go that very day down into the valley and visit the home of Seraphina. He would behave with candour, he would be open in his dealings. He had proved in commerce that he was 'a white man'; he would now be bold, and prove it in love.

Such was his resolution, but the enterprise was not entirely successful. He set out early in the afternoon, carrying a camera, and a stick in case he should meet snakes. He walked as fast as if he were in a more temperate climate, and felt the heat. The first part of the journey took him across an undulating plateau, through country much like that immediately round Madumbi. But after about an hour he came to the top of a hill which marked the end of an escarpment ('The hill is long and steep,' Seraphina had said) and he began to follow a downward path winding among rocks and thorn trees. This brought him out on to a platform or small tableland and before him lay suddenly open an immense view. Directly below lay the valley of the Umgazi river, where Seraphina lived, and he sat down under a bean tree to rest and to gaze at the scene.

STORIES OF AFRICA

Somebody was coming up the hill. It was a young man. He was a typical Lembu, naked except for a fur codpiece and some bead ornaments, upright, slender and vigorous. He came striding along, singing joyfully as he went, glistening with oil and sweat, his movements full of natural pride. He was holding a tiny shield, a stick and a knobkerrie in one hand, and in the other a large black cotton Brummagem umbrella, to shelter himself from the sun. When he saw Frant he looked surprised and then saluted him with a large and cheerful gesture. Frant knew him by sight and responded cordially.

'What are you doing here?' said the young man. 'Are you out on holiday?'

'Yes,' said Frant, 'I am just out on holiday.'

'Why aren't you riding?'

'I have no horse.'

'But white men don't walk!'

'I like walking.'

The native expressed surprise.

'Is that a camera?' he said.

'Yes, it's a camera.'

'Will you take my picture?'

'All right. Go and stand over there. But you must close your umbrella.'

'What, must I close my umbrella?'

So Frant stood under the bean tree with his feet among the open pods and little black-and-scarlet beans that had fallen from it, and took a photograph of the native, who stood smiling and glistening in the sun.

'Do you know me?' said the young man.

'Yes,' said Frant.

'Do you know Seraphina?'

Frant was startled.

'Yes,' he said, unable to conceal his surprise.

'She is my sister.'

THE CHILD OF QUEEN VICTORIA.

'What! You're her brother?'

'Yes.'

'Fancy that!'

'Seraphina likes you,' said her brother. But, thought Frant, is he really her brother? The natives used such terms somewhat loosely. Was this perhaps a rival trying to warn him off? He put the thought out of his mind, for the native was so friendly. 'Seraphina likes you,' he said. But in Lembu the same word means to like and to love, so perhaps he meant 'Seraphina loves you'.

'I like Seraphina,' said Frant.

'It is not good,' said the native, 'when a white man likes a black girl.'

There was no condemnation in his tone, no threat, no high moral purpose. He smiled as he spoke what he no doubt regarded as a self-obvious truism.

'Why?' said Frant.

'Do I know? It is so.'

Frant wanted to say 'Would you be angry if your sister married a white man?' but he had no wish to suggest any such thing. And it seemed too crude to say 'Would you be angry if your sister slept with a white man?' So he said:

'We are all people.'

'Yes, we are all people, but we are different.'

'I like natives,' said Frant.

'I know you do. But you live in Lembuland, and there are no white people near here for you to like.'

This was really unanswerable.

'There are Mr. MacGavin and his wife,' said Frant.

Seraphina's brother (if he was Seraphina's brother) laughed.

'Nobody likes *them*!' he said.

'What is your name?' said Frant.

'Me? Umlilwana.'

'And where do you live?'

STORIES OF AFRICA

'Down there,' said Umlilwana, pointing to the valley.

The river Umgazi, which seemed to consist mostly of a broad bed of stones, with only a small stream of water in the middle, curved in a gigantic S-shaped bend just below where they stood. And on some slightly raised ground in one of the curves of the S were a group of grass domes, which were huts, and a cattle kraal made of thorn trees and brushwood, and a few patches of maize and millet and sweet potatoes. And that was the home of Seraphina. It looked the most peaceful place in the world.

'Will you take me there?' said Frant.

'Take you there! What would you do there?'

'I want to see your home. I want to see Seraphina.'

'Seraphina is not there.'

'Not there! Where is she?'

'She has gone on a journey to the mountains for several days with our mother and father to see our cousins. There's nobody down there but an old woman and some children.'

'Oh,' said Frant, and was silent a moment. 'I am sorry,' he said then. 'I wanted to see Seraphina.'

And suddenly everything seemed utterly remote. The view was like a view in a dream. Seraphina (*could* that be her name?) seemed only an idea and her cousins like characters in a myth. And even the friendly smiling Umlilwana seemed utterly strange and unapproachable.

'Yes, I am sorry,' Frant repeated in a dull voice. 'But I should like some day to visit your home and take photographs of Seraphina — and of all your family.'

Umlilwana was a little suspicious of this, but he said Frant would be welcome.

'Will you do something for me?' said Frant. 'Will you come and tell me when Seraphina returns? Tell Seraphina I want to see her. Tell her I want to see her again.'

'All right,' said Umlilwana in English and with great affability. It was about all the English he knew.

THE CHILD OF QUEEN VICTORIA

'Umlilwana, you are my friend.'

'All right, will you give me some cigarettes?'

Frant smiled, and gave him all he had. Umlilwana was loud in thanks.

Some children could be seen playing near Seraphina's kraal. They looked as small as ants. The distant mountains looked infinitely blue and remote, with the shadows of a few light clouds patterning their peaks. There was nothing to do but to return to Madumbi.

§ 9

Frant returned to Madumbi. So, a couple of days later, did the MacGavins, both with a touch of righteous indignation at Frant's oddness in not having gone with them, and Mrs. MacGavin with more than a touch of dyspepsia. Life then resumed its usual course. But things were not quite the same. First of all, Frant was in a far more cheerful frame of mind. Not only had he begun to act with some initiative, not only had he seen Seraphina's home and made friends with her brother, but he had told somebody of his love for her. As soon as she returned he meant to bring matters to a head, even though he and she were 'different'. And if her continued absence was a great trial to his patience, he got up every morning in hopes of a visit and news from Umlilwana in the course of the day. But day followed day, and Umlilwana did not appear. Frant played with the idea of sending him a message, but as it would have to be a verbal one, he thought it more prudent not to do so. And when he once ventured to inquire about Umlilwana, and to ask if he were really Seraphina's brother, the people he spoke to said they had never heard of either of them. And at night he lay naked and sweating on his bed, tortured continually with the image of Seraphina, remembering her gestures, her 'sadness so sweet', and the touch of her flesh.

STORIES OF AFRICA

'Frant should have gone away with us,' MacGavin remarked to his wife. 'He's quite liverish now at times.'

'This weather's enough to make anybody liverish,' said she. 'I always did say that January was the worst month of the year. It's bilious weather. But it's not his liver, if you ask me, it's his nerves.'

January was certainly a bad month at Madumbi, and that year it was more trying than ever. There had been no rain for weeks, and things were beginning to look parched. The heat was dry and intense. And then, day after day, clouds would collect in the morning and accumulate in the afternoon, thunder was occasionally heard and once even a few drops of rain fell in the dust, as if a few devils had spat from a great height. Every morning seemed to promise a thunderstorm, and one began to imagine how the earth would smell after rain, and how cool the air would be, and how the flying ants would come out in the twilight, but every evening the clouds dispersed and left a hot moon to glare down on the veld, or the glittering arrogance of the stars. And every morning Frant said to himself, 'Umlilwana will come, or Scraphina herself,' but every evening he found himself alone again, exhausted and restless. Even the natives, in their anxiety about their crops, were beginning to get on one another's nerves. The air seemed charged with electricity, it seemed to brace one's very muscles against a shock which was not forthcoming, and to leave them at once taut and tired. Even MacGavin took to glancing often at the sky, at the great cumulus clouds that hung in it all the afternoon, and he would say, 'It'll be serious if something doesn't happen soon.'

It was like waiting for an earthquake, a revolution, the day of judgment almost. There was an awful mixture of certainty that something was going to happen, and of uncertainty as to when it would happen. 'We only want a storm to clear the air,' Mrs. MacGavin repeated every day until Frant almost felt that he could murder her. The sweat ran down inside his shirt, his overheated

THE CHILD OF QUEEN VICTORIA

blood inflamed his overstrained imagination, he found it more and more difficult to sleep and eat. Trade grew slack, because few could endure to climb up the slopes to Madumbi, and when the store was empty it was far less tolerable than when it was full. The morning sun beat down on the corrugated iron and the interior grew so hot that it failed to cool down during the night. Strange stories came in — that some grass had caught fire simply from the heat of the sun shining through an empty bottle, and several huts had been burnt in consequence; that a young crocodile had come right up one of the little tributaries of the Umgazi and had been found less than a mile from Madumbi itself, an occurrence never before known; and that a native woman had been arrested for killing a new-born baby with six fingers on one hand, in the belief that this deformity was keeping the rain away. Where was Umlilwana? Where was Seraphina? 'I will wait till next Sunday,' said Frant to himself, 'and if neither of them has come by then I shall go down to the kraal itself on the pretext of wanting to take photographs.' But he did not have to wait till Sunday, for the weather broke.

The worst day of all was the fourteenth of the month.

'Well, this is the worst we've had yet,' said Mrs. MacGavin at supper time.

'You've said that for the last four days,' observed her husband.

All the doors and windows were wide open. The sky was completely overcast and nothing was stirring but the moths and other insects which flew in from the garden and bumped against the paper lampshade, or against the glass which covered 'The Confession', or fell into the soup, the powder from their wings mingling with the film of grease which already covered that liquid. The rays of lamplight lay on the creepers of the veranda itself and on the path, but beyond them was utter silence and hot, heavy darkness.

'Hark! Was that thunder?' said Mrs. MacGavin.

STORIES OF AFRICA

'You always say that at supper time,' remarked her husband.

'It *was* thunder,' she said, her head on one side, as she pushed a stray wisp of hair out of her eye.

Yes, it *was* thunder. They all heard it. Low, continuous thunder.

'That's up in the mountains,' said MacGavin. 'It's a bad sign if it begins up there. If there *is* a storm, it'll probably miss us altogether . . . Ah, did you see the lightning? Yes, that's where it is. I bet it's pouring up there already. And I don't like a dry storm. It's much more dangerous. More likely to strike the trees.'

Frant's heart was beating loud and fast as if in anticipation of some personal, not a meteorological event. He walked alone to the bottom of the garden and stood there watching the play of lightning in the distance, but it did not seem much more than on previous nights. He came in and tried to read a paper, lighted several cigarettes in succession, throwing one or two away half-smoked, paced up and down in the garden, glancing up at the darkness, and then retired to his room where he lay on his bed without undressing. His hands were clenched, the nails dug into the palms, and he was conscious of little but the beating of his heart. He couldn't hear the MacGavins talking anywhere, or any natives, and had lost all sense of the time. He put out his light, and like a convict without a crime, in a prison that was not locked, for a sentence of indeterminate duration, he just lay there sweating.

At last he got up and went to the window. The moon was out again. It was almost full, and stood high in the sky, flooding the landscape with light. To the south, vast banks of cloud were ranged above the forest, and among them, now and then, a worm of lightning played, followed by a distant roll of thunder. Not a leaf seemed to be stirring, when he noticed that a light breeze was rising and feathering the tops of the distant trees. Very soon the tops of the mimosas near the house bowed, lightly

THE CHILD OF QUEEN VICTORIA

swaying towards the moon, and a tremor ran through the grass as if an invisible hand had stroked it. The wind rose, the clouds towered and toppled upwards, the moon was caught in a web of flying mist, the thunder grew louder, and the flashes of lightning more frequent. A greenish light seemed to emanate from the moon, and as the sky grew more heavily loaded, the forest, by contrast, appeared more ethereal, the heavy boscage and the trunks of the huge indigenous trees appearing in great detail, all dry and luminous and lurid, the foliage beginning to churn and writhe slowly on the topmost boughs. The tenseness of the atmosphere, the expectancy of nature, and the way in which the whole landscape, the very buildings and their shadows, seemed to take part in the great symphony of the impending storm, combined to produce an effect so dramatic as to seem almost supernatural.

The rolling of the thunder was now continuous. All the mountain country was overhung with the incessant play of sheet-lightning, as if a curtain of fire, continually agitated by unseen forces, hung over half the world. The wind began to howl round the house, leaves and twigs to fly from the trees, a pile of timber was blown over, and the moon was half hidden in a swirl of clouds. Chains and forks of lightning, steely-blue and sulphurous red, larger and brighter and more frequent than Frant had ever seen, lighted everything with a continuous, shaken glare. Thunder pealed almost overhead, phalanxes of cloud advanced like avenging armies, the house shook, the windows rattled, and he put his hand to his burning and throbbing head. His pulses raced, sweat poured down his face and body, and he felt as if his veins would burst. Suddenly he caught sight of a white horse, which had broken loose from heaven knows where, and was careering madly, its mane and tail flying, its halter trailing, along the slope of the nearest hill. It seemed a creature of fire as it tossed its head, swerved at sudden obstacles, and galloped up to the ridge. There for a moment it stood, quivering with fear and

STORIES OF AFRICA

exertion in the quivering glare of the lightning, and then, made splendid by freedom, disappeared from view.

'I can't stay in the house an instant longer!' Frant said aloud to himself, and taking up an electric torch, he stepped out into the garden. A strong refreshing breeze was blowing, but not a drop of rain had fallen. 'It looks as though MacGavin was right — the storm seems to have missed us altogether . . .' He wondered what on earth he had brought the torch for, since the lightning was quivering incessantly, like a network of luminous nerves.

'Is that you, Frant?'

It was MacGavin calling from the house.

'Yes. I can't sleep. I'm going for a walk. It's much fresher out now.'

'A walk! At this time! Don't go far. It's risky. And if it *should* come on to rain . . .'

'I'll be all right, thanks. Good night.'

He disappeared from view, and instinctively found himself taking the path he had taken on Christmas Day. He was frightened of the night, of losing his way, of the storm. He had at first no thought of going far, but when he paused to try and calculate how far he had already come he was almost as afraid to turn back as to go on, so he went on. He had got an idea that he must get to the bean tree, and he kept telling himself that it was not really very far. The wind was behind him now, and its freshness gave him energy. The glare and racket of the storm grew no less — it now seemed to be everywhere except immediately overhead. He hurried on, stumbling now and again, for the path was in places rough and narrow. He saw lights once or twice but did not meet a soul. And back at Madumbi MacGavin had grown anxious about him.

Before he came to the escarpment there was a loud detonation just overhead, and it began to rain. He had come too far now to turn back, so he hurried on, vaguely imagining that he would ask for shelter at Seraphina's. Near the top of the hill he realized

THE CHILD OF QUEEN VICTORIA

that the worst of the weather was in front of him. The lightning revealed a thick grey veil of rain beyond the valley, and he could hear a tremendous steady downpour in the distance. The nearer he got to the top the louder the tumult grew, and he thought, 'The river must be a lot fuller by now than when I last saw it.' He was going downhill at last, but not so fast as he wanted, for it was raining pretty hard now and the paths were getting slippery. A feeling of terror seized him. He felt that he would never get down to the valley, that the storm would beat him, that it was no good thinking of turning back.

There was no doubt as to what he could hear now. The river must be in flood. And he suddenly thought, would the kraal be safe? Hardly . . . He was running now, to reach the bean tree. He was soaked to the skin, and his feet kept slipping. He missed the way twice and found it again, and then, waiting for the lightning to show him where he was, he found he was only a few yards from the tree.

And just at that moment, exactly as before, he saw a man coming towards him. Only this time the man was running. And this time it was not Umlilwana he saw. And this time he was terrified.

The man didn't see Frant until he almost ran into him, and he was too frightened.

'Au!' cried a familiar voice. '*Umtwana ka Kivini!* Child of the Queen! What are you doing here? Where are you going? Child! My child! Have you *seen*? Look, look!'

He dragged Frant over the slippery rocks to the very edge of the tableland.

'Look!' he cried.

A prolonged flash of lightning lit up the whole valley with a tremulous, pale violet glare like the light of some hellish arc-lamp, and in a few seconds Frant had understood. Gone was the S-shaped bend, gone were the grassy domes, the kraal and little fields! There was nothing where they had been but a gigantic

STORIES OF AFRICA

swirl of greyish water, in which trunks of trees could be seen travelling, spinning and half raising themselves above the surface like animate things.

'Seraphina!' cried Frant. 'Do you know Seraphina?'

He had caught hold of the little old man, who was shivering with fear and cold and seemed the only reality left in the world.

'Seraphina!' cried Frant. 'Do you know her? Did she come back? Was she at home?'

'She was at home for two weeks, *umtwana*,' said the old man, shaking like a leaf. 'The cattle are drowned!' he cried in the voice of Job and of Lear. 'The houses, the people — all are drowned!'

'Drowned?' cried Frant, shining his torch full in the old man's face. 'Why? Why are they drowned?'

'The water came like a wall, my child,' said the old man, and the torchlight made the raindrops running down his face look as if it was covered with tears. He was shivering violently from top to toe, and his old tunic clung to his skin.

'Umlilwana,' said Frant. 'Was Umlilwana her brother?'

'Umlilwana?' said the old man. 'Umlilwana wasn't her brother! She was going to marry Umlilwana.'

In the lightning-glare he saw Frant's face.

'All is finished!' he cried, putting out a black and bony claw, as if to defend himself from some unknown danger. In Lembu the same word means to be finished or to be destroyed. 'Are you bewitched?'

Yes, all was finished, all was destroyed. Already the rolling of the thunder was increasing in volume, but the roar of the flood seemed to grow louder, and the rain was coming down like whips of ice and steel. It was like the coming of the deluge itself. It was like the end of the world.

Something in Frant urged him to leave the old man and run down the hill and plunge into those maddened waters and lose himself, but something stronger told him that he must return to Madumbi, to the store, to the MacGavins, to the making of a

THE CHILD OF QUEEN VICTORIA

livelihood, to the fashioning of a way of life, to a roll of undeveloped negatives, and to a python skin nailed to a wall like a banner, with two large holes in it cut by a girl with a hoe.

'I must go back!' he said to the old man, and gripped his shoulder for an instant. Then he made off in the direction of Madumbi, flashing the torch on the path. The old man called after him to take care, but he was at once out of earshot in the downpour. After he had stumbled a short way one spasmodic sob escaped from him, and he began to run.

4 WHEN THE SARDINES CAME

QUITE ordinary people sometimes behave in an extraordinary way. A sudden mood will possess them, and drive them to cast off their closest ties, which they find a hindrance to the attainment of new and mad desires. Lifted to the heights, they have no more use for comfortable valleys, and forsaking reality, they embrace the air. At any rate, that was the case with Mrs. Reymond.

On the South Coast of Natal, in the early nineteen-twenties, there was a charming and little frequented retreat which showed few signs of becoming so spoilt, or should one say developed, as it is now. A road, for instance, now runs past Reymonds, with quite a quantity of traffic, and houses are going up here and there. But at that time the only means of communication with the outside world (beyond one or two paths that led off through the bush into the native reserve) was the tiny station known as Reymond's Halt, which never figured in time-tables, but of which you caught a glimpse from the train. The line ran between the house and the sea, and everywhere was the characteristic thick bush. The house stood in a large clearing which had been converted into a pretty garden — a lawn, palms, poinsettias and so on. At the back were some grassy uplands called 'the farm', because Reymond ran a few cows, kept poultry, and maintained some fields of maize and a large vegetable garden, these things taking up much of his time. Yet he took things fairly easily. He was still under fifty, but the war had knocked him about rather badly. He was a quiet, harmless, equable sort of man, who took less interest in politics than most South Africans do — 'All governments are alike,' he used to say — and who, un-

WHEN THE SARDINES CAME

like many of his fellow-countrymen, treated the natives with fairness and even kindness, and had a good name among them in consequence.

His wife was rather younger than himself, and people had said that their marriage was romantic, though it was probably no more romantic than most. They were childless, but obviously very happy together, sufficiently alike (in their taste for a quiet life, for example) and yet sufficiently different to get on well with each other. Reymond sought for himself the quiet interests of the 'farm' as if to forget the strenuousness of his earlier existence. His wife, on the other hand, finding things a little quiet down there, made some effort to keep in touch with the outside world. She read a certain amount, played a lot of tennis and a little Chopin, and took an interest in all sorts of things. She was not very well educated, and had not very good taste. Rupert Brooke and Omar Khayyám were her poets, the dust having settled on Ella Wheeler Wilcox, but she enjoyed the efforts she made towards improving herself and enjoying herself. The contrast in the natures of husband and wife made a pretty balance. Sitting in a long chair on the veranda he would listen to her with his pipe in his mouth, and when she had done talking he would ask her advice or tell her about this or that happening on the 'farm'. She always made a point of spending a day in Dunnsport once a week, partly for shopping purposes and partly to see her friends there. Reymond went to town less often.

They might almost have been taken for a model married couple, until a slight restlessness in Mrs. Reymond's behaviour became noticeable. It seemed as if she no longer enjoyed her activities for their own sake but as an outlet for a kind of frustrated energy. As she was no longer a young woman, one might have expected her to be like her husband, contented and settled, but then she was not so old that there was really any reason for her to behave as if life had nothing more but repose to offer her.

STORIES OF AFRICA

No, she was lively, and with only a hint of a foreshadowing of age about her, a certain dignity and resignation at times in her manner.

It was a young medical student called Edwards who had the best chance of observing her behaviour. A cousin of Reymond's, he came to stay for a couple of months because he had some reading to do for an examination, and wanted quiet. It was certainly quiet enough down there, and he soon fell into a regular routine, which was only broken by occasional dances and weekends in Dunnsport. After breakfast he used to go straight down to the beach with his books. He always went barefoot, first down the steps to the railway, all warm in the morning sun; then over the prickly cinders of the line; and then along the short, tunnel-like path through the bush to the sea. It was shady and sandy and uncannily silent in there, and one came suddenly out again to the sun and the sound of the waves. He used to work all the morning, then swim, then return to the house for lunch on the veranda, sleep awhile out of doors, and then go fishing (he never caught much) or walk along the line. If the weather was especially warm he had a second swim, usually worked again before supper, and spent the evening talking, or singing (rather badly) to Mrs. Reymond's accompaniment, while her husband sat on the veranda smoking his pipe. Almost the only variants to this programme were visits to or from their neighbours, none of whom lived very near. And once Reymond took Edwards out shooting, but they came back very hungry and almost empty-handed, and Mrs. Reymond laughed at them, with just a suggestion of bitterness in her gaiety.

It was winter time, and the weather was nearly perfect, only sometimes a little windy. There was a sort of drowsiness in the air which was very peaceful and pleasant, and only marred by Mrs. Reymond's slight uneasiness and by those trifling odds and ends of everyday troubles which tend, in isolated places, to become magnified into things of importance.

WHEN THE SARDINES CAME

'I hope you'll still be here,' Raymond said to his guest once or twice, 'when the sardines come.'

The coming of the sardines, it seemed, was expected to take place at about the same time every year. It was the great annual event. Immense shoals (so Edwards was told) would pass slowly up the coast, close inshore, and pursued by innumerable seabirds and large predatory fish. At that time everybody stopped work and turned angler.

Edwards was still at Raymonds' when the sardines came. It was one day towards the end of June, a perfect day. Like most perfect things, it didn't last long, but a great deal happened in the time. There were no clouds and no waves. There was no wind. It was perfectly warm and still, and the sea undulated so lazily that the tides seemed to have lapsed, and the water was scarcely troubled at its edge. The sky above the horizon was a darker blue than the sea. At lunch-time the kitchen boy brought the rumour of the sardines' approach. An extraordinary atmosphere of tension and excitement was at once created, as often happens before some natural event, and all three seemed to have lost their appetites. Afterwards they noticed that the wind had got up a little, and the sea was no longer quite so calm, but this was usually the case in the afternoon.

At about two o'clock some dark stains were visible on the sea, rising and falling with the waves, the water round them disturbed, and birds wheeling overhead. A little later they heard voices from the beach and went down all armed with rods and nets and baskets. The servants had preceded them.

The sands, nearly always deserted, were now crowded with all kinds of people, men, women and children of all colours and ages. To the right and left, hundreds of fishing-rods rose into the air. Everyone was looking out to sea, and not very far out, for the dark patches, which were enormous shoals of sardines, had spread and spread, and coming nearer had become much larger. One could see distinctly the flashing of huge triangular fins and

STORIES OF AFRICA

curving tails as the larger fish swam madly round their prey. One could also distinguish that most of the birds were gulls and gannets. Snow-white in the afternoon sun, the gannets fell like bombs, rising a moment or two later brown and wet from the waves, fish in beak. The tide, the current, the pursuers, and the inscrutable alliance of fate and nature, gradually drove the myriads of victims towards the beach, where excitement almost gave way to ecstasy. And when a wave at last drove the first edge of a shoal right up on the shore, so that in retreating it left a few silvery flounders on the wet sand, a sudden movement ran right through the crowd, and an old Indian woman in a magenta skirt darted into the water with a basket. A moment later, and the sardines had really arrived. There was a certain poetic justice in the fact that nobody bothered about them — they had enemies enough already. No, the old hunter in the heart of man was after bigger game, and it was the pursuing fish that everybody wanted to catch.

The pitch of excitement was intense. It was the one mad day in the year. Not only were the sardines maddened with fear (or whatever in them corresponds to that feeling) of their pursuers, but the second fear now possessed them of being driven clean out of their element. As for the great fish-of-prey, the lust of the chase had driven them into such a frenzy that, with an utter disregard of consequences, many found themselves driven up by their own energy and the impetus of the waves right on to the beach, where their great metallic fins and steely tails grooved into the soft wet sand like the keels of ships that run aground in a fog. Until that moment their natural aversion to man had been in abeyance, and had they been able to consider him at all, they would no doubt have seen him simply as a rival. The air was thick with the wings and cries of birds, but they held a little more aloof than the fish.

Most remarkable of all was the behaviour of the crowd, which was very mixed. There were Indians and Mauritians from the

WHEN THE SARDINES CAME

sugar-mill a couple of miles away; Zulus from kraal and kitchen; poor whites and *bywoners*; people who rather fancied themselves, like the Scotch engineer from the mill, with his trousers now rolled up over the knees; one or two people of rather the same sort as the Reymonds; and a selection of the oddities who used to live in those parts, hidden away here and there in little houses in the bush along the coast. There was a gaunt woman, who was a vegetarian, lived by herself and did water-colours; an old Norwegian sailor who lived between the sun and the sea, wearing only a pair of khaki shorts, his torso burnt to the colour of rose-wood and covered with fine gold hairs; and a family of Russian refugees — an old father who never left the house, a daughter who worked in Dunnsport, and a young son. Mrs. Reymond and Edwards used to make jokes about these last, especially the son, a tall, fair young man with wild, elemental eyes. Indeed, they had given him the nickname of 'the bush-baby', calling him after the large-eyed galago, that strange creature of the woods. And the 'bush-baby', like almost everybody else round about, whom they knew either by sight or by repute, was of course on the beach on this day when the sardines came.

The excitement of the hour had already worked an extraordinary, an almost magical effect upon the minds of all these people — an effect as violent and as magical as upon the fish. Divided at all times by a thousand barriers, of race, of money, of caste, of class, of language, of pride and fear, but especially by various kinds of colour-bar — the Indians and natives living in mutual contempt, the 'coloured' people looking down on their darker neighbours, the whites and near-whites looking down on everybody else, and being, in consequence, for the most part mistrusted in their turn — divided like this at all times, they were now, quite surprisingly, all brought to a level. Just as enemies will unite in a common fear of a common danger, so they will sometimes be united by something which makes an appeal to any emotion as primitive as fear — by a promise, for example, of

STORIES OF AFRICA

something for nothing. In this case, one rather heavy couch of nature had made the whole world kin.

Mingled with the sounds of splashing and dashing, the cries of birds and children, could be heard the hiss of lines being thrown, and the whirr of unwinding reels. Here and there a great fish was hooked, and rods could be seen bent nearly double, as if they might snap at any second, jerking spasmodically without a pause, as if they had a motor bicycle on the hook instead of a fish. Except in the case of the old Norwegian sailor, it was mostly out of the question for one person to manage one fish; to every engaged rod there were at least two fishermen; and it was even possible to see an Indian, a Zulu, a white and a half-caste all united in a single effort — a rare sight indeed in United South Africa.

It was not long before Mrs. Reymond said to Edwards:

'Oh, look, Charles, there's the Russian bush-baby! And he's hooked a fish!'

There he was, a blond boy of less than twenty, in shorts and an open shirt, rather slender, with the large eyes of one who has learnt too young the meaning of hunger, and who has looked at death too near and too soon. He was staggering about in the sand, and looked almost as if he were doing some savage dance, straining every muscle to prevent himself being dragged into the sea, and to stop the rod, which was bent in the shape of a C and kicking like a sapling in a cyclone, from being jerked out of his hands or snapped in two. The servant who had come with him was holding him back by the waist, and two or three boys ran up to give a hand if needed. The whole effect was that instead of playing the fish they were being played by it.

Mrs. Reymond was fascinated. She had eyes for nothing else. Her husband was busy some distance away, and had apparently not caught anything yet. As for Edwards, he had already landed a fair-sized fish, and had handed his rod over to the kitchen-boy. Mrs. Reymond took no notice of either of them. Not even

WHEN THE SARDINES CAME

when a giant rock-salmon was caught by the naked hands of a group of children and dragged floundering out of the water, was her attention diverted. The Russian boy, or rather the Russian boy's fish, was gradually moving away to the left, away from the main scene of action, and Mrs. Raymond moved too. Edwards couldn't make out what was interesting her so much. It seemed to him that a dozen tussles quite as remarkable were going on at the same time.

Important things in life often happen so suddenly and unexpectedly that they simply take one's breath away; if they happen in other people's lives, and one is only a spectator, it is often a little difficult to grasp, let alone convey, the exact reason for them, their details and consequences. All Edwards knew was that at that moment he felt quite certain that something important was going to happen and that it wasn't going to happen to him. On the left of the beach was a group of jagged rocks, to which the Russian was gradually getting nearer, and his supporters were excitedly warning him to try and avoid them. But the fish was wild and perhaps wise as well, and plunged determinedly on in the same direction. Occasionally it reared itself out of the water, and in the late light it looked, to the heightened imagination of the spectators, as big as a dolphin. A moment later the Russian boy sprang up on to a high rock, and with a very precarious foothold seemed in danger of falling. But still he held on. Edwards expected Mrs. Raymond to say, 'Oh, isn't he plucky!' but she was far too intent to speak. He glanced back to see how far they had come from the crowd, when he heard her utter a sudden little cry, a most moving sound that seemed to come straight from her heart, and turning quickly round, he saw that the Russian boy had disappeared. She ran forward, her high heels sinking into the sand, and Edwards followed.

When they arrived at the rock the Russian boy was being lifted out of the water. His wet hair had fallen over his face, and he was bleeding horribly from the leg. By a miracle, the rod was

STORIES OF AFRICA

neither broken nor lost, and a wiry Indian, up to his waist in eddying water, was holding it upright with all his strength, the butt end pressed against his hip. The Russian boy, the 'bush-baby', fainted from loss of blood. Fortunately both Edwards and Mrs. Reymond (who had done some nursing during the war) knew what to do. When the flow of blood had been checked by a rude tourniquet, the boy was carried up to the house and laid, by Mrs. Reymond's orders, on her bed. She looked round once for her husband, but he had been a good way off at the time of the accident, and not knowing what had happened was not yet back.

'Will you fetch the doctor, Charles?' she said, turning to Edwards. 'I'd rather you went than one of the servants.'

Edwards went. To reach the doctor meant a long ride through the reserve, and he did not return with him until ten. (All that is changed down there now — they have a telephone and a car and so on.) It appeared that the wound had been caused by a sharp bait-knife, worn casually sheathless in the belt, but there was also a slight fracture in the foot, caused by the fall. The consequence was, it was decided that the patient should remain where he was, and he did. It should be remarked that the fish was landed by the Indian; it was a 'springer', rather over five feet long, the shape and colour of a torpedo. Before it was cut up, the patient, the Indian and the splendid carcass of the victim were photographed together by Edwards. Mrs. Reymond was overjoyed.

'It was really you who caught it,' she said to her protégé.

Meanwhile Edwards went on with his work as usual, and Reymond went every day to see the patient's old father and report progress. Like all Russians, the old man was a great talker; like all Russian refugees, he let it appear that he had had something to do with the Court; anyway, quite a friendship sprang up between him and Reymond, whose visits to this new acquaintance grew longer every day. So Mrs. Reymond was left even more in touch with her patient than she otherwise would have been.

WHEN THE SARDINES CAME

The change that came over her during the following days was most remarkable. All her restlessness seemed to have vanished, and she looked ten years younger. She was sometimes silent for several minutes, which was unlike her. And when she talked, it was about Boris — the progress of his cure, what he had told her about his early life, what he had said about this, that or the other. At times she was like a mother boasting of her child's cleverness, and it is no exaggeration to say that at other times she was like a young girl shyly praising a lover. When Boris was able to get up and hobble about with crutches she was so pleased that it would not have been surprising to hear her exclaim, 'See, he can walk!' Her continual pleasure was very evident, but she was inclined to be brusque with her husband, and even (so Edwards thought) to neglect him. And Edwards watched Reymond closely to see what effect this was having on him, but that mild-tempered man seemed to remain exactly as usual. Then one day, walking bare-foot along the veranda, Edwards happened to glance in at a window and saw Boris kissing Mrs. Reymond. When he had got over his surprise (which was not altogether a surprise) he wondered, being rather young and foolish, if he ought to draw Reymond's attention to what was going on. But fortunately he had enough sense to keep his mouth shut.

Boris soon gave up his crutches, and carried a walking-stick instead. He and Mrs. Reymond used to go for short walks together — very short walks, for they often walked just down the garden, crossed the railway line, followed the path through the bush, and seeking out some group of rocks on the beach, sat in the shelter of them for hours at a time. When Boris was almost well again, it became known that instead of going back to his father's cottage on the coast he was going to take up a job in Dunnsport. Two days before he went, Edwards happened to be passing through that silent tunnel of foliage between the railway and the beach, and trudging through the deep, dry sand, couldn't help overhearing voices coming towards him.

STORIES OF AFRICA

'So you see,' said Boris, speaking in his attractive foreign accent, 'that wouldn't really be possible . . .'

'But I shall *never* forget —' Mrs. Reymond answered, and her voice was quite transfigured with emotion.

Edwards coughed, and as he came face to face with them made some bright remark about the weather. As far as his own observation went, that was about the end of the whole affair.

Boris duly left, and for a week or two it was plain that Mrs. Reymond missed him grievously. Indeed, as if to hide the fact, she mentioned it casually more than once, and even pretended to joke about it. It would not be true to say that she was soon her usual self again. When she was resigned as far as she could be to the absence of Boris she seemed to have lost her former restlessness, and by contrast with her recent fervours, appeared definitely middle-aged. It was as if in the course of a few weeks she had made up the difference between her own age and her husband's, and a new peacefulness seemed to have asserted itself in their relationship, a mutual confidence. And then one day, during a walk along the beach, Reymond turned to Edwards and seemed about to speak. But it was plainly hard for him to do so, for he was not much of a talker at any time, and was quite unused to expressing his more intimate feelings.

'Oh, Charles,' he said, 'I want to explain to you something you mayn't quite understand.'

'Yes?'

'About my wife,' said Reymond, looking out to sea, 'and Boris.'

'Yes.'

'Why do you say "yes" like that? I suppose you have your own ideas . . . I suppose you wonder why I didn't do anything about it. That's just what I'm going to explain. Well, you know how things are with us, we have no children, and we don't see many people down here. Of course I don't mind that, but for my wife — for a woman, you know — it's not so nice. I could see for some time that she's been feeling it a bit. Of course she's

WHEN THE SARDINES CAME

not so used to a country life as I am . . . Well, I saw how it was after — well, after the sardines came. That boy just became everything to her. He was like a son and a friend and a sweet-heart all rolled into one. Well, I'm not a terribly jealous man, but I can't say I altogether liked the look of things. But you see, if there's one thing I can't stand, it's when I feel that my wife's not happy. I thought it was better to let things run their course. I felt sure my wife would come down to earth again all right, and she did . . . Now I know nothing like that'll ever be likely to happen to us again. I dare say it's not so nice for a woman to feel that she'll soon be face to face with old age . . . And then you see, women are funny. She'd have been annoyed if she'd thought I wasn't jealous, and yet knowing that I *was* jealous somehow irritated her . . . Ah well, I'm sure it's all over now. . . . I don't know why I've told you all this, except that I didn't want you to get wrong ideas into your head. And I must say it wouldn't have been any easier if you hadn't been here — triangles are apt to have sharp corners. . . . And anyway, if you hadn't been here you'd have missed the sardines!

'Which I wouldn't have missed for anything,' said Edwards. He longed to know how Mrs. Reymond had justified her behaviour after Boris's departure — had she repented with tears? had everything been taken for granted? or what? — but he didn't like to say anything. Besides, he wanted to appear understanding, a man of the world, and tried to look the part in silence. In any case, they had almost reached the house, and Mrs. Reymond was waving to them from the tea-table, which had been set on the veranda.

When Edwards left the South Coast his mind was quickly filled with his own affairs, but whenever he thought of the Reymonds he was haunted by that woman's voice saying 'I shall *never* forget . . .' and again he seemed to see her trying to hurry forward, her high heels sinking into the sand at every step, towards the last passion of her life.

STORIES OF JAPAN

A PIECE OF GOOD LUCK

§ I

THE village of Omura, in the prefecture of F——, consists of one street of grey wooden houses. In front there is nothing but rice-fields. At the back there is an abrupt mountain, too steep for cultivation, and partly covered with pine trees. The view exemplifies the truth that in the Japanese landscape there is no middle distance. No traveller, glancing out of a train window, could expect to see a more typical country village: indeed, Omura is just visible from the railway, though it is doubtful if any passenger ever regards it. And although there is a station not very far away and bearing the name of the next village but one, it is seldom that any of the inhabitants of Omura go in a train. Why should they? Except petty officials and an occasional merchant they have very little reason to move. They live together something like a large family and in more harmony than villagers in most other countries, because there are so notably few differences or causes for differences among them. They are all so much alike, and everybody else's business is such common property as one's own that there is hardly any room for gossip. And there is very little news.

The seasons pass. Here a bare tree is suddenly in flower. On that fence of split bamboos the frail cups of morning glories carry drops of dew in their silken throats. A persimmon tree is hung with fruit long after the leaves have fallen. The last cosmos flowers are shaken by the autumn wind, and the feathers are ruffled back on the back of a bird. In January the *nanten* bushes at cottage doors are bowed down, with all their bunches of scarlet berries, under a weight of snow. Whenever the new moon appears, all the old thoughts are renewed.

STORIES OF JAPAN

The pines endure. The routine of work in the rice-fields is only varied by the slight variations in the weather. Even quite an intelligent European, were anything so unlikely to happen as that such a person should come here, might be overwhelmed or taken in by this surpassing pastoral peace. A Japanese of a literary turn might, on some summer's afternoon when the street is so placid that one can hear the feet of chickens scuffling in the dust, when one can hear the drops from a water-pipe falling one by one into a runnel at the roadside, when one can hear a drowsy cicada half-way up the mountain — such a man might be put in mind of an old short poem which seems to carry years, even centuries, of experience —

The dragon-flies are flitting
Above the village
Where nothing ever happens.

Somebody yawns. The shadows slowly lengthen. A cat with no tail crosses the road, settles down to sleep in the sun, shuts its eyes, half opens them, shuts them again. . . .

Yet it would not be quite true to say that nothing ever happens. That is, it depends what you mean by nothing. For instance, children are born and people die. Further, the number of children who are born exceeds the number of people who die. So occasionally a new house goes up, a new collateral family is founded. This has been going on for some time, the process is slow, the change is all but imperceptible. Then again at times a rumour fills the air, a rumour which, though slight, is powerful enough to take hold of the whole body and threaten it with death, just as a man may take an insect between his fingers and (whether you call it caprice, fate or God's will) may let it fly away or else pinch out its entrails. Even at Omura the vibration of earthquakes is sometimes felt. Our imaginary European might feel it as a little link in a chain which includes fatal catastrophes of the forgotten past, dread disasters of the unknown future;

A PIECE OF GOOD LUCK

nervousness would be excusable, so would fear of God. Within living memory, however, nothing worse of the kind has happened than the dislodging of three tiles from the roof of the barber's shop.

Of course it is obvious that Omura (like Tokyo, or that city of the clouds, New York) is liable to change and accident. And we must take into account other things than changing seasons and acts of God. This is not a village where nothing ever happens, for there is a small cottage at the southern end where life has been in a way more eventful than in any other house. And when anything happens in life, somebody has to suffer for it. To the inhabitants of that house things have happened.

The reader might prefer to know about the 'average' life of the village, he might like to be lulled by some smiling chronicle of domestic bliss, some rural idyll, some cottar's Saturday night. If so, Omura is full of these things, and we are now at the wrong house. But if, on the contrary, the sight of an oldish woman and a young girl, neither in any way remarkable to look at, but living alone together, should provoke in us any curiosity at all, then we may rather disregard all those other lives.

These two are mother and daughter. Their name is Hara. The older woman is a widow, and she has survived two of her children. Even as a child, she had seen her own parents mauled by misfortune, but you would never guess all this from her face, manner and appearance — at least, not for some time. She is always cheerful, smiling and even laughing, but after some time one realizes that it is all put on. It is a mask. She conceives it to be her duty to present to the world a gentle smile, and nobody commends her for it. She is not really a very old woman, but she is old for her age, and is now practically bedridden. Her face shows marks of woe to a careful eye. As for her own eyes, they are kindly, but the rims are red, and in the winter when the wind is cold they water easily, and she looks exactly as if she is weeping, although she is really smiling all the time.

STORIES OF JAPAN

I will not harass the reader by describing her feelings at the death of her husband by violence; of one of her children, at a promising age, of a disgusting disease; and of another by a pure accident, which of course afterwards appeared to have been easily preventable. The village explained all this by the fact that the late Hara, stout-hearted, headstrong and boyish, had married her in defiance of the indications of the zodiac. In fact, by overruling his parents and defying the stars, he had been asking for trouble. To this theory the widow had always paid lip-service, perhaps to save trouble, to take the line of least resistance, but naturally the yearning of a woman's heart, especially when combined with that of a man's, is stronger than the frown of an astrologer: the astrologer may reserve the right to say, 'I told you so.' So the difference between the fortunes of the Hara family and those of the rest of the villagers may at once, if you like, be ascribed to the fact that the Haras began wrong. If you take the wrong turning at first, you are likely to reach the wrong destination at last; and nobody in Omura had ever before been known to marry against the indications of the heavens. Not that anybody was harsh or callous. They were spontaneously and constantly kind and most of them were somehow related to or connected with the family, whose two survivors could hardly have existed without some kind of support.

The daughter, Chiyé, was just seventeen, an ordinary country wench, a small, plain, healthy virgin, awkwardly bashful, with cheeks as round and hard and red as apples, no nose to speak of, and black wispy hair of the texture of horsehair. Not clever, but not an idiot. And perhaps, like all young women, a problem. The mother could easily find a home, and people would take in the daughter too. Before long Chiyé might be married off. But her mother secretly cherished another plan. Her late husband had a married sister in Tokyo whom she had only once seen since her marriage. They had been familiar in childhood, and still sometimes wrote to each other.

A PIECE OF GOOD LUCK

This sister was still living. Her husband, an official, was said to be rather well-to-do. If only Chiyé could go to them! The smiling widow brooded, lying awake in the night and listening to the girl's heavy regular breathing, and at last decided to write and make a suggestion to her sister-in-law. But before she could write, a letter came from Tokyo which happened to be a direct invitation for the girl to come.

People who have suffered a great deal sometimes suspect a sudden happiness: they think there is a catch in it somewhere. The widow, torn by a lifetime, mistrusted her own elation. She told the girl who, at the thought of Tokyo, was too scared to speak.

'It is a piece of good luck,' said the mother. 'And we must make the most of it.'

It was a piece of good luck, an extraordinary chance for the girl. It is not every day that a female bumpkin of Omura is offered a safe niche in the capital. But nearly everybody was dead against it. They said, in their cottage-wisdom, that it was madness for such a young girl to go to Tokyo alone.

'But she won't be alone,' said the widow, 'she'll be with her aunt.'

'Everybody knows the dangers of such a great city. Even her aunt can't protect her. They say that there are foreigners in Tokyo who just go about spoiling virgins. Why, only the other day in the newspaper — and not only foreigners —'

'I'm sure she'll be safe with her aunt and uncle.'

The widow was hopeful, and with the suffrage of a minority, wrote back her thanks and said the girl was coming. One or two people thought that this was as bad as the old story of Hara and the zodiac; and one or two said so, but not to the widow.

The village where nothing ever happens? Hara Chiyé was going to Tokyo! One early autumn morning a crowd of villagers could have been seen standing on the platform of the station at the next village but one. The girl herself, to be chaper-

STORIES OF JAPAN

oned by the guard, who was an acquaintance of a distant connexion, leaned out of the window, full of smiles, blushes and confusion. Her sensations since the receipt of her aunt's letter had been powerful, and corresponding to their outward manifestations. She was young and low-bred and showed what she felt. From one moment to another she had hardly known whether to feel joy at the excitement of the prospect and at the envy of her friends, or embarrassment and shame at this launching out, or dread at leaving the village, or sorrow at leaving her sick mother, from whom she had never been separated for a single day. The two predominant sensations in this upheaval were a mixture of bashfulness, sadness, and homesickness, and also a vague anticipatory joy. She was by no means a pudding-head.

Now, at some chance remark, she hid the lower part of her face in her red cotton scarf, blushed to match it, blinked her bright black eyes, and with a small fat hand in a pink cotton glove put back a wayward wisp of horsehair from her forehead. Her mother had not been able to come and see her off, and as Chiyé stared at all the friendly valedictory faces in the station they suddenly seemed almost strange or hostile. She thought of her poor old mother and wondered when she should see her again, gave a loud sniff, and another, and very nearly burst into tears. She was saved by a piercing whistle, ten voices all speaking at once, ten rustic bodies all bowing like grass in a storm, hands, smiles, faces, farewells.

The train moved out of the station, and with a burning face and beating heart she sank on to the seat, feeling that all eyes in the long carriage were on her (as, indeed, most of them were), and not daring, for several minutes, to glance up at the rack over her head, where a small basket, containing all her worldly possessions, and a string bag of fat persimmons were trembling a little with the vibration of the train.

A PIECE OF GOOD LUCK

§ 2

She had been unable to form any definite ideas about her aunt and uncle, so that she was at first neither overjoyed nor disappointed. Everything was so new and strange. Her aunt was very kind, even effusive, and smiled and chattered a great deal. It was not at all like her mother's smile, and in spite of all this cheerfulness Chiyé liked her uncle much better, quite an ordinary, elderly man, who was seldom at home and hardly took any notice of her except to speak to her as if she was a servant. Perhaps that was why she liked him. Or perhaps she realized intuitively his ordinary heart about the same time (it was very soon) that she saw through her aunt's cheerfulness to an inner core of hardness, selfishness, cupidity, and cunning. The fact that her uncle spoke to her as master to servant was not surprising, for it was practically as a servant that she worked, though of course she drew no wages, for the prosperity of her uncle was only an Omura legend, and even had he had money his wife would still have watched *sen* as carefully as she watched *yen*. Her aunt, who already had two children, expected to give birth before very long to another. For this reason, she explained, she was particularly glad to have Chiyé with her. So Chiyé, whatever she might have looked forward to, became a drudge. The house was in a poor part of Tokyo, cold in winter, hot in summer, dark, dusty, dirty, and obscure. Few visitors came. Her aunt went often to the public bath-house and gossiped for hours at a time. Chiyé looked after the house, the children, the clothes and the shopping. Her aunt then took to sleeping in the daytime.

'I'm sorry you have so much work to do,' she remarked once, with a radiant smile, 'but, you see, my coming confinement —'

She talked a great deal about her coming confinement, until the expected event took on an excessive importance in Chiyé's imagination, and when at last the child was born, the girl was so

STORIES OF JAPAN

obsessed with the significance of its arrival that, although her work immediately increased, she devoted all her spare thoughts and time to playing with it, looking at it, kneeling by it, talking to it. Chiyé was not unhappy, but her aunt was, for, like so many people, she wanted money and did not know how to get it: her husband had lost some money unexpectedly and she herself also needed more, to say nothing of the children, now three in number.

Chiyé's mother now wrote much oftener to her sister-in-law as well as to her daughter. The widow said she hadn't been very well in the winter, but had picked up in the spring. She asked many questions and always expressed her hopes of seeing Chiyé again before long, though she must have known that such hopes were unlikely to be fulfilled. And Chiyé, when she had a moment to think, experienced pangs of longing to go back to Omura. But meanwhile her aunt thought of a plan. Chiyé had been just a year in Tokyo when her protector came to her one day and said:

'A friend of one of my friends knows a lady who keeps an important high-class hotel, and this lady asked my friend's friend to ask her to ask me if I knew of any young girl who wants a situation, as a vacancy has just occurred on her staff which must be immediately filled. Of course I at once thought of you. It's a wonderful chance, and I've accepted it for you, and you're to go as soon as possible.'

She paused significantly, as if waiting for gratitude, but Chiyé, whose heart was beating hurriedly, only stared at her with wide-open eyes.

'I'm sorry you have to leave us, but I think this is a real opening for you. And you can earn some money, which you'll be able to send to your mother —'

The girl thought that her aunt was rather over-eager, rather too ready with all this information. She felt a slight resentment that she had not sooner been told or consulted about it.

A PIECE OF GOOD LUCK

'But —' she said timidly, 'but, Aunt, do you think it is all right — I mean is it quite safe — for me to —'

'Chiyé, I have already paid for you a premium.'

'A premium?'

'Yes. There are so many girls who wish to get that place that at first we must pay some money for them to go in, then they work on trial for a month or two, then they get paid proper wages.'

'But —'

'So it is an excellent situation.'

'And you have paid —'

'It is not mine, but your uncle's generosity. Don't thank him, because you know it annoys him to be spoken to by a servant — well, by any girl, even about ordinary household things.'

'And I must go soon?'

'Yes, it will be better. The sooner the better.'

'But you do want me to go, Aunt?'

'No, no, of course not, but I'm thinking of your poor mother. It is time for you to try and send her something. You came to Tokyo to help to support her, you know, not to help me.'

Chiyé hid her face in her sleeve. She sobbed once or twice. When she looked up, her aunt had gone out of the room. But one of the children had come in, and was standing in the doorway with the baby tied on to its back. Chiyé got up and ran to the baby, loosened it, lifted it up and embraced it. Whenever she just glanced at its eyes a thrill ran right down her spine.

'Where's your mother?' she asked the eldest child.

'She's gone to the bath-house.'

Indeed, at this moment, a street away, her aunt was squatting in exceedingly hot water with three other ladies; the gold teeth of her smile gleamed radiantly through the cloudy steam, and the sound of her voice, flowing on continually in a stream of small-talk and home chat, mingled with the sound of the scalding hot water chortling out of a tap a yard from her nose,

STORIES OF JAPAN

and helped to preserve for her the good name of a sociable and animated busybody.

Chiyé, although she was holding the baby in her arms, felt a faint but sickening sense of nameless apprehension, loneliness, helplessness. She was now to go among strangers! Not as a relation, but a servant. On trial. A premium. A real opening. Don't thank your uncle. The recent words of her aunt kept recurring in her mind, where every one of them had stuck. She was still full of hopes, but neither now nor later was she capable of telling herself the real truth. She was not conscious enough. The real truth was that she did not want to leave the baby, the true centre, had she only known it, of her life at her aunt's.

Less than a week later she set out, accompanied by that aunt, and carrying a basket and bundle, for the hotel where she was to work. They rode in a tram, and the older woman, smiling affably, talked all the way.

The Kaméfuku, or Lucky Tortoise, Hotel is hard to find, for it is at the end of a blind alley within a maze of narrow streets which all look much alike and none of which leads anywhere in particular. This part of Hongo-ku is dingy and dirty. It has never been anything else, but in the years after the great earthquake it was at its worst. To reach the hotel, in fact, one has to go through slums. The final approach is narrow, dark and smelly; as cold as the grave from October to April, and for the rest of the year sultry but sunless. The front of the hotel, such as it is, faces north, and is screened by a number of tuberculous trees and by the blank wooden walls of some cramped houses opposite. The prevailing colour may be called an unclean slate or battleship-grey. The alley-way, the houses, the trees are grey, the hotel is dead grey, and the lightless air is grey. The stinking water which runs, or fails to run, in the open drains at the side is dirty grey, the faces of the older inhabitants of this region are doughy grey, the past, present and future are muddy grey. And as Chiyé and her aunt entered the alley-way — the woman walk-

A PIECE OF GOOD LUCK

ing with some speed, assurance and determination, the girl lagging because of her load, her uncertainty and her short legs — a cold, dank, dead air touched her, like the grey lick of a gigantic tongue, and she shivered.

It is characteristic of the Kaméfuku Hotel that its dark portal does not face the alley-way. Like so many things in Japan, it is round the corner. But let not the reader for one moment assume that because of the prevailing neutral tints these surroundings are therefore destitute of that colour to which he has a right. Ah, no. Is this not the land of cherry blossoms, nay, of the Rising Sun?

It might be by now reasonably supposed that the Kaméfuku Hotel is only a resort of the indigent and obscure, of the mentally and physically grey, but this is not the case. It cannot be judged by its appearance. Chiyé and her aunt have only just reached the *genkan*. Let us at least wait until they get inside. There is another thing to take into account if one is trying to arrive at the true status of the house.

Although it is so unfortunate in its immediate surroundings, it is necessary to remember that this part of Tokyo is quite convenient and central. For instance, it is near the University, and some important schools, within easy reach of Kanda and Uéno, and served by various means of communication. The hotel is only two minutes from the trams. Yet in spite of all these facilities, it also has the advantage of being comparatively quiet. Most of the people who stay there do not do so simply because it is quiet and central, but also partly because of the other people who stay, or have stayed there. The hotel attracts, generally speaking, certain types of men. Chiyé will find them out for herself. She is already bowing at the entrance, blushing, palpitating, and by slipping out of her light wooden clogs on to the polished floor she stands also on the threshold of a new phase of her life.

STORIES OF JAPAN

§ 3

She bows and blushes before the proprietress herself, Mrs. Kikuchi, a big woman for a Japanese, a masterful and calculating widow, whose portly stocky front, always covered with an apron that was clean the day before yesterday, serves as a pedestal (the contours of the back view being apparently much like those of the front, only apronless) for a hard, square, puffy face. There is no reason to suppose that a Japanese landlady need be so very different from one in corresponding circumstances elsewhere. The Kaméfuku Hotel being in a slum conceals no tea-house tea-roses. Look at this heavy, costive face with the lustreless, dusty, drab hair drawn up and back on every side and screwed into a top-knot in the middle of the plateau above. Look at the shifty eyes; furtive, adaptable and quite unenthusiastic smile; and large, calculating, avaricious hands. This is Chiyé's mistress, and Chiyé accordingly touches the floor with her forehead.

The three women seat themselves round the firebox on the matted floor of a room just off the entrance, a room that may be called the office, for it contains a telephone and a broken gramophone, a calendar hangs on the wall, and in the corner a young man is seated doing accounts at a low desk littered with papers. He takes no notice at all of the women, except to glance with cold indifference at Chiyé. He is the younger son of the proprietress. His elder brother is out. His elder brother is nearly always out.

In spite of her aunt's cheerfulness, and the apparently maternal benevolence of Mrs. Kikuchi, Chiyé feels uneasy, helpless, victimized, and wants to weep. She is handed a cup of tea, and again blushes, muttering her thanks. But she is not so confused that she fails to notice underneath the formal mutual politeness of the two elder women some degree of intimacy and understanding. This surprises her, for she had supposed that they were not even acquainted, but she is far too innocent to suspect anything.

A PIECE OF GOOD LUCK

Before saying goodbye to Mrs Kikuchi, her aunt extracts a promise that Chiyé shall be allowed to come and see her from time to time, and then grinning and nodding, and bowing low four, five, six times, opens her oiled-paper umbrella, gathers her skirts closely with her bony left hand and steps out on her high clogs into the street. It has begun to rain.

The first few months that the girl spent in these new surroundings could not be called sensational, but nevertheless they were of singular importance to her, for she was now more cut off than she had ever been before from her relations and friends. If she had had much time to think and brood, no doubt Omura and her mother and the old and happy days (ah, they never seemed so happy at the time, but only when the traveller in the desert looks back to the leafy mountains does he understand what he has left) would have seemed very far away, far and near like a lover in a dream. But luckily she had to work hard, and work, though it may not be a cure, is at times a useful drug. Then it must also be remembered that she was not, strictly speaking, a thoughtful or brooding person by nature, but ready enough to be at home where she found herself and to accept happiness without seeking it. Her thoughts, like everybody else's, came to her from her feelings. Her reason was the slave of her passions; the belly, as the Chinese long ago discovered, being the home of the soul.

Even when she was tired there were usually a few minutes before she slept, and she sometimes lay awake at three or four in the morning — it was at those times that she felt herself, all unwitting, in the grip of nameless powers, and the longings and cravings that stirred her then were long afterwards to translate themselves in the brain of that bright and active daylight virgin into regrets, hopes and desires. And then she might sigh or smile, for nobody had taught her that it is useless to dwell on the past except to profit by it, and that it is useless to expect anything of the future.

She slept in a room with four other maids, and all five of them

STORIES OF JAPAN

snored. It was the duty of each to look after a particular section of the untidy, rambling, scrambling building; all made, or nearly all, of wood and glass and paper; full of twists and turns and ups and downs; which sometimes broke out, as in the façade, into a 'foreign' aspect, and from whose windows one always caught sight of other windows or sunny corners of the roof. The girls also had to help with washing, washing-up and other activities. They were maids-of-all-work, and they all had to work unceasingly, though they occasionally had time off, when they could attend to their own clothes: but somehow if they ever settled down to talk or to read or write letters the telephone was sure to ring. The telephone in that room was apt to ring at any time, and the receiver and bell, hanging there black and shining, were like a perpetual warning, always on the verge of breaking silence.

'Moshimoshi! Hullo!'

And at the other end the voice of the younger son of Mrs. Kikuchi (for the elder one was nearly always out) could be heard, hard, insolent and peremptory. The young man never smiled. In the daytime he sat in the office and bullied the maids; at night he sat in the office listening to the wireless, talking to his mother or his friends, and occasionally bullying the maids over the telephone. He was one of those men who seem to derive sexual satisfaction from insulting female dependents. Until he married, six years later, this vocal sadism was almost his sole occupation.

Chiyé soon became friendly with a maid called Tsuya, a country girl who had been in Tokyo about six months longer than herself, but the others, for one reason and another, she did not like so much. One was rather old, one was rather cattish, one was rather dull, but still she got on with them, for they all had their good moments, and she herself was ready enough to get on with anybody at all times. In spite of her awkwardness she was gentle and unselfish. The vague feeling (most of her feelings were vague) of loneliness and nostalgia was not quickly got rid of. She did not only think of old village days and miss her mother.

A PIECE OF GOOD LUCK

Now she also missed the house and children she had just left, the family and surroundings of her aunt, and even that gossiping, scheming woman herself. Most of all she missed the baby she had looked after.

She had been less than a month in the place when she asked leave to go and see her aunt. Mrs. Kikuchi, with maternal condescension, readily agreed. Chiyé put her old red scarf round her neck, found her aunt all smiles, and spent a lot of time playing with the baby. The second time she went her aunt was out. And when she wanted to go a third time, Mrs. Kikuchi refused without giving any reason. Chiyé said nothing, but believing that during the next few days she noticed less benevolence in the manner of her mistress, she decided to discuss, or rather suddenly began to discuss the matter with her friend Tsuya in the servant's bedroom. It was a room in which the characters and idiosyncrasies of all the inmates, visitors and connexions of the hotel were sooner or later thoroughly and repeatedly discussed and compared. It was a temple of gossip, hearsay and invention, in which curiosity — an escape from dullness — was more conspicuous than malice — an escape from suffering.

The two girls chanced to be alone. Tsuya began by asking under exactly what circumstances Chiyé had come to work here. Tsuya looked so simple, but behind her sad, mild eyes was a quick brain, and by asking this question she had at once gone to the heart of the matter. Chiyé told the story of the 'opening' and the 'premium', and Tsuya kept on answering shortly, quite non-committal:

'Is that so? So?'

And then the telephone rang. It may easily be imagined who was at the other end. The conversation stopped.

Four days later they were on their way to the bath-house in the next street, when Tsuya came out with a piece of information. Quite by chance she had overheard that morning, in her wing of the house, part of a conversation between Mrs. Kikuchi and an

STORIES OF JAPAN

elderly woman who was visiting somebody in the hotel. They had at first been talking about Chiyé's aunt, and it was this which had caught her attention. Then had come a reference to Chiyé herself. Somebody had said: 'And that was what you paid?' The answer was not clear. Then:

'The girl knows?'

'Not yet,' in Mrs. Kikuchi's voice. 'I shall explain to her when it is necessary.'

From these and other somewhat scrappy data Tsuya, who already knew something of Chiyé's aunt, had constructed a theory.

Chiyé began to tremble.

'I believe,' said Tsuya, 'that your aunt sold you to this hotel.'

'What?'

'Mrs. Kikuchi has certainly paid some money to your aunt. That means she has bought you. You can't escape. You're bound, just like a girl in a licensed house.'

'It's impossible,' said Chiyé, in the teeth of the facts. 'My aunt said —'

'And you believed her! Why should she pay a premium for you? Is she so rich? Does she love you so much?'

'She is my father's sister.'

'And she has taken advantage of that to enrich herself. It's well known that she's fond of money.'

'Oh, but I can't believe it —'

§ 4

Gradually, however, she forced herself to believe it. Her work seemed to increase, she hardly dared to look at her mistress, she could think of nothing else. . . . But surely she would get wages? She would be able to send something to her mother? Should she write to her mother and try and confirm the truth? No, she would be sure first. Without consulting Tsuya, she decided to

A PIECE OF GOOD LUCK

ask permission once more to go and see her aunt. After hesitating for a day or two, she timidly approached Mrs. Kikuchi, feeling sure that the older woman could read her thoughts plainly.

'Why do you want to go?' said Mrs. Kikuchi. Chiyé thought she had an odd, shrewd expression.

'Only — only for a visit,' she faltered.

'Ah, so?' This was said in a strange way. 'Then you may go. But you must be back at six.'

She found her aunt at home, very kind and cheerful. She couldn't believe — and yet she must ask. After a time she became confused and agitated.

'What's the matter, dear? Aren't you feeling well?'

'I'm quite well, thank you,' she said slowly.

She realized that she simply could not bring herself to ask. She blushed, wondered if it was time to go back yet, and tried to forget herself by holding the baby. When she went away, her aunt, beaming and smirking, gave her some clothes for a present. Chiyé was so surprised at this unexpected and unusual generosity that she thanked her aunt profusely — and found herself already on the way back. She told the whole story to Tsuya.

'And so you didn't ask her after all?'

'Oh, I *couldn't*.'

'Well, it's certainly true.'

Her aunt wrote to her occasionally, but Chiyé always felt disagreeable now when she read these postcards. She tried to forget that she was a prisoner. She tried to forget her aunt, and though she longed sometimes to go and see her again, she did not ask for leave.

Now what was, in fact, the actual truth of her coming here? Her aunt, in exchange for the 'loan' of a considerable sum of money, had undertaken to surrender Chiyé, body and soul, to the hotel, on condition that the pledge could at any time be redeemed for an equal payment. It is hardly necessary to add that should the aunt ever by some extraordinary stroke of fortune

STORIES OF JAPAN

come into any money she would, as a good mother, use it for the education of her children or some other worthy purpose. Mrs. Kikuchi was quite satisfied with her bargain — such a convenient form of contract. And Chiyé began slowly and painfully to learn by her own experience the universal truth that slavery always and everywhere survives its abolition.

What a life! And yet the girl had been brought up to nothing much easier. If she suffered now, it was not because she had come down in the world. On the contrary, she had arrived in Tokyo; and here she was. Chiyé may at times have longed to be elsewhere: who doesn't? But if she now no longer enjoyed the peace of Omura, if she was now separated from her mother and the scenes and friends of her childhood, she lived at any rate in Tokyo, a circumstance for which she knew many of those same friends envied her, and she was philosophical enough to console herself with this thought. Often, hurrying alone down an empty corridor to answer the telephone call of a new arrival, she would feel a pleasurable qualm of delightful anticipation. Her life contained elements of surprise which prevented it from being dull. A scrap of gossip in the maid's room would set her ears a-tingle and furnish her for days with food for speculation. Rumours, thoughts and dreams; occasional familiarities from one of the lodgers; the whole stress of character and circumstance made for variety.

She toiled, but she was not bored. Tsuya was her constant confidante. She became slightly thinner and paler but remained perfectly healthy. Such physical changes were for the better. She had never been ugly, and was now, she hoped — peeping in somebody else's mirror while she paused in dusting a room — she told herself that she was now less plain than she had been.

She began to take an interest in the newspapers, of which her somewhat elementary education allowed her to read a great part. Curiosity was born in her, and brought with it the usual results,

A PIECE OF GOOD LUCK

especially ambition. She was able to formulate in her mind a definite wish to marry and bear a child. She wanted a home, a husband, a lover, an intrigue, a romance, a double suicide, a concrete hope to live for — anything she could get.

She read in the newspapers about the careers of exceptional girls, and saw no reason why she should not also be an exceptional girl. She might become a waitress in a café or restaurant; or an actress or film actress — she was not quite clear about the difference, if any, between these. She might learn some musical instrument, flower arrangement or needle-work, and earn money by giving lessons. Two girls from a high school were reported to have lately joined a ship for America as stewardesses — unheard-of originality! but she might do the same. She might become a woman painter or novelist. One of the other maids, indeed, had this last ambition, and had already written from memory a fragment of her experiences at a primary school. Fame and fortune await successful women writers. . . .

Perhaps this cultural trend in her dreams (rather than thoughts) was partly caused by some of the persons she had to wait on. The Kaméfuku Hotel has long been a resort of some of the lesser men of letters, and usually houses some sort of a novelist, a brace of poets and other intelligentsia not usually of the most popular or successful, nor perhaps of the most refined. Hidden away round so many corners, it is a convenient periodical retreat from wives and families, friends, creditors or the daily task. Even a best-seller may appear there for a week-end, not necessarily unaccompanied.

When such a person turned up, the house was at once in a flutter. The proprietress and her younger son were excessively obsequious, the bath steamed hotter, the cook worked harder, the maids pattered up and down the smooth bare floors of the passages. Once a well-known film actor, tall, strong and florid, arrived at dusk on a motor-bicycle and ordered everybody about, which they all enjoyed, fairly tumbling over one another to

STORIES OF JAPAN

oblige him. The same thing occurred with a retired wrestler. And just at present the debauched son of an enormously rich factory-owner in the country was staying on the first floor, a lout who came to Tokyo at least twice a year, and always had the same room. He was so free of promiscuous tips and caresses, and was considered such an important visitor, besides being flushed with lust and coarse of speech, that the maids were always in and out of his room, especially in. The stories Chiyé heard of this rake naturally excited her imagination, and she wished in vain, half repelled and half fascinated, to get a chance of attending him, but her work lay elsewhere.

Tsuya related anecdotes of a lady with two husbands, a divorcee; of an eccentric young foreigner in a bleak back room who was visited by a young woman in dark clothes who always covered her mouth with her sleeve and looked melancholy, but had a silvery laugh when with him; and of an Indian, a gentle and handsome man who had had to leave the country because he was blackmailed. So Chiyé's mind was prepared by the fragments of many local dramas for anything to happen.

§ 5

Her peculiar care was a corridor with three rooms on one side and five on the other. Of these eight rooms, one, small and cold and facing north, was empty. The inhabitants of the other seven were not, with two or three exceptions, of surpassing interest to her. One was an old man, an odd recluse, who lived frugally, but was said to be very rich. He has no special part in this story, but that Chiyé rather liked him and attended him many times daily. He never rose before noon, only ate one light meal during the day, read meticulously three newspapers, went out every evening, and dressed in very good dark brown silk kimonos. He smoked vile stinking cigarettes, but nobody noticed that they were vile and stinking. His chief peculiarity was a completely

A PIECE OF GOOD LUCK

bald head, quite round and smooth. He was sufficiently proud of this dome to wash it daily with care, and Chiyé had the duty of carrying to him at the bath a saucerful of white-of-egg, with which the old gentleman polished his glossy cranium for three or four minutes until it shone like red lacquer.

In the next room to him lived a young man with long hair who worked in an office. The long hair showed that he was musical, but the only sounds that ever came from his room were those of expectoration. However, he went out sometimes in the evening, looking very serious, and carrying with great care an *empty* violin-case. It was Chiyé who found this out, and she accordingly held him in some contempt. Later on, she saw a large volume of translations from Karl Marx lying on his table: its pages long remained uncut.

'Why do you buy such a book,' she asked, 'if you don't mean to read it?'

He answered with a surprising frankness, so that afterwards she found it easy to forgive him for being an intellectual snob.

'Some of my friends asked me if I was a Marx-boy,¹ and of course I had to answer yes. One must be in the fashion, one can't be thought an ignoramus, so, as everybody is reading Marx now, I bought this book.'

Next door to this youth lived a married couple, who were quite contented, and therefore of no distinction whatsoever. Beyond them, in a smaller room, were two university students in whom Chiyé took a special interest. They teased her in a friendly, off-hand way, and she became quite attached to them. Most of their time was spent in playing baseball or talking or reading about it, but when the time for examinations was getting near they sat up all night with wet towels on their heads, back to back, over law text-books. Neither of them ever passed an examination. Sometimes when they were out Chiyé would pause in her sweeping and finger their clothes and other belong-

¹ *Marukusu-boi*.

STORIES OF JAPAN

ings. It gave her an inexplicable thrill just to touch their baseball gloves and bats.

The only thing she regretted was that they never attempted to make love to her. They even teased her about her appearance.

Tsuya, although better-looking, seemed little luckier. She told Chiyé about a young man on the third floor who was the son of a general and quite rich, but never played baseball. He was always reading or writing, but he went out a great deal, for he gave lectures nearly every day in a high school and a university. He was lively and good looking, but he never had letters from women, and never took much notice of Tsuya, though he was quite polite to her. It was evident that she admired him very much, and took pains to please him. At one time she had never stopped talking to Chiyé about Minami — for that was his name — but lately she said little about him. No doubt she was disappointed because he practically ignored her.

Chiyé herself had once been sent up to his room on some errand, and had found him sitting on the matted floor before his low desk, which was littered with books and papers and illuminated by a standard lamp with a red shade. His sleeves were turned up, and he was busily writing. She had approached him timidly, for she knew that he was translating from a foreign language the history of the world; advertisements of the first and second parts had already appeared in the newspapers. When he looked up and spoke to her she did not think he was so handsome as one of her baseball students, but she could not help liking the manly charm and vivacity of his open face. His eyes were bright and intelligent, his colour good and his voice clear, but it was impossible not to notice that his mouth was a little drawn, that it could not escape, even when he smiled, a stigma of sadness. It was as if, in his face, there was a war between the forces of heart and head: the upper part of the face, even the bright smile, seemed to show the power and alertness of intellect and will, but the resigned mouth, and even sometimes the eyes, showed the fatally unconquerable

A PIECE OF GOOD LUCK

power & emotion. Of all this, though, she only got a vague impression.

She would catch a glimpse of Minami in the corridors or at the door of the bathroom, or run into him just as he was going out, and she studied him from afar. Hearing by chance that his nickname among his students was Vitamin, she could see that the name suited him well, for he was restlessly eager in all his doings. Had she only known, he was in the throes of reason against romance, will against wish, that battle in which we are all engaged for life. Chiyé almost envied her she-friend the privilege of waiting on this serious and lively young man, but whenever she tried to talk about Minami, Tsuya made little response, so she gave it up.

An occasional letter from her mother, who seemed comfortably settled, would for several days send her thoughts back to Omura. Her mother told her to keep any money she might earn, a noble sacrifice on the part of that weak old woman in a country where children are bound to make noble sacrifices for their parents without expecting any gratitude. However, except for a little pocket-money, Chiyé had as yet had nothing from Mrs. Kikuchi, nor was she likely to get much out of that lady, who might fairly accurately be called her purchaser.

It has been said that in the care of Chiyé there was a small empty room facing north, but although it faced north it afforded only a very small glimpse of the northern sky. Chiyé sometimes slipped in there at the quietest part of the afternoon, and would stand a minute or two gazing up above the cold dark roofs into that serene and sunny immensity against which was printed a slender column of iron, banded with scarlet and black, the chimney of a bath-house, out of the top of which poured unceasingly a creamy and sulphurous plume of smoke, whose direction silently altered with the wind. But her attention would usually be attracted by giggling and singing quite near at hand, and she could look down at a row of windows only a few yards

STORIES OF JAPAN

away, in deep shadow, and partly screened, whence the sound proceeded. That gloomy wooden barrack opposite was the dormitory of a girls' school, and this side of it so nearly touched one end of the Kaméfuku Hotel that it seemed that between them no ray of the sun ever shone. At night, though, an oblique segment of a moonray, cut by the angles of roofs, might travel into the canyon between the two buildings, and that dazzling light might reveal the motionless head and shoulders of a virgin, looking up at the purity of the night, and dreaming, just as if she were asleep.

Passing down her corridor one afternoon Chiyé noticed that the door of this room was open, and hearing voices, looked in. Her two baseball students were at the window, one shaking with laughter, and the other leaning out and calling to somebody. She hurried to another room where she could look out and see what was going on. They were talking familiarly to two schoolgirls at the opposite window. The girls were in paroxysms of giggling: one had her hair down and her hand over her mouth: the other, a beauty, was tying something to a long bamboo pole — such as is used for hanging out washing — the other end of which was held by one of the students. It was a letter.

'Oi,' cried one of the students, 'be careful!'

And the girls both doubled themselves up with excitement, blushing and shaking with laughter, their faces half covered by their silken sleeves.

So that was why the students ignored her! They were in touch with that lovely creature over the way. It was not jealousy that Chiyé felt, but rather disappointment, a sudden sickening sense of the futility of hope. She remembered how they always teased her — but she did not want to be teased, she wanted to be loved. She told the story to Tsuya, who showed great interest in it, but could only offer by way of consolation the news that the students were due to leave soon (for they had just failed again in their last examination), and then, she suggested, perhaps somebody more

A PIECE OF GOOD LUCK

promising would take their place. She counselled hope, and Chiyé sighed, feeling lonely. Somehow she could not be on quite such intimate terms with Tsuya at present: it was just as if something had come between them, though of course, she assured herself, there was nothing that could possibly have done so.

§ 6

As it was a long time since she had been to see her aunt and her baby cousin, Chiyé asked leave to go. Mrs. Kikuchi, as usual, smiled slyly on her large drab face. It was impossible for Chiyé to gauge at all what the proprietress was thinking or how much she was hiding, for that inscrutable expression might conceal everything or nothing. Mrs. Kikuchi was a cunning woman, and like all cunning people she could not hide her tricks permanently from anybody really watchful: Chiyé, however, was sufficiently pure in heart to be gullible. Mrs. Kikuchi now gave her gracious assent, as if she had nothing at all up her sleeve.

An hour later Chiyé might have been seen walking quickly on her clogs down a narrow street in that dingy and overcrowded quarter with which she was so familiar, but she suddenly paused a moment, as if in surprise, for she had noticed that the shutters on the street side of her aunt's house had been drawn across the windows. This was odd. Chiyé hurried to the entrance. It was locked. She went round to the back. The kitchen door was also locked, and all the windows were shuttered. It was obvious that the family were away. Impossible! In a dustbin at the kitchen door there were some orange skins that looked quite fresh. Hoping against hope, and glancing up sideways, Chiyé rattled the door. There was no answer. For a moment she could hardly breathe, as if she had been suddenly immersed in cold water.

Then she remembered a friend of her aunt's was living next door who would tell her why the family were absent; but her

STORIES OF JAPAN

call was now answered by somebody she did not know. She asked for the former neighbour by name.

'No, I'm sorry, she doesn't live here now, but went away some months ago.'

'Then, I beg your pardon, but can you tell me where my aunt is at present?'

'Your aunt?'

Chiyé explained. The neighbour frowned.

'The house is to let,' she said majestically, 'for the family have gone into the country for good. They left yesterday, and most of the furniture went last week.'

'Into the country!'

'I don't know the address, I'm sorry.'

As Chiyé came out, she saw a man in a fur cap and a long overcoat with a frayed velvet collar standing in front of the old house. He had taken a large piece of paper out of an imitation leather dispatch-case, and was pasting it obliquely on to the outside wall. It bore the words *To Let*.

She plucked up courage to ask him for her aunt's address. He looked at her with a broad smile, for he was a cheerful man. He was rather proud of his fur cap. When he spoke, the words simply poured out of his mouth. Chiyé smiled politely, and at last gathered definitely that her aunt had left Tokyo and was not coming back. He did not know the address, but no doubt she could get it from the landlord, who was away at present, having gone to visit his native place in the prefecture of N——, as his wife's nephew was about to marry, etc.

Chiyé thanked him, bowed and started back for the hotel. On the way she sat very upright in the tram, with a flushed face, and staring at her knees.

Mrs. Kikuchi affected surprise at the result of this expedition, and promised to make inquiries. And late in the evening, after her work was done, Chiyé sat down and wrote to her mother for information — she, at any rate, must have been told, and

A PIECE OF GOOD LUCK

would explain. Then at last she confided it all to Tsuya, who was very sympathetic, but could not help reflecting on the cunning of the aunt and the proprietress, whom she felt convinced were in league; Tsuya told Chiyé yet once more that she had been sold by one to the other. Chiyé wept.

During the next few days she suffered from headaches. It was the end of the summer, and the change in the season, together with thoughts of what she could not help regarding now as her unfortunate situation, tended to produce in her a disturbed state of mind. September is the May of autumn, says an old poet; and it is true that in the fall of the year we may be liable to feel a restlessness akin to that we felt in the spring. Just as a person in the autumn of life makes a sudden final spurt, so we may feel in us again, when the heat goes and the sky becomes serene and clear, other clouds of heat, a precious madness and creative longing. And the less we know about it the more we are at its mercy, yet even the very wise have to obey it, just as they are forced always to do things which they fondly suppose they themselves have originated, planned or approved.

Chiyé, with her hand to her forehead, decided to go to a fortune-teller. She made this decision without consulting anybody: it was unusual for her to be so independent, but adversity instils desperation, and desperate people are apt to act for themselves. Besides, she who was now going to consult the zodiac no doubt had in her something of her father's wilfulness, the man who had defied the zodiac. Having, as a child, heard often enough of her head-strong father's misfortunes, she had every excuse for being superstitious. And so the generations vary: the children run away from the mistakes of the parents, but they run on pretty much the same sort of legs.

Mrs. Kikuchi felt she could safely let Chiyé out on a long tether now and then — if all the windows and doors are locked, the canary may certainly be let out of its cage for half an hour and given the freedom of the room — by analogy, one conquers by

STORIES OF JAPAN

yielding — so with her craftiest smile she gave the girl an afternoon off for 'shopping,' and asked no questions. Chiyé had not the slightest intention of shopping — which she would have liked very much — for she had only just enough money to pay for bare necessities.

§ 7

She went first to Uéno, and then, feeling extraordinarily venturesome and reckless, got into the new underground railway just opened between that place and Asakusa. It was a wonderful experience, for while she was thinking what she would say to Tsuya when she got back, she found the train had already got to the other end.

She made straight for the fortune-teller's booths near the great temple of Kwannon (goddess of Mercy, Pity, Peace), for she had made a mental note of them on a visit to Asakusa (how long ago it seemed!) with her aunt and the children. She had not dared to ask or suggest anything at the time — and now here she was! First she climbed up the temple steps, where before that gigantic and cavernous portal she stood a moment in a group of worshippers. Under that overhanging cliff of carved scarlet wood she clapped her palms together softly, twice, to draw the attention of heaven; bowed her head; and asked for nothing but help. On her way down the steps she noticed a crowd of people gathered in an attentive ring about fifty yards away on the right, within the great compound, under a vast ginkgo tree whose leaves would soon turn pure yellow, and as she had plenty of time determined to go and see what they were so interested in. Flocks of fat doves rose and fell, flapped, strutted and cooed. Some were on the ground just before her feet. So tame! She held out her hand and made a small sympathetic noise, but the doves, sleek and iridescent, turned their backs to her because she had nothing to give them. But she was luckier when she reached the crowd,

A PIECE OF GOOD LUCK

for she arrived just as some others, exclaiming with valedictory astonishment, were disembroiling themselves, so, slipping in, she got their good place.

In a round space three Chinese jugglers were performing, with the assistance of a Korean who spent all his time packing and unpacking, and seemed oblivious of everything else. The eldest Chinese was stout, middle-aged and wheezy, and his buffooneries were done with such an air of boredom that they were quite funny. Another was a boy. But the chief actor was a man of about thirty-five, who, like the others, was dressed entirely in black silk brocade, fitting tightly above the waist and ending in a loose divided skirt. He never kept still for a moment, and so held closely the attention of the spectators. At present he was blowing clouds of fire very rapidly out of his mouth and darting backwards and forwards to keep the air rushing in and out, while his associates kept up a continual patter in excellent Japanese. A moment later he was standing still, with his delicate hands on his hips, and the older man was pulling yards and yards of parti-coloured paper ribbons out of the now fireless mouth, with which, it seemed, all his tricks were done.

Chiyé looked at him carefully. His skin was redder than that of a Japanese, his hair was cut short and he looked animated and perfectly healthy. The eyes were small and rather flat, lidless, bluish underneath and with a metallic sparkle that seemed not quite natural. The cheeks were flushed, but perhaps that was their usual state. The nose had no bridge, and would have been effeminate had it not ended in a pair of widely-gaping nostrils. But it was the mouth that made his living, and it was the mouth that was remarkable, for in repose it was shapely, but showed itself capable of expansion and distortion. The lips were thick and red, and about them, even when fixed in some grotesque position, lingered a smile in which there was neither cruelty, nor contempt, nor humanity, but some other quality which had hints of these and yet seemed not to possess them.

STORIES OF JAPAN

Their owner now, for a change, occupied himself with some sleight of hand, while the boy and the Korean took out a basket from the bag on the ground. Then he went over to them and the other side, where he could not be seen so easily, and Chiyé turned her head to look at some girls among the spectators near her. Suddenly a loud murmur began to travel round the crowd, the girls gave a little scream and Chiyé could see the same actor coming round the ring. He seemed to be holding his hands before his face — now he paused right in front of her —

In his hands he was holding firmly the fore part of a shining black snake, whose little winking head curved alertly on its neck. Its tiny, slender body passed into his mouth, and was loosely held between his moist, caressing lips about which, as in his eyes, there was now some trace of contempt at the fascinated, gaping horror of the crowd. The long, smooth, tapering tail of the snake protruded several inches from his left nostril, where it flickered and twitched lithely and obscenely.

Somebody exclaimed aloud. Chiyé, panic-stricken, forced her way out of the crowd, tore her sleeve in doing it, ran in and out among the people until she could no longer hear those gasps of incredulity, could no longer see — She shut her eyes, but the sight that had so powerfully caught her imagination was already burnt into her memory. She tried for days to escape it, to forget it, to hide herself from it, but always that face, that mouth, would pursue — an image of pure evil.

She now made her way over to the fortune-tellers' booths, but she was trembling, and had to stand outside for several minutes. She felt hysterical: the excitement of what she had just seen, the prospective excitement of whatever she was just going to hear, were too much for her.

The fortune-teller before whom she at last found herself was an old man with a keen eye, which he never removed from her face except to watch some abracadabra he was arranging all the time with his hands. He condescended to receive from her in

A PIECE OF GOOD LUCK

advance the sum of two *yen* and fifty *sen*, in return for which he told her a lot of astrological claptrap which she could not understand at all, but said clearly enough that if she worked hard her life would not be a failure, that she was not destined to return to her native place this year, that she must beware of a man with a scar on his right forearm, that her character prevented her from seeing the bad intentions of others because she lacked intuition, and finally that if she followed his advice she might live long. . . . But he had said nothing about marriage. She did not dare to ask him, but blushed vermilion, for his eye was fixed on her, and she was afraid he could read her thoughts.

' . . . and about marriage,' he said, and paused.

She waited, expectant, red, breathless.

He pronounced a long astrological sentence.

'But — but I don't understand,' she said anxiously.

'You will when the time comes,' he said cryptically.

How she longed to put another two *yen* and fifty *sen* into his hand! But her money was nearly finished. Suddenly she had an idea, and blurted out:

'And shall I have a baby?'

The seer narrowed his eyes.

'I see no reason why you shouldn't,' he said emphatically, and looking her up and down.

How delighted she was at this last piece of honourable condensation! What a marvellous prophet! When she left him she bowed as to a prince of philosophers, a celestial sage; and then, as it was late, the servant hurried home to the hotel.

§ 8

Two days later she received a letter. It was her mother's answer to the inquiry about the whereabouts of her aunt. Yes, her mother knew, but at first could not understand why Chiyé had not been told that her aunt's husband had been transferred

STORIES OF JAPAN

permanently to Nagoya, and that the whole family were to be there for good. However, word had since come from her aunt that the removal had been so unexpected and hurried that there had been no chance to say good-bye to Chiyé, who was now fortunately safe in the care of her kind friend Mrs. Kikuchi, working well and quite happy, and who would no doubt later be able to pay a visit to Nagoya, etc. Chiyé's mother exhorted her to work hard and be a good girl and then one day she would be able to come back to Omura and see her loving parent. Her dear mother!

Chiyé showed this letter to Tsuya, who was praising the mother and once more abusing the aunt, who had no excuse for going away, she said, without saying good-bye to her ward — when the telephone bell rang, and Chiyé was ordered to present herself immediately at the office. She hurried downstairs, and when she got there, the second son of Mrs. Kikuchi (the eldest was out) kept her waiting a few minutes and then threw her a telegram, saying insolently that it had come the day before, and that she was a fool for not having yet removed it. A telegram? Chiyé rushed upstairs again to share it with Tsuya, who was just hurrying down.

'A telegram?' said Tsuya. 'All right, I'll be back before long, but Mr. Minami has just rung his bell, and I may be delayed —'

Chiyé carried the telegram to the light and opened it. It was from Omura. She read it through slowly three times and then stared at it. Her mother was dead.

The telephone began ringing again and again.

The effects of this news on her mind are better imagined than described, for she was stupefied by it. Whether she was stunned by the blow, whether she was one hardened or insensible to adversity, or whether she was able to put a stoic face on her troubles, it is certain that no ordinary observer could have judged from her appearance. She stood in the middle of the room with the telegram in her hand, and looked out of the window at a

A PIECE OF GOOD LUCK

sunny patch of roof where on a wooden platform some blue and white clothes were waving in the wind: they had been freshly washed, and there was hardly a cloud in the sky.

All this time the telephone was ringing wildly, and Mrs. Kikuchi, who happened then to be on the same floor, came in to answer it. What was her amazement to see one of the servants actually in the room and ignoring the call! The stout old woman was not quick in her movements, but she was not slow in her understanding, and by the time she had taken the telegram from Chiyé and read it, the bell had stopped ringing. She said nothing and went out.

She would certainly have been on the verge of feeling sorry for the girl had not a doubt at once attacked her as to whether her own proprietary rights were not now perhaps in danger. Possibly some relation of the girl might wish her to return to her native village. Mrs. Kikuchi was a woman of business; she had two sons and a hotel, and she made up her mind to write to Chiyé's aunt and find out how the land lay.

Chiyé's grief was real, and her mind was much occupied, as people's minds often are at such times, in recalling and reconstructing early memories and precious hours and episodes. As her mind got into this habit of retracing forgotten paths it would often come, at odd and unexpected moments, upon some vivid situation whose very existence it seemed to have forgotten, and she was able to escape, to lose herself, to drug herself out of the present into a dream picture whose revival was more poignant than novelty.

These mental conditions were followed, as they often are, by a vague, a very vague craving to express them, and Chiyé, whom a kind of natural modesty never left, so that her tongue was not always willing to utter aloud the thoughts that arose in her — even supposing it could express them — now half wished to write with ink her heart's tears for her kindest and dearest friend and protector, her dead mother. It was a half-wish, and she was less

STORIES OF JAPAN

than half-educated, and her character was only half-developed. It went the way of all half-wishes, and nothing was done.

To her friend and fellow-servant she told something of her feelings, and honest Tsuya was as usual a real prop. Tsuya could only console her with hazy hopes, but she meant well, and her sympathy was precious as far as it went — as far as it went, because the sympathies of Tsuya were now deeply involved with Minami, translator of the history of the world. What was more, Minami returned them.

The situation thus produced was piquant, to say the least, and the confidences Tsuya chose to make were the first influences that began to stir Chiyé out of her trance of memory, which nothing in her daily round had been able to do, although quite a time had elapsed since the receipt of the wire. Tsuya did not say much, but what she did say was pointed, and it was quite clear that between her and Minami a feeling of a true and noble intensity had come to exist. But how could it exist? Tsuya was a housemaid and Minami the son of an officer of high rank in the army. They were far too serious for there to be any question of a temporary liaison, and it seemed that things had already gone so far as a tacit admission that marriage alone would be satisfactory. Up to this Chiyé felt sure of her ground, and beyond it she feared to tread. The face of her friend was radiant and resigned, like that of one who endures in the knowledge of a glorious and speedy relief.

Meanwhile Chiyé was a little distracted by various changes in the house. Her baseball-playing students suddenly left, and a gentleman was due to come, who was said to have some connexion with the stage. The flutter below stairs was quite noticeable. It was variously asserted that he was a producer of films, a playwright, an actor, rich, poor, old, young and many other things. One would have hoped him to be, at the very least, youngish, dashing and prosperous. Was he married? Well, either a widower or divorced, it was not quite clear which.

A PIECE OF GOOD LUCK

He arrived late one afternoon in February, got out of a taxi, and was shown straight to his room by the proprietress herself, who seemed not only to have been expecting him but also to be acquainted with him. They went upstairs, he laughing shortly and abruptly and she wheezing with unctuous politeness.

Chiyé had the duty of helping him to change his clothes, of showing him to the bath, of bringing his supper and making his bed. She was as dry as she could be in her manner, for Jin (that was his name) spoke to her from the first with a careless and contemptuous familiarity she distrusted. Whenever she looked at him he could see that she feared him, and this gave him a pleasurable thrill of anticipation.

Jin was a man of thirty-nine, lean and sinewy, with hairy hands, a swarthy face, mauve lips and white teeth which always seemed to be grinning. His eyes were untrustworthy. He did not appear to work for a living, but always had money. He wore sometimes Japanese and sometimes foreign clothes, undoubtedly had some connexion both with theatre and cinema, and was reported by Mrs. Kikuchi to be well known as a tennis-player. He went out a great deal, but in spite of this Chiyé soon got to know and like him better. He was fond of a joke, and would scold her about some trifle until she apologized, and then laugh at her. This made her blush, and he enjoyed making her blush. Once or twice he pinched her arm, and once he asked her if she had ever been kissed.

'Chiyé,' said Mrs. Kikuchi, 'please be very polite and obedient to that gentleman, for he is related to me.'

She somehow could not feel angry with him, but did not want his attentions, even though they might only be playful. She talked about him to Tsuya, saying that she must have misjudged him at first. Tsuya answered rather absently, saying that he seemed quite a sincere gentleman.

And then an unexpected thing happened: Minami left the hotel.

STORIES OF JAPAN

'What'll you do now?' said Chiyé.

'I don't know,' said Tsuya. 'But I'm also going away for a time.'

'What! With him?'

'No, no, of course not. My father is ill, and I have to go home for a few days.'

Two days later she went, and until she came back Chiyé had a lot of extra work. Until she came back? She never came back.

§ 9

The story all came out a week later. All the newspapers were full of it, the hotel was buzzing with it and waves of excitement washed through every heart. It was briefly this:

Minami had become infatuated with Tsuya, and had decided to marry her. He accordingly went to his father, General Minami, to get permission, which was sharply and finally refused. He was told that he must be out of his senses to imagine that he could marry a housemaid, and was ordered to leave the Kaméfuku Hotel. The young man had submitted with a good grace to his father's anger, and asked for a few days' delay, which was granted. The father then repented of his anger and spoke kindly, but Minami had already made up his mind to ask Tsuya to elope with him. Tsuya was not the girl to say no. Minami then addressed to his father a letter which he asked a friend to deliver after another week: he said nothing of its contents.

Next he met Tsuya by appointment. She was dressed in her best clothes, and they went to the station and took tickets to one of the smaller lakes near the bottom of Mount Fuji. The train was over-heated, as the season was hardly yet early spring, and the outside air was bitterly cold. They had nothing with them but the clothes they stood up in. Minami, however, carried some money. Late at night they arrived by motor at a small hotel near Lake Kawaguchi. Their appearance excited the curiosity, if not

A PIECE OF GOOD LUCK

the suspicion of the proprietor. In the first place it was an odd time for visitors. There was a lot of snow on the ground, the hotel was empty and there was absolutely nothing to do. Then this couple had brought no luggage. Madame Minami? She hardly seemed his social equal, though certainly a modest and not inelegant young woman. They spent the night there, and in the morning Minami must have guessed that he and his companion were regarded rather doubtfully, for he decided on their moving to another hotel, farther round the lake shore, where they arrived in time for lunch. In the afternoon they played ping-pong with the family of the proprietor.

The next morning Minami bought a lot of caramels and some soda-water, and announced that they were going out for a walk. His usual manner was consistently eager, and his voice high, so it would have been difficult to detect any additional excitement, had that been present in his manner. It was a cruel, dark morning and looked as if it might snow. However, the young couple went out. They walked a long way, and stopped at last in a lonely thicket of cryptomerias near the edge of the water. At about three in the afternoon Minami went alone to a hamlet about a quarter of a mile from the hotel, a hamlet through which they had passed in the morning. Here, at a little shop, the translator of the history of the world bought some more caramels, with which he returned over the snow under a black sky to his love.

Meanwhile, the letter he had written in Tokyo had been delivered to his father. It contained a polite and respectfully filial intimation that as he was not allowed to marry the girl of whom he had spoken, he proposed not only to leave Tokyo with her, but to leave this life itself. The distracted father at once raised the alarm, and two days later General Minami, the friend who had delivered the letter (everything should be arranged by a go-between), a police-officer and a manservant set out from the little hotel where the pair had spent the second night.

About midday these searchers found the thicket. A large hole

STORIES OF JAPAN

had been scooped in the snowy ground and there, half in and half out, lay the naked body of Tsuya. She was dead partly from exposure and partly from poison. Her young skin had hardly lost its freshness, and the perfect contours of her body still suggested softness rather than stiffness, life supple rather than stark lifelessness. Near her lay the empty soda-water bottles and some little folded squares of paper from the caramels. There were traces of a fire, and it seemed that the girl's clothes had been used as fuel: the cold must have been extreme.

While these things were being examined, four dapper young men arrived on the scene, two press photographers and two reporters. The body of Minami was not found till the next day. He had hanged himself on a tree.

The newspapers were full of the story, and especially made much of the fact that the girl was still a virgin. They saw fit to use the word 'platonic'. The public curiosity was thoroughly aroused — for two days. A monthly magazine printed the story in its own way. Two schoolgirls lay in front of a train to show their sympathy. General Minami, the unfortunate father, remembered particularly the filial submission of the younger man to his will, and asserted repeatedly, too late, that if he had known it would lead to this he would never have refused his consent to the union.

Many people were able to realize the strength and sincerity of this double suicide. Some said young Minami had always been impulsive and excitable, and this was his final folly. One of his teaching colleagues thought his death foolish, and said so. Many older people sympathized with the father, and were inclined to condemn the son. The general did not say one word against the dead, and communicated very finely with Tsuya's family. Few of the younger generation were unstirred at the time of hearing, reading and discussing the story: very few remembered it long — a day seldom passes without a tale of suicide, a week seldom without one or two more or less sensational double ones.

A PIECE OF GOOD LUCK

Chiyé was thrilled to the marrow. Entranced, enraptured, intoxicated, her sympathy with the dead lovers was so great that she felt a kind of hopeful triumph, a kind of congratulatory enthusiasm. She could not feel grief at the death of her friend, and though she certainly missed her, the sense of loss was itself lost in thankful pride and joy that the love of those two had been consummated: she regarded death as a conclusion quite as complete as bodily union, or as bodily union followed by death. She laid hands on every possible newspaper, cut out every word relating to her friend, and read and re-read these cuttings until she practically knew them by heart. Then by a lucky chance she happened to be at the main door when an intimate friend of Minami's called for information: in the end he told her more than she could tell him. From him, and from other sources, she was able to add quite a lot of detail to what she already knew.

She learnt how the general had already vaguely proposed a certain bride for his son; and of the character of the general, who came from Kagoshima and was rigidly conservative and feudally strict with his family — all the money the son had earned by his lectures, had been paid in, as a matter of course, to the father, and the young man had lived (and died) entirely on the proceeds of his translations. Chiyé was also able to see a brother of the dead girl, from whom she heard indirectly that Tsuya had expressed frankly in letters home the nature of her affection for Minami. Those warm phrases glowed in Chiyé's breast for the remainder of her life. Indeed, the whole affair left her with a lasting emotion, whose untarnished freshness would recur to her years later, purely as a memory, or as a consolation in her own disconsolate hours, or more mysteriously, as a kind of nameless hope.

But it cannot be said that she now entered on a period whose chief reality was memory, either idealized or applied, for present events of the first importance were about to take possession of

STORIES OF JAPAN

her life, a rudderless boat driven about, continually and with varying violence, by the intentions — good, bad or indifferent — of other people. In this she took after her mother, who, even before being tamed by misfortune, had always submitted naturally to the control of those who wished to control her. Buddha, that aristocrat, teacheth not the servile to rebel.

§ 10

'Oo! Mr. Jin did give my arm a twist this morning,' Chiyé exclaimed in the servants' bedroom, rubbing that member, and wrinkling her nose with an expression indicative neither of pain nor disgust.

Jin had done more than that, were it only known. He had given a twist to her life-story. He had also made plans to give a party, not for her, but for two intimates. The amiable twisting of her arm had gone with the information that she would have to wait on his guests, a duty she now looked forward to with positive pleasure.

Whatever her first impression of Jin might have been, she had quickly got to like him. He was always cheerful. He paid attention to her. He was familiar with her as no other man had ever been. But she did not let herself go. She did not for one moment try to convince herself that there was going to be anything like a repetition of the feelings Tsuya may have had for Minami. She now liked Jin's attentions, and though she hardly thought it within the bounds of possibility that he would suggest such a thing, she would have no objection to marrying him. She was now in a state of mind and body when marriage would do her good. She kept her head, but she by no means kept Jin at arm's length. On the other hand, she was not going to let him take liberties. She continued to play the fish very prettily. He was certainly hooked, and if she could help it he was neither going to get away nor be landed just yet.

A PIECE OF GOOD LUCK

'The two gentlemen I am expecting,' said he, 'are my intimate friends, and I want to give them a good supper. I was going to call in geishas, just to make things cheerful, but on second thoughts I won't. For one thing it's expensive, and for another there's no need. It's only to be a friendly little gathering. So you'd better dress yourself up as well as you can, and be as bright as possible. It's a pity you're such an ugly little thing—'

He flipped her ear.

'Oh, but yesterday you said I was a pretty little thing.'

'I was only joking, fool. Don't forget to have the *saké* properly warmed. I've already told Mrs. Kikuchi about the dinner.'

He speaks to me, she thought, going downstairs, just as if I was his wife. Mrs. Kikuchi also spoke to her about the coming evening, and advised her to smarten herself up and do her best: it was a good chance for her to show how clever she could be at waiting on the gentlemen, and pleasing them.

'Try to be bright,' said the old dame, 'and understand what the gentlemen say. Even if you don't, you must make them think you do, so mind you laugh at all their jokes. Nothing spoils a dinner so much as a dull waitress. Try to anticipate their wishes, and when they ask for anything get it as quickly as you can. Never ask them to repeat their orders, and don't keep them waiting. If they get a little tipsy, that won't hurt you, so don't worry. Of course they will expect you to drink with them, but you must just pretend — a sip here and a sip there — you understand? And don't forget to show plainly that you admire them. Men are very easily made fools of. Flatter them a bit, you see?'

The mistress actually nudged the servant, and smiled ponderously instead of winking. Chiyé had never really been able to dislike her, and now this kind and confidential manner made the girl's heart go out to her. This advice was so motherly and yet so sisterly in tone. At that instant they were as closely leagued as a pair of suffragettes. People are often as united by a common sex as by a common enemy.

STORIES OF JAPAN

Chiyé, feeling somehow that this was a critical evening, took great pains with her appearance. The result was good. Her hands were red, coarse and pudgy, and her wrists somewhat thick and strong, but her body was now at its best. She was not ungraceful in her movements, especially since the death of Tsuya. Her feet were small; she walked with small, simpering steps, the toes too much turned in; and occasionally, as she knelt or rose, an inch of pink skin appeared above her snow-white *tabi*. Her clothes were of fine flowered silk of several thicknesses, and the sleeves, as they swayed, showed the tantalizing edge of a bright red lining. Her neck, thickly daubed with liquid powder, supported a head which had greatly improved since the arrival of the awkward bumpkin girl from Omura, and which was crowned with a glossy black, perfumed coiffure decorated with gaudy pins. When she looked in the glass her black eyes sparkled in her pretty face with the quickness of a bird on a blossoming bough. Her eyebrows, by nature a little too heavy, had been shaved into a pair of thin blue-black curves like two quick strokes of a fine squirrel's-hair brush. Her mouth was ready to smile moistly. Excited by pleasure, a warmth rose to her cheeks. Her appearance caused surprise even among her everyday associates. There are such moments of transfiguration in every woman's life.

Jin was greatly struck when she first came into the room bringing trays with another maid, but as he was in the midst of conversation with his guests he made no comment, and affected not to notice her. When she came back alone the second time to wait, he spoke banteringly to her, and his guests began to take notice.

One of them, no longer young, tried, by the cultivation of a boisterous manner, to give an impression of his still having a young heart. The other had lately returned from China, and patriotic delight at his homecoming made him thirsty and talkative. In his cups he became garrulous, but nobody at first took much notice of him. Chiyé was kneeling between the other two.

A PIECE OF GOOD LUCK

When the old man tried to make her drink she showed a coy confusion of nature and art, and had to answer all sorts of pleasantries, not all of the most refined. The gentlemen were so free with her that she found no difficulty in finding repartees to match their sallies.*

All at once there came up from the street the sound of the night-watchman's drum and his chanted warning of fire:

'Shinanomachi, Shiocho!'

The returned exile from China had now got on to his reminiscences, while the others steadily gorged and sipped their warm rice-wine. He was no lover of the Chinese, he declared, a cruel, dishonest and dirty race who ought to be the servants of the Japanese.

Suddenly, through and above the drunken laughter, the watchman's drum sounded much nearer, and his voice cried sadly and loudly, as if in the room:

'Shinanomachi, Shiocho!'

'I tell you,' shouted the speaker, red in the face, 'the Chinese don't understand the value of civilization!'

'If the cursed Americans were not so sentimental,' cried the old man, 'we could punish all the Chinese, and make slaves of them, and shoot every one of them down, the dogs!'

Chiyé half-consciously waited for the watchman's drum and drone again. It came, already less loud, and long-drawn-out, dying away in the distance, more like a voice of hope forsaken than of present danger:

'Shinanomachi, Shiocho!'

'A fire somewhere,' said Jin absently.

'Cruelty?' exclaimed the man from China. 'You! you don't know what cruelty means. They'd tear the skin off your face. I've seen two soldiers spend an hour pulling a young girl in half, and enjoy doing it.'

And he proceeded to tell them a story he could not have told sober. Only that morning, as a matter of fact, he had, in a

STORIES OF JAPAN

crowded room, been heatedly defending the Chinese against every accusation, including this one and others much more trifling: truth by no means always lies in wine.

Chiyé alone was now sober, and into her mind there rushed the memory of that Chinaman she had seen at Asakusa, the one with the snake in his mouth, and she turned her head and hid her face in her sleeve. Her skin was creeping with horror.

'What! what's the matter?' cried Jin. 'Here, let's make her drink—'

And he caught her round the middle, pinioned her arms, twisted her backwards and called to the others to make her drink. One picked up a cup, but the old man grabbed a porcelain *saké*-flask and forced its mouth into hers. The china gritted against her teeth. She struggled and vainly shook her head as the warm liquid kept on jetting into her throat and up her nose, until she sputtered and choked.

At this moment one of the paper doors was slid back, and anybody noticing that could also have made out dimly in the dark passage the large kneeling bulk of a woman in a greyish-white apron. However, nobody in the room saw Mrs. Kikuchi, who had just looked in to see how things were going, and who now leaned forward with a slow cow-like movement, so that her head and massive bust were in the room. On her face she wore (she could afford to wear it) an almost good-humoured, an urbane expression of easy tolerance, and what practically came to a satisfied smile, and then withdrew, sliding to once more the sibilant screen.

Chiyé was released to fetch more *saké*, and the gentleman from China, red in the face, began to snooze. The old man talked heartily, and Jin felt very cheerful; but under his gaiety there was all the time a vague lurking anticipation, which found some satisfaction in an increasing wish to get rid of his guests. Perhaps this early spring night helped to cause the restlessness in his veins. When Chiyé came back he asked her the time.

A PIECE OF GOOD LUCK

'What, is it so late?' exclaimed the older man. 'Oi!' And he began to try and wake his companion.

'Drink,' said Jin.

They drank, getting more and more noisy. Jin suddenly turned to Chiyé and said rapidly in a low voice:

'Go and order a taxi.'

She did not come back till the taxi had arrived, and then announced that it was at the door.

'Well, I don't want you to go,' said Jin, 'but your car's waiting at the entrance.'

'What? I never ordered a car,' said the old man.

'Of course you did,' said Jin. 'Are you so far gone that you've forgotten?' He turned to Chiyé for confirmation: 'Didn't you hear him?'

'Oh, yes, that was why I went to order it,' said she.

'Then tell it to go away, you wench,' said the old man angrily.

'You'll have to pay a lot if you keep it waiting,' said Jin. And so, bickering and protesting, the two guests were at last piloted downstairs and bundled into the taxi. It was about two o'clock in the morning.

Jin came back to his room and stretched himself on the floor. When Chiyé appeared he ordered her to take away the things and lay out the bed.

'But leave the *saké*,' he said, refilling his cup. 'And bring another bottle.'

She cleared away, and then opened the cupboard and drew out the mattress. He let her make the bed, and just as she was finishing, stepped behind her, threw his arm round her neck and tripped her up. They both fell on the mats. She gave a cry of surprise, but made no resistance.

'Drink some more,' he said, 'come on.'

He made her finish the last flaskful with him, cup for cup. She hardly knew what she was doing. Her windpipe was on fire, and her eyes watering.

STORIES OF JAPAN

'Now I must go,' she said, trying to stand up.

'No, no,' he said several times, with extraordinary and unnecessary emphasis. 'No, no. There is no need to go. Absolutely no need.'

They rolled over together on the floor. Suddenly she was afraid, and struggled to get up. He thrust his hand into her coiffure, which fell half apart, and one long coil of hair broke loose and unrolled almost to her knees. Against the smooth silk it looked like a rapturous black cascade in a drunken dream.

'Help me to bed,' he said, 'before you go.'

She helped him out of his clothes, standing behind him, and putting his scanty night kimono over his shoulders. She always remembered afterwards his long straight back, wide at the shoulders, narrow at the waist, muscular and golden. He tied his girdle and then turned, his face purplish white, and fondled her ear. Suddenly he threw her down, kicking, on the bed, and before she could get up had switched off the light.

'No, no, no,' she said, trying to get away, but he at once caught her again, and somehow she could not, she did not want to, she did not attempt to resist.

§ II

She lay with him again the next night. She became his mistress. And there were no regrets. Looking back, she saw Minami and Tsuya, their young arms interlaced for a pillow. Looking forward, she considered the possibility of a home and a child. She liked Jin. She was happy.

He, however, had not the slightest intention of continuing to live with her for more than a short time. She clung to him with such faithfulness that he was in two minds what to let her think. But in truth she neither ventured to trust nor to doubt him. She was contented with the present, not absolutely content, but happier than she seemed to have been before, and happy in a new

A PIECE OF GOOD LUCK

way which seemed somehow old and familiar. Jin could not make up his mind whether to promise a liaison he did not intend to continue or whether simply to let things drift and leave her guessing. He took the latter course, but she never attempted to guess, leaving everything to him, less from confidence than from force of circumstances. And suddenly he blurted out one day as if he were joking:

'Of course you've never imagined that I should continue to live with you?'

And laughed.

She looked at him without answering. There was no reproach in her gaze, no surprise. It was impossible for him to know what she really felt. And he did not greatly care.

Indeed, she felt neither surprised nor reproachful, worked as usual, but with a deep inward calm, a physical balance, that she had never known before. She continued to serve Jin, and he gave her presents, not valuable ones. Everybody knew that she lived with him and nobody made a fuss. When he was out or when she was alone or not working she sometimes picked up a newspaper. It gave her a unique pleasure, with its unexpectedness and sensational appeals to her imagination. She happened one day to see a loose sheet of the morning paper lying in the kitchen where the cook had put it down, and as she was just going up to her room picked it up and took it with her. There was at the bottom of the page, just above some advertisements, a short paragraph which cut her to the heart so that she never forgot it. It left, one might say, a scar on her memory. Yet the journalists could not have thought it important, or they would not have put it down there. Perhaps they wanted too much space that day for the arrival in Japan of the executive committee of the Pan-Pacific Peaceful Penetration Push from America.

In a poor suburb of Tokyo, said the paper, a child of three had been murdered. The circumstances were these. Two married women lived next door to each other. One was the mother of

STORIES OF JAPAN

the child; the other, older, was barren. The barren one had become obsessed with her misfortune; unbalanced; until, maddened by that mother-and-child happiness always under her eyes, she had, in a paroxysm of suffering, put an end to it. She had confessed everything quite openly. That was all.

Into Chiyé's mind the effect of this story, though powerful, worked its way slowly. Eventually, it diverted her attention from the union with Jin, which still went on, to the hopes of becoming a mother; and with these hopes she was now entirely taken up. It was not that the two states of feeling were different things — there was only one flood of emotion: it had now set all in one direction. The first rare freshness and activity of her body, followed by some more disturbing sensations, made her pretty sure that what she most desired would happen, and she passed busy days in expectant peace. The time of waiting was then broken by two important events.

Late on a dark, steamy, rainy midsummer afternoon she returned from an errand and had hardly folded her umbrella when one of the maids said to her:

'You didn't tell me that Mr. Jin was leaving this afternoon: I went to his room to prepare tea, and found that he had already left —'

'No, I didn't, I'm sorry,' said Chiyé in an expressionless voice. Already left! She was taken completely unawares by this news. Somehow the fact that he had gone (she had half supposed he would go soon) did not matter to her so much as the fact that he had gone without saying good-bye to her. People glanced sideways at her to see how she liked being deserted, but there was no sign as to how she took it. A few days later she heard from Jin, and it was a nice letter. He kindly enclosed some money, but as she was now drawing a small regular wage from Mrs. Kikuchi, this tribute, or quittance-money, was not absolutely needed.

The shock of his going away she only felt in its entirety long afterwards. This was so often the way with her — things hap-

A PIECE OF GOOD LUCK

pened to her quickly, and not always unexpectedly, and she could not take them all in at once. Slowly the significance of facts, whose meaning she ought to have realized at the time of their occurrence, would bear gradually in on her; as a bank of clouds, at first ranged apparently immovably on the horizon, will soon, slowly toppling, advance, forced forward by some large wind too high up for humanity to feel, and, preceded by a few scarfy and dissolving forerunners, will spread, and darken, and overspread the whole mild sky. The sky may be hidden for weeks, but the clouds do not last, continually changing their forms. Afterwards the sky is srenner than ever.

She was not only slow to realize, but, once having realized, quick to forget or overlook (not necessarily to forgive) where most people would bear active remembrance or malice. Her anger, if it could be called that, did not last. And just at the moment when she had more or less forgotten things they had a way of forcing themselves back on her. It was a long time, for instance, since she had thought much about her aunt, but now who should walk into the Kaméfuku Hotel but that very woman! — the same as ever, only a little more so than usual.

In the same room, the office, where they had once sat together before, the three women, all bowing and smiling and getting politer and politer every minute, were once more assembled. In the background sat the younger son of Mrs. Kikuchi at his telephone and ledger: her elder son was not there, for he was nearly always out. This meeting was by no means merely formal. The aunt and niece were genuinely glad to see each other. Chiyé couldn't help sniffing and blubbing in her sleeve. Crocodile tears? Why should they be? She was not a person to feign emotion. That her aunt had sold her into her present life did not now sway her mind: the far-eastern character, with its elaborate traditional machinery of revenge, seems, whether from fatalism or inertia, often to know better how to forgive than the Christian character, whose business is supposed to be the turning of the

STORIES OF JAPAN

other cheek. But Chiyé was soon filled with curiosity to know what her aunt had come for. Mrs. Kikuchi on this occasion was positively motherly, and looked at Chiyé almost with pride. As for the aunt, her affability was quite remarkable. After a barrage of platitudinous compliments had been created, she came down to business.

Now it had happened that a distant relation, some kind of cousin, had come to her from Omura with an offer to adopt Chiyé and eventually to arrange for her marriage and safeguard her future, at the same time asking the aunt her opinion, and suggesting that she should go to Tokyo and put the matter to Chiyé. The aunt had replied that Chiyé was in service, and could hardly be released without a considerable payment. This upset the cousin a little, but he did not yet withdraw his offer. Wishing to hear more details, he urged the aunt to go to Tokyo, which she agreed to do.

Her scheme was to see Mrs. Kikuchi and the girl together and to tell Chiyé at once of the cousin's offer: naturally thinking that the girl would be eager to go back to her native village, and that Mrs. Kikuchi, in order to avoid losing a good servant, might privately advance something to prevent it. This ingenious plan did not work out in practice exactly as she had foreseen. In the first place, Chiyé now surprised her very much by expressing very little wish to return to Omura! Mrs. Kikuchi had a twinkle in her eye. Her second son, with his mouth open, stared vacantly at the group. The puzzled aunt began to persuade. Chiyé wriggled her shoulders awkwardly. Mrs. Kikuchi said that the girl was very happy where she was, but that she should not attempt to try and force her to stay if she really wanted to go; — conquer by yielding! — however, as the girl was used to her work and now able to earn wages, no doubt she would be more prudent to stay where she was. The aunt, exasperated, smiled more winningly than ever; she positively beamed with rage. As she was again expecting an addition to her family, a small finan-

A PIECE OF GOOD LUCK

cial contribution to the home would have been welcome, especially as she had had the expense of coming to Tokyo. She did not know what to do. If she could see the girl alone, possibly she could persuade her, but obviously Mrs. Kikuchi would prevent that.

While she was hesitating she was lost, for the voice of one of the maids was repeatedly calling down the passage for Chiyé, who at once rose, bowing, and went out of the room. The subsequent conversation between the other two convinced the aunt that her attempt was hopeless, and that the only possible courses left to her were either to write to Chiyé and persuade her, or else to get the cousin to come to Tokyo, which might perhaps induce Mrs. Kikuchi to seek her as an ally in making the girl stay. By the time Chiyé returned to the room, her aunt had decided to leave, and after a lot of ceremonious leave-taking the visitor was bowed out. Mrs. Kikuchi, after this, could hardly have been more maternal in her manner.

The root of the matter was Chiyé's indifference. This requires little analysis, for she was now a person of one idea only, beyond which she cared for nothing. And it was not the idea that she was going to have a child.

§ 12

The idea which now possessed her was a terrible one. It was, that perhaps after all she was not going to have a child. To most people, no doubt, in such a position as hers, this would be cause for thankfulness, a matter of profound relief. But she was not most people. She was Hara Chiyé. She wanted one thing in the world, and have it she must. As for Omura — her aunt — Jin — the future — they were shadows in a dream.

She was alone, and she could not stand it any longer. If Jin had married her, she would not have been much less alone, for her loneliness was a matter of the deepest feelings in her whole

STORIES OF JAPAN

existence. She was utterly alone: only one comforter could come to her out of the world, and that comforter must come out of herself. She had not yet by any means given up her present hope. She only had the suspicion that she might be deceiving herself. She counted on her fingers the months since Jin had left her.

Once or twice a week she was allowed to go out for a bath. The bath-house was in the next street but one, and she usually got there when it was rather crowded. This afternoon, however, about a fortnight after her aunt's visit, the season being late summer, she got out much earlier than usual, and found only two people in the bath, married women of middle age, deep in conversation, a conversation that had begun somewhat obstetrically. They seemed to have plenty of leisure, for after twenty minutes they showed no sign of departure, while one or two other people came and went. One of the pair sat on the edge and dandled her stubby legs in the water, where they appeared curiously foreshortened. The other sat on the bottom with only her head sticking out of the water, her hair screwed up in a top-knot, and never stopped talking for an instant. Chiyé far outstayed her usual time to listen to them.

'Where do you say it is?' asked one.

'At the Temmonji temple in Koishikawa,' said the other, 'just over there — you know? The stone in question is on the right as you go in at the south gate, the main gate. Behind some trees, a cherry tree, I think, and some dark bushes.'

'Ah, so.'

'Quite a tall stone, six or seven feet high. They say it has been successful in a great number of cases.'

'Yes, I've heard that. They say one can see somebody there almost every day.'

'Oh, yes. One should go in the evening. That's the best time, they say.'

'And the wife of —'

'Yes, I was going to tell you. The wife of Mr. Hoshiai had

A PIECE OF GOOD LUCK

been to doctors, priests, fortune-tellers and all such people. She was quite in despair, for she had already been married six years. Then she prayed at this stone only three or four times — just came in the evening, you know, and prayed — and now she has a fine boy more than three months old.'

'Wonderful!'

'A very old stone. It is said to date from the time of Genroku, but I hardly believe it can be as old as that.'

The speaker, dripping, clambered out of the water; so that Chiyé suddenly realized how long she herself had been sitting there, and hurriedly got out and dressed. As she came out in the street her head felt quite fuddled with steam, but her heart beat quickly as she at once began to think of a plan to visit the temple of Temmonji in Koishikawa.

How peaceful the streets were as she went back! Children were playing, old men sat smoking and chatting at the open shop fronts, and young women with babies on their backs could be seen moving in the lighted interiors of the houses. At the corner the policeman sat in his little kiosk with a red lamp, doing nothing. Arm-in-arm, some idle students in thin *yukata* clattered along on high clogs. There was a smell of cooking, intermingled with stray whiffs of scent and sewage. At a fishmonger's, the electric shone wetly on the various glistening corpses of the fish, all of whose noses were pointing in the same direction, and over them a loud-speaker coughed from its black vulcanite throat a lecture on English grammar. The boy from the macaroni shop hurried past on his bicycle, pedalling frenziedly with his fat legs in white tights, and balancing on one hand a lacquered tray laden with bowls of hot, savoury food. A blind masseur tapped his way along slowly, blowing now and then a plaintive whistle, over against which could be heard the tinny whining of a mouth-organ.

An active young woman with a towel in her hand, clothes like a servant's, and a slightly dishevelled appearance, turned down a

STORIES OF JAPAN

narrow and smelly by-street towards the Kaméfuku Hotel. She was not walking quickly, but there was an intent expression on her face, because above and between her eyes her smooth girlish forehead had a tiny pucker: it could hardly be called a frown. It was not dark yet, for the sky was perfectly clear, with a reflected glow as if turquoise-colour should become transparent. In luminous air floated a far and pinkish new moon, and almost immediately, no doubt, it would become possible to notice here and there the sparkle of a star. At the sky, however, that playground of everlasting change, Chiyé did not happen to look up. As she passed the kitchen window of the hotel she could hear the sizzling sound of frying.

She very soon contrived a chance to pay an evening visit to the Temmonji. She walked there in less than half an hour, entered the gate, and found everything as the woman had said. An old scarred stone, mossy, and roughly cylindrical in shape, with a round top, stood behind a small shrubbery. In the dusky shadows it had an ancient, awful secrecy, an almost godlike presence. Chiyé looked hastily round. There was nobody much about, though she could hear some footsteps on a flagged path, and distant motors and trams.

Before the monolith were one or two stone tablets with inscriptions, a few cheap sacred pictures damaged by the weather, a bamboo vase with a fresh spray of leaves, a small stone trough in which were the remains of fine powdery ash, a pile of small stones and a money box. Chiyé opened her left hand, and from its sweaty palm picked, with the forefinger and thumb of her right, two coins, which she dropped into this box; and then, groping with her right hand inside the flap of her left sleeve, drew forth a small pebble, which she added to the pile before her. Her only regret was that she had no incense to burn. She bowed her head, clapped her hands together inaudibly and prayed for a baby.

She prayed earnestly for some time, her eyes tight shut, and

A PIECE OF GOOD LUCK

occasionally softly clapped, palm to palm again, her hot house-maid hands. At last she opened her eyes and bowed to that dark image. Turning to go, she saw that the overhanging boughs of a cherry tree near by were all tagged and knotted with paper prayers. And a great peace came on her, as if some responsibility, some load, some fear, had been taken from her. She may not have had the faith of certain conviction, but she was wonderfully soothed. Lying in bed that night, she snuggled down into the clothes and hugged her knees against her plump country breasts in a transport of nameless and unreasonable ecstasy.

This feeling of exaltation did not soon wear off. It was as if she shared some delightful secret with that wise and ancient pillar, whose inanimate silence was so full of divine wisdom. And when a letter came from her aunt, urging her to leave Tokyo, she only read it once and then thrust it away somewhere and forgot all about it. A month produced none of the desired symptoms, so she went to worship again.

This time she stopped in the twilight at a stall near the entrance of Temmonji to buy the devotional burning sticks she forgot before. As she came through the trees towards the shadowy corner of the temple compound, the figure of a young woman, elegantly dressed, and hiding her face in a lacy wrap, came from the direction of the stone and hurried past her, leaving in the air a trail of scent. Chiyé turned curiously to watch her; the figure went towards the great entrance gate, passed through and went down the steps. Chiyé moved across to the left and looked over the wall just in time to see the elusive and expensive visitor getting into a very large motor at the kerb. A servant in uniform closed the door, bowed and got in beside the driver. The headlights were suddenly switched on, the long car turned and glided away like a shadow after its swiftly travelling projection of white light.

Chiyé wonderingly approached her god. Before him was a spark at the tip of a still-burning joss-stick, from which a single

STORIES OF JAPAN

thread of blue sweet smoke streamed waveringly upwards in the tranquil evening air. Still burning? So the rich also came to this place, the young wives of millionaires! It was quite enough to confirm her faith in the value of her prayers.

But to those prayers the stone returned a stony answer. She had confided to it her most intensely real, her most human feelings. She had prayed to it, and yet she never knew that it was simply a phallus. If she had known, she could have prayed to it no more fervently. When the extreme limit of the possible period of gestation was passed, she gave up hope, but still not absolutely.

§ 13

A second letter came from her aunt, blaming her for not answering the first, and repeating the same urgent advice. Chiyé wrote back a short and polite note saying she did not want to leave Tokyo; but she never made the slightest proper attempt to analyse her feelings until long after the letter had been posted. And then, when the idea of going back to Omura did suggest itself to her, somehow she always pushed it into the back of her mind, with the result that there the idea of her native place gradually underwent, after long preparation, a curious sublimation.

For example, once when she was very young, she happened, playing at noon in early summer with others of her own age, to come unexpectedly, behind a little farm surrounded with camphor trees, upon a whole field full of salmon-pink peonies. They had been planted by the owner simply for his pleasure, but going back another year to look at them she found he had had to convert the land into a paddy-field, for he was short of money, and Japan was short of Japanese rice. He never planted peonies again, but in her mind the field of quivering, globular, full-orbed strong, delicate, flesh-coloured flowers glowed on always in the rays of an ever-bright meridian sun. The shiny petals, seemingly

A PIECE OF GOOD LUCK

of the texture of strong silk, could be easily crushed with the fingers or slit with the nails, but the petals in her memory were indestructible.

In the Omura of her mind there was a field of peonies; in the Omura to which her body was asked to return there was only a muddy rice-field. This contrast did not only appear in vegetable affairs, it came in everywhere, all along the line. The distance between the two Omuras was always increasing, the one gleaming in a tender haze; the other bare as bones. In one her mother still lived; in one her mother was dead. One was the scene of old wholehearted hopes whose vagueness made them dearer, the Omura of her childhood; the other exhaled a faint whiff of disillusion, this Omura she could not go back to. Her mind had kept much of its childish quality, so let it not be supposed that she carefully reasoned out and balanced things for herself. As for saying to herself that if she went back her prospects would be better than if she stayed — she would never have dared to say such a thing, even had she been capable of saying it. There was nothing and nobody to push or drag her away, and so she stayed.

She had completely forgotten how her mother had said it was 'a piece of good luck' for her to go to Tokyo. Had she remembered, she would have agreed whole-heartedly. She would have said yes, she considered she was lucky to be in Tokyo still, she was lucky to be something more than a mere country girl. She regretted nothing, was neither particularly elated nor depressed, and hoped for she knew not what. How many people are in the same boat! She became friendlier with the other servants, and a busy gossip, though not a malicious one. She knew all that was to be known of the ins and outs of the affairs of everybody in the hotel and many people outside it. Every newspaper she set eyes on she set hands on, and gradually formed a bulky collection of cuttings (some of the earlier ones, including the well-worn accounts of the double death of Minami and Tsuya, were already

STORIES OF JAPAN

yellowing with age) which she kept in a large cardboard box covered with red satin. In the same box there was a small doll.

She was given much of the marketing to do, and soon got familiar with the numerous tradesmen at the back door, the cheeky ones, the servile ones and the domineering ones. She proved herself a bargainer with the makings of a good housewife. Sometimes at her work, washing a floor, for instance, or hanging out blue-and-white clothes to dry on the breezy platform on the roof, or late at night just before undressing, she would indulge herself in a little pleasant melancholy: she would even think of going back to Omura. Then she could be heard crooning some sentimental folksong, like the *Sadobushi* which she had picked up somewhere:

Towards Sado Island, towards Sado Island,
Inclined trees and grasses;
There's a dreamy and a happy land.

It is a kind of *Swanee River*, and she sang it in a tiny, far-away voice, not melodious at all, but so thin and shrill that it was almost like an insect's.

Sometimes when she was not aware of it the great body of Mrs. Kikuchi would pause at the top of the stairs, or at a door or window to watch her or listen to her for a moment at her work. Then both women, one unconscious of the other's presence, might be smiling secretly to themselves.

Hara Chiyé is still working at the Kaméfuku Hotel. She now fancies herself in love with the butcher's young man who comes twice a day to the back door. They are, indeed, likely to marry soon. If they do, Chiyé will of course hope for a child. Why not? Don't you remember?— That fortune-teller she went to said there was no reason why she should not have a child.

THE PORTRAIT OF AN EMPEROR

ONE summer's day in the first quarter of the present century Yoshida Shojiro was appointed principal of a country school in the prefecture of F——. He was nearly forty, though he felt much younger, especially on that day. He regarded this appointment as an important step in his career. But still it was merely a step, for he was not without ambition. His father, a silk merchant, had left a flourishing business and three sons, two of whom had continued to trade with considerable success. Yoshida was often a little galled by the knowledge that his two brothers secretly despised him for his profession if not for his comparative poverty, and also by being aware that it was generally said of him that he ought to have been a business man. The fact is, he looked like and seemed to have the character of a business man, and knew it. He hoped to become in time a conspicuous official with a post in the Mombusho, or the director of a high school, or even an assistant professor in a university: once, but only once, in a dream, he saw himself actually as Minister of Education, with a telephone at his elbow: he unhooked the receiver and was just telling some secretary that, yes, if it could be fitted in, he would consent to lay the foundation stone on Thursday week — when the alarm clock woke him up. He earnestly believed that about an official of rank there is something more sacred, a more radiant aura, than there is about even a millionaire. This belief kept him going. It pulled him over those rare occasional moments of ennui, of doubt, of sick headache which are apt to occur even in the best-regulated officials. And so, when he was telling somebody about some clever thing he had done, he could afford, as an official, to say jokingly, 'You see, I am

STORIES OF JAPAN

quite clever at business. I ought to have been a business man.' And having said this he would laugh or titter nervously.

This laugh was quite characteristic out of school hours, and prevailed in all kinds of conversations, even serious ones. When he laughed his eyes almost closed, and behind the projecting teeth and shaking smile his quick calculating brain could do its work. For he certainly had a quick, shrewd brain. It would be quite unfair to say he deliberately used his cheerfulness as a mask. It was simply a nervous laugh, which he naturally did nothing to suppress, because he knew that to succeed one must be popular, to be popular one must be polite, to be polite one must be cheerful. Of course, on official occasions he preserved the becoming dignity. Also, he never smiled to his wife. She was a model Japanese wife, silent, hard-working, obedient, trusting and trustworthy, a good mother and housekeeper, with some natural and some acquired tact and good sense; in fact, a good, simple woman altogether, and quite pleasant looking.

Another peculiar occasion for the smile to fade was when anybody happened to say something which might possibly, conceivably, be interpreted in a sense at all adverse. For example, if one said, 'Perhaps your little son is tired after his long walk?' or 'Don't you think it's rather cold weather for this time of year?' he would immediately appear as though he thought one were trying to 'get at' him — almost as if the fatigue of the infant might be construed as a reproach to the virility of the parent, or as if a caprice of the weather involved some personal responsibility. The answer to such polite conventional fatuities would always be a shock and a contradictory 'No, no, no, not at all,' in which there was no smile, but a quick touch of righteous indignation. In sum, one couldn't help feeling sorry for the nervous weakness of the man. The sight of a man unable to find strength in himself and trying to arm himself with authority is far too common to provoke surprise.

Yoshida's management of the school is best hinted at by

THE PORTRAIT OF AN EMPEROR

quoting his retort to a subordinate, who had said, 'As a teacher, I thought it was right for me to—'

'You must always remember,' Yoshida impressed on him, 'that your first duty is not to be a good teacher, but a good official.'

The recipient of this reproof was a meek and spectacled young man who sometimes wrote poemlets about autumn dew and the shadows of dragon-flies' voices: he afterwards went away and of course never came to any good.

For the first year or two everything went smoothly enough. The principal was not popular, but he was not unpopular: he was accepted. His nickname was *Mezamashi*, which means alarm-clock. He made up for his strictness in school by resolute geniality outside it, and was more pleasing to his superiors than to those below him. Almost his only anxieties during those first years were the visits of inspectors and the occasional weakness of examination candidates, but these feelings were modified by a casual hint that intimated a possibility that he might after a year or two be recommended for promotion.

His family life was perfectly satisfactory. His wife was obedient and well-behaved, and without any obtrusiveness took a real interest in his career and in such details of the everyday routine as he chose to confide to her. She was proud of his ambition, and showed her pride by means of respectful sympathy. They had two dear little children, and everything in the garden was lovely.

Yoshida received a letter to say that on a certain day in about three months' time he might expect a special official messenger carrying a copy of that photograph of the Emperor which was just being issued to every school, college and university in the country, and advising him to prepare suitable ceremonies for its reception: the letter concluded by asking whether he had a proper place ready to house the photograph permanently.

STORIES OF JAPAN

From the moment when Yoshida read this letter a change began in him. Probably his wife was the first to notice it, though of course she said nothing to anybody and very little to herself. But she couldn't help wondering why he was getting so fussy about the reception of the Imperial photograph. Not that she failed to recognize its importance. In pure, unquestioning loyalty she was an example. One might have seen her, for instance, on public holidays, hanging out the national flag, a red spot on a white ground, and the reverence of her fingers and the radiance of her face had something almost hypnotic about them. But her gentle, cow-like placidity simply could not understand fussiness. As she had been educated to put up with everything, she said nothing.

The first thing Yoshida decided was to build a special little kiosk or shrine of reinforced *konkurito* to hold the precious gift. The tiny building should have no windows, and one double folding door to be opened only on occasions of national importance. But it must be very strong, rainproof, fireproof, burglar-proof, foolproof and earthquakeproof. The school was in funds, so the work was at once sanctioned by authority. This was the only school in that part of the country which was to have the privilege of providing such exceptional security for the Imperial gift. Such photographs had usually been kept in a safe part of the main building.

There is no doubt that the authorities were favourably impressed, and there is no doubt that if Yoshida made the plan partly to impress them, he also did it from motives of genuine duty, loyalty and enthusiasm. He arranged a ceremony for the laying of the foundation according to Shinto rites and he himself was present in a frock-coat, striped trousers, a very high collar and black satin tie. As it was very hot, the month being June, he perspired freely, particularly after making his speech. But fortunately in the photographs which he had caused to be taken nothing like that was really obvious: in them his face seemed to

THE PORTRAIT OF AN EMPEROR

shine with nothing but dutiful satisfaction. Naturally the whole school was present at this function.

While the building of the kiosk, or shrine, was going on, the principal came every day, and usually twice daily, to watch. He not only watched, he made inquiries, assertions, suggestions and positive contradictions, so that the workmen, patient, cheerful, stolid country fellows, became piqued. They said nothing to him. Perhaps it was just as well he did not know what they were saying to one another. One of them became so nettled that he ventured to oppose some trifling, but, as it seemed to him, unpractical order of Yoshida's with a polite and reasonable refusal. Yoshida lost his head, said he regarded this as an act of open rebellion against authority, dismissed the workman and communicated his name to the police, suggesting that an eye ought to be kept on him, as he was quite likely to stop at nothing short of lese-majesty. The police filed his name and kept an eye on him. Yoshida gave an account of everything to his wife as usual, and she, as usual, had not the slightest doubt that he had done perfectly right, and told him so.

Just before the concrete shrine was finished, an inspector arrived and officially inspected it. He congratulated the principal, who thereupon told him the whole history of the little structure, its virtues, and what it had cost and how long it had taken and how he himself had supervised its daily progress, and how, why and when the workman had been dismissed, etc. The inspector at first listened carefully and assented affably, but later he became a trifle bewildered by the principal's enthusiasm, and half mesmerized by the principal's vivacious unceasing laugh. Yoshida was confident that everything he had said to the inspector would be retold at headquarters. He repeated every word to his wife. She had no doubt that he was perfectly right, and her eager attention never waned, but at the end she did venture to hazard that he ought not to worry so much, as he was looking quite thin since the end of the summer. He gave her such a look for her

STORIES OF JAPAN

presumption that she never again dared to offer him a word of advice. After all, she told herself, he was always right, and there could be no doubt that his zeal would eventually be rewarded with promotion—it was time for her to wash the baby.

Some time elapsed between the completion of the building and the arrival of the photograph, and others besides his wife began to notice the principal's excessive preoccupations. He was thirsty for congratulations, easily agitated about trifles, and the smallest school children had begun to feel nervous of him. It was found necessary to combine the two ceremonies of reception and installation, and this was a great disappointment to him.

When the great day came he got out of bed long before dawn to look at the sky. It was the first day since his marriage that he had got up before his wife. It turned out splendid autumn weather, and everything went off wonderfully well. Of course it was a whole holiday, there were flags and a band, local personages arrived in Ford cars, there were photographers, speeches, reporters—only a country affair, but very satisfying. All the teachers, children and spectators filed before the open shrine and bowed profoundly to the photograph dimly seen inside.

His wife shared his pride and pleasure. At midday, however, when the very bright hot sunshine made his black frock-coat look as grey as ashes, she had noticed that he was beginning to go bald. She said nothing, having no doubt that he was doing the right thing in losing his hair, for he had turned forty. Now that all this concern about the photograph had been duly arranged, she hoped he would settle back again into the usual routine. But in this she was somewhat disappointed, for although in a way he had certainly become calmer, a fundamental change seemed to have come into him lately. She could not understand his fussiness and increasing nervousness, and would have liked him

THE PORTRAIT OF AN EMPEROR

to see a doctor. She said nothing, but showed this much of her thoughts in a letter to her sister in Osaka — 'He seems to worry about trifles,' she wrote, 'but perhaps will become calmer.'

He had now formed the habit of going every morning, fussily, on his way to school, to inspect the little shrine. In the town people commented on his devotion to duty, though it is doubtful if anybody actually used the word 'officious.' This habit was bad enough, but worse was to come. Time passes vaguely and impalpably in these country places. A rumour arose that a lesser Prince of the Blood might visit the town on his way to manoeuvres, and in the uncertainty of its truth Yoshida brought himself down to something like nervous prostration, but the rumour was never confirmed and the prince never came. Spring again gave way to summer; summer to autumn; and Yoshida began to go twice daily to inspect the shrine.

'If anything went wrong,' he told his wife, 'I should never forgive myself.'

She wanted to reply that nothing perhaps was likely to go wrong, but instead she murmured a soothing assent. He did not play with the children now so much as he used to. Perhaps he thought that as they were growing older he ought not to take too much notice of them, to spoil them. No doubt he was right. She heard indirectly that he was unpopular, but she put this down to jealousy, and as nothing came of it she did not worry.

The winter was uneventful, except that Yoshida refused to take a proper holiday, returning abruptly from a hot-spring resort after only four days. The time for promotion, he said, was getting near, and as he had lately read in the newspapers of a terrible case in which a school photograph had been lost in a fire, he was doubly anxious that nothing should go wrong. His behaviour was by now well known in the countryside, and though some people thought him to be the victim of a mania nobody said so,

STORIES OF JAPAN

for one does not comment at all on anything even so remotely connected with the Imperial House. It is true that the Japanese sometimes understand the art of silent conversation, but it is also true that the swords of policemen have been known to transfix unspoken words. Yoshida, continued to do what he regarded as his duty, and nobody interfered with him. He was sometimes stared at.

One morning, late in February, he was awakened by the sound of water dripping from the eaves. He went to the window just after the sun had risen. The snow was melting rapidly and the thatched roofs of cottages smoked in the sun-thaw. After breakfast he went out cheerfully, wearing gum boots, a short black overcoat and a brown felt hat. His wife was delighted to hear him humming an old tune as he closed the gate behind him. The dazzling sunlight reflected from the thawing snow always put him in a good mood, and he felt almost as light-hearted as a schoolboy. But when he came in sight of the playground he saw that at school something was wrong. His heart throbbed painfully, and he walked quicker, splashing through the slippery mud and slush, but as he came nearer a sick terror took hold of the pit of his stomach. A crowd of children and some peasants were standing there, staring and pointing at — what? *What?* Yoshida almost ran. The spectators made way for him, saluted him, but when he said in his agitation, 'What's wrong? What's up?' they didn't answer. They pointed and stared. He then saw what was wrong. The door of the shrine was open, and the photograph had disappeared. A ray of the sun lit up the bare wall.

Everybody expected him to fall into a frenzy. But he was by no means the madman he was taken for. Not at all. He was a loyal and dutiful official, a servant of his Imperial lord and master. He behaved with exemplary calmness, quietly fastened the door of the shrine, ordered the lessons to continue as usual, summoned an emergency meeting of the teachers, told them what had

THE PORTRAIT OF AN EMPEROR

happened, asked them to leave everything to him, telephoned for the police and explained what he had found, and then, on the stroke of the bell, entered his classroom as usual. He was invariably punctual, infallibly so, since he had learned by chance that his nickname was Alarm-clock.

At lunch-time he telephoned to the police again, who had as yet no news, returned to his classroom, and finally went home as usual — except that this afternoon he omitted to go near the shrine, only glancing over the heads of the school children at the broken lock on the door. When he came in, his wife saw at once that something had upset him, but she said nothing, and began to clean the mud off his gumboots. He had gone straight to his study and was very silent, so she peeped in to ask if she should bring tea. He was writing a letter. He started at her voice, and drew a sheet of blotting-paper over his writing.

‘No, not yet. In half an hour,’ he said.

She came back at the proper time with the tea, and he handed her the letter, already sealed up, and told her to take it at once to the post, which she did. She could not help noticing that it was addressed to a very exalted personage, and wondered why, half feeling all the time that something was wrong. She never suspected that it contained her husband’s resignation from his position. In the street one or two people seemed to be staring at her curiously. At the post office a friend came up and exchanged several bows and after the usual compliments begged to offer her sincere condolences on the misfortune which had overtaken her respected husband. The poor woman was at once engulfed in a wave of nameless fear.

‘What — what misfortune?’ she asked.

The friend was utterly astonished and confused, and smiled politely.

‘Is it possible that you don’t know? Ah, how sorry I am that I should be the one to carry you such bad news. The Imperial photograph has been stolen from the school —’

STORIES OF JAPAN

'Is that so?'

'Some peasant took it, they say, whom your husband once dismissed. The rascally fellow wanted his revenge. Pray accept my condolences in this unspeakable affliction —'

The principal's wife had only one thought, to give and to give with all her might streams of pure warm sympathy as a cow gives milk. She ran back home with the small steps of habit, propriety and the dignity of a schoolmaster's wife. She ran through the wet streets as fast as she could for the narrow kimono, but when she got home Yoshida was already dead. He had eaten rat-poison. His face and body were horribly distorted and his children were staring at the corpse.

Only two other suicides were reported in the newspaper as having occurred on the same day. A young private in the Imperial army had done away with himself, overwhelmed at having mislaid a pair of slippers issued to him by his regiment. And further, a clerk in the Imperial bureau of communications, suspected of the theft of two yen from a colleague, had seen fit to throw himself from the roof-garden of a department store in the Ginza. But neither of these cases had such a large paragraph as Yoshida's.

The feelings of the widow were not what those of a European woman would be in circumstances at all parallel. She was deeply aware of the honourable behaviour of her late husband, a credit to his country, a starry flower in the annals of his family, a proud memory to his wife and children. Her love for him as a husband, her respect for him as a man of judgment, were rather strengthened than shaken. There was not the slightest doubt that he had, for the last time, done the right thing. As for her, she took the children and went to live with her sister in Osaka.

Her brother-in-law was no longer young, but he was very well off. His house was large and comfortable, and contained a miscellaneous collection of rich and poor relations, stray guests and visitors, dependents and retainers. He was, in fact, a *narikin*, a

THE PORTRAIT OF AN EMPEROR

profiteer of the boom of 1920, quite simple and kind-hearted in spite of his wealth, and often showed special kindness to his sister-in-law's children. Yoshida's widow settled down to a quiet, regular, respectable life. Her health was good, like that of her children, she had everything she wanted, and a real affection for her sister. Although life in Osaka was an interesting change from former years, she had plenty of time to think about the past: but she never became morose, and rather pleased everybody with her cheerful staidness.

Among the more permanent occupants of the house were several students, and though she saw little of them, she sometimes heard pieces of gossip about them and even felt a vague motherly interest in their activities. She could not help noticing one of them, a young man called Wada, a sort of cousin of the family. He had long hair, and a pale face which indicated a mixture of devilry and sadness that attracted her very much. She had never had more than a few words, but wished she could have a long talk with him. She would have liked to ask him about his career, his ambition, and so on. While she was in this state of mind she chanced one day to overhear part of a conversation between two older members of the household. One voice sounded like that of her brother-in-law. They were talking about young Wada.

'He takes no interest in his work at the university.'

'So?'

'Refuses to compete in the examinations.'

'What! Really?'

'Speaks disrespectfully, associates with bad companions and clearly intends to go to the bad.'

'Ah, I'm very sorry to hear it. Women, I suppose? Some geisha or other?'

(The listener's heart beat a very little faster.)

'No, no. I only wish it were. It's worse than that. Much worse. The fact is, I'll tell you, he calls himself a radical —'

STORIES OF JAPAN

(The listener did not know exactly what a radical is, but she guessed instinctively that it was something bad.)

'— a radical. And he's actually on the black list of the police. It is more than a disappointment to me. It's a disgrace.'

'But perhaps he'll grow out of it. These young men —'

'Well, I hope so, but I fear — Do you know what he actually had the effrontery to say to me the other day? I told him he was disloyal to the Emperor. "I have got nothing against the Emperor," he said, "but after all he's only a man." "If you ever say or think such a thing again," I said, "I'll disown you." He didn't answer.'

'Ha!'

'And I may have to disown him —'

At this point Yoshida's widow lost the thread of the talk. For one brief second the remark of Wada had seemed like a flash of truth, for one instant she was on the verge of doubting, and then she was absolutely flooded with a proper revulsion of feeling. The blood mounted to her cheeks. For the first time in her life she felt something like anger. To think that that boy, that student, that lazy long-haired good-for-nothing, that *radical*, should mock at the Most Sacred Majesty for which her husband had died! To think that he should dare to *doubt*! She saw again the face of Yoshida on the floor of his room, the projecting teeth horribly exposed and slavered with yellowish foam, the familiar features fixed in the last grim purpose, the children watching. . . . All her pride, all her love, all her life, summoned up in her at this moment a magnificent renewal of the faith she had never lost.

She no longer wished even to think of Wada, and meeting him by chance the same evening she felt that she froze him with a smiling politeness that cut like a knife. Wada himself only thought her manners were rather stiff.

'I suppose,' he remarked to somebody, 'it is because she has lived nearly all her life in the country. A *petite bourgeoisie*.'

THE PORTRAIT OF AN EMPEROR

Yoshida's widow's mind, which had never really wavered, was now for ever made up. As the years went by, she became formal and even prim, devoted to her children and to household affairs. But the words 'only a man' haunted her till her dying day.

1927

THE SLEEPING HUSBAND

I FEEL a few lines are needed to explain how this fragment came into my possession. When I was living in one of the better quarters of Tokyo I happened to be acquainted with a certain officer in the army, my neighbour, and his family. Owing to circumstances which will appear below, this family had occasion to take refuge in my house for several days, and Madame S., the officer's wife, occupied much of that time in writing. When she left the house she was in a great hurry, and left her manuscript behind. I am not a scholar of the Japanese language, but as soon as I learnt that she had been writing personal memoranda, I wrote to her in Oita prefecture and asked her permission to have them translated and to allow me to print them abroad, without her name. This request surprised her so much that she at first refused, saying that she had never dreamed of writing those pages for any eyes but her own, and expressing shame and confusion at her carelessness in leaving the papers behind when she had to quit my house at a moment's notice. As she did not specifically ask for them to be returned to her, I pressed for her consent to a translation, urging her with the obvious remark that the fact she had written for the love of the thing and for her own satisfaction showed her to have something of the character of an artist: and I quoted an anecdote of a famous Chinese painter of old times, who said that he worked from the same necessity and inner law as the silkworm spinning her cocoon, that is to say, according to nature. I did not feel that this was an exaggeration, for if there was one thing that I particularly remarked about Madame S. in the short time that I knew her, it was her natural grace. At last she obligingly yielded to an importunate foreigner, and here is the

THE SLEEPING HUSBAND

result. The too literal translation I have simply recast, without adding or leaving out anything.

§ 1

[This first part was written in her own house, and carried to mine when she came. The first page seems to be lost.]

. . . morning, and as I sit here I recall that it must have stopped snowing quite early last night. When I looked out this morning the sky was gem-like. I don't know what the time is now, but the sun has risen quite high in the sky, it makes the snow warm and the white layers on the roofs are rapidly melting. Glittering drops are falling from the eaves as heavily as if it were raining, and when the paper screens are shut and I see on them the shadows of the falling drops, I can almost imagine a sunny shower outside. I open them again, and the first thing I see is a young maple tree in the garden, which has been bent down under a mass of snow — now unexpectedly dislodged! so the young tree springs back to its former position. What a sugary, swishing sound that was! I remember how frightened I was as a child when I heard for the first time a bamboo cracking under a weight of snow in the middle of the night with a loud report.

'And now under the eaves there is quite a little runnel, and flakes of foam and bubbles float away, whirl away on it like boats on the rapids of Hozu. A light steam is rising from the ground. I wish I could continue for ever to look at the beauties of nature.

'In this room, on the mats just behind me, my husband is sleeping with his mouth open. His head is only a few feet from my knees, but it seems much farther away. Toki, the servant, is out, and has taken the children, so the house is unusually quiet. There are two sounds, the ceaseless drip-dropping of the melting snow and the snoring of my husband. I am in just such a position

STORIES OF JAPAN

where a woman ought to be happy — between her sleeping husband and a quiet garden; and yet, although my children are healthy and I am devoted to them, although I am not starving, I am miserable. I don't complain aloud (how unthinkable!), so I'll just put down on paper as well as I can a few of my feelings. If I can get them out of me and see what they look like, then afterwards I'll destroy it all. One thing I'll remember is that my life is not as bad as poor Toki's has been. I'll try and say more about her than about myself, for she has told me so much, and as for writing about my own life I don't know how or where on earth to begin — not because so much has happened to me, but because — well, I don't know.

'What really surprises me is that even when I married I was so ready to expect the best from men. I didn't think they were angels, but then nor did I think they were devils: I don't think that now, but I know some of them come near it. Ah, this life is a dream. Before I married I must have been blind or deaf. I certainly couldn't have been ignorant, for there were plenty of signs and hints, even plainer things to guide me. Was I so innocent, or simply a fool? Was I more foolish than other girls? I wonder.

'I remember how we used to call all our men-teachers at the high school by the names of flowers, nicknaming them violet, peach-blossom, tiger lily, *kikyo*,¹ and so on. How absurd! Yet I believe I'd do the same again, I could do it now, for I am not disillusioned or cynical, I am simply unhappily married.

'To take, for instance, young Kishi, who has quite unwittingly caused most of this last unreasonable trouble, I know my love for him is a true thing, and there would be to me nothing ridiculous in calling him by a flower name. Which one would suit him? I can't think exactly now. Perhaps *yamabuki* — the single one, which I, unlike most people, have always preferred to the double. . . .

¹ The Chinese bell-flower.

THE SLEEPING HUSBAND

'How angry my husband would be if he by chance read these words! Is there *anything* in this house which doesn't make him angry, at any time whatsoever? But I'm not afraid. I don't love secrets so much. I have already admitted to him that I still feel, and shall always feel, a sincere but innocent affection for Kishi. I love him with a pure, true love. Is it likely that I should have committed adultery with that mere boy, as I am accused of doing? No, no, I am quite the faithful wife. Oh, quite. But the only answer I got to my honest assertions, for my frankness, was a blow in the face with my husband's knuckles. It was not the first. But I'm going too fast. I'm not going to try and write my life (as if I could!), but I must go back a bit. . . .

§ 2

[This section was written in my house.]

'It is strange I should have stopped just there. The last words I wrote were "go back a bit". But where have I gone? Now I'm not even writing in my own house, but actually in a foreigner's. He's kind to the children and to me — rather over-polite to me, which is ridiculous. It's unnatural to be always saying "thank you" and "I beg your pardon" to a woman, but I can't help admitting that I like it. If I'm going to explain how I come to find myself here, in a foreigner's house, with the two children and Toki, I must stop this way of writing, it's too fluent and colloquial, like talking. And I began in such a high-flown way — well, I can't keep up such a formal style. I must be as brief as possible.

'Well, then, my esteemed parents are well-to-do as they have always been, but their reasons for marrying me to this man will always seem to me inscrutable. I have learnt to be dutifully filial to my father and mother, but I told them I didn't want to marry a soldier, and that I could never love this particular soldier. I

STORIES OF JAPAN

never liked the look of him, and I was able to see him three times before my marriage. I have twice asked my parents to arrange a divorce, but of course it was useless to ask. How could I expect them to agree? Once, also, when my husband had spent everything and even borrowed money on account of one of his affairs with women, he forced me to go and ask them for money. This they also refused; so now I don't see much of them, though I write regularly. Nobody can call me undutiful, either as daughter or wife. I have long since got used to the indifference of my parents and the behaviour of my husband. He has been much worse during the last year. I have got used to his drunkenness and dirty talk to the children, but once he actually came in with his friend Captain H. and two geishas. It wouldn't be true to say that all were completely drunk, though the two men certainly were. The girls had been drinking. Not only did I have to endure this orgy in my house, I had to assist at it. I had to receive those women, and serve them with smiles. Why do I speak of it as if it were some extraordinary episode of the distant past? It may happen again. I have never complained, nor have I told anybody but Toki. She said she was sorry for me.

'Our house is too big for us, my husband said from the beginning, so one room has always been let, and the rest of us have crowded into two others. The lodger is a student, and I've got to know him and some of his friends quite well: one of them, called Kishi, happened to get ill. I was sorry for him, and liked him, and as he was poor and living in bad lodgings I asked him to come to our house and we would look after him till he got well again. My husband was away for the autumn manoeuvres, and then for another fortnight on some other duty. By the time he came back Kishi, after being with us about a month, had gone away quite fit to his rooms again. At his rooms, it seems, there is a young girl, the daughter of his landlady, who has long loved him in vain; and in the house next door is a private in my husband's regiment who loves that girl. She never looks at the

THE SLEEPING HUSBAND

soldier, and thinks only of Kishi, who never looks at her! It is easy to imagine the despair of the soldier, but I think he acted very foolishly. He wrote an anonymous letter to my husband saying that Kishi had slept with me for a month. What did he expect to gain? Did he think to make Kishi appear disreputable to the girl? Did he owe me some unknown grudge? Did he hope to win the favour of my husband, his superior? Whatever he hoped, the results were unfortunate. Perhaps I had been indiscreet to let Kishi sleep in the same room as me, but Toki and the children were there too.

'My husband came back suddenly, two days earlier than he was expected, drunk of course, seized me by the hair, and started blurting out the whole story with a lot of disgusting remarks which I have no wish to record. Our student lodger slipped out of the house and went and told Kishi to escape, as my husband was threatening to kill him; and then came back and tried to protect me. He kindly knocked my husband down, and we had no more trouble that night, only words.

'The next evening I went out to buy something, and when I came back my husband had drawn his sword and was ordering the children to kneel down, because he intended to behead them. They were too terrified to cry, and had already started to obey him. Their little eyes seemed much larger than usual. He was really wild, so our student lodger went for the police: but they refused to come, saying they had no right to rebuke a man in his own house unless some crime had actually been committed. When the lodger returned, my husband was kneeling on me and trying to pull out my hair: Toki had managed to hide the children. At last, leaving my husband and our lodger in argument, I went out with Toki and the children, and we spent the night safely in a police shelter. The two policemen on duty were awfully kind, and bought some goody-goodies for the children; one of them obligingly told me the story of his life.

'My husband has already got his revenge for my supposed

STORIES OF JAPAN

union with Kishi. He has arranged to be transferred to Oita prefecture, so well known for its roughness and remoteness, and I am ordered there with the children. My husband is taking several days to "celebrate" his departure from Tokyo, and our lodger forbids me to go to my own house at all. How we shall finish packing I don't know. Meanwhile I am taking refuge in this foreigner's house, and while we have been here Toki has told me all her history, so that I am ashamed now to have spoken of my own troubles. She knows better than I the meaning of lonely sorrow, yet how cheerful she is! She has worked for us for months, and there is always a smile on her face, which is almost a baby face, though she must be nearly twenty. I believe it is impossible for her to feel anger, but I know she can feel fear and other things deeply enough. I have never seen her appear either sad or annoyed at anything, and even in telling me her story she smiled all the time.

§ 3

'Toki had never told me anything of her experiences until quite lately, when she saw that I was just beginning to suffer. She said she was afraid I would get rid of her if I knew her story. Most people would refuse to keep such a servant, she said, and it's true. Certainly from her baby face I could never have dreamt what she has been through; and yet, now and again, I have almost suspected that there was something under the surface — she has a strange way of narrowing her eyes, especially in moments of doubt or apprehension, as when she is asked some unusual question. . . .

'Before I begin, I must put it down that I don't reproach anybody. If my parents choose to abandon me to such a husband, is it not because they believe that I belong now entirely to him and his family? Doesn't it require some sacrifice, some unselfishness on their part, to give me up? I can't help feeling that they love

THE SLEEPING HUSBAND

me dearly. If anybody read these pages they might think I was blaming my husband. I am not blaming him: I am unhappy with him, and I am sorry for my children. Nor would I blame anybody for Toki's life, for there's something wrong, something evil, that makes people bad. They are not naturally bad. Her father must love her as his daughter, and yet she says she can't see his love. *I can see it, I can realize that he persecutes and bullies her because he loves her.* I believe I can understand some of her feelings, though she told me her story without much comment, without saying very particularly whether people were good or bad, so I'll try and do the same. She doesn't seem to judge people by what they are, but by what they do — that is, if she judges them at all!

'Her father, she told me, is quite well off, but loves his money so much that he refused to let her go to a high school, which he could easily have afforded. Her home is in Chiba prefecture, and she has several brothers and sisters. She didn't speak much of her youngest days, but there are two incidents she particularly remembers, which she told me at the end, so I'll keep them to the end. It is quite plain that even as a child she was unhappy at home, and so as soon as she was old enough she ran away.

'Although she had never been there she ran straight to Tokyo, and went to a servants' exchange or employment bureau, where she was told to wait in an anteroom, but was almost at once shown into the manager's room. The manager was talking to an oldish man, who seemed to Toki to have a fine character. He sat a little aside while she answered all the manager's questions, but when she was asked what kind of work she wanted to do she didn't quite know what to answer. It was at this point that the older man leant forward, touched her on the knee and told her in a confidential tone that he was the head of a private detective agency. His firm, he said, were at present looking for some clever young women detectives — how would she like to

STORIES OF JAPAN

try that? She had no money and she was hungry, so she said she'd like it very much.

"Then," said the gentleman, "let's go along at once. It's all right, we'll take good care of you."

'And she went with him. It was already evening, so they didn't go to his office, but to a private house in the suburbs. Here she prepared supper, and they both sat down to eat it. The gentleman was very kind, and brought her some soda-water to drink. Very soon after this she either fell asleep or became unconscious, for the soda-water was doped. She says that she has no clear knowledge of what went on in the night, but she awoke late in the morning in a very confused state of mind and body, and the first thing she saw was a letter from her host which said that he didn't like to wake her up as she seemed so tired, that he had had to go out to business and that he hoped to return in the evening. Her first thought was to escape. But where could she go? She knew nobody in Tokyo. She was alone in the house. It would be better to wait and see what turned up. Anything would be better than going back home, back to the father and elder brother she particularly hated. . . .

'And in the evening the nice gentleman returned, bringing with him her father and that same elder brother. He had left early in the morning for Chiba prefecture, and, representing himself as a private detective, had informed the girl's father that by a lucky chance and his own adroitness he had already managed to trace the girl. If a considerable sum of money were immediately advanced to him, he thought he could lay hands on her. She might, he said, be in the town, but if she was found in the suburbs it would be necessary to pay a bit extra. On the way back he affected to inquire at an office, and then came straight to the house where he had left Toki. When she saw her father and brother she dashed out of the room, snatched a pair of scissors off a low table and locked herself up in the W.C. There, overwhelmed, maddened with rage and shame, fear and disappoint-

THE SLEEPING HUSBAND

ment, she ran the scissors quickly over her head, and hacked off roughly but speedily the whole of her long and beautiful black hair. At the moment when the three men were about to force the door she walked out with an extraordinary jagged head, and dangling in her hand thick and lustrous hanks of hair. At first her relations were too surprised even to speak, but they soon hurried her out of the house and took her home. When they got back they were so ashamed of her escapade and of her appearance that they kept her shut up in one room. She says she was forbidden to leave it even for a bath, half-starved, and treated with cruelty. After three weeks of this frightful confinement she escaped to Tokyo again.

§ 4

'This time she went to quite a different employment agency, and as soon as she came there realized how much better it was than the former one. It was kept by a middle-aged man and his wife, simple folk, who asked her to spend the night in their house which was tacked on to the back of the office, and this she cautiously but willingly consented to do. The wife of the manager was really kind and motherly in her manner, and suggested that Toki would do well to become a hospital nurse.

"Nursing," she said, "is a very special profession. There is something noble about such a calling. It is indeed a holy mission. And although one must work hard, it is an honour to belong to such a profession." Toki felt that this was quite true, and at once undertook to work in a hospital.

It was not a very large hospital, so there were not many patients, and between them and the staff, which was also small, there was unusual intimacy. Toki's hair was of course still very short, and everybody thought that she had made it so for coquetish reasons, so she was at once nicknamed *Moga*.¹ This nick-

¹ A truncated Japanese form of *modan garu*, i.e. 'modern girl'.

STORIES OF JAPAN

name was used even to her ever-smiling face, and very soon familiar remarks were added, for the usual discipline of a hospital was not in evidence here at all. The familiar remarks gave way to solicitations.

'It hadn't taken her long to discover that all the patients were there to be cured of venereal diseases. Without having any idea as to what might become of her, she repeatedly urged the superintendent, or doctor in charge, to let her go; but it seemed that she had previously signed some sort of contract, though she was not aware of having done so. They told her that if she ran away she would be brought back, but that they would allow her to go after six months. She stayed there for six months, during which one of her patients died of general paralysis of the insane.

'About a week before she was due to go, she happened one evening when off duty to be walking in a park, not far away, when she luckily met a man she knew and liked, a distant and friendly connexion of her family. To him she described her situation, begging him to find for her another more tolerable, or at least to put her in the way of finding one. The face of her cousin (as she called him) was gloomy, but not unkind. His forehead was full of wrinkles, for he was a journalist by profession, and no stranger to domestic anxieties. His wife was consumptive, he said, and they were now living at Hiratsuka, and kept one servant. He suggested to Toki that she should come and look after his wife, be a companion to her and cheer her up a bit. His manner was agreeable, and his offer was made in kindness and sincerity, and although he warned her that she could expect neither money nor joy, she accepted the place with eagerness, and at once went there on leaving the hospital.

'Her cousin the journalist was nearly always away on business, so his wife, except for the servant, was much alone, for she had neither friends nor relations. The grass mats in the house were in places discoloured by blood, especially in one room, where the lady, whose malady was in an advanced stage, spent much of

THE SLEEPING HUSBAND

her time. Her wasted frame and haggard face, a ruin of loveliness, at once aroused the sympathies of Toki, who became a devoted attendant, an attendant to whom the unfortunate woman, knowing she must soon die, confided nearly all her thoughts. Those were not happy days; and the woman and the girl, as time went on, were nearly always alone, for the servant was apparently unpaid, and came in much less often now that Toki undertook so much of the work of the house.

'The slowly dying woman would sit talking, always in the same strain, smiling wanly as if to excuse the absolute hopelessness and nihilism of her words; in the middle of her smiling desolation she would frown, her whole face would contract in an agonized expression, and vainly clapping to her mouth a thin white hand she would be shaken, shaken, wrenched almost to death, with a protracted and harrowing spasm, that Toki was powerless to alleviate. The invalid had a habit of sitting in the dark, as electric light, she said, hurt her; and another habit of caressing a cat with mottled fur that seemed dear to her. Toki had an instinctive and superstitious dread of cats, but in any case the whole situation would be enough to affect anybody's nerves.

'Directly a moment came when the sun or moon was shining, when there was no wind or special cause for anxiety, when there was an air of gaiety or a silence with flowers, with the chirp of a bird or summery vibrations of insects; or if they were watching a globe with various goldfish; directly a moment came of bright peace, it was false, pain burst out, and all was spattered and stained. The end came soon.

'One breezy spring afternoon, about the time when the cherry trees are covered with flowers, Toki in the garden heard her name faintly cried. She ran in and found the poor woman in agony in the bathroom. She did what she could, and then hurried to fetch the doctor, who was away. She ran back. In the evening the woman died, choked by her own breath. It was already getting late when Toki found herself alone with the dead body. She

STORIES OF JAPAN

hunted for her purse, and at once went to the post office to send a telegram to the absent husband. Unfortunately she couldn't remember exactly which newspaper he was working on. She knew it was one of two, and sent the telegram to the wrong one, after which she was burdened with the suspicion that she might have done so. The husband was not destined to return that night.

'By the time the girl got back to the house it was pretty dark and the wind was rising. A *mokuren*¹ tree at the gate, now still leafless, but full of winged white flowers, looked, she said, as if a whole flock of birds had waveringly settled on it, and were about to fly away again. Just then she remembered that she hadn't seen the cat all day. Where was it? She dreaded to open the door and go in. But of course she was still half expecting that the journalist would return. It never occurred to her to try and get somebody else to help her — besides, whom did she know that would do so? She went in and shut the door, her ears full of the wailing wind and her mind (more than her mind — her whole being) full of thoughts of the cat and the corpse. Everybody knows it is unlucky for these two things to be found together. She didn't know which to fear most. Was the cat inside the house or out? She had a firm idea that it must be inside, and although she dreaded now to open the sliding paper doors of the room where the dead woman lay, she forced herself to look and see if the cat was there. It wasn't; so she closed the room again carefully.

'Toki herself couldn't tell me at all what she really felt that night, but she must have been near to madness. She's a funny girl at the best of times. Which was more terrible, she considered, to have a light in her room or to have none? At all events, she had to put her head tight under the bedclothes, though nothing could drown the fitful screaming of the wind outside. She kept on thinking that she heard the husband at the door — the dead woman moving — the cat stealthily prowling. And she couldn't help thinking of that tree (which had been so gay and scented in

¹ The lily-flowered magnolia.

THE SLEEPING HUSBAND

the morning sun, *that* morning, as far away as a dream) so near to her in the dark, a whole flock of ghostly birds, spirits of the dead, glimmering, fluttering, trying to fly away all together, but somehow failing, and still clinging all together on the bare and waving windy twigs.

'And then she heard a voice. Distinctly. A high voice. A cat's? A woman's? A ghost's? It was outside the house. It was inside the house? It was continually wailing. It didn't want to be let in. A sound she had never heard before, nor could ever hear again. It knew the woman was dead. Toki was afraid to listen to it, afraid to get up and let it in, afraid to be alive. But she couldn't stand the sound. She got up, prepared to pass through two dark rooms to the door to let it in. When she got up the sound ceased. Still she went bravely forward. She was afraid to go back. When she came to the entrance she saw the cat's eyes shining in the dark. It had been inside the house all the time.

'She shrieked and shrieked, but there was nobody to hear her. . . .

§ 5

'These peasants are too superstitious! In the morning she was afraid to get up, and didn't move until she heard a loud daylight knocking. It was the grocer's boy who had come as usual to the back door for orders. Trembling, she sent him to fetch the servant, who had been away for days. Then the husband appeared or was sent for and the house filled with people and light and air. The wind, the cat, the tree and the corpse are all present in her heart to this day.

'The husband had thought himself fully prepared for the woman's death, but now it affected him more profoundly than an unexpected shock could have done. Only three people went with him to the funeral — a friend of his, Toki and the servant. It was a warm sunny day, and Toki's mind was full of the misery of

STORIES OF JAPAN

that broken woman, who had seared her heart with the confession of her loneliness, her meaningless existence, her lack of parents, brothers, sisters, friends, her utter resentful hopelessness. And the feeling which now took possession of Toki was one of limitless inescapable futility, the inanity of living, the dullness of dying. She no longer cared for anything. She missed nothing, wanted nothing, feared nothing, hated nothing. Until at last there rushed into this vacuum the desire to die. She prepared to leave the house, and the journalist was too self-absorbed even to ask her where she was going. She got into a train for Odawara. Why Odawara? Because she had once been there as a child, on some school excursion. She knew what it was like.

'On the evening of the same day as the funeral she was walking on the beach at Odawara. The weather of the morning was fulfilling its promise, and a tranquil moon lit a cloudless sky and a calm sea, the sound of whose ripples came occasionally to the ear like sighs of contentment. She sat down. An elderly woman approached her.

"I beg your pardon, but I wonder what you're doing here?"

"I came here to-day," Toki was prepared to lie without any hesitation, "to visit my relations, but their house has been moved — they've gone away."

"Where are you going to stay, then, to-night?"

"I'm not sure. Can you — can you tell me of a suitable hotel?"

"I can't; for I think there's no hotel would admit a young girl like you alone."

"Oh."

"But if you like I'll be pleased to find you a room. I know a nice house near here that belongs to my friend, who will, I'm sure, give you a secure lodging for to-night. Won't you come with me now? It's getting late. How bright the moon is!"

Toki went with her, and occupied a room as suggested at a very respectable house near the shore. The family went to bed early, and at about eleven Toki slipped out of the house and went

THE SLEEPING HUSBAND

on to the beach. A perfect spring night: but how fatal is spring to the young!

'The moon was now in quite a different part of the sky, but the sea was as calm as before. She looked carefully round her. There was no movement at all, except that in a distant house a light disappeared. After it had been put out she thought how yellow it had been. She turned to the sea, easily undulating, dusky, hazy, lazy, indifferent, peaceful, powerful. It was much warmer than she expected, and she waded out. When the water was up to her shoulders she paused, thinking she heard something, and then, satisfied, groped forward in the waiting ocean. She wanted to sink; the more she wanted to sink, the more she found herself swimming. She couldn't help swimming. She tried to swallow some water and spat it out again. But her clothes began to be heavy and dragging. She had now no will either to strike out or to sink. She rolled over on her side. The water closed over her head, but she came up again. This happened twice. Then she was fighting like a wild beast. Her body felt as if it would burst in two, her brain was full of cold and fiery salt, a hot and universal roaring filled her ears; but into that roaring came a quieter tune, and dreamily she seemed to be going, going down, down to nameless oblivion, to perfect peace. . . .

'She is not clear whether it was a watchman or a fisherman who saved her, for when she became at all conscious again she was lying in a hospital. Faces were staring at her. For a long time they meant nothing. And then she realised that they must be the faces of drowned men at the bottom of the sea. But could that be right? Surely they were not resolving themselves into a look of expectancy. Under the sea? They were like words, whose meaning was a series of questions, in an unknown language.

'No one had yet identified her, but a doctor in a white overall, and a policeman with a sword at his hip and white cotton gloves on his hands, were now doing their best to find out who she was.

STORIES OF JAPAN

At first, feeling in her very bowels the growing rebirth of fear, she pretended not to understand; and when the men pressed her for an answer, tightly shut her lips; and when they hung over her, persistent and threatening, she sobbed without weeping. But the policeman knew his duty, and as soon as she could stand she was marched off to the nearest police-box, where she stood, her heart wildly palpitating from fear and exhaustion, and her head sunk on her breast. She has described to me at length the combined efforts of three policemen cajoling, persuading, threatening, to force from her the name and address of her parents. I am surprised, for I have always found policemen so kind. Perhaps they really thought she was the escaped concubine of an eminent official (judging from the questions they asked her), or perhaps it was simply that they had nothing else to do: when men are idle they get so awfully cruel. Toki held out as long as she could, but at last there was no hope for it; and so she thought of a stratagem.

"If," she said, "you'll promise on your words of honour not to communicate it to anybody at all on any pretext, then I'll tell you where my home is."

"They all promised.

"I don't believe you," she said, "you're deceiving me."

"They protested their good faith, but she laughed. At this they solemnly undertook to convince her that they wouldn't under any circumstances betray her, but that in accordance with their duty they were bound to find out where she lived, and asserted that if they failed in this they would be severely punished.

"She told them.

"One of them laughed.

"She stared, as if bewildered.

"They at once sent a telegram to her family.

"This time her mother and brother fetched her home, after many bows, smiles, thanks and apologies to the policemen, begging them to excuse the behaviour of an insane girl. On the

THE SLEEPING HUSBAND

journey, she says, they treated her as a lunatic, but at home she was treated as a criminal.

'She managed to escape for the third time; and with the aid of her relation, the journalist, now of course a widower, she got a place with me, and I have done my best to treat her kindly. Before I end this writing I ought to mention two trifling episodes of her childhood, which, she says, have impressed her more than anything that has since happened in her life. They must have influenced her character. I wonder, by the way, what she thinks of people generally? She swore to me that she would never marry. Stupid thing!

'The first anecdote is this. When she was at the primary school in her native place she was in the same class as a certain little girl who was the daughter of one of the richest and most influential men in the neighbourhood. This child was accordingly a great favourite with the teachers, but Toki asserts that her character was not estimable. For some unknown reason the child hated Toki and was always trying to score off her. Now it happened that this little girl possessed a certain gaudy pencil-box, the gift of her father and the envy of her school-fellows. This object she put secretly into Toki's school bag, or satchel, with the eventual result that Toki was unjustly held up to the local world as a thief.

'It is unlucky to tell stories about fortune-tellers, but the other story shows how even when a child she had begun to be ridiculously superstitious. One day, returning from school, she stopped to listen to some quack fortune-teller in the street. This personage was impressively warning his audience that if in any of their houses the W.C. was built at the south-western corner, it was a positive indication that one of the inhabitants of such a house would certainly become a raving lunatic. Toki knew at once that her own home was built like that: perhaps she may again try to do away with herself, for, she says, she is still afraid of becoming . . .'

STORIES OF JAPAN

§ 6

[There the manuscript abruptly ends, and when I asked its author to continue it she said she was unwilling to do so, nor did she tell me how she had originally proposed to end it. The reader may have noticed that Captain S., the lady's husband, removed, as a result of his drunken jealousy and impulsive and brutal stupidity, his whole family to a distant part of the country, Oita in Kyushu. Toki wouldn't go with them, saying she preferred to stay in Tokyo. Perhaps she felt that in the capital there would always be more security, more chance to hide or escape when necessary. Madame S. managed to find her a place with a youngish couple, who happened to be among my best Japanese friends, and in their house I occasionally saw her. After some time they lent me rooms, into which I gladly moved, and it was while there that a small incident occurred, which I may as well record briefly here, by way of an end-piece. When I had been in the house a couple of months my friends happened to go away for a week, so that I was alone in the house with Toki. She was a good servant, quiet and fairly thorough, though inclined to be forgetful, and, out of pure thoughtlessness, a bit of a mischief maker. It was in the early summer and I was just getting over a slight attack of 'flu. Although the morning was bright and warm, I decided to stay in bed, for I still had a touch of fever. My bed, being a Japanese one, was on the floor, and the house and weather being both delightfully Japanese, I had opened the whole end of the room to the sunny air which filled the garden outside. I had been lying on my stomach and reading, but I put the book down and gazed up at the perfect sky, and listened dreamily to the faint fresh humming of new-born insects, when I suddenly became aware of a man standing just in front of me. My pillow was only six feet from the garden where he stood. He must have come in at the little garden gate, which was unusual, but I supposed he was some old pedlar who had come in that way by-

THE SLEEPING HUSBAND

mistake-on-purpose to avoid the servant, and perhaps to get round the master. Yet he was a bit too neatly dressed for a pedlar. He was not a very attractive old man. He stood with his hat in his hand, and I saw that his round head, bald in places, was covered with short white bristly down, and looked like the swollen breast of some unpleasant bird. His head he carried rather forward, for he had a slight stoop, and on his neck the skin was dry and mottled. His face was small, not an open face, and with no prominent feature. Eyebrows he lacked, but the place where they ought to have been was raised enquiringly, and the gaze of his pale eyes was fixed on me above a pair of old-fashioned spectacles, which had permanently slipped down, for like most Japanese he had no bridge to his nose. His mouth was curiously small, half open, looked as if it had never smiled, and disclosed regular rodent teeth.

This inglorious picture was not, I venture to assert, the figment of an invalid fancy. It definitely was a small, dry old man who was not pleasant. I was just going to tell him that there was nothing to-day, thank you, when he opened a little covered Red Riding Hood basket and took out a slip of paper, which he handed to me with the sort of hand you'd expect a man like that to have — a close fisted man. Poor beggar, I thought, being an experienced pauper myself. I don't blame him for *that*: money's certainly scarce enough. I can't read much of the Japanese script, but I was able to make out on this bit of paper the name of my absent host.

'Yes,' I said, 'he lives here. Did you want to see him? He's away now.'

I thought the old man was dunning for some forgotten bill to be paid. He then asked me what seemed an unnecessary question, scrutinizing me closely:

'Does anybody else live here?'

I was just going to say 'Yes, I do,' when I changed my mind and thought I'd call the servant to come and get rid of him, for I

STORIES OF JAPAN

didn't feel well enough to go on being civil to this tedious old creature: I listened for Toki, thinking she was in the next room or in the kitchen beyond. In a paper house sound travels, but nothing could I hear just then. No doubt she had gone out shopping—it was no use calling. I turned to the old man again, wondering how to get rid of him, and thought of a good plan.

'I'm sorry,' I said, smiling politely, 'I don't understand.'

He then asked several more questions which, instead of answering, I met with as blank a look as I could command, and the old man, bowing and muttering, put down his basket and hat and went next door, where I heard him asking his questions again. Old devil, I thought.

Just then the sliding paper door of my room opened, and there stood Toki.

'My father!' she whispered, and dived into the large wall-cupboard behind me (in which the beds are usually kept) just as the old man returned with the woman from next door.

A nice position for me! At my head a furious parent, and at my feet—if he only knew it—his trembling child. I was at a disadvantage. I was a foreigner. I had to be polite. I had to act my part. My temperature was 38·8°. The two submitted me at once to a volley of leading questions, both leaning forward and trying to read my thoughts by outstaring me.

'I don't understand,' I protested with a smile and a shrug.

'Where is the servant who works here?' they demanded.

'Ah! the servant!' I said brightly. 'She's away just now.'

'Where is she?'

'I don't know.'

'When will she be back?'

'I don't know.'

They exchanged significant looks. 'How can you cook your meals without a servant?' they asked.

'I don't understand,' I said. But they wouldn't leave the ques-

THE SLEEPING HUSBAND

tion. They repeated it in all possible forms, with various antics, until only a moron could have failed to understand.

'Ah, so?' I said sweetly. 'Well, I look after myself when there's nobody to look after me.'

It was obvious that they didn't believe a word I said.

And now, while the old man went on with his cross-questioning, the woman left him, and I could hear her going round outside, peeping and poking into every room. If I made the slightest protest they would at once be positive of what they now strongly suspected — that I was hiding the girl. As the woman came back she stumbled over something, and plucked the old man's sleeve.

'Look!' she muttered, and they both looked down. 'Her clogs.'

Toki had left her clogs just outside! The most damning evidence.

'If you come back next Wednesday,' I said, 'somebody may be here.'

That would give me time to get her out of the way. . . . They both smiled scornfully, looking over my shoulder, to the right, to the left —

'This gentleman,' the woman explained, 'would like to wait here a little longer, in case the girl *returns*.'

'Certainly,' I said, 'please do.'

She left him, and he made himself somewhat at home, but instead of sitting down before me, he craftily moved, with an affectation of courtesy, along to the other end of the garden front of the house, and there sliding back a door, sat down with his feet in the garden and his head in the house, and in such a position that he had a commanding view of the four main rooms, including my own, and could hear the footfall of a mouse in any one of them.

The sun was now high in the sky, the dew on the leaves was all gone and a drowsy silence ensued: but silence was the last thing I wanted, for the girl might think the coast was clear and burst out at any moment! I coughed meaningly, but my cough might

STORIES OF JAPAN

have meant 'Come out,' so I didn't do it again. Leaning far forward, I was in time to see the old man leaning far back and twisting his neck to peer into an inner room where a lot of Toki's sewing and odds and ends were scattered on the floor. He must have known that she was in the house. What I really feared was that he would come in and start looking in the cupboards. And if I tried to stop him, he would feel certain that I had something to hide. And in this most awkward of silences the girl might so easily emerge. . . . At last I could stand it no longer.

'I'm sorry,' I said, 'but I have to go out very soon. Won't you come back on Wednesday?'

I got up giddily, pulled on some clothes and started sliding the various doors together and closing everything.

'The servant here,' he said meaningly, grasping his wicker basket, 'is my daughter.'

'What!' I exclaimed. 'Is she really? Fancy! What a pity she isn't here to-day! Well, good-bye — I'm sorry your visit was useless — good-bye.'

I bowed him out and closed all the doors. When he had gone, I let the girl out. She thanked me, and then stood for quite a minute, her hands hanging limply at her side, her head down, not moving, and one of the most shocking expressions on her baby face that I think I have ever seen on the face of a human being. She seemed like an animal which, after struggling endless hours in a trap, after giving up all hope and being paralysed with raw terror, after being slowly frozen into madness, is suddenly set free — and has no feeling except an organic certainty that its liberty is somehow worse than its captivity.

Just for one moment she looked like that, and then lifted her head — with the smile restored to the baby face. It was very moving. She submitted to these events without any comment, for she was submissive; and soon started talking again quickly and gaily. She said she would rather die than speak to her father. And yet I must say that some time later the old man wrote,

THE SLEEPING HUSBAND

hoping for a reconciliation: was the father in him restored, or had he some scheme? She of course refused unconditionally. What can they have done to her at home? How mysterious and terrible are the relations between parents and children, and how little we know about them! And yet whenever she spoke about her home she used to smile. It was only then that I fully understood the words of Madame S. when she wrote: 'Toki can feel fear very deeply, but it is impossible for a nature like hers to be angry.']

THY NEIGHBOUR'S CREED

ARE you afraid of death?' old Kurodaké asked me suddenly, not fixing me with a hypnotic stare or anything like that. Indeed his eyes were cast down on the bowl of rice he was holding in his left hand, while his right, poised in mid-air, lightly held a pair of antique ivory chopsticks which he used to wash carefully and put away in an old lacquer case after every meal: he carried it about in his sleeve, as one might carry a spectacle-case. My eyes rested for a moment on his hands, which were of an extraordinary delicacy and agility, and young-looking; then I looked at his face as if to meet his question. He was still looking down, and there was a ghost of a smile on his lips, not a cynical smile, but tranquil, like the smile on the face of a carved *bodhisattva*. The other members of the family were looking at me expectantly, and Mrs. Shiroy, the old man's niece, tittered nervously and hid the lower half of her face in her sleeve as if she was a schoolgirl instead of a grandmother.

'What a strange question to be asked at breakfast-time,' I remarked defensively, and smiled politely. As if I had made a joke, Mrs. Shiroy lowered her sleeve and tittered quite openly; her husband showed even more front teeth than usual; and her son Hajimé laughed, I think out of sheer good nature. The old man, quickly manipulating his chopsticks as if they were part of him, took a couple of mouthfuls of rice and a small pickled plum, which he picked up as deftly as a watchmaker might pick up a jewel, and then raised his eyes, over which the lids drooped a little, and looked at me as if still awaiting an answer. As I was rather afraid of him, for his brain was as delicate and agile as his hands, I wanted to avoid giving a banal answer, which would

THY NEIGHBOUR'S CREED

have disappointed him, or a dishonest one, which he would at once have seen through.

'I think of death quite often,' I said. 'Sometimes I'm afraid of it, but not always. Sometimes, when I'm enjoying life and looking forward to things I want to do, I resent the necessity of dying and wish I could live for ever. Sometimes, when gloomy or disillusioned, I think I should welcome death. So I suppose it's a matter of mood.'

He nodded, with an air of appreciation, but said nothing: I dare say he found my reply too commonplace. Outside in the street, the clatter of daily life was increasing, but it was a hot morning, and it was going to be a very hot day, and somehow the tempo of life seemed already a little slowed down by the heat. One can be scorched in the summer in Hiroshima.

The old man was not the sort of person to whom one easily says, 'It's going to be awfully hot to-day, don't you think? Hajimé and I are thinking of going for a swim.' With the approach of age, Hajimé had explained to me, his great-uncle was withdrawing his mind from earthly things and in the autumn would retire, in the traditional way, to a lonely hide-out in the mountains, where he would sit at night listening to a distant waterfall and watching the moon rise above a grove of bamboos. So I said instead, 'But what made you ask me that question, sir, this morning?'

'I have seen some foreigners, of course,' said Kurodaké, 'but this is the first time I have had the chance of talking with one. It is very interesting for me.'

I bowed slightly, as if to signify that I would do my best not to be a bore, and looked out over his shoulder into the garden, to which the side of the room was open. It was a small, formal, flowerless garden, very clean, with evergreens, a fantastically-shaped rock, a stone lantern, a pool of water: everything was conventional and symbolical and orderly. Violent, emotional, deeply pessimistic, the Japanese soul (if one could speak in such

STORIES OF JAPAN

a general way) evidently needed, I reflected for the thousandth time, a rigid scheme of everyday life to contain and direct its energies, to bound its fears and circumscribe its joys. After the slight first shock of surprise that the great-uncle had never before spoken to a foreigner, I remembered that he had hardly been out of Hiroshima in his life, and that Hiroshima was just a provincial town, through which foreigners might pass by train to Kobé or Shimonoski, but in which there was seldom any reason for them to linger: he had succeeded, I had gathered from Hajimé, to a comfortable old-fashioned firm of *saké*-brewers, and had enjoyed ample leisure, which he had devoted to editing the works on occultism and esoteric Buddhism of a seventeenth-century writer, whose name I never could remember. The great-uncle, the garden, the noises in the street (among which the itinerant fish-pedlar's horn sounded forlorn and ancient), the stillness in the room where we were sitting, produced an overwhelming sense of continuity and inevitability.

Hajimé's father, a mild and modest gentleman of moderate means, who had never done a stroke of work or hurt a fly in his life, had unclosed a small black silk fan and was fanning himself without haste and without rest. His face was now composed, with no expression except of benevolence: he seemed to be waiting quietly for an interesting dialogue about death between his uncle-in-law and his foreign guest, and waiting quietly, too, for death itself: one could imagine him folding his fan, and leaning back with a sigh at last. Mrs. Shiroy, as a woman, knew that speculations about death boil no rice; on her knees beside the low black lacquer table, she was clearing away the breakfast things and no doubt thinking already about the preparation of luncheon, since even philosophers must eat. Hajimé said nothing. He was sitting cross-legged on a flat silk cushion and smoking a cigarette; his springy hair, which he wore long and parted in the middle, had fallen forward and was hanging over his eyes. I wondered what he was thinking.

THY NEIGHBOUR'S CREED

'I suppose,' said the old man, who had put away his chopsticks, and was now playing with a chaplet of big amber beads as if he were telling them, 'that you think of death as the beginning of personal immortality?'

'Christians do,' I said; 'and I think many people feel that they live on in a way after death, not so much in the memories of those who have known them, as in the repercussions of their good and bad actions, however great or small, among those who have known them.'

'Ha!' said old Kurodaké, as if the right nail had now been hit on the head. 'But supposing there were no repercussions of that kind?'

'But there surely must be repercussions,' I said. 'Everything one says or does all one's life, or even refrains from doing, has consequences that cannot be measured. "Nor knowest thou what argument Thy life to thy neighbour's creed hath lent."'

Hajimé helped me to explain the meaning of this quotation.

'Yes,' said Kurodaké, 'I understand; I agree. But supposing that when you died your body was destroyed without trace, and your house, and all your possessions, and all your relations, friends and even acquaintances, and every personal relic or reminder of yourself?'

'You mean in an earthquake?' I said, for in Japan one is never long unconscious that one is menaced by the very earth one walks on.

'I mean more thoroughly than in an earthquake,' he said.

'Fire?'

'I mean more thoroughly than by fire,' he said.

'I can hardly imagine that.' I felt the conversation was getting a little dotty.

'I can imagine it,' said Kurodaké, and his eyelids drooped so low over his eyes that his expression suggested omniscience. It was uncomfortable, and I looked away.

STORIES OF JAPAN

'Have you in mind,' I asked, 'human destructiveness or an act of God?'

'Human destructiveness,' he said.

I glanced appealingly at Hajimé, but failed to catch his eye. A klaxon sounded suddenly in the street like an alarm, and made me jump. I had been warned that the summer was fierce in Hiroshima, and although the sweat was running down my face I had forgotten for the moment all about the projected swim. I told myself that the old man was dotty and must be humoured, but when I looked at his immobile eyes and his restless fingers playing with his beads I reminded myself that a madman lives by truths of his own, and that the sane must seem to him not only his persecutors, but his ignorant persecutors.

'In that case, you see,' Kurodaké went on, 'repercussions of personal acts would be of no importance. Everything would depend on the actions of the spirit after death.'

'It might feel revengeful,' I said.

Kurodaké laughed abruptly, but made no comment.

'I advise you to leave Hiroshima,' he said.

This was rather blunt.

'Oh!' I exclaimed, 'I hope I haven't offended you?'

'No, no, no!' He smiled almost broadly. 'I speak as a friend.' He instantly became grave again. 'What I have in mind is that you should die in the customary way — with repercussions — and avoid the new kind of death, which will impose a great burden of responsibility, and work, on the spirit. I desire your spirit to be at rest.'

I bowed again, and said: 'And the same to you.'

'You are not made,' he remarked, 'for a life of action. You should lead the life of a scholar or hermit.'

I thanked him for the advice, and he rose to his feet, springily and effortlessly, like a young man, and bowed himself out of the room. Mr. Shiroy had also gone, though I had not noticed his going.

THY NEIGHBOUR'S CREED

Along with Hajimé, I asked a good many questions about his great-uncle. Kurodaké's wife, it appeared, was dead. He had one son, an officer in the navy, with whom he had quarrelled and whom he now never saw or mentioned. Hajimé did not know the nature of the quarrel, but in the family it was supposed that Kurodaké had wanted his son to be a quietist like himself, whereas the son had been determined to live an active life: the father had allowed the son to have his own way, but after, in due course, finding him a bride, he had refused to have anything more to do with him. And what sort of reputation, I asked, had Kurodaké? Among the business men of Hiroshima, said Hajimé, his great-uncle was regarded as slothful and unenterprising; among scholars he was held in respect; among servants and common people he was spoken of as a sorcerer — he had undoubtedly discovered missing persons and objects, of whose whereabouts he could not have had conscious knowledge, and he was said to have foretold future events of a private nature.

'And tell me, Hajimé, what do your father and mother think of him?'

'They respect him. He is continually urging my father to sell our house and go and live in the country, where he owns some land, near Ozu in Shikoku. My father has always lived in this house, which was built by his grandfather, and does not wish to leave it, but I think in the end he will agree.'

'Why? Because of this new kind of destructiveness which Kurodaké San prophesies, and which I must say I find rather fanciful? Is there some chemical industry in Hiroshima, where they do research into new explosives or something? But I had better not ask questions like that, or you'll think I'm a spy — although you know how little interested I really am in such matters.'

We did not go swimming that day, but lolled about with books and cold drinks and a gramophone. I felt uneasy all day, and all day it grew hotter and hotter. In the evening we were to

STORIES OF JAPAN

go out in a boat to see the great annual religious festival, when, with much ceremony, a sacred object is rowed across to the sacred island of Miyajima. When I heard that Kurodaké would be with us, my feelings were mixed: I thought that with his alleged powers of divination he perhaps already knew more about me than I knew myself. . . .

After dark we were out on the water: so, it seemed, was half Hiroshima. There was no wind and no thunder, but the sky was overcast and the air more than sultry. Although we were only wearing thin cotton *yukata*, Hajimé and I were still very hot. Mr. Shiroy had taken off his panama hat and was still using his fan; his wife, whose hair had been newly dressed, looked demure in a matronly way — ladylike is perhaps the word; and Kurodaké, who sat with us in the stern of the motor launch, handed me a pair of field-glasses which he had thoughtfully brought for my use. He seemed in a less vatic mood, made jokes and laughed at other people's jokes and looked and behaved (though with dignity) more like a young man than an old one. At the same time his black *haori* coat, ornamented in the middle of the back and on the sleeves with a feudal crest in white (I can see it now — inside a circle, three wavy lines to represent running water), gave him a slightly hieratic air.

Battleships from Kuré, anchored along the line of the procession, were playing with their searchlights, turning them now on the countless boatloads of spectators, now on the sky, now towards the invisible horizon. There were lights everywhere, lanterns, torches; staccato music from a *samisen* came sharply amplified over the water; and in due course the holy boat arrived, propelled by naked oarsmen, standing and absolutely uniform and rhythmical in their movements, which were timed exactly with the thudding of drums struck by musicians in sacred vestments — those drums which are held against the left shoulder and struck with the flat right hand, and which are somehow much more dramatic than the drums of Europe. At the same

THY NEIGHBOUR'S CREED

time a very ancient chant arose from a party of seated singers — though singers seems hardly the word for the utterers of those deep, stylized cries, so eloquent of pain and of resignation to pain. In the middle of the boat, guarded by standing priests, a sacred ark glittered with gilding and lacquer and brocade.

Caught by a searchlight, this gliding coloured vision became instantly bleached and ghostly; excited by the heat and by *saké* and by the drums, and by the whole occasion, I thought again of death and destruction and of Kurodaké's phrase about 'the actions of the spirit after death'.

Near and far, fireworks were being let off: emeralds and rubies flowed in galaxies, hung suspended, drifted, vanished; bunches of luminosity, like magic laburnum or wistaria, suddenly hung over the sides of boats and seemed to produce magically in the water swarms of mauve or golden bees; there was a hissing and sputtering, and from our own boat a fountain of little globes, blood-red and incandescent white, played high out in a curve over the water. Looking back towards Hiroshima, one could see a huge *feu de joie*, no doubt in some open space like the parade-ground at the barracks or perhaps just outside the town; looking towards Miyajima, one could trace the progress of the holy boat and hear the ever fainter reverberations of the ritual chanters and the drummers. Seeing me looking in that direction, and knowing that Hajimé and I were going there the next day, Kurodaké told me several useful or interesting things about the sacred island. Then he said in quite a matter-of-fact tone of voice:

'It may interest you to know that on that island nobody may be born and nobody may be buried.' (I made a polite expression of interest, as if I was hearing this for the first time.) 'It is not generally known,' he went on, 'that in Hiroshima many people have been born who will never be buried.'

'Ah, is that so?' I said gravely, feeling that he ought to be humoured about his obsession. It was so hot that I felt disinclined to question him, and thought to myself that there had been

STORIES OF JAPAN

previous instances of prophets dwelling on the future doom of the cities to which they belonged.

As we headed for home, two searchlights met above the distant bonfire and showed that in the windless air the smoke had risen like a tall column and had flattened out at the top: it appeared motionless.

'What a peculiar shape that smoke is,' I said, inspecting it through the field-glasses. 'It looks just like a poisonous toadstool.'

As soon as I had said this I thought it sounded rather precious. Why hadn't I said simply 'like a mushroom'? But the smoke was livid and discoloured; it *did* look rather like a poisonous toadstool. Mr. Shiroy nodded assent, displaying, in the pinkish light of a lantern hanging just over his head, an affable keyboard of teeth. Kurodaké said nothing. His eyelids were heavy, as if with sleep, but his eyes were open and were looking towards the smoke. When I looked again in the same direction the searchlights had vanished, the smoke was no longer visible, and the bonfire had died down. I wondered if I had imagined the thing, especially when I asked Hajimé if he had seen it and he said he had not.

I never saw Kurodaké after that night. He did not appear at breakfast the next morning, and Hajimé and I left before lunch for Miyajima, where we spent some happy days.

Some weeks later, when I was back in Tokyo, I had a letter from Hajimé in which he said that his great-uncle was no longer under his father's roof. One sunny day, walking in the street with Mrs. Shiroy, Kurodaké had exclaimed that *some* of the passers-by had no shadows. He had grown very excited, and had begun pointing wildly at one person after another, attracting much attention and creating something of a disturbance, which held up the traffic. Just as a policeman was approaching, Kurodaké fell to the ground in a fit. He had been removed to a mental hospital and some anxiety was felt about his condition.

THY NEIGHBOUR'S CREED

Hajimé said his mother had been greatly distressed by the whole affair. Her embarrassment in the street had been extreme, but fortunately her great-uncle had mostly singled out young people, especially young girls, when he was airing his extraordinary delusion. He had only denounced two elderly persons as shadowless; one of them was Mrs. Tanaka, the bank manager's wife, who had been very much offended.

I still have Hajimé's letter: it is dated September, 1927.

1946.

STORIES OF GREECE

NAUSICAA

THE island of Corfu, so the guide books say, was the island of the Phaeacians. It was here that Ulysses swam ashore and was received by Nausicaa, and even to-day there are children to be found who bear that name. The first part of Greece to become a colony of Rome, Corfu was ruled later by the Byzantines, the Venetians, the despots of Epirus and the kings of Naples. Then after four centuries of Venetian domination it was occupied for a while by the French, until at the beginning of the last century it became a republic under Russian and Turkish protection. For fifty succeeding years it was controlled by the English, and at last in 1863 became part of the kingdom, now the republic, of Greece. What changes! Strange and various are the traces they have left. Old stones remain from the heroic age. The Byzantine Church of St. Jason and St. Sosipater, the procession in which the mortal remains of St. Spiridion (now vested in a company which pays handsome dividends) are carried in a silver coffin, the lousy monks at Palaiokeastrizza, many a ruined convent and ikons in every house tell of the Christian era and tell of its decay. In the side of a forgotten rampart a fig tree has split in halves a stone lion of St. Mark. And on the esplanade a statue of the Venetian marshal Von der Schulenburg, brother of 'Maypole' Schulenburg, who was mistress of George I of England, crumbles slowly, a perfect specimen of the mock-heroic, and a reminder that the Christian era was also one of politics and war.

What else do the guide-books say? They direct you to the palace of the English governors, built in the elegant style which prevailed at the beginning of the last century. At a proper distance stands a piece of shoddy Italianate vulgarity typical of the end of the same century — the villa 'Achilleion' which formerly

STORIES OF GREECE

belonged to the Kaiser. In the town library (though the guide-books make no mention of this) there are first editions of Petrarch and Erasmus Darwin, and in many a house may be found Venetian mirrors and Victorian lamps, Empire chairs and Turkish silver. There is even a Chinese museum. Wherever you touch the place you come upon this same extraordinary richness, an accumulation of racial tendencies and historical survivals, an epitome of Europe ever so faintly flavoured with Asia. And when you leave the town, with its tall old pink Venetian houses, its ghetto, its mouldering forts and decaying hatchments, you find all round you a natural grandeur, beauty and fertility of a kind that can be found nowhere else, a landscape alternately Homeric and West Indian. Heather and sweet potatoes grow in the same ground as the fir and the palm, while the olive trees so flourish that whole groves attain a height of fifty or sixty feet.

But in spite of all these glories, there is certainly a curse on the island. It becomes evident on certain days when the climate, which is sub-tropical and capricious, becomes suddenly violent or sultry, and brings with it low fevers and mugginess; it is plain in the decay to be found on all sides; it can be felt instinctively by those whose instincts are sharp enough; and it can be learnt from the fate of many of the distinguished people who have been connected with the island. Capo d'Istria, regent of Greece, died by the hand of an assassin; so did the Empress Elizabeth of Austria, who built the Achilleion; Kaiser Wilhelm II, her successor in the property, lost his throne; while Count Constantinos Theotoki, that noble Corfiote character, lost his fortune, died a death of lingering agony, and was attended to the grave, in spite of his public spirit, by a mere handful of people. Nothing, however, is more sinister than the atmosphere in which the inhabitants of the island actually live, the aura, as it were, which emanates from them. One expects them to be decadent, but one is not prepared for such a degree of degeneration as that in which they live and move. It is not simply that they are poor and live for the most

NAUSICAA

part in squalor, it is not simply that they share the generally low standards of living and physique common to most Greeks to-day, nor is it that, like the poor everywhere, they breed more children than they can feed. Nor can the climate be held solely to account, though it is certainly relaxing and demoralizing and must have hastened the decay of the common people as well as that of the formerly pretentious Corfiote aristocracy. No, the truth is that the blood is stagnant, and that ever since the long lazy centuries of Venetian domination, though some of the people have emigrated to Athens, to India, Turkey, Egypt or America, very little new blood has flowed in. Inbreeding has done and is still doing its work thoroughly. Cripples, half-wits, hunchbacks, are common enough; faces are pale, tissues flabby, blood and skin diseases very prevalent; and the unborn are often condemned to face this harsh world with as many handicaps as heredity and environment can well lay upon them. And if anybody feels any discontent, any enterprise, any energy, he goes to other lands to make his fortune, and is not over-anxious to return. If it is true, as it seems true, that some kind of spell hangs over the island, it is open to doubt whether the matter can just be explained scientifically, for if any place is haunted, Corfu is haunted; and if it is possible for a place to be singled out for bad luck, for a curse, then Corfu is such a place. In contrast to the fertility of nature, the orchards bowed down under many kinds of fruit, and the wild cyclamen which perfumes the mountain breeze, in contrast to the complexity of their history and the splendours of their past, the inhabitants have the appearance of victims. Whether nemesis is to be explained in terms of science or not, it is certain that nemesis has overtaken them.

Visitors to the island are not numerous, although it lies on the direct route between Brindisi and Athens, and this is perhaps because nothing is done to attract them. Consequently when tourists arrive, they seldom stay more than a few days. They drive to the Achilleion, they take a boat to Pontikonisi — especi-

STORIES OF GREECE

ally if they are Germans, for this is Böcklin's 'Island of the Dead' — they climb to the top of the old fortress to enjoy what their Baedeker calls 'a superb * * View', they take a few photographs and a disapproving stroll through the town, after which there is nothing, they complain, to do. And it is true, that for many modern travellers, there is little to do. The hotels are few and bad, and their standards are those of the boarding house, the only amusements they provide being a tuneless piano, a copy or two of last week's *Continental Daily Mail*, and some furniture and Tauchnitz novels of the late 'nineties. Many people cannot bear scenery unless they can take it in small doses while they are rushing along in a motor, nor can they feel at all at ease in a place where life is frugal, lazy and corrupt. Cocktails, wireless programmes, and golf are not to be had for love or money; and when there is no taxi available, one must drive in a battered victoria, so that Americans sometimes go away uttering a wish that somebody would 'clean up' Corfu — and this in spite of the fact that the English have left a legacy of roads, water, sanitation, cricket and ginger beer. It is true that before the war some efforts were made to galvanize the place into some sort of flashiness. A casino, for example, was planned and built, but to-day its gardens are all overgrown with gigantic flowering yuccas, and the building itself, like every other available building in the place, has been used for the housing of refugee children from Asia Minor. The plaster is coming off the walls, and every afternoon a little girl with elephantiasis drags herself past on her way back from school.

In view of the general atmosphere of the place, which is provincial and nostalgic where it is not actually mournful and unhealthy, it is a little surprising that among the Greeks themselves Corfu is considered to be well worth visiting, not simply on account of its historical associations and natural beauties, but for a much stronger reason. It would be too much to say that the town has a reputation for gaiety, but one hears it said in Athens

NAUSICAA

that the Corfiotes have a certain licence of morals which is entertaining to the stranger. Nobody would assert that the Corfiotes, or any other Greeks, are remarkable for a strict moral rectitude, but what is the good of licence without enterprise? What is the use of wickedness, at least as an attraction for tourists, if it is accompanied only by anæmia, apathy and impotence, to say nothing of poverty and squalor? In Corfu the flesh may be willing but the spirit is weak. Yet there is the fact, and there is no getting away from it, that every year there are Greeks who come to Corfu expecting to be amused. Just such a person might have been seen, one evening at the end of last summer, strolling about on the esplanade.

Napoleon Emmanuclides was wondering how to conclude the day, which happened to be his forty-first birthday, and not finding any solution to the problem, he glanced at his watch. It was exactly ten o'clock. He looked casually at the people sitting in the cafés and at the passers-by, but they did not interest him nearly as much as he interested them. They knew him for a stranger, and some already knew him by sight, for he had been here a week, and everybody noticed that he was always well-dressed. The Greeks seem to attach an undue importance to clothes. They will often look at a man's clothes before they look at his face, while a slight shabbiness or incorrectness in their own attire will cause them a discomfort which amounts to pain. Indeed, there are few countries where men dress so well and women so badly. A Greek with the most precarious means will contrive to look smarter than he is rich, while a Greek of any standing will often appear more stylish than a man of similar standing elsewhere. Emmanuelides was not exceptional in his tastes, and as he strolled about was agreeably conscious of his appearance. The night was warm for September, and he was wearing an elegant fawn-coloured suit that fitted him perfectly, while everything else, shirt, socks, and so on, had been chosen to harmonize

STORIES OF GREECE

with it. As he had grown older he had become more particular even than when young. His hair and teeth were scrupulously brushed, his moustache was fastidiously trimmed, and his nails had been so carefully manicured that they shone like polished pebbles, but he was very careful that his manners and appearance should not lead people to say that he was effeminate. 'Well-groomed' was how he would have liked to hear himself described, and he was proud of his extraordinary resemblance to one of the only European monarchs of our day with any pretensions to looks and style. Like that monarch (now an ex-monarch) Emmanuclides had his clothes made in England. To a casual acquaintance at the hotel he had remarked airily that he had only brought eleven suits with him to Corfu, and the acquaintance, who was not Greek, at once concluded that Emmanuclides was, besides being well-dressed, well-to-do. But in fact Emmanuclides was not by any means a rich man; his private income was small and his salary an ordinary one — he was employed by an international commission in Egypt in matters of local government. If his salary was moderate, his vanity, as has perhaps been made plain, was greater, or at least more patent, than is usual. Yet one could not very well dislike him on that account, for it was only the usual vanity of the Greek male, which is so frank and spontaneous and often goes with such good nature and vivacity, that it cannot be regarded as anything more than amusingly innocent — unless, of course, one is somehow made to suffer by it. If people are vain and unhappy and malicious they can be very unpleasant, but Emmanuclides, coxcomb as he was, had pretty much what he wanted in life, and though shallow, was not unkind. He was flattered by his friends, who were of various nationalities and as shallow and cheerful as himself; he was particularly flattered to be liked by English people, preferably those with titles or rank; he was flattered every now and again by being saluted in mistake for that king he so much resembled; women flattered him; and altogether he was quite gratified to

NAUSICAA

find himself in a world which thought so highly of him and treated him so well.

But Corfu! This was another story! Never in his life had he been so disappointed by a place. Why, there was absolutely nowhere to go and dance of an evening; the theatre was closed; the women were dowdy and stuffy; the men provincial to a degree. After a week's stay he felt he had exhausted every pleasure the island had to offer. The hotel was as dreary as its inmates, German professors and American spinsters, and even the food was wretched. Fortunately he had brought an introduction to a man who had had to do with both the imperial owners of the Achilleion, and the anecdotes of royalty he heard from this man gave him some pleasure, but as he had come to Corfu thinking to find a little gaiety and international smartness, perhaps even a little illicit gaiety, he naturally felt frustrated. He had been to all the show places and had been more or less bored by them, had tried swimming and had caught a cold, had scratched the surface of local society and found it wanting, for he had not the wit to see how even its decay was enthralling and not unseldom comic. He was definitely disappointed.

Take to-day, for example. He had woken at nine, taken a bath, made his usual elaborate toilet, rung several times more than anybody else to call the servants, and after a final survey of himself in the mirror had sauntered out, well dressed and slightly scented, into the garden, where he consumed a light and leisurely breakfast. After this, while he was enjoying an English cigarette, he fell into conversation with a young American couple who were staying at the hotel. The man was a classical scholar who was just completing his first visit to Greece, and who, strangely enough, was more interested in the people than in the broken columns and the debris which fills the museums. He had a theory that the Greeks of to-day, in spite of the Byzantine tradition and in spite of their changed blood, are not entirely unlike the Greeks

STORIES OF GREECE

of antiquity, especially in their vices. He had seen something of the Greek colonists in America and had detected in them (he thought) a certain matter-of-factness characteristic of their ancestors, the same love of money, the same obsession with politics, the same jealousy of anyone among them who gave evidence of possessing a few brains or a little power. In Greece itself he had learnt to feel affection for a race he could never help admiring in spite of its faults, and had been overjoyed to discover once or twice in Athens types of men and women who seemed to him to correspond physically to the beautiful creatures of early Attic art. About them, as about the majority, he had no illusions, and now, here in Corfu, he had come to regard Emmanuelides, whom he saw at meals, and with whom he and his wife exchanged a few words every day, as the very archetype of the modern Greek, not the antithesis, but the late offspring of archaic glories. He saw him plainly as one of those frivolous beings who abound in the modern world, who are incapable of thought, who take nothing seriously, who never seem to be without money though they appear to do little or no work for it, who like wearing parti-coloured shoes and silk shirts at expensive international resorts, who are often not without a little culture and a little charm, whose aim is pleasure and whose ambition is bound up with the gossip-column and a little display; and he could not help seeing him as simply one of those Greeks who, in their decadence, long before Christ, had scattered abroad, to Rome, to Alexandria, to Babylon, ready to act (so Juvenal noticed) as tame poets, domestic philosophers, social parasites, speculators, quack doctors, cheap-jacks, music-masters, rhetoricians, masseurs, or mountebanks. He could not dislike him, though he saw through all his shallowness and charlatanry; and as for his wife, she really liked him, feeling rather pleased to be asked if she knew why the Prince of Wales didn't marry, and if she didn't think the tango had come to stay. One could not, however, spend the whole morning, in this beautiful weather,

NAUSICAA

discussing such matters, so he pressed his wife's arm and said to Emmanuelides:

'Well, if you'll excuse us, I'm afraid we must leave you. They've brought a couple of bicycles around for us, and we want to get to Carone and back before lunch.'

And so Emmanuelides was left alone again, glancing at his shoes once more to see whether they had been properly cleaned. He stood at the entrance to the hotel, sniffing slightly, for he was not quite sure whether he had altogether lost the cold he had caught while bathing, and looked up and down in the sun-glare of the street, wondering how he should occupy the time until luncheon. He had already written postcards to all his friends, and felt disinclined to repeat the process again so soon. He yawned, with a slow, pleasurable, feline yawn, and then glanced at his nails, an occupation from which he was distracted by the arrival of a taxi. As soon as he saw it he decided at once to go for a drive, but he did not allow the chauffeur to guess his intention at once. The American couple had called the weather 'beautiful', but the month was September, in some ways the worst month of the year in Corfu, so he had been told, for it is then that the heat tells most, not because it is at its greatest but because of the unhealthy dampness with which it is overcharged; the air seems to have lost some essential ingredient, and becomes stale and listless, bringing no ozone from the sea; it is breathed with difficulty, like the atmosphere surrounding some other and crueller planet than this; the sea itself is silent, without ever a wave, and seems stagnant; at its edges whole banks of seaweed decay with a frightful and noxious stench; and at sunset the rock pools begin to coruscate with the transient gleams given off by tiny phosphorescent vermin; the very fish which are drawn from these waters seem, in September at least, to be either tasteless or touched with some almost imperceptible taint. Yes, decidedly the only thing to do on a morning like this was to move through the air in the hope of refreshing oneself. One might drive through the village of

STORIES OF GREECE

Potamo, for instance — not because one was interested in picturesque poverty but because it was one of the places that people went to, and would form a topic of conversation with the American couple. The taxi-driver approached Emmanuelides and suggested a drive, but he shook his head. They exchanged a few words, and the taxi-driver became importunate, whereupon a thoroughly Greek conversation ensued. Emmanuelides called him a thief and a liar, they both invoked heaven, and their four hands went through a long series of eurhythmics and spasmodics which ended in the chauffeur's reluctantly agreeing to do the drive for half the price he had at first asked. Emmanuelides then put on a white hat and dark spectacles and got into the car. The chauffeur drove rather fast, hoping to get another fare on his return to the town, and it was noticeable that whenever there was a downward slope he switched off the engine for economy's sake. The car ran between hedges of prickly-pear, past thickets of bamboo and pink-and-white chapels, a cemetery with cypresses, a villa with palms, past fields of cabbages and egg-plants, but Emmanuelides was not much interested in what he saw, and began to ask the chauffeur some facetious personal questions. At one point, where it was necessary to slow down, a boy with wasted limbs and eczema ran begging by the side of the car, and Emmanuelides without any hesitation threw him a drachma, which at that time was worth about three farthings. The chauffeur was sulky, and as for the village of Potamo, well, why did people come and see it? Certainly the church was large, but all the houses were rotting or in ruin, there were pigs in the main street and the discoloured plaster was everywhere coming away from the walls. Certainly some of the peasant women were wearing their celebrated costume, but although their hands and feet were small they were not exactly beauties . . . And before he knew where he was, Emmanuelides was back again at the hotel. The dining-room was chilly, in spite of the heat of the day; the food was as poor as usual; and there was no liveliness

NAUSICAA

among the visitors. Afterwards, following his customary routine, Emmanuelides took a long siesta, sleeping for more than two hours.

When he rose, he dressed carefully in a different suit to the one he had worn in the morning, and went out for a stroll in the town, where he had a little shopping to do. But directly he found himself in the narrow principal street, called after Our Lady of Victories, his progress was impeded by a crowd, he heard the slow strains of an approaching band, and was obliged to stand by for a funeral to pass. And what a funeral! After the band, which was playing a dirge stridently and slightly out of tune, came four popes and a number of young men holding candles. The bright westering sun, shafted between two rows of houses, shone full upon them, made the candle-flames almost invisible, and lit up the faces in such a way as to make them all livid or lurid, especially those already pale from sickness or debauchery. There were no women at all in the procession, but it did not produce any idea of restrained and manly grief or of the nobility of death. On the contrary, the sun was so merciless that it not only shone like a searchlight upon the funeral itself, but seemed to draw out grimly every suggestion of mortality in each living face and hand, showed up the greenish tinge of clothes once black, and made death seem but a matter of corruption, misery and degradation. The climax came with the arrival of the hearse, all varnished black angels, gilded knobs and twisted pillars, and drawn by two gaunt horses entirely caparisoned, except for the eyes and hooves, with a material which had once been purple velvet, but which the ruthless sun showed to have faded almost to grey and puce, revealing the tarnished braid of the borders and even small rents and darns in the side. Two of the mourners had faces quite disfigured with grief, several more had affected the same emotion, and all the rest were set in various expressions of dutifulness, habit, sympathy and indifference. The last slow feet followed the fading notes of the band, and the spectators felt no

STORIES OF GREECE

doubt of the reality of either the sting of death or the victory of the grave. Even the unserious Emmanuelides had been made to feel momentarily gloomy and uneasy, to remind himself that this was his birthday, and to wonder how long he was likely to be allowed to live. The atmosphere had become steamy again, and he wiped the sweat away from his forehead.

By the time he had done what he had set out to do, had sat in a café to watch the people and read the newspaper, had spent half an hour in conversation with a returned Greek-American who professed himself disgusted with the lack of comfort in his native island, and had finally returned to the hotel, it was nearly time to dress for dinner.

And now it was ten o'clock, and there were three hours to be whiled away somehow, for Emmanuelides never dreamt of going to bed before one in the morning. He was standing irresolutely under a tree in the esplanade when somebody stepped out of the shadows and touched him on the arm. It was a young man who was wearing a large cap which had been manufactured to look like tiger-skin. He had a pale face and neat black moustache, and it was clear from his roguish expression and insinuating manner that he was a pimp. Every instinct that was most frivolous in Emmanuelides immediately awoke, and he promptly began to ask the man a number of bantering questions, although he had not the least intention of being persuaded by him. Coquettish and chaffing, his behaviour was never more characteristic of the type of man to which he belonged, and the pimp soon saw that there was no business to be done and turned away to seek honester game, so that Emmanuelides found himself exactly where he had been ten minutes before.

Just at this moment the moon rose. An orange moon, not quite full, it suddenly looked out dramatically from a cloud-wreath above the mountains of northern Epirus on the other side of the strait, scattered its light on the sea, and with level rays cast

NAUSICAA

a pale radiance upon the old fortress, the trees in the esplanade, the façade of the English palace, and the mouldy statues that stood here and there — an English governor in streaky bronze; Guilford, the eccentric philhellene, in marble; and especially the fantastic Schulenburg, in chipped periwig and sandstone toga, pot-bellied above his panelled trophies. Moonstruck, the whole scene had a touch of magic. Long shadows, and contrasts of light and shade, seemed to distort the proportions of things, and the esplanade became a stage set for any improbable happening; while by way of overture a blind fiddler had struck up in a café with an eerie Heptanese folk-tune. But although the appearance of the moon had given the hour and the place a sudden glamour, Emmanuelides saw little chance of anything happening to distract him, and on turning over in his mind the possible amusements — a primitive open-air cinema, a game of cards or billiards, a dull walk or conversation — he rejected each in turn. It was then, however, that an idea occurred to him. It is perhaps no exaggeration to say that the only ideas which ever occurred to him were those connected with his own pleasure, and this was accordingly one of them. Why, he reflected, should he not take a boat for an hour or two? He at once made his way to a landing-place he knew of, where there were always boats to be had, and sure enough there were several to choose from. But he did not choose a boat so much as a boatman, for what would be the good of spending time with a dreary companion? One of the boatmen was much younger than the others, and Emmanuelides at once got into his boat, at which the older men were rather annoyed.

As soon as he had pushed off, the young boatman looked narrowly at his passenger, feeling for him, as it happened, an aversion as instinctive as the attraction he had exerted over Emmanuelides. He could only think of him as a fool with money to spend, and felt towards him the usual Greek envy of anybody a little richer or happier than oneself, and that bitterness which can

STORIES OF GREECE

only be felt towards people of one's own kind. Emmanuelides could see the boy's black eyes sparkling in his handsome face, but he did not consider how far these good looks were due to poverty and hunger, and sought to please him by making amiable remarks. He was only answered shortly. The boat was not far from shore when some voices became audible, singing the words of a tango which had been the fashion in Greece for several months past, and the tune of which tended to haunt the least musical ear. It was a tune based on an indigenous Argentine melody, but had been written by a Polish-Australian Jew in Paris, and popularized by a negro comedienne with what the Greeks call a pancosmic reputation. With Emmanuelides it was a special favourite, and as the singers ashore left it off he took it up, humming it in a rather highly-pitched voice, grinning, and beating time with his foot on the bottom of the boat.

'Ah, how often I have danced to this tune,' he exclaimed.

The boatman, whose name was Spiros, made no comment, bending to the oar.

'Do you like dancing?' said Emmanuelides, without waiting for an answer. 'I love it myself. I usually dance every evening at the same cabaret, and forget all about the work I've done during the day. It's pleasure and exercise combined. But in Corfu there doesn't seem to be any dancing. What a dull place it is!'

'Where do you live?' said Spiros.

'Well,' said Emmanuelides, 'I live in Athens.' He was very cautious and reticent, or in other words he was telling a lie.

'Are you in business there?'

'Yes, in business,' he lied, and there was a silence broken only for a time by the creaking of the oars. 'And you?' said Emmanuelides in a soft voice. 'Tell me something about yourself.'

The boy laughed rather contemptuously, and said nothing. 'Dancing', in the sense that Emmanuelides used the word, to Spiros represented all that he felt he himself could never attain to,

NAUSICAA

a world of ease and pleasure and money, and his envy of the older man became intensified at every word.

'Well?' said Emmanuelides expectantly.

'What do you want to know?' said Spiros, avoiding his glance.

'First of all,' said Emmanuelides, 'please stop rowing. We've gone quite far enough, and it'll do you good to have a rest.'

Spiros obediently put up the oars, and still said nothing. Emmanuelides, leaning forward, offered him a cigarette, which he took, and lighted. When the match lit up his face, Emmanuelides was quite struck with his good looks, so struck that he forgot to be discreet, and said suddenly:

'Do you know, I was lying to you just now.'

'Were you?' said Spiros. 'What about?'

'I told you I was in business at Athens, but I'm not in business and I don't live in Athens. I live in Egypt and I'm an official.'

'Ah,' said Spiros, 'not in Alexandria?'

'Yes, Alexandria. Why do you ask?'

'I only wondered . . . But why did you lie to me at first?'

'Well,' said Emmanuelides, 'at first I didn't quite trust you, because I didn't know you. But now I see that I can trust you, I see that you're a good boy.'

'But is there any secret about where you live?'

'Oh, you never know. I'm a stranger here, and an official. People sometimes talk —'

There was a pause. The moon had risen higher, and the Othoman islands could be distinctly seen, bathed in a golden mist.

'As you are an official,' said Spiros, not without hesitation, 'perhaps you can help me.'

'I'll do anything I can for you,' said Emmanuelides with an unexpected eagerness, leaning forward again. 'Let me be your friend.'

Spiros was a little suspicious of this generosity but he resolved to turn it to good account. It seemed to him an enjoyable sort of revenge, to take thorough advantage of the kindness of a

STORIES OF GREECE

person one despised. So he began talking a little of himself, making his story seem as pathetic as possible. He stressed his poverty, which was genuine; explained that his parents were both dead, which was true; said that he lived with his uncle, that his life was dull, that he helped the fishermen in the intervals of managing his boat, that he had no money and no future — all of which was equally true. Seeing how effectively he was playing on Emmanuelides' feelings, he was careful not to overdo his performance, but with silence, and an occasional catch in the voice, he worked wonders. It became clear that Emmanuelides was excited and interested, perhaps by the story, or by his moonlight excursion, by this variation from his recent boredom, or by Spiros himself.

'Have you any brothers or sisters?' he said, not because he wanted to know, but because he wanted to watch Spiros, to hear him talk, and to make it appear as if he took a very special interest in him. At this question the boy's manner and expression immediately changed. It was possible, even in the moonlight, to see his dark eyes dilate, to see that he had somehow been touched to the quick. And Emmanuelides, with an almost feminine alertness, missed nothing. Where Spiros had previously been speaking for effect, he now spoke with passion. The words hurried to keep pace with his thoughts.

'I have one sister,' he said, 'and it is with regard to her that I want to ask your help. Her name is Nausicaa. Three years ago she was married to a man who came from Egypt. We knew nothing of him, he was not a Corfiote, but my uncle said that she ought to marry him, and she did. When she went away, it was the worst day of my life. And although she promised to write, and although I have made inquiries, we have never heard a word from that day to this. I am longing to see her again, at least to have news of her, but I have a great fear. From things I have heard indirectly, I believe it is possible that she has been forced to become a prostitute in Alexandria.'

NAUSICAA

Emmanuelides was careful to utter a horrified exclamation.

'And this is where I ask you to help me. Can you inquire for me if she can be found? I can give you all particulars, and the name of the man she went away with . . .'

Emmanuelides felt a glow of satisfaction, felt that he had conquered this at first contemptuous boy, felt that by promising help he could complete that conquest. Laying his hand on the boy's knee, he said, in very gentle and emotional voice:

'But of course I will help you, *pallikaraki*. I'll make detailed inquiries directly I get back, and let you know the result. I'm sure she can be traced.'

And Spiros believed him, forgot his envy, felt that he really had found a friend, so that his whole attitude to Emmanuelides changed, and his reserve melted away.

They stayed out so long on the calm water that warm night that, by the time they returned, the moon was in quite a different part of the sky. After Emmanuelides had given the boy some money, he made his way back to the hotel, feeling very pleased with himself.

Shortly afterwards, he made a second excursion, spending the whole afternoon on the water with Spiros, renewing his promise and assurances in regard to Nausicaa, and making himself as amiable as possible. But in his own mind he had already decided to leave Corfu, and when, on their return in the evening, a little rain began to fall, he felt himself in danger of being bored again, for his curiosity about Spiros was now satisfied.

'I shall have to leave in a few days,' he said on landing. 'If I don't see you before then, be sure to come and see me before I go.'

And although Spiros regretted in some ways the prospective departure of Emmanuelides, his heart beat quicker at the thought of the possibility of his sister's being found, so he said good night to him with mixed feelings.

Before Emmanuelides reached the hotel the rain was falling

STORIES OF GREECE

quite heavily. It continued to fall, on and off, for a week. Also, the weather was very cold, and because it was early in the season, the hotel was inadequately heated. The visitors were miserable, but none was more bored than Emmanuelides, who did not know what to do with himself, and attached himself rather too closely to the American couple. Their views on the charm of the Greeks became a little modified. Besides, not having been long married they were quite contented to be alone together, whatever the weather was like. One day, when it cleared a little, they went out bicycling again, largely with the idea of escaping for a time from Emmanuelides, but the bad luck which is characteristic of the island came upon them, and the woman fell off her machine and was slightly injured.

It was the morning of Emmanuelides' departure. He rose much earlier than usual, put on his slippers of soft red leather, and a dressing-gown of brocaded silk, and went over to the window. Not only had the rain stopped, but there was not a cloud in the sky. The room faced westwards, looking inland over a wide and varied panorama, which now appeared, with the sun's bright beams shining through the unsullied air as if through a crystal, clearer than he had ever seen it before. The sea was all diamonds, while between the rocky heights of San Salvatore on the right and those of Hagia Dekka on the left, towers and trees and gardens were as finely coloured as those in a medieval illumination or oriental miniature, and just as the Middle Ages and the East are to be thought of as largely squalid and filthy, full of the corruption of earth and humanity, so were the houses of Corfu; but if those paintings are glorious projections of mortality, so too this aspect of the island seemed such a projection, with the white cliff cluster of the village of Pelleka over there (so poor and dirty really) looking now like a colony of love in Paradise itself, as if nature wished to show that she does not disdain the function of art, which can paint a heaven with earthy colours. The morning

NAUSICAA

sky, the sunny white houses among green trees, the cries of children and the twinkling leaves below his window, were not unappreciated by the spectator, for he was tired of days of rain. But he was also tired of Corfu, not with the frantic ennui of the nervous and high-strung, but with the weak satiety of a dilettante. He was bored, and glad to go, and looked at the landscape without regrets. Indeed, it made him unwontedly reflective, for he felt it to be slightly sinister, and he remembered his birthday, the funeral he had seen, and the mad moon rising over the esplanade. Yes, he even became imaginative enough to think of the dirt and disease he had seen, which festered even now behind those white walls of near mansions and distant cottages; he remembered how he had been told only yesterday that Corfu had had the first lunatic asylum in Greece, and he saw madness brooding in innocent hamlets; he thought of the two madwomen he knew so well by sight as familiar characters in the town — one, young and dressy, who hurried off daily to stand motionless for hours under a tree in the square, muttering empty litanies; the other older and lousy, with a shock of curls, who strolled about scavenging and sometimes wept so vehemently as to cause laughter, hers seemingly the shrill grief of a buffoon. Already the magic of the light was slightly coarsened, soldiers were marching, a motor-lorry was passing, day was terrestrial, and Emmanuelides had finished his cigarette. He threw it away, and turned to shave and pack, glad to go, but feeling a slight irritation at the thought of a possible visit from Spiros.

As often, and perhaps usually happens, two human beings had each other in mind at the same moment, and Spiros was just dressing with a view to saying good-bye to Emmanuelides. He was dressing in borrowed clothes, while Emmanuelides was explaining to the valet-de-chambre that his tenth suit must not be crushed in the packing. From his childhood up Spiros had been familiar with the façade of the hotel. GRAND HOTEL BRISTOL AND ITHAKA was written in Greek and Roman letters above the door,

STORIES OF GREECE

and he seldom went past without exchanging a nod with the hall-porter, a distant connexion of his by marriage. But the idea of entering had never occurred to him. Even on the occasions when he had brought back a scarf or camera which somebody had left in his boat, there had always been a servant at the entrance to receive it. Not that the hotel was awe-inspiring; it simply housed a floating population of persons who were mostly foreign and therefore rich, or if not rich, able, under pressure, to pay. Yet this morning, so brilliant after the rain, Spiros went up the steps a little awkwardly and uneasily, proud and yet somehow ashamed of his blue serge suit and borrowed white collar that pressed a trifle tightly on his brown, muscular neck. The clear voices of two young women from 'Europe', from one of those pulsating cities that form the nerve centres of the world, rang with quick laughter and repartee, and he caught sight of their figures through the revolving glass door. They were tall and slender, dressed very simply and smartly, with a touch of carelessness and scarcely any jewellery or paint, standing and moving in ways that were neither slack nor stiff, but easy with the ease and elegance of people who have never known for generations what it is to be without money or food, and who regard any momentary lack of one or the other as a joke. They both glanced at Spiros as he passed, with the quick, calculating glance of their species, and his gaze rested on each of them in turn, deliberately, independently, with that mixture of shyness and hostility that can be seen in the faces of peasants, children, animals and persons very highly organized. A moment later they had gathered up their things and gone out into the sunshine, while he went slowly upstairs. On the first floor there was some confusion but he found his way to Emmanuelides' room.

'Ah, there you are,' said Emmanuelides airily. 'You're very smart this morning.'

'These clothes do not fit me,' said the boy, looking at the luggage piled up in the middle of the room.

NAUSICAA

'You haven't yet tied on the labels!' Emmanuelides exclaimed to the servant. 'Please do it quickly.'

'You won't forget . . .' began Spiros.

'Now where are my keys? Ah, here they are! I thought for a moment I had lost them!' Emmanuelides smiled broadly.

'I came to say good-bye,' said Spiros, 'and to ask you not to forget . . .'

'To inquire, you mean? But of course I shall not forget . . .' He glanced at his watch. 'Ah, look at the time! I must hurry. An American lady who is staying here has had a bicycle accident, and her husband says she is determined to see me before I go. One must consider the ladies . . . And the ship sails in three-quarters of an hour!'

He moved out of the room, and Spiros followed, saying again: 'You won't forget?'

Emmanuelides looked back over his shoulder at the servant, who was still busy with the labels, and seeing that he was unobserved, for he had a horror of scandal, pinched Spiros' cheek.

'Good-bye,' he said facetiously, 'and be good.'

He began to walk away, smiling as usual, on his way to the room occupied by the two Americans, glanced down at his breast pocket to see that the corner of his handkerchief was properly displayed, and then turned round and said to Spiros:

'I'll make inquiries, but they may not come to anything. People move about, you know—it is not always possible to trace them . . .'

Twenty minutes later he appeared at the front door. Spiros saw him go, and then after a few minutes' conversation with the porter, stepped across the street in the splendid sunshine, walking aimlessly in the direction of his home. The air was wonderfully fresh after the rain. Two or three children were playing with a cat in an alleyway, and a stout woman came out of a doorway, gave them a quick glance, and then, looking in the opposite direction, called out in a sonorous voice, 'Nausicaa! Come back

STORIES OF GREECE

when I call you!' Spiros started, and involuntarily glanced round, just in time to see a tiny child appear at the top of some steps in response to its mother's call. When he reached the corner of the next street his ear caught the distant sound of a siren from the direction of the port. Familiar enough, that prolonged, vibrant wail had never meant so much to him. But the boat was leaving, and its cry was not one of expectation but of farewell. Its effect on him was that of a warning to abandon hope, the last cry of the ghost of an illusion, and it seemed as though that departing ship were leaving him utterly alone on a desert island. He no longer cared whether Emmanuelides made inquiries or not, for he felt certain now that Nausicaa would never be found. 'People move about, you know, it is not always possible to trace them . . . ' When he considered how much he hated the man who had uttered those words, how instinctively and whole-heartedly he detested him, Spiros could not understand how he could have allowed himself to behave so amiably towards Emmanuelides. And because he was unwilling even to catch a glimpse of the departing ship, he turned and took a road that led directly away from the sea.

THE CRISIS

§ I

ZAPPAGLOU, a wholesale tobacco merchant, formerly of Stamboul, is a very fat patriarchal creature with somewhat old-fashioned tastes, and when he retired to Athens with a small fortune he did not go and build himself a pretentious villa at Kephissia, but acquired from some impoverished relations a real old Greek house, dating from the days of the Turkish occupation and standing right in the very shadow of the Acropolis itself. The house is on the steep north side of the Acropolis, in that old quarter now threatened not only by the usual encroachments of modern life but even by the zeal of archæologists from the western world who have got an idea into their heads that all sorts of antique treasures must be hidden under these charming streets so crowded together on the slope — though of course all they will find is an assortment of broken bits of bad late sculpture and the usual lumps and odds and ends.

Zappaglou's house can easily be distinguished from a distance, because it has two cypresses and a large fig-tree in the yard. It is approached by some steps turning off from a very narrow passage called Mykonos Street, and surrounded by a thick old wall which is partly whitewashed and has two Byzantine capitals embedded in it (one of them upside-down) as well as what seems to be a section of a slender fluted column of great age. In this wall there is a gate, or rather a door, which leads into the yard, and as soon as you get inside you find a palm tree as well as the other trees already mentioned. There are various outbuildings on two sides, and on a third there is the house itself, covered with stucco of a very light fawn colour. There is an iron balcony, the windows have shutters, and the roof is tiled, while above it rise

STORIES OF GREECE

three or four of those elegant Venetian chimneys which are shaped like an inverted cone. In the yard there are usually to be found a nondescript dog, some washing hanging out, and some rather dirty children, while on the balcony above one is certain in good weather, during the mornings or late afternoons, to see Zappaglou himself, sitting in a white alpaca jacket and a pair of white cotton trousers which are cut so that they almost reach his armpits, in order to enclose his enormous paunch. On his wrist there is a tiny gold watch which he wears not because he really cares what the time is but because it gives him a feeling of authority. Its face, misty with the steam that continually rises from such a gross organism, is almost hidden in a forest of black hairs.

Sitting up there on his balcony, talking politics or food and wheezing cheerfully over his own jokes with his crony, a retired shipowner, Zappaglou is pretty well content. Of course there is an 'economic crisis' on. There always is nowadays. But that is not peculiar to Greece. And in any case the very words 'economic crisis' are Greek and have been so for a very long time, so that if the words creep into the conversation now and then they bring with them no disturbing novelty.

Where he sits Zappaglou has the Acropolis and his own house and family at his back and the best part of Athens spreads out before him. There, on the left, is the Theseion; there, on the right, is the Constitution Square and the formerly royal garden; and there is the rocky hill of Lykabettos with the white church like a lighthouse on its summit, and over there is Mount Hymettos, ready to turn violet when the sun has set. But if it is agreeable to Zappaglou to sit in such a commanding position, which makes him feel properly related to the history and traditions of his race and family and to the town and its contemporary life, he has other causes for satisfaction. A newspaper at his elbow — a progressive conservative newspaper — is ready to share with him his own opinions, and being a newspaper it puts no

THE CRISIS

great strain on the intellect. His wife within there is ready to be argued with or to advise him, as she has done with sound common sense for the last forty years, and she is no doubt giving an eye to the preparation of supper in that kitchen which is a favourite haunt of his, for cooking is his hobby, and to see Zappaglou squeezing a few drops out of a lemon into his favourite soup is one of the most comfortable and heartening sights imaginable — the only thing is that if he were a little less fat he would be able to get nearer to the stove and his activities there.

Sometimes he glances down into the yard and calls out an order to a child or a servant, and sometimes he looks across to the outbuildings and thinks of their inmates, and certainly they give him plenty of food for thought. First of all, there is a whole family ensconced in three rooms at the end. These are the cousins from whom he took over the whole place. Hopelessly improvident, they would have let everything go to rack and ruin if he had not stepped in just when he did. And he has been kind enough to let them stay on, provided they keep to the other side of the yard. He only charges them a very small rent, which they are always backward in paying, and this gives his wife grounds for saying, 'You ought never to have let them stay on here. I advised you against it, but you allowed family sentiment to get the better of you, and now you see what comes of it, and I hope you're satisfied.'

Next to the rooms occupied by the cousins is a servant's room, and then, up a flight of stone steps, comes a room used by Zappaglou's youngest son, the apple of his mother's eye and the chief bane (a much more real one than the 'crisis') of his father's existence. In the first place, although Costa is supposed to be in the tobacco business with his elder and married brother and is paid a salary for that, he seems to be always in need of money. Then he will insist on living in that room and sometimes will not come near the house itself for two or three days at a time. He shows every sign of becoming one of those amiable

STORIES OF GREECE

wasters whom nature is liable to provide as sons to successful business men. And besides, it is he who is responsible for the presence in the only remaining room in the yard of Nikos and Timos.

Nikos and Timos are beggars, and they live in that room for nothing. Of course, old Zappaglou is not so mean that he minds doing a little something for charity, but when the beggars came he was already charitable in other directions, and there is the crisis to think of. Besides, although he has no real objection to Nikos and Timos, and rather likes them and especially the respectful way in which they always speak to him, their presence is useful as an argument against Costa. And in Zappaglou's conversations with his wife about their youngest son such arguments are needed, for she will admit no fault in the boy.

'I don't know where he picked them up!' Zappaglou exclaims irritably.

'They don't do any harm!' his wife retorts.

'And they don't do any good either,' he grumbles.

'Ah, well, you must put up with them. What with the crisis . . .'

'The crisis!' he roars. 'If anybody wants to get anything out of me they always start talking about the crisis! If people do anything wrong nowadays, they don't blame their own wicked hearts or their own laziness — oh no, not a bit of it! What do they do? They blame the crisis! Don't they understand that for a serious man life is always a crisis? I've always found it so. I've always been in a state of crisis, trying to avoid bankruptcy or overwork or starvation or family troubles or bad cooking. And the only way to overcome one crisis after another is by hard work. And that's what's wrong with Costa — he's afraid of work! And not content with being a beggar himself he must go and add two more beggars to the household!'

'He's not a beggar!'

'He will be one day!'

THE CRISIS

These discussions are never conclusive, and nobody is less affected by them than the subjects themselves. The way Nikos and Timos were brought to live under the unwilling patronage of old Zappaglou was this. His son Costa, sitting once in a café of ill repute at the Piræus, saw the two beggars come in, one playing an accordion and the other singing, and taking a fancy first to the music and then to the performers, he prevailed upon his mother to allow them to come and live in the room in the yard, at that time empty, and there they have been for more than a year. They don't seem ungrateful.

'Like everybody else,' they say, 'of course we feel the effects of the crisis, and are thankful to have a roof over our heads.'

But when Nikos and Timos speak it is never possible to tell for certain whether there is not perhaps a trace of irony in the tones of their voices, for they are both, in a sense, people who have been quite disillusioned but whose disillusionment has partly healed, and people of that sort are apt to be both independent and mysterious. And then that 'we' of theirs is rather formidable. Neither of them is ever heard to use the word 'I'. Never was there such a mating of two natures. Yet they remain very definitely two natures, and when one speaks for both, it is because he knows the other would approve of what he says though incapable of saying the same himself.

'And how are "we"?' old Zappaglou sometimes asks them when he is in a good temper.

'We are very well,' they reply gravely.

Separate natures, and yet neither can be said to play a more active part than the other, as is so often the case in partnerships between two human beings. Nikos, who is blind, is the more beautiful of the two. He is rather tall for a Greek and holds himself very erect, while his blindness causes him to tilt his head back more than he would ordinarily do, and this tendency is becoming to him and brings into relief the harmonious regularity of his features. Timos is shorter. He is not blind, but nearly so. He

STORIES OF GREECE

suffers from a severe ophthalmia. His eyelids are scarlet and inflamed and nothing seems to do them any good.

These two expect nothing of life but what it has already given them. They do not dread death, but would prefer not to be separated. Their outlook on life combines the most unutterable melancholy and a constant gaiety. As for their time, that is mostly spent in the streets, where they beg. Nikos plays his battered accordion, of which the notes are surprisingly pure and plaintive. He sings also, in the most melting voice, a few snatches of old folk songs or of popular tunes like *Valencia*; while Timos, who can at any rate distinguish people from houses, approaches the former with a battered tin tray which he holds out for alms. It is a good idea, that tray. If you give them too little, your meanness lies naked in the sun until Timos chooses to pocket it.

§ 2

Rather late one afternoon, when Nikos and Timos were out begging, and Costa was down at the sea with his friend the sailor, old Zappaglou was sitting on his veranda. He had risen from his siesta and was now sitting there with his hairy paws clasped over his huge belly. He was waiting for his wife to bring him a large slice of an excellent melon which his sister had sent him, and his mental faculties had temporarily abdicated in favour of his salivary glands. Before the melon arrived, however, his attention was caught by the passing of a pedestrian up the lane just below the house. A foreigner, thought Zappaglou, a tourist no doubt, he has a white suit and is eating something out of a bag. But beyond that he registered no further impression, for he did not know that he would ever see the passer-by again. Besides, the melon had just arrived, and seemed much more important.

The passer-by, who was wearing a Palm Beach suit and eating

THE CRISIS

Turkish Delight out of a paper bag, was none other than Fletcher B. Raper, newly appointed chief local executive organizer for Greece of Study Trips in Bible Lands, Inc. Mr. Raper was delighted with Greece and with Mr. Raper. And he thought Turkish Delight was the swellest candy imaginable. He had a large glabrous face, like an omelette in texture and a boiled shrimp in colour. The eyes were keen but unseeing, the nose was small, the nostrils were pinched, the mouth was thin, the ears were large, the cheeks were like buttocks, the chin was determined — and the whole, supported on a high, starched collar, would have done very well for the head of an American president, the only trouble being that an American president nowadays has to have two O's in his surname, and Raper — well, Raper hasn't even one. 'Raper Runs for President,' though, sounded quite plausible.

At the moment Mr. Raper was not 'running for president' but climbing to the Acropolis, and although the afternoon was well advanced he continued to feel the heat. He had felt the heat all the morning, and had not perhaps been wise to schedule visits to three museums in the hot sun in as many hours. And instead of taking a proper siesta after lunch he had been busy with a typewriter in a hotel bedroom facing the sun. He thought he was going up to the Acropolis to get cool and to improve his knowledge of that ancient spot, but he was just getting hotter and hotter. He told himself he was a fool for not taking a taxi, but with the crisis back home he figured to try and save something out of his salary as local executive of Study Trips.

Turning a corner into an even narrower lane than the one he had left, he came face to face with Nikos and Timos. He saw that they were beggars and he saw that they were dirty. Whatever faults Mr. Raper may have had he looked very clean, and the lousiness of the two beggars quite upset him. Also, he saw that he would have to give them something, and that rather irritated him. Nikos was standing in the middle of the way, and singing

STORIES OF GREECE

in a low voice as if he was the only person in the world. He looked very tall, and the absolutely resigned and self-contained expression on his face made Mr. Raper feel somehow awkward. Timos, seeing a white blur approaching, went up to it with his tin tray, and said something in Greek. It was Greek to Mr. Raper. He had so far been too busy doing what he called 'studying up' statistics to learn much of the language, though he had already arranged for lessons; Greek art, literature, and mythology had also eluded him hitherto. He now produced a ten-drachma note and placed it reluctantly on the tray, and then, catching sight of Timos's inflamed eyes, hurried off up the hill, wiping his fingers on his handkerchief in case he had picked up some germs. Somebody ought to clean up these slums, he thought, and popped the last piece of Turkish Delight into his mouth.

Five minutes later he was seated in the shade behind a broken column near the Erechtheion. He had had to sit down on account of a slight feeling of giddiness. There were rumblings in his interior and he wondered if he had been wise to eat so much Turkish Delight, but he believed that if you *think* there is something wrong with you there soon *will* be something wrong with you, so he took out his pocket book to look at a list he had made of things he hoped to do on the following day. Mr. Raper was ambitious. He was proud of his new appointment, and he meant to make a success of it. He knew that he was lucky to get it in a time of world-wide crisis, and he also knew that if or when the crisis passed, heavy bookings could be obtained in the Middle West for Study Trips in Bible Lands. All that would be wanted would be a large-scale publicity drive.

Mr. Raper fell into a day-dream, into a doze. He was a romantic person, and as he sat there, leaning back against that ancient marble fragment, he dipped into his future, and found it as succulent as Turkish Delight. He imagined himself being interviewed by a correspondent of some great newspaper back home. He worked out the headlines:

THE CRISIS

U.S. EXECUTIVE, CHIEF LOCAL ORGANIZER OF STUDY TRIPS IN BIBLE LANDS, INC., TELLS CHARMS OF HELLAS — GREECE IMPORTS MORE FROM AMERICA THAN ANY OTHER COUNTRY — FLETCHER B. RAPER ADVISES TOURISTS TO COME BEFORE MODERNIZATION IS COMPLETED. :

'I found Executive Raper strolling on the Acropolis in Athens, Greece,' the interview would begin. "Scarcely a century ago," he said, "this tiny country had a total population of hardly 600,000 but she now embraces a large area and a population of 6,204,684. The influence of the United States may be in part attributed to the presence in the United States of 498,231 persons of Greek birth. At the present time Greece imports more goods from the United States than from any other country in the world, and the United States, on its side, is the chief purchaser of Greek staple commodities. The principal public works now being carried on in this country are being carried on by well-known American corporations, and include the new American sewage farm on the plain of Marathon. If we sewage farmers could only get together we could drain the world, and if all the dollar bills for draining all the countries in the Balkans alone were laid end to end and converted into gold they would weigh more than Paraguay's war debt to Japan did before the slump.

"Travel in Greece at this time is fraught with material discomforts, but doubtless within a few years the system of projected automobile highways will have linked up the sacred sites whose names have come down to us in history, and also at that time the whole country will be dotted with tourist hotels. We take our Greece for granted, little comprehending the giant economic strides this little country has taken, so my advice to all and sundry is to come and see historic little Hellas before American money and American enterprise have cleaned it up, which it sorely needs. What Greece wants is better roads, better ruins, and better toilet-paper. What would St. Paul have said,

STORIES OF GREECE

what would Poet Byron have said, what would Excavator Schliemann have said? *You* can visit Greece too. Visit mosquito-free Missolonghi — Ice-water in every bedroom — Dancing in the winter-garden every afternoon — Attend the Eleusinian Mystery Ball on Thanksgiving Night — Balls all the year round — Conjure up the classic past in eight thousand restful bedrooms, each with bath.

‘ “And what has America done here in Athens? Here in Athens we have the American School of Classical Studies, the American Friends of Greece, Athens College at Psychiko, the American College for Girls at Phaleron, and the new Y.M.C.A. located on Euripides Street. Say, where would Greece be without America? Where would America be without Greece? And where would waffles be without syrup? And where would the Parthenon be without a bum executive walking all around it? In the British Museum probably.

‘ “Yes, sir, all in all, the friends of Greece can hope and expect that in the course of the coming years, when once we have got over the crisis, this country, always one of the most interesting in the world, will become as well one of the most prosperous, independent economically as well as politically. Say, where should we be — where should I be, we be, where would you be, they be, without the street-car, the elevator, the radio, and the telephone? Visit the classic shores of Hellas before it is too late. Tread where Socrates trod, Plato argued, and Helen of Troy launched all those ships. Why, this land is so impregnated with history that it cannot fail to touch a responsive chord in even the least idealist among us. See the Ilissus by moonlight, see where Homer nodded, see the quaint Republican Guards in their ballet skirts.” ’

At this point Mr. Raper’s dream took such an eccentric turn that it can no longer be reproduced here. And then he suddenly woke up, shouting, ‘Say, who called me a bum executive?’

It was ten minutes before sunset, closing-time on the Acropolis

THE CRISIS

and an irritable official was doing his voluble best to rouse Mr. Raper from his stony couch. He succeeded, and Mr. Raper was the last to leave the Propylea, which he did with the sun shining full in his eyes. Oh, that sun! Mr. Raper was sick of it. Mr. Raper felt sick and a little shaky at the knees, and a fine, cold perspiration broke out on his forehead. He took off his hat to cool his head, and began to make his way downhill.

§ 3

Five minutes before sunset Zappaglou, in a black alpaca coat and a straw hat, left his house for a short stroll. At the corner of Mykonos Street he was surprised to see again the foreigner he had seen earlier in the afternoon. But this time he was not walking purposefully along and eating sweets out of a bag. No, he was leaning against an old wall, had gone very pale, and was rolling his eyes in a way which made him look rather like a cow that is just going to calve. He must be ill, thought Zappaglou, staring. And as he stared the foreigner gave way at the knees and fell down face foremost in the dust, in a dead faint.

The leviathan was galvanized into action. He bellowed to a woman in a doorway for water, and as he was a hearty man and had a hearty voice, and as it was the evening hour when people are awake and about, he attracted a lot of attention. Heads popped out of windows, willing helpers appeared from nowhere, and curious people came running from near and far, while a rumour spread rapidly that an English lord had committed suicide as his heart had been broken by an unfaithful wife. Amidst a babble of excitement Zappaglou had Mr. Raper carried up to his house till he should recover, and sent somebody for a doctor.

Two streets away Timos heard people running and caught a fragment of excited questioning.

'Why are people running?' said Nikos. 'Is there a fire?'

STORIES OF GREECE

Timos screwed up his scarlet, mucous eyes and looked after the blurred and hurrying figures.

'You may as well stop playing,' he said, 'till the people come back. There must have been an accident, and it has drawn them all away.'

Nikos smiled, and said nothing. He was standing very straight against a white wall under an overhanging fig tree. The last rays of the sun shone full upon him, upon his lean figure and his calm, handsome and filthy face, which had not been shaved for two days, with its expression of peculiarly Balkan hopelessness oddly mixed with a subtle and perhaps ever so slightly disdainful smile. He looked a young dandy in his rags, as he still touched a note or two from his accordion with his long fingers.

'Even if I could see again,' he remarked in a dreamy voice, 'I doubt if I should go and look at this accident of theirs. Even if we could see all right, Timos, I doubt if we should be able to see this crisis they're always talking about.'

Behind his eyes there is some real world of his own. His blindness, by sharpening all but one of his senses, has produced in him a kind of inversion; he knows that, being blind, he is exceptional as the world judges, but it seems to him that *he* can see and the *world* is blind. What were all these people running for? It is the world, not Nikos, that is stampeded by a whim, swayed by phantom and fetish, ruled by rumour and by fear. He feels a kind of security, thanks to Costa and old Zappaglou and his wife, and thanks to Timos, and thanks to the public which supports him, as a whirlpool supports a feather or a straw. Perhaps when people glance at his upturned face they sometimes suspect that he may be able to see more calmly and deeply into things than they can. And no doubt the fragments of tunes that escape from his accordion suggest mystery to them, produce in them pangs of longing for something they have lost or will never attain.

Detaching a hand from the instrument he scratches himself in

THE CRISIS

the groin, for he is troubled with crab-lice. As for Timos, he has squatted down on the ground, leaning his tray against the wall by his side. He is waiting for the people to return, and sits so still that he looks as if he would not mind waiting for ever.

1932.

THE ISLAND

AN AFTERNOON IN THE LIFE OF COSTA
ZAPPAGLOU

THE place was reached by tram, and the afternoons were hot. The trams were old-fashioned, and inside were like drawing-rooms full of chairs, with the sun on the right-hand side shining through the faded white-and-green striped canvas curtains which were drawn, but only on that side. In spite of the heat (a dry heat) the light shining through the curtains like that made the people look cool and beautiful, especially an old man with a clear skin and white hair (he held his hat on his knees), a young woman with a baby, and a sunburnt sailor in a white uniform. PERGAMOS was written on his cap in gold letters, and he and Costa had got into the way of making this journey together twice a week. Costa was very clean and carefully dressed in a thin light suit. On the left-hand side of the tram the curtains were not drawn, and the sun shone full upon Attica, drawing vibrations of heat out of rocky Hymettos, and revealing first one and then another splendid view (as the tram turned a curve or travelled between the houses) of the bay of Phaleron, a lot of little sailing-boats at anchor on the dark-blue water, and farther out an old-fashioned battleship, brought from the English in the 'nineties, and painted not grey, but sky-blue, a squat, complicated, inefficient and comfortable-looking dreadnought, quite large, at anchor not very far out, with some white washing hanging on a line amidships. That was the *Byron*, not the *Pergamos*, then in Crete, the sailor on the tram having work in the meantime at a dockyard. There was no need to remind Costa, when a retired merchant in white trousers and a black alpaca coat, wearing a

THE ISLAND

straw hat and carrying a melon, got up and the tram slowed down, that the stopping-place had been reached, and he and his friend got out. But the merchant went up a steep street between stucco houses, a steep rough street with no traffic, going directly towards the sun, his shadow climbing behind him, and light billows of golden dust hanging in the air at his heels. Those two turned to the sea.

The road and the tramline were at the top of a cliff and curved out of sight together a few hundred yards farther on, but there was a steep narrow path, once a goat-track, down the face of a cliff leading to the bathing place, of which the existence might never have been suspected. This path they took, when the sun was already far past its zenith, for although early in the afternoon it was late in the summer.

The path led down to some steps cut in the rock (they had been used for at least two thousand years) and the steps led to a terrace, where there was a wine-shop, painted pink, with an open front, and overshadowed by a large and leafy fig tree which filled the air with its perfume. Crossing the terrace, which had on it a few tables and chairs, and a balustrade at the side, one became aware of the sound and smell of the sea twenty feet below. The keeper of the place, a man little more than forty, lean and healthy in a thin and dirty white sweater, his face rather lined yet young-looking, exchanged a cheerful greeting with the sailor, whom he had known all his life, and with Costa, a more recent acquaintance, who paid for the right to bathe (no tickets were issued), drawing a crumpled note from his trousers pocket.

They went as usual down the wooden steps to the wooden bathing cubicles, built in the shape of an L, with a wooden veranda in front of them looking on to the narrow beach, half shingle and half sand, and the sea.

'It always seems to me strange that you can't see the island from here,' said Costa, 'but I suppose it must be behind that cliff. I must swim a good way out and see if I can see it.'

STORIES OF GREECE

'No, you mustn't try and do that,' said the sailor, but he gave no reason and did not say that he did not like Costa to go far away from him or that he feared the sea or the cramp that may overtake swimmers. He had already thrown his towel on the seat in one of the dark cubicles and was unlacing his shoes. Looking back at the sea over his shoulder Costa followed him in and closed the door. Having no windows, the cubicles were dark, but not so dark that it was impossible to see all the signatures and dates pencilled on the walls, all the erotic poems and drawings which, while the sailor undressed, Costa looked at with some curiosity. From outside came the splash of somebody diving, and two wet bathers hurrying along the veranda shook the whole rickety structure of the bathing cubicles.

They were soon in the water, where the sailor was less enterprising than Costa, for he had been smoking too much lately and was short of wind. The water was warm, and while the sailor stood in it up to his waist, exchanging a remark with one of the other bathers (as there were fewer than a dozen of them that day, many of the cubicles were empty) Costa was already swimming straight out to sea as if he meant to have a sight of the island, for it seemed to him reasonable that if one could see it from the top of the cliff one should be able to see it also from sea level, provided one swam out far enough.

'Come back,' cried the sailor. 'Don't go out so far!'

'It's all right,' cried Costa from a distance, laughing, and waving a glistening arm before swimming out farther.

When the sailor saw that Costa was determined to swim out farther, when he saw him swimming straight out in a leisurely but steady way, he plunged in after him and swam with furious energy until, short of breath, he caught him up. When Costa saw this he stopped, treading water, and they began to argue.

'Why do you want to stop me?' he said. 'There's no danger. If you had only let me swim for another three minutes I believe I

THE ISLAND

should have caught sight of the island and then I should have been satisfied and should have turned back.'

'But I tell you, you can't see the island from here! And why should you want to see it from here when you can see it so easily from the top of the cliff? It isn't an important island. Nobody lives on it, and there is nothing on it but the ruins of a temple and some plants.'

'I know,' said Costa, 'but . . .'

'Please come back when I ask you,' said the sailor gravely. 'Come, let's race back to the shore.'

And knowing for certain that Costa would not, indeed could not refuse flatly to do what he asked, he struck out vigorously on his return journey to the beach. But Costa followed him half reluctantly, swimming back in his leisurely way, so that he got back to the beach some moments after his friend. They did not go into the water again that afternoon, but sat against some rocks in the sun.

'Before we settle down,' said the sailor, 'I'll go and get a couple of cigarettes.'

'Not for me,' said Costa. 'I don't want one now.'

'You don't want one? Very well, I shall get one for myself.'

He was lying on his belly, and the sun shone upon his slender, rose-brown back and the few faint black hairs like the traces of a very fine paintbrush at the top of his spine. He got up then and walked away, with a slow, proud gait, holding himself very erect, his feet now in the water and now out, as the waves broke and receded. Presently the shadow which was advancing from the cliff seemed to drop a veil behind him as he stepped into it, and he disappeared into the cubicle. He came out a moment later with the cigarette between his lips and a curl of blue smoke trailing away from his head, and meeting an acquaintance remained in conversation with him for some minutes, though they were too far away for Costa, reclining now on a smooth hot rock in the sun, to hear what they were saying. This disturbed him. He

STORIES OF GREECE

was of a jealous nature. The curtain of shadow fell away from the sailor as he advanced again (the cigarette now half smoked), walking with easy grace and a black rag round his loins, glad of the sun falling warm on his golden shoulders again, for with the summer so far advanced the shade in mid-afternoon was not quite so warm as it had been a few weeks before. The history of his extraordinary race glittered in his dark eyes. He was humming to himself the following song:

Water springs out of the earth, and out of the olive, oil,
And out of a lovely mother springs a strong young man;
Drop by drop the water wears away the stone
And a girl with mincing airs destroys the strong young man.

His voice was deep and low, and the old Klephtic melody sounded sad between the rocks and the sea.

A light warm breeze blew among the sunny rocks, and the top of a tram could be seen and heard passing along the top of the cliff. Three boys were playing in the water, and fragments of a heated argument about politics drifted down from the terrace under the fig tree. The sailor lay on his back looking up at the cloudless sky. From just below the base of the neck to the navel there was a distinct groove in his body.

The man who kept the place came down to talk. He stayed with them for some time, bringing cigarettes and some fresh figs on a plate.

'You'll be sleeping in Athens to-night?' he said.

'No, we shall be sleeping in Phaleron. But we're going to have supper here, soon after sunset.'

'Before you go,' said the owner, addressing himself to Costa, 'remind me to show you the mosaics in my cellar, where in ancient times there was a bagnio.'

'We must go and dress now, the sun's getting low.'

They got up slowly, brushing off the sand that had stuck to their skins, sticky with salt from the sea.

THE ISLAND

'I'll get a bucket of fresh water,' said the sailor as they walked back to the cubicles, and went to fetch it. It was very warm in the cubicle, on which the sun had been shining all day long, and as they were by this time both warm and dry they were in no hurry to dress.' The sun still glinted through the cracks in the wall at the back, which faced west, and made little strips of light on their bodies where they sat. They could hear boys splashing in the sea and there was a sense of approaching evening.

When they had washed and dressed they went up to the pink house, but had no sooner reached the top of the steps leading to the terrace than they heard a low moan behind them, and looking down, saw a bather at the bottom of the steps in pain, still wet from the sea, and supported by his companion: he had cut his foot badly on some broken glass on the beach, and was being helped up to ask for iodine and bandages.

Leaving Costa, the sailor became at once engaged in a furious argument in which the owner was taking part (his wife came out of the café in her apron but did not stay a second to argue, running back for bandages), and the injured man, and his companion especially, who was trying to fix the responsibility for the injury — whose fault was it that there was glass on the beach? and whose fault that a foot had been cut on it? and who would pay the doctor's bill and who would compensate the injured man for being unable to go about his work for at least a week? The injured man had meanwhile turned quite pale. In contrast to his black hair his face had gone a clear honey colour like some antique mask, the eyelids lowered from faintness. He was helped inside — carried, for he felt unlike hopping on one foot, by his companion and by the sailor, to a chair. When the sailor came back to Costa there was a little blood on his white trousers, just below the knee.

'It'll wash out,' he said.

And yet that little stain was never washed out of their memories. They afterwards remembered this afternoon.

STORIES OF GREECE

It was quiet now, the sun was setting, and everybody had come out of the water. Two or three lights began to twinkle on the pale blue battleship anchored out in the bay, the *Byron*, that looked more like some fantastic cathedral planted on an islet than like the death-dealing machine that it was.

They sat at a table drinking glasses of *ouzo* and watching the moon rising like an enormous bubble from the sea. There was silence again, and the moon began to shine down on the darkened sea. The owner came out to find out what they wanted for supper and to ask if they wanted to see the mosaics, so they got up and followed him.

The café itself was lighted with oil-lamps, and a door at the back led into what in prehistoric times had been a large cave, in ancient times a bathing establishment, and was now used as a cellar. They descended by steps into a circular room with recesses in the wall now occupied by hogsheads of wine. A second door led into a larger room, now used for storing things, where the owner flashed an electric torch upon the mosaics. There were two. One, somewhat damaged, of Phœbus-Apollo driving the small-headed, prancing horses of the sun; the other, in good condition, of a woman helping a warrior to arm.

'If these could speak,' said the owner, laughing rather slyly. 'they would tell some strange stories!'

The sailor said nothing, looking sidelong at Costa to see if he was pleased with the mosaics.

'Aren't they good!' said the owner.

'They're wonderful,' said Costa.

'We hardly ever show them,' said the owner. 'But you're privileged because you're a friend of *his*.' Smiling, he nodded towards the sailor.

'Thank you very much,' said Costa.

When they came out again the moonlight was brilliant, and they went back to their table at the edge of the terrace. It had been covered with a white cloth, and they asked the owner to

THE ISLAND

join them at supper, which he did. They had red mullet with bread and a salad, resinated wine, and afterwards some black currant-grapes and coffee. A beggar came round, the moonlight was playing on the sea, and when he had gone a band could be heard faintly playing on the battleship *Byron*, now all twinkling with lights, for there was a party on board that night. In the distance the moon was shining on Hymettos, and here and there all over Greece it was shining on marble columns, some of which were still standing while others had fallen.

'I'm sleepy after bathing,' said the sailor. 'Let's be going soon.'

'Very well.'

'Oh, did I tell you that I'm going to be transferred to a submarine?'

'To a submarine! You never told me!'

The sailor smiled sadly, and with his black eyes flashing began to sing in a low but languorous voice:

'Drop by drop the water wears away the stone. . . '

The night seemed full of an immense yearning when he stopped singing, and it did not vanish at the changed tone of his voice as he said, when they were getting up to go:

'Costa, from the top of the cliff you'll be able to see the island quite safely!'

Calling out 'Good night!' to the owner they passed under the fig tree and up the steps, but when they got to the top of the cliff they forgot to look at the island. Walking in silence, with linked arms, they felt for the moment content.

LOCAL COLOUR

UPON certain kinds of Nordics the effect of living in Mediterranean countries is the reverse of bracing. The freedom, warmth and glamour of their surroundings begin to sap their intellectual or artistic activity and ambition. They drift into idleness and weaken in will. While constantly talking about what they are going to do and accomplish, they do nothing and make nothing, and at last discover that in gaining liberty and sunshine they have lost purpose and vigour. It is a matter of taste and temperament. You can't have everything.

But when the Nordic, young, enterprising and healthy, first finds himself enjoying freedom, warmth and glamour, the effect upon him is indescribably delightful. He is without responsibilities, he has a susceptible body and an impressionable mind; the sun warms his skin and the blood sings in his veins. Life is full of promise, he is ready for anything, and if anybody asks him if he doesn't feel the heat he says, 'No, I love it.'

Two people in this happy condition were sitting in basket chairs on the veranda of the best hotel in Athens. They were English undergraduates who had come to spend the long vacation in Greece. They were not sitting there alone. They had a guest — nobody less than Madame H  l  ne Strouthok  melos.

'Don't you feel the heat?' she said, looking from one to the other.

'Not a bit,' said Grant.

'We love it,' said Spencer.

It *was* extremely hot, all the same. The glare was dazzling. It was just that hour when nothing seems likely ever to cast a shadow again, and the air itself buzzes like a cicada. The young men, neatly dressed in light summer clothing, sat in easy attitudes,

LOCAL COLOUR

but there was much more assurance in their voices than in their feelings. They had brought a letter of introduction to Madame Strouthokámelos and in delivering it had added an invitation to lunch. And here she was in the flesh, and they felt rather shy. Spencer, the English one, was uneasy because he was wearing rather too pretty a tie, which he had bought in Paris, and Madame Strouthokámelos kept glancing at it every now and again as if it offered a clue to his soul. Grant, the Scotch one, had begun looking at the toes of his shoes, and that was always a bad sign with him. Just then an important looking man in a straw hat came up the steps, and catching sight of Madame Strouthokámelos made her an obsequious bow, to which she replied with a cool nod. *Cool*, that was it. It was her coolness that was so disconcerting.

She was neither young nor middle-aged. She had dignity without stiffness, she was handsome, healthy, powerful. There was no powder on her face, she wore no jewellery, and her clothes were simple. She had taken off her little soft hat, just as a girl might have done, with a single gesture and laid it on the table at her side, and now she sat there with her head, most appropriately, against a white marble background. Spencer was facing her, Grant saw her in profile, and if they had been in the presence of Juno herself they could scarcely have been more impressed.

Before meeting her they had tried to imagine what she would be like, and they had invented a perspiring Levantine matron in black which the sun had faded, with a bluish moustache, bad teeth, and voluble French. And here was Juno at forty, or the Venus of Milo come to life, a woman of noble proportions, with naturally wavy hair, black, becomingly streaked with grey, and drawn back from a smooth forehead, from a face with regular features supported grandly on a firm neck like a cylinder of honey-coloured marble. Her skin was clear and honey-coloured too, and it made the white of her eyes and her fine teeth seem to be ever so slightly tinged with very pale blue. Her strong arms

STORIES OF GREECE

were bare, and her cool dress hung loosely over her firm breasts and clung against her hips and thighs. So much for her appearance. She had a manner to match it.

She had once had a baby — but rather a small one. It often happens with amazonian, mammoth, or merely muscular women that their offspring comes into the world as an embodied protest against size and strength — in fact, the little Strouthokámelos weighed at birth no more than four pounds. It was, however, her husband rather than her child who had mainly disappointed her. Had he been dutiful, she would no doubt have worn him out, but he was casual, and she lost him. Strouthokámelos had been a little too Greek in his nature for her taste — she had been 'finished' in Paris and Vienna, but they hadn't prepared her for what happened. And when it *did* happen she took pains to inform herself about aspects of life, of Greek life, to which she had hitherto paid little attention. And having been informed, she was resentful. What she could no longer ignore she blamed, frowned upon, or affected not to notice, according to circumstances. And whenever any reflection happened to be cast by foreigners upon the Greeks in general she hastened to proclaim her countrymen's conformity with Christian morality, with the finishing-school view of human nature, failing altogether to remind herself that they are scarcely a European people.

Madame Strouthokámelos was not a fool. She was very much the reverse. Like so many citizens of the lesser European countries she was an excellent linguist, equally at home in English, French, German and Italian. She had read a great deal and was still reading. She was a capable housewife, a born organizer and to some extent a woman of the world. She could stride through thistles in Thessaly, hold her own at the bridge table, make a speech or sack a maid, was a personal friend of the prime minister, and of course was fully equal to the present occasion. She glanced in the direction of the dining-room, and then said:

'Do you specially want us to have lunch here?'

LOCAL COLOUR

'No,' said Spencer.

'Not if you know of anywhere better,' said Grant.

'Ah, I see you're the practical one,' she said, displaying her classical, milk-blue teeth. 'I don't know about *better*, but hotels are all the same everywhere. I think while you are in Greece you ought to do as the Greeks do. I know a little place down by the sea, towards Vouliagméní, where we could get a nice *Greek* lunch. Do you think you would like that?'

'We should love it,' said Spencer.

'I'm all for local colour,' said Grant.

'Ah, that's just it,' she said. 'If we go there, it will be *Greek*, whereas *this* . . .' She shrugged her shoulders, but there was a delicious smell of food wafted from the dining-room. 'Then we may as well go at once?' she said, rising to her feet.

Her hosts got up obediently. She was used to obedience.

'You've left your book behind,' she said to Spencer. 'What is it? May I see? Ah, Proust.'

'Do you like Proust?' said Spencer.

'He's very clever, of course, but I don't much care for the atmosphere.'

Spencer popped *Sodome et Gomorrhe* into his pocket.

'And now,' she said, leading the way, 'we'd better get into a taxi.'

The taxis, open touring cars, were lined up under some pepper trees on the opposite side of the road. Madame Strouthokámelos waved away the svelte hotel porter as if he was an insect, led the way, chose a taxi, instructed the driver brusquely, and climbed in. Spencer and Grant exchanged glances and followed. She made them sit one on each side of her, and the taxi drove off, rushing down the Amalia Boulevard towards the sea.

'She doesn't like men,' thought Spencer.

'She despises us,' thought Grant.

'It isn't many miles,' said Madame Strouthokámelos, and began

STORIES OF GREECE

asking them the usual questions about how long they were going to stay, where they were going, and so on.

'I'm afraid we Greeks are rather misunderstood or misrepresented,' she said. 'But there is a wonderful new spirit in the people. The refugees from Asia Minor have increased the population enormously, and have helped to consolidate the national feeling. The younger generation, the Greeks of your age, are manly and patriotic. I think there is great hope for the future.'

'Manly,' thought Spencer. 'She's thinking of my tie.'

'What is she getting at?' Grant wondered. 'Is this propaganda?'

It was propaganda.

'So I hope,' she went on, 'that although you'll be here such a short time you'll really be able to get in touch with the people a little and get an idea of what they're really like. That's one reason why I'm taking you to this place for lunch. I don't suppose any foreigner's ever been there before.'

'That's much more interesting than the hotel,' said Grant.

'Much,' said Spencer a little half-heartedly, remembering the smell of the hotel lunch.

'Hotels are so much the same everywhere,' she repeated.

They had passed Phaleron, and the conversation turned to Byron. They sped towards Glyphada, along what was then one of the only two decent roads in Greece, and the asphalt was like burnished steel. There was almost no traffic at this time of day. The sea was like a fiery glass and Byron had given place to the Greek language. The road was about to be very bad, when Madame Strouthokámelos, employing that language with great determination, brought the car to a standstill. They all got out, and she waited for her hosts to pay the fare. Then she led the way across a piece of waste land to a little white house by the sea.

There was no path. The way was through loose, burning sand which filled one's shoes. There were some prickly bushes

LOCAL COLOUR

about. They passed a pine tree, sighing to itself. The rays of the sun seemed to be vertical. Presently there was a crazy notice-board decorated with broken fairy-lamps and the inscription PANTHEON.

'Here we 'are,' said Madame Strouthokámelos as if she owned the place.

And immediately a man came out to welcome them. He treated his visitor with deference — she was known to have influence in important circles; her bearing would have demanded respect in any case; and she had brought two young foreigners with her. Well, three lunches meant three profits. He led the trio round to the seaward side of the Pantheon.

'Now, surely this is better than the hotel!' cried Madame Strouthokámelos.

And indeed it was.

A veranda thatched with myrtle branches, and floored with the earth itself, on which stood three round tables covered with coarse but clean tablecloths, and chairs; and only a few yards away, the Aegean sparkling like a million diamonds. There was even a suggestion of a breeze.

The table at the far end was occupied. Four men, workmen or peasants apparently, were seated there, eating a cheerful meal. Beyond them were some rocks and bushes. At the corner of the house a single plant of maize had grown to a great height. It looked very green and was in flower. Beneath it some fowls were enjoying a dust-bath, and tied to one of the veranda-posts was a goat, recumbent in the shade. With clear yellow eyes which looked as though they missed nothing and saw through everything it watched what was going on. It looked so independent that one could not tell whether it was enjoying what it saw, enjoying a cynical attitude to what it saw, or simply indulging in sheer observation for its own sake.

The proprietor approached Madame Strouthokámelos for orders. She took off her little soft hat again, with the character-

STORIES OF GREECE

istic sweeping gesture, and then, with a clean, capable hand on which the nails were cut short like a man's, she patted her hair, though its wiry waves had not lost their shape.

'There's not much to choose from,' she remarked. 'Of course they weren't expecting us.'

'We leave the choosing to you,' said Grant.

She ordered red mullets, black olives, white bread, a tomato salad, with yaghourt and coffee to follow.

'It sounds marvellous,' said Spencer.

'You'd better taste it first,' she said. 'At least everything here will be fresh.'

The fact that she never wore gloves aided the general impression that she was 'classical' in appearance.

'And what are we going to drink?' she said.

Spencer stole a glance at the other table.

'What are *they* drinking?' he said.

'*Retsina*, probably,' said Madame Strouthokámelos. 'Do you know what that is? White wine with resin in it. It's very nice. Would you like to try some?'

Spencer and Grant said they would, though somebody had told them that it was perfectly revolting.

'I adore the goat,' said Spencer.

'Isn't *adore* rather a strong word?' said Madame Strouthokámelos. 'It seems to me it stinks slightly.' She laughed.

'Exactly what are those people?' said Grant, looking at the other table.

'Oh, just country boys. It's a pity you can't talk to them. Very cheerful, aren't they? And they're really typical.'

They were, indeed, very cheerful, and had just ordered some more wine.

'Would you like to offer them some cigarettes?' said Madame Strouthokámelos. 'They would be very pleased.'

'Would they?' said Grant, and crossed rather shyly to the other table with an open cigarette-case. The 'country boys', even more

LOCAL COLOUR

shyly, helped themselves. And Madame Strouthokámelos, leaning forward graciously, addressed them in Greek.

'These are two young Englishmen,' she said, 'visiting Greece for the first time.'

The country boys expressed interest.

'So I've brought them down here to lunch, so that they can see a bit of the *real* Greece.'

The country boys registered approval and pleasure.

'I see you've got a guitar there,' said Madame Strouthokámelos. 'Won't you sing for these foreigners?'

The country boys laughed and looked at one another and then addressed themselves to one of their number who wore a lilac shirt, urging him to play. He took up the guitar just as the food arrived for the foreigners.

In spite of the heat Spencer and Grant were hungry, and the pleasant atmosphere and the pretty song that was now being sung to the guitar combined to whet their appetites.

'What a delicious lunch,' said Spencer.

'Perfect,' said Grant.

'I'm so glad you're enjoying it,' said Madame Strouthokámelos, and then, turning to the country boys, she suggested another tune for them to play. Her manner was gracious and patronizing and did not go down with them very well. However, the tune she suggested happened to be a favourite with Lilac Shirt, so he soon struck up with it. Drink had made him confident, and vanity made him self-conscious, so he became rather noisy, laughed, and now and then flashed a glance at Spencer and Grant. Madame Strouthokámelos wore an indulgent smile and nodded a gracious acknowledgment.

Conversation turned to the *retsina*. Grant thought it even more disgusting than he had anticipated — it tasted to him like pure turpentine, and he did his best not to make a wry face as he swallowed it. Spencer, who was rather romantic, pretended to himself and to the others that he liked it.

STORIES OF GREECE

'It has such a nice *piny* sort of taste,' he said. 'But I don't think I could put away quite as much as *they* do — not in the middle of the day, at any rate.'

As he spoke he indicated the country boys, who had opened a fresh lot of wine and were getting very merry.

'Is that what they do every day?' said Grant.

'No, I think they must be celebrating rather a special occasion.'

The proprietor appeared in the doorway, looking genial above his apron. Somebody else had taken the guitar now and was playing a rapid syncopated tunc. Lilac Shirt was looking rather flushed. His shirt had come unbuttoned, revealing a lean brown chest, very hairy. He was supporting the head of one of his companions in his lap, and making remarks which surely *must* be ribald. Spencer stole a glance at Madame Strouthokámelos. Yes, sure enough, she was looking at her plate, and a faint frown now marred her rather too regular features. Then Spencer looked at Grant, and Grant looked at Spencer and kicked him under the table, then they both looked at the other table, on which somebody was beating with a spoon just to add to the noise of the guitar and the laughing and the singing.

'They *are* getting gay,' said Spencer, in an affectedly innocent tone of voice.

'They have been drinking a little too much,' said Madame Strouthokámelos with an expression of something like distaste. 'Have you had enough to eat, or shall I order some cheese?'

'Aha,' thought Grant, 'she's trying to hurry us away just when it's beginning to get interesting.' And he said, 'Yes, please. I should like to try the cheese. I expect it's very good here.'

With obvious reluctance Madame Strouthokámelos ordered cheese. The proprietor made a laughing comment on his other visitors, but she did not reply.

At this moment one of the country boys rose to his feet. He was very slender, with lank black hair and rather sleepy-looking

LOCAL COLOUR

eyes. He was going to dance. The others clapped and uttered cries of delight, encouragement and facetiousness. The dancer raised his arms and spread out his hands and began to dance to the guitar. He was skilful and kept excellent time and for a moment it seemed as if Madame Strouthokámelos' slightly disdainful expression might vanish.

'The cheese is excellent,' said Grant.

Spencer lighted a cigarette.

Just then Lilac Shirt rose to his feet, approached the other dancer and clasping one hand round his partner's waist and the other round his loins he called for a tune. Shouts of laughter, and one of the remaining two began again on the guitar. Madame Strouthokámelos frowned once more. The frown was deeper this time.

The tune was a tango. Lilac Shirt proceeded to sway his partner into a caricature of a tango. With absurdly languorous movements they danced, still keeping excellent time with the music. Lilac Shirt's white trousers were, however, a little too tight for really free movement.

'How well they dance,' said Spencer, smiling. 'I think we ought to join in.'

He got another kick under the table.

He then saw that Lilac Shirt's way of holding his partner was perhaps a little too daring, a little too intimate, for the open air, at midday, in public. As the dance continued the goat rose to its feet — as if to get a better view. It stared with its pale amber eyes at the dancers, then turned to look at Madame Strouthokámelos — it was a look that spoke volumes, but banned volumes — and then again fastened its keen, glassy, unblinking stare on the dancers.

The guitar-player paused. Lilac Shirt, leaning against his partner who was leaning against one of the veranda posts, embraced him and kissed him on the mouth. This brought loud cheers from the other two. All four of them had forgotten the

STORIES OF GREECE

two foreigners and Madame Strouthokámelos — a fact which made her next words rather wide of the mark.

'They have forgotten themselves,' she said in a tone of disgust. 'They have drunk too much.'

Lilac Shirt's kiss was so prolonged that she averted her eyes and rose abruptly to her feet.

'We had better go,' she said in a quiet and furious voice, and picking up her hat she went round to the landward side of the Pantheon to demand the bill. Spencer and Grant followed to pay it. Glancing back, they saw Lilac Shirt and his partner disappear behind some rocks a few yards away.

As for the goat, it had settled down again, and was quietly chewing the cud. Its yellow eyes were shut for the siesta.

STORIES OF ENGLAND

NO GHOSTS

MRS. DE PAUL-PINCUS's visit to Quarenden Hall was short, but has not been forgotten. At the corner of a lane leading to Quarenden, a large maroon-coloured car slowed down, one afternoon last summer, in order to leave the main road. As it did so, the occupant glanced at the fingerpost and then told the chauffeur to go slowly as she wanted to have a good look at the country. A healthy, middle-aged woman, both fussy and determined, she was rather over-dressed in white with touches of black, and equipped with an Edwardian bust and one of those tiny little modern hats, pinched in at the top, so that she had at once an air of old-fashioned prosperity and of trying to keep up with the times. A bright young person in 1907 — her memoirs and her earlier novels equally make it plain — Zélie de Paul-Pincus, far less exotic than her name, has gradually ripened into a fairly successful woman of the world without losing her youthful archness. Indeed, that archness has contributed to her success. Her face, carefully made up, is enlivened by a pair of quick but not penetrating eyes, now slightly discoloured. She looked that afternoon as if she might have been on her way to a garden-party, with the pearls rising and falling on the powdered triangle of pink skin at the base of her neck, and her expensive clothes and full contours suggesting the opulence of summer only slightly shadowed by the approach of autumn. She looked a little out of place, gliding in her shiny, dark-red limousine between the brambly hedges of a country lane. Sitting comfortably there in her comfortable car, she vibrated a little, like a jelly decorated with cream, as she glanced from side to side with a shallow, practised eye, looking for local colour.

The road was narrow, the landscape typically English, with its

STORIES OF ENGLAND

sumptuous elms, its green grass, its fields of corn more delicately green, its savour of hay and meadow-sweet, and the continuous trilling of larks overhead. The car went slowly up a long incline, between hedges so tall that they shut out the view, and Mrs. Pincus looked absently at the back of her chauffeur's head. She had a sudden feeling that he was almost a stranger to her. She treated her servants with what she conceived to be dignity, and this prevented her from learning much about them. Her sudden qualm was followed by no resolve to learn more.

Towards the top of the hill, the hedges sank and revealed an untidier landscape. From the top, there lay open to the view a broad, wooded valley with a stream winding through it on its way to join the distant Gloucestershire Ouse, and in the middle, held together like a bouquet by the ribbony stream, the trees and towers of Quarenden itself. Mrs. Pincus made her chauffeur stop for a moment, and as she gazed at the view, her eye was not dreamy like the scene before her, but glinted like that of a hungry sparrow-hawk which catches an old but tender rabbit asleep and means to gobble it up at once.

Quarenden is an old and beautiful but not a very large house. Its chief interest is an increasingly rare one — it has been in the occupation of the same family since the early Middle Ages. 'There have been Potts at Quarenden since time out of mind,' Mrs. Pincus said to herself, resolving that when she came to 'use' the 'material' before her, she would substitute a more high-sounding name for that of Pott. She did not know the present Mr. Pott, and her visit to him was made possible by a paragraph in a local newspaper to the effect that Mr. Edmund Pott, following the example of other landowners, had kindly consented to allow certain portions of the grounds and Hall at Quarenden to be seen by the public on alternate Thursday afternoons throughout the summer for a fee of not less than a shilling per head, the proceeds to be given to the new county hospital. 'The Hall, certainly entitled to rank as one of the less known of England's

NO GHOSTS

stately homes, has never before been opened to the public, and Mr. Pott is to be congratulated on his public-spirited decision, which will afford a welcome opportunity in these hectic days of visiting this venerable relic of Merrie England. Once an abbey, founded by Odo, Bishop of Bayeux, the Hall passed through some stirring scenes of historic pageantry in mediæval times. Queen Elizabeth is said to have passed a night under its roof. . . .’

Mrs. Pincus, in her car, began to glide down into the valley, and then to be jolted a little, for the surface of the lane was rough. On either side the hedges had grown tall and ragged, and fat blackbirds flapped noisily off when they saw the car approaching — they whistled shrilly, and left the bunches of elder-flowers shaking in the still, warm air. And then the car came to a stop, in a warm, country silence, smelling slightly and wholesomely of cow-dung, with bees buzzing about among the dead-nettles and cow-parsley.

‘I suppose this must be the way, ma’am,’ said the chauffeur, looking rather doubtfully at an old five-barred gate which stood half-open under the hedge.

‘I suppose it must be, Horsfall, though it seems incredible that this should be the only way to the Hall, this awful lane. Are you sure you came the right way?’

‘Yes, I came the way they told me,’ said Horsfall, ‘but we can’t go no farther with the car.’

‘Well, I’m afraid I must walk. Will you open the gate? There must be some mistake.’

Unfolding a white sunshade, she began to make her way along a rough footpath across a meadow to the house, leaving Horsfall to drowse over a cigarette and a newspaper. She glanced anxiously at a distant and somnolent cow, and then began to compose a remark to make, if she got the chance, to Mr. Pott: ‘I’m looking for material for a historical story I’m thinking of writing — but of course it’s a secret!’ She could see ahead of her

STORIES OF ENGLAND

a low stone bridge over the shadowy stream: it led, seemingly, straight to some neat lawns and the house itself. She felt uneasy. Surely this couldn't be the right way? Her assurance had not deserted her, but the summery silence seemed oppressive. She had expected to see a car-park and a throng of dressy visitors, and surely if one invited the public one didn't expect it to struggle over a meadow to the front door? A little puzzled, she paused to wipe one of her shoes on a tussock of grass, for it had got sullied in the meadow. She could almost have cried — everything seemed to be going wrong.

She had hardly taken two steps on to the bridge when she was startled by the loud quacking of innumerable ducks. There they were, flotillas of them on the stream, regarding her with bright suspicious eyes and quacking with surprise, tinged, it almost seemed, with resentment and even malice. To right and left the quacking spread; it was taken up by more and more ducks, which could be seen in the sunbeams under the willows and hawthorns, and away in the distance to right and left the panic spread, and a faint chorus of quack-quacking filled every pause in the louder protests near at hand. Had a fox appeared on the bridge the birds could hardly have made more fuss; had they been mastiffs and watchdogs they could scarcely have startled her more. But with an air of determination she passed over into the garden.

There were the grey walls of Quarenden, seemingly all staring windows; and here was a wide lawn with beds full of flowers; but not a soul was in sight. Had nobody, then, in the whole countryside come to see the house and help the hospital? She wondered if she should go straight up to the front door or if she should first approach the shabby grey-flannel backside of a stooping gardener which could be seen over there, just beyond the flower-beds. Yes, she would speak to him first. Getting nearer, she saw that a farther expanse of lawn was almost entirely covered with duck-pens made of wire-netting, and that he was busying himself with the construction of yet another.

NO GHOSTS

'Good afternoon,' she said in the tone of voice she used when addressing servants.

The man, whose trousers were really extraordinarily shabby, jumped a little, for he had not heard her approaching across the grass. Then he straightened himself slowly, as a man does who is not as young as he has been, and confronted the stranger, holding out his arms at an angle from his body, for his hands were very dirty. He looked at her rather blankly for an instant, an oldish man with a white moustache and shrewd country wrinkles round a keen pair of eyes, and before he had time to reply to her greeting (for he had a country deliberateness) she said:

'Do you know if I can see the Hall?'

'Well, there it is,' said the man, nodding his head towards the house and smiling an odd smile which was at once benevolent, cynical and defensive. He waited for her to speak again, and she was a little taken aback. Was he really a gardener?

'I read in the paper that one could see over the house,' she explained, not without condescension.

'So one can, on certain days,' said the man, smiling, 'but this doesn't happen to be one of them, I'm afraid. I only show the house on every other Thursday, and this is one of the other Thursdays.'

The truth being now clear to her, Mrs. Pincus, cursing inwardly, thawed with appropriate haste.

'Oh, I *am* sorry!' she said. 'How silly of me to make a mistake about the day!'

'Well, as you're here,' he said, twinkling, 'I'll put a good face on it and show you the house. I expect you've come a long way. Only I warn you, I shall fine you a bit extra for the hospital as a punishment for coming on the wrong day. How do you like my ducks? In those boxes over there, eggs are being hatched out, here we have the youngest ducklings with their mothers, those are a fortnight old, those a month, and so on, until they're quite emancipated.'

STORIES OF ENGLAND

'Dear little things!' Mrs. Pincus said gushingly.

'Paying little things,' said Mr. Edmund Pott. 'I shall have to go and wash my hands. Would you mind waiting for me in the hall? You'll find the front door open, I think.'

And he made off round a corner, while Mrs. Pincus, bridling with pleasure at the thought of a personally-conducted tour, of her luck at getting Mr. Pott to herself, sailed off into the shadow of the house. Her taste in interior decoration was merely fashionable, and when she found herself in the hall she was a little shocked. A high, plain room with a stone floor and windows far above one's head, it was crammed with an accumulation of centuries — especially of the last century. She felt that the anti-macassars, the large bad Chinese vases stuffed with bulrushes and the photographs in elaborately carved Indian frames did not go very well with the old portraits and escutcheons.

'We sit in this room in the summer but not in the winter,' said Mr. Pott, reappearing with clean hands. 'This is the oldest part of the house —'

Unlike most guides to ancient monuments, he had developed two forms of monologue. When showing round large parties of visitors he stuck to facts and dates and two or three anecdotes; when showing round a small party or a single visitor he made the process more human and was more conversational, and derived amusement from the way they took his sallies and the remarks they made themselves. But Mrs. Pincus somehow failed to call out his natural amiability. He took a dislike to her, and was in any case annoyed at being interrupted in his work.

'I think I must have come by the wrong road,' she began.

'Oh, that doesn't matter! You came across the field, I expect. There is another way, but it's not much better, except that there's no field. We don't bother much about the road — after all, there are so many good roads nowadays, it doesn't matter if you strike a bad one now and then. They say that in the eighteenth century a man who lived here was making his way over a very muddy

NO GHOSTS

road when he saw a hat lying on the surface. He kicked it, and found it had a head inside. When they dug out the possessor of the head, they found he was on horseback. So really *we* can't grumble. . . . This is called the South Gallery.'

On the right, pictures; on the left, some picces of sculpture after, but a long way after, Canova, mixed with cases of stuffed owls, and surmounted by trophies of arms from outlandish places.

'The young man in the blue coat is by Gainsborough.'

Mrs. Pincus had little knowledge of painting, but Gainsborough, she knew, was Gainsborough, and confronting the homely-faced Pott in the pale blue coat, she murmured:

'Charming!'

'He's usually thought very plain.'

'As a painting, though —'

'Oh, it's all right as a painting,' said Mr. Pott, walking rapidly into a large room with an ornate ceiling, a room that was very dusty and devoid of furniture, except for one table on which was the mouldy top of a christening-cake under a glass case.

'We don't use this room,' he said, 'but people look at the ceiling.'

Mrs. Pincus looked at the ceiling.

'I never look at ceilings myself,' said Mr. Pott. 'They give me a stiff neck. Can't see the point of painted ceilings.'

'I was going to say —'

'Please mind the step. This room was used to keep armour in when I was a boy. Armour — who wants armour? There's not much in it now but tennis rackets and old boots, as you see. . . . Now we go this way.'

'What a beautiful house you have,' said Mrs. Pincus. 'I'm thinking of —'

'Beautiful? Well, it may be, but I'm used to it. Ramshackle, I call it. It's all right now, but it's the winter that tells. I'm not as young as I was.'

STORIES OF ENGLAND

'Of course, it's the *continuity* that's so wonderful!' she exclaimed, wishing he would talk about his family.

'Look out of the window and you'll see the stream,' he said. 'It was once the moat. This used to be a bathroom. I used to fish out of the window. There aren't many men in England can say that they've caught fish from their bathroom window.'

He was slipping into the public form of his monologue.

'No, indeed,' she said, thinking that living away in this hole might have made him a bit touchy, and that he must be humoured.

'I must confess,' she said, taking advantage of a pause, 'that I have at the back of my mind — but of course it's a secret! — an idea about writing an historical novel, and when I came here to-day I was quite shamelessly keeping a weather-eye open for local colour. Do you think you'd mind your house being described, as I imagine it to have been in Elizabethan times, in a novel?'

'Good God! In a novel? Afraid I never read 'em myself. Well, I can't stop you, can I? Afraid I shall never read it, so I shan't know what it's all about, shall I? Put me in, too, if you like. Old country fossil making a duck-run. I shall never know, shall I?'

He led the way up some stairs.

'Now we're going on to the roof so that you can see the view.'

They came out on to the roof. Part of it was flat. There were stone chimneys, and against one of them a garden seat, painted green. Leaning on a balustrade, they looked down on the lawns and flowers, they could see the glasshouses in the kitchen garden, and a sunlit bend of the stream all dotted with ducks, and there was a view of the only park-land remaining to Quarenden.

'What a heavenly afternoon!' said Mrs. Pincus. 'What an enchanting view! How lovely to live in such a peaceful place in these difficult times!'

NO GHOSTS

A faint chorus of quacks came up from the distant ducks, as if in assent.

'Well, the times are just as difficult in peaceful places as they are anywhere else,' said Mr. Pott. 'A brother of one of the Regicides was drowned just at that bend in the stream. The Cromwellian troops were camped at the top of the slope. The siege lasted nearly two months. And there had already been a battle up there in the time of the Heptarchy. Fortunately, we aren't troubled by any ghosts.'

'What, no ghosts!' said Mrs. Pincus. 'Oh, but you must have!'

'Oh, but we haven't!'

'Oh, fancy there being no ghosts!' she said, with a disappointment half real and half feigned, and sat down on the seat.

'Lord, I should have warned you!' cried Mr. Pott.

'Warned me?' She smiled coyly up at him.

'The paint's wet.'

She stood up as abruptly as if she had been stung.

'Your beautiful dress must be ruined. Turn round. Yes, if I may say so, I'm afraid we've given you rather more local colour than you bargained for. Oh dear, I *am* sorry.'

The white seat of the dress was now barred with blotchy green stripes.

Mrs. Pincus's one consolation was that he had said, 'your *beautiful* dress'. She seized the chance of showing that she knew how to be gracious, and smiled, delighted that he should have put himself in the wrong.

'And I'm afraid there's nothing in the house that'll take it off,' he was saying.

'I shan't pretend I'm pleased,' she said, as they made their way downstairs, 'but it was really my fault, wasn't it? For being lazy. I was so entranced with your view and its associations that I felt I *had* to sit down and enjoy it for a few moments more.'

'I'm exceedingly sorry,' he said. 'Will you come and write your name in the visitors' book?'

STORIES OF ENGLAND

She wrote her name, but he didn't even look at it. She had hoped he would say, although he didn't read novels, 'Ah, Mrs. de Paul-Pincus! Of course, I know your name very well.' Then she noticed a collecting-box for the county hospital.

'I wasn't going to ask you for anything,' he said, 'after ruining your clothes like this.'

'Oh, but you *must* take this,' she said, opening her handbag and producing a ten-shilling note.

'We could almost endow a bed with that,' he said. 'We only get a bob as a rule.'

'And I *did* come on the wrong day,' she said, gathering up her gloves.

He showed her to the door but no farther. As she crossed the bridge, a mocking, valedictory chorus arose from those hateful ducks. Horsfall saw her approaching rapidly across the meadow, and guessed that she must be out of temper. She asked him abruptly for his *Daily Express*, and told him to spread it out on the seat. He could not guess why until he opened the door for her to get in.

'Home, Horsfall,' she said crossly, but as he took his place at the wheel he could not help smiling.

'That was how she looked,' he afterwards told the cook, 'like a green blooming zebra.'

1934

EVER SUCH A NICE BOY

YOU want to know how I first met Freddy? Oh, it's quite a long story. No, we don't come from the same place at all. You see, my home's near Gloucester. I was in service there with Major and Mrs. Trumbull-Dykes. Mrs. Dykes was ever such a nice lady, she was just like a mother to me and writes to me every Christmas, not that I haven't got a real mother, because of course I have, and she's always been good to me too, I couldn't wish for a better. Well, the Major used to suffer from rheumatism something terrible, he was always carrying on and saying the house was damp, though it was as dry as a biscuit. He wouldn't rest but they must move to Devonshire, nagging away all the time.

Well of course Mrs. Dykes wanted me to go with them, but I didn't like the idea seeing that I hadn't never been more than a few miles away from home. It was Mum that persuaded me. 'You've got a good home with them,' she said, 'you'd better go with them.' Of course, most of the things was sent off by train, and we was to follow by car, but there was a lot of luggage all the same, just like gipsies we were, all packed in with a kettle and I don't know what else. Of course, I hadn't never driven so far before and the Major drove ever so fast and it quite turned me up, what with the bumps in the road. 'Stop, Gilbert,' said Mrs. Dykes, 'Edith wants to be sick.' 'I don't *want* to be,' I said. 'I've *got* to be.' Oh, I *was* ashamed. 'Never mind, Edith,' said Mrs. Dykes, 'you'll feel better now.' 'You'll never make a sailor, Edith,' said the Major. Oh, if I was on the sea I think I'd die.

Of course, it was ever such a nice house that they had, just outside Paignton, everything easy to keep clean and the kitchen all white. The reason I didn't want to go away was I was afraid I would be homesick. It's funny, isn't it, when you get homesick?

STORIES OF ENGLAND

You see, I was only a kid and me never having been away from home before I just cried and cried. 'Why, Edith,' said Mrs. Dykes, 'whatever's the matter? You're not homesick, are you? Aren't you happy with us?' And, of course, when she spoke to me so gentle that just made me cry all the more. 'If you're so unhappy,' she said, 'maybe it would be better for you to go home at the end of the month.'

Mind you, the Major was always a worry to her, you never knew what he'd be getting up to. I don't believe there was nothing between them and hadn't been for a long time, though I dare say the Major wished there was, so of course they always had separate bedrooms. Well, one afternoon about tea-time, yes, it must have been about tea-time because I was making the toast, the Major must always have his hot buttered toast for tea, there I was making the toast and the Major come into the kitchen. Of course, I didn't take no notice until he come up and caught hold of me. I asked him to let go and stop his games, but he wouldn't, so I hit at his hands with the toasting-fork to make him leave go of me. He had ever such big veins in his hands, they stood right out. 'Oh, you little vixen! You little spitfire!' he said. 'Well, you had no call to lay hands on me,' I said, 'whatever would Mrs. Dykes say?' And as he wouldn't stop his tricks I said 'Give over, will you!' and hit him again over the knuckles with the toasting-fork. 'Damn it, damn it,' he said, and then he run out. Just as I was getting tea ready to take into the drawing-room Mrs. Dykes come in, she'd been out shopping, and 'Oh, Edith,' she said, 'I'll just take the Major's tea up to him. He's ever so upset,' she said, 'he's hurt his hands something dreadful, he's resting in his room. He caught them in the mowing machine and they're all swollen up.' Of course I didn't say anything, but you should have seen the state his hands were in. Of course, I didn't mean to hurt him like that, but it was his own fault in a way, wasn't it?

My homesickness didn't get any better. I seemed to be always moping, so Mrs Dykes said I'd better go home at the end of the

EVER SUCH A NICE BOY

month. Well, only a couple of days before the end of the month I was cleaning the windows. It was a lovely morning, and when I was doing the window of the spare room I couldn't help noticing that there was a boy painting the roof of a shed in the garden next door, and when I was looking at him he looked up and saw me and he grinned and waved his hand. That's ever such a nice boy, I thought. Of course it was Freddy, though I didn't know at the time. I was ever so pleased. I didn't like to be too forward, but I waved back at him. Then I run downstairs to Mrs. Dykes and I asked her if I could stay with her instead of going home at the end of the month. 'Why, Edith, of course we should be very pleased,' she said, 'but whatever's made you change your mind so sudden?' Well, I knew I could tell her everything, so I said, 'I've just seen ever such a nice boy painting the roof of the shed next door, and he waved to me while I was doing the spare room window.' With that she run upstairs with me and looked out and when Freddy saw two of us he didn't know what to think. 'Yes, Edith,' said Mrs. Dykes, 'you're quite right, he *is* a nice boy.' So I didn't go away at the end of the month, and I just waited, hoping I'd see him again. I'd forgotten all about being homesick.

Next thing a note come to the house, addressed to 'Miss Edith.' Just like that, 'Miss Edith'. Of course it was from Freddy, asking me if I'd meet him at the corner on my evening out so we could go to the pictures. Oh, I *was* excited. I run and showed it to Mrs. Dykes and 'Of course, Edith,' she said, 'you'll have to go, but I wish we knew something about him. Isn't there anybody we could ask?' Well, next time the butcher's boy come round I said, 'Do you know anything about a fellow round here called Fred Carter?' 'Fred Carter?' he said. 'No, I can't say I do. What sort of work does he do?' 'I believe he's something in the building line,' I said. 'The only Fred I can think of,' he said, 'that's in the building line is Fred Baines, him that was painting that shed next door.' 'And what sort of a fellow is he?' I said. 'Oh, he's all

STORIES OF ENGLAND

right,' he said, 'but what do *you* want to know for? Has he been round here after you?' 'Don't be so nosey,' I said, but what I couldn't make out was if his name was Baines why did he call himself Carter, but it turned out that his stepfather's name was Baines so everybody used to call him Baines's boy though his name was really Carter.

So off I went to meet him, and 'Do be careful, Edith,' said Mrs. Dykes, 'don't let him take no liberties,' she said, 'until you're sure of him.' Oh, and do you know, he was *late*. Oh, I was that worried I could have cried, I thought he was just making game of me. Oh, I *was* upset, I thought I'd have done better to go back home after all. But just then he come up, all smiles, and we went off to the pictures, and we did have a lovely time. Of course after that everything was all right, but Mrs. Dykes said he must come to the house so she could see him for herself, and of course everybody liked him, you know how it is, people always do seem to take to Freddy, and after that he was always coming round, every night he used to come round, Mrs. Dykes was ever so kind, and the Major liked him too.

Then one evening, late it was, Mrs. Dykes come running down to the kitchen, screaming blue murder, 'Edith! Edith! Freddy!! Freddy!! Come quick, there's a man in my room!' Well of course we run upstairs and Freddy grabbed the poker and when we got up to her room there was nobody there but the Major. Do you know he'd got in through the window, thinking to surprise her, she wouldn't let him set foot in her room at all in the ordinary way. 'What on earth's all this?' he said when he see us. 'Why, Gilbert, it's only *you*!' said Mrs. Dykes. 'What do you mean by giving us all such a fright, creeping in at my window like that? Why, I thought it was a *man*!' At that Freddy and me couldn't help giving a laugh. Soon after that I left to get married, and I was sorry to leave in some ways; Mrs. Dykes cried when I went away, ever so good she was. Poor soul, I can't help thinking of her sometimes, with that Major of hers.

THE 'NIGHT BEFORE THE WAR

OR perhaps it wasn't. It may have been a few nights before war was openly declared. It was one of those hot summer nights when 'Hitler' and 'Poland' had become the commonest words in the English language, when the Maginot Line had still to be proved a fond delusion, and when young men with neatly rolled umbrellas were beginning to look a little out of place and were expecting the fall of something heavier than rain. Not that Henry's habit of carrying an umbrella could be held against him. He was small, shy and conventional, and without his apparatus of umbrella, gloves, cigarette-case and so on he could hardly have faced the world; but one could easily guess that if he survived the coming war he would come out of it with a good record, for it would give him his first great chance of asserting himself.

At this time he was a civil servant with a small circle of conventional and unimaginative friends, and was living with a married cousin and her husband in a flat near Baker Street. At present they were away, and on this particular evening he had been dining out in Chelsea. When he returned, rather late, to the silent flat he found a telegram waiting for him. It was characteristic of him to open it not with his finger but with a paper knife. The telegram was to say that Violet had been taken ill and would he come at once. He rushed out of the house, not only without an umbrella but without a hat — such was his agitation — then got into a taxi and directed the driver to a rectory in Camberwell. Violet was the rector's daughter and she and Henry were virtually engaged, but he did not expect to be able to marry her until his sick old rich uncle was dead: the uncle had

STORIES OF ENGLAND

a really promising phlebitis, and in his heart Henry had been hoping that the phlebitis would work faster than Hitler.

Violet was indeed ill, but not dangerously, and Henry was allowed to sit and hold her hand for an hour or so. Then she fell asleep, so he tiptoed out of the room and after a short conversation with her mother, who insisted upon his drinking a glass of barley-water, he left the house. Although it was very late, it had occurred to neither of them that he might have spent the rest of the night there, and it did not occur to him until he was out of the house that the chance of finding a taxi thereabouts at such a time was very slight, that the tubes had stopped running, and that if there were still any buses they would be going in strange directions to remote termini.

Henry walked vaguely in the direction of Vauxhall in the hope of picking up a taxi. With typical prudence — a symptom perhaps of the activity of deep-seated and undiscovered coral-insects busy beneath the surface of his mind with the building of tiny galleries of anxiety and guilt — he felt in his pockets. He found that all the money he had on him was threepence-half-penny. He also found that he had come out without his key. A cold sweat came out on his forehead, for without it there was no means of getting into the flat before breakfast-time. He thought for a moment of going back to the rectory, but felt too shy: he did not wish to risk disturbing Violet, and he was too considerate to trouble her mother. Where, then, was he to spend the night? He thought of friends who might put him up, but one was out of town, another was recently married, others he was reluctant to disturb. An uneasy feeling in his intestines caused him to remember with distaste that the rectory barley-water had been lukewarm: Violet's father's stipend perhaps precluded an ice-box.

To Henry, whose life had been so sheltered and orderly, and as regular in its material comfort as that of a prosperous old lady, and to whom eccentricity and excess and even disorder had always been repulsive, there was something slightly scandalous

THE NIGHT BEFORE THE WAR

and almost alarming about being at large at this time of night. He thought vaguely that he would go on walking. Perhaps he would walk about all night. He was afraid that if he stood still or sat down on a doorstep he would be arrested for loitering. How was he to know that before long he would be a seasoned veteran of mechanized warfare in the deserts of Africa?

His feelings were wonderfully mixed. The thought that Violet was not in danger filled him with relief and made him almost light-hearted: before the menace of coming events she was in any case doubly precious to him. Then there was the deep dread of the unknown and inevitable that lay against his heart in those days like an ulcer. Then there was an extraordinary sense of something like adventurous gaiety at finding himself at large in London at night, and unprotected by money, a key, a hat, gloves and an umbrella. For perhaps the first time in his life he was unsheltered; he had come face to face with that uncertainty which is the very beginning of the forming of a character; it was as if a mild ordeal to mark his attainment of manhood had been devised for him by some power unknown.

He was walking up the Vauxhall Bridge Road with a springy step, but the night was hot and he was sweating a good deal. There were very few people about. Approaching Victoria, he felt thirsty and turned into a squalid little snack-bar which was open all night. There was nobody in it except an old man behind the counter, who was bleary and greasy with heat and fatigue. Henry exchanged twopence for a cup of tea and asked the old man if he could put him up for the night. The old man said he couldn't, but a friend of his in Tachbrook Street might. Henry said he had only three-halfpence on him: would the friend take his watch as security for payment for his lodging? The old man said there was no harm in trying.

Pimlico was deserted. Had Henry known something of the strange ramifications of the life of that quarter, he would have felt even more adventurous. In his world the very word Pimlico,

STORIES OF ENGLAND

seldom used, could hardly be uttered without a note of superiority and even sarcasm; it suggested nothing but seedy squalor, it was a symbol of those vast, submerged areas of unsheltered life that were better ignored; non-intervention was the great weakness of Henry's world. Down an empty, brightly-lighted street he preceded the sound of his own footsteps while behind the hushed façades hearts were beating and rank dreams were acted. Henry knocked firmly at the house to which he had been sent. His hand had hardly left the knocker when a woman's voice shrieked inside the house, 'Do that again, you swine, and I'll scream the place down!' Henry started back in alarm, but evidently the remark was just part of an argument, for a man's voice replied, 'Oh, come off it! Why don't you put a kettle on, you silly — ? I could do with a cup of tea.' Feeling *de trop*, Henry retraced his steps towards Victoria.

Whether as a result of the heat, or the rectory barley-water, or the tea he had drunk, or all the emotion he had felt earlier in the night, or the immense apprehension of the war quickening his metabolism, there now came upon him a pressing natural need. At Victoria it could not be satisfied, for everything was closed for the night. The last porter, like the last of the Barons or the last of the Mohicans, was leaving for home. Henry asked his advice, but the porter could not help him. For the first time in years Henry understood the resentment of the poor against the rich: for the price of a hotel room he could have had a bed and also what he far more urgently needed.

'It seems,' he remarked to the porter with a bitterness born of frustration, 'that in the capital of the British Empire after midnight a dog may, but a man mayn't — even if he has a penny. There aren't even any dark corners. If we're going to have a war, let's fight for the right to do what I want to do, when we want to do it.'

The porter grunted sympathetically, for one call of nature makes the whole world kin; and bade him a kindly good night.

THE NIGHT BEFORE THE WAR

By now in some discomfort, Henry directed his steps towards Hyde Park Corner. In Grosvenor Gardens a belated bird of paradise, who looked about forty-five, intercepted him and asked him if he wanted a naughty little girl — by which, so little are we able to see ourselves as others see us, she meant herself. He said he was sorry, not to-night; and it did just cross his mind that a bed was becoming a more expensive thing as the night wore on.

As he was passing St. George's Hospital he was hailed, from the direction of the Artillery Memorial, by an old lady seated at the base of that construction. More out of civility than curiosity, Henry crossed over to her: she might be mad or drunk, on the other hand she might be in need of help. He was a stranger to that moth-like population of fly-by-nights, conspirators, derelicts and eccentric loiterers that was loosed nightly upon the capital at about his usual bed-time.

'How dare they say it's round!' She said scornfully, in the sort of voice one might have expected to hear in a residential 'guest house' in Bournemouth. 'It's disgraceful, a regular plot! What was good enough for Our Redeemer is good enough for me. *He* never said it was round. Nowhere in Holy Writ is it called round.'

She looked fiercely up at him, evidently waiting for an answer.

'But *I* never said it was round,' he replied in self-defence, wondering what it was.

'Then you are a most unusual young man. An open mind, keep an open mind, and above all, don't jump to conclusions. Fear God and keep your bowels open.'

'I only wish I could,' said Henry irritably, for his pangs had not lessened.

'And what's to stop you, pray? You should eat bran. But I bless you for not saying that it's round.'

'But what is it?'

'Why, it's flat. I have proof.'

'But *what* is flat?'

STORIES OF ENGLAND

'The earth, of course! What have we been talking about?'

'Of course,' said Henry, 'how stupid of me! But I'm afraid I must be on my way. Good night. Pleasant dreams.'

And he left the old fundamentalist sitting on her fundament and muttering to herself at the feet of a bronze image, complete with bronze overcoat, of one of those who died to make the world safe for heresy.

The Park was of course closed, and Henry, whose journey had by now become an endurance test, plodded up Park Lane. Opposite the Dorchester he came face to face with an upstanding young navvy, who asked him the way to Epping.

'But surely,' said Henry, momentarily half gulled, 'you're not going to Epping to-night! Besides, you're not going the right way.'

'How far would it be?' the young man asked innocently, looking at Henry with a disquieting directness. It was a faked air of innocence. Like Henry, he was looking for a night's kip. He hoped to be offered a bed or a shilling. No doubt he used the same technique every night, inquiring late, of kindly-looking and often slightly mellow middle-class strangers, the way to remote places.

'I'm sorry I can't help you,' said Henry, suddenly haunted by vague recollections of stories of blackmail. 'As a matter of fact I'm looking for a bed myself, and I've only got three-halfpence in my pocket.'

'Have it your own way,' said the man, and Henry left him with a falsely cordial good-night, to which he made no reply.

At the Marble Arch, Henry decided to make in the direction of Paddington. The night seemed hotter than ever. Upon locked iron gates he read the word *Gentlemen*. Keeping a stiff upper lip and grinding his teeth, he passed this outrage on civil liberty and entered the Edgware Road, a hopeless vista.

By now he had begun to feel that he was living in a nightmare. A white cat dashed past him so quickly that he was not sure

THE NIGHT BEFORE THE WAR

whether he had seen it at all. Men in strange hats and boots with a seventeenth-century look were flooding the streets with hoses, and when he looked back, the Marble Arch appeared to be floating on a black lake. Farther on, two men were fighting in Titchborne Street. Locked together, they were still on their feet, and appeared to be performing a difficult and exhausting dance. 'Nobody was watching them and they might just as well have been trying to kill each other. Perhaps they were trying to kill each other.

Near Cambridge Terrace an open-fronted snack bar was still serving customers of nocturnal habit, and there was a cheerful clatter and chatter.

'Hullo,' said a young woman standing at the door. 'How are you getting on?'

'Well, I don't know, really,' said Henry, thinking to himself that she did not look at all like a tart. 'How are *you*?'

'Can't grumble. Long time since I've seen you.'

'Well, I've never seen you before in my life.'

'Flattering, aren't you!' said the young woman, smiling. 'You don't remember *me*!' And she thrust her face forward, as if she were showing a passport. It was the sort of face one might have seen somewhere, and Henry felt as one feels when a strange place suddenly seems familiar — have I been her before? When? How?

'I don't think I do,' he said.

'Of course you do!' she said, giving him a little slap on the lapel of his coat. 'And that long talk we had!'

'Where?' said Henry.

'Fancy asking me where!'

He felt that he was losing his grip on reality, and turned away.

'I'll be seeing you!' the young woman called after him.

Do I, he asked himself, naturally attract lunatics and impostors, or are all the nocturnal inhabitants of London streets, the people whom as a rule I never see, lunatics or impostors anyway?

STORIES OF ENGLAND

At the corner of Praed Street he paused. Was he going to walk about all night, or what? Catching sight of a policeman, he remembered having heard that one could sleep, in case of necessity, at a police station. So he went up to the policeman, explained that he had accidentally locked himself out of his flat without any money, and asked what he had better do about a bed. Policemen, nurtured on suspicion, tend to take a low view of human nature, to look instinctively for ulterior motives and doubtful credentials, and to believe a man guilty, especially at night, unless he can prove himself innocent. This was not an agreeable policeman, and he looked at Henry with sour scepticism, which hardened, during Henry's further explanations, delivered with a falsely jaunty air, into hostile disapproval. Perhaps it was the tense expression that Henry wore — and small wonder — that caused the policeman to look him up and down so insolently. Henry did not lack spirit, and for fear of losing his temper he turned on his heel and made off, with what was meant to be an air of dignity, towards Paddington.

Delightful accidents do happen, and suddenly Henry saw, on a rapidly moving bicycle, a face he knew. It belonged to the nephew of the daily woman at his cousin's flat. This young man was by day an artists' model and by night a partner in a coffee stall, from which he was now returning to his home beyond Paddington Green with part of the night's takings. When he heard of Henry's troubles, he lent him some money, and crouching low over the handlebars, curved like the horns of a luck-bearing antelope, sped smilingly away.

Never did four half-crowns look so attractive. Henry made for the nearest hotel, but the night porter was hostile and suspicious, and seeing that Henry had no luggage and no hat he said the hotel was full. Farther on, where Bayswater begins, the wanderer was luckier. A more sympathetic porter showed him into a nice clean bedroom, in which, for six-and-six, he could sleep for a few hours: it would soon be daylight.

THE NIGHT BEFORE THE WAR

'Before you go,' he said, 'you might just show me where the—'

'Yes, sir, that little door just at the end there. Good night, sir.'

'Ah, little door, little door,' thought Henry, making for it as unerringly as William Tell's arrow made for the apple, 'if you don't lead to Paradise, you lead to something very like it. No pilgrim ever arrived more thankfully at a long-sought shrine than I at this little door. This gleam of white tiles and frosted glass is more precious to me than ivory and diamonds . . .'

Once he was in bed, he was so tired that he felt wide awake. Ideas, images and phrases rushed through his head like a garbled film. The Marble Arch floated on a black lake. 'How far,' said a voice, 'is it to Epping?' 'They say it's round,' said a bronze soldier, stepping off his pedestal, and at the end of a vast, deserted street, brilliant with electric light, Henry saw himself knocking at a door that would never open. He thought of the war that might begin at any moment, of things that he had to do in the morning, of Violet, and how extraordinary it was that in the greatest city in the world it should be so difficult, so nearly impossible, for a man to relieve himself.

He decided not to wait for his uncle's money, but to urge Violet to marry him at once. He reflected that if he had been married, he would have been highly unlikely to have found himself locked out and wandering in the streets of London. Yes, yes, he thought, society protects itself against the pauper and the outcast. If you won't sleep respectably in a conjugal bed, says society, then you shan't have a bed at all; you shall wander the streets, and, what's more, I won't even allow you to answer a call of nature, for to commit a nuisance is to incur a penalty.

He saw suddenly that this night marked a stage of his growth, a turning-point in his life. He felt as if he had been liberated, as if he had passed a difficult test. Without an umbrella, without a key, without money, he had come nearer than ever before to being himself. Love and death were staring him in the face, and

STORIES OF ENGLAND

he could stare back at them without flinching, for with the aid of one he could master the other. He was filled with an extraordinary sense of confidence, power and well-being.

The blind had not been drawn and an elaborate floral pattern on the lace curtain was visible in the light thrown up from a lamp in the street. He had a sense that he had never known before of identification with London; he understood, in the hallucination of fatigue, the differing humanity of all those whom he had by chance encountered during these last hours; his heart warmed to them because he knew for the first time that we are all wanderers on the face of the earth; he had become a man, with the strength of a man. Closing his eyes, he imagined himself alone with Hitler, fighting to kill and absolutely confident of being the winner. Then the memory of the feel of Violet's hand as he had held it became intensely real to him, beyond words heartening, life-giving and soothing; and so he fell asleep.

A WEDDING GUEST

'THE day after to-morrow,' said Madam Cardoon, 'I'm goin to a weddin'.'

'Something special?' said her late husband's nephew, who knew she had some classy friends.

Her only reply was a twisted, mocking smile, and she hurried to draw back the black-out curtains in order to inspect the weather. It was a morning in January, 1945, and the nephew-by-marriage, on belated Christmas leave, was spending a couple of days with his aunt. The relation between them was simple. She was a lonely old woman and liked to mother him, a process to which he had no objection. Besides, she fascinated him, for she was unlike anybody he had ever known: she seemed to live almost entirely in the past, a fantastic past that was reflected in her manner and appearance, her style and setting.

Juliet Cardoon lived in an 'upper part', consisting of two floors over a junk-shop in a byway of Bayswater: she was much impoverished. The narrow, plain-fronted, brick house had not originally had a shop on the ground floor; it had been built in the eighteenth century, probably by some successful small tradesman who wished to live out in the country but within easy reach of London. No doubt it stood then in an acre or two of its own, but now it was all hemmed in with heavy, decayed Victorian houses and small shops, except at the back, where a noisy garage had been reduced to silence and ashes by incendiary bombs. Some of Madam Cardoon's windows had been blasted, and from time to time pieces of plaster fell from the ceiling into her hair or her soup.

The rooms were not large, but they were neatly proportioned and lined with their original panelling, from which their occu-

STORIES OF ENGLAND

pant had long ago had layers of wallpaper stripped in order that the old wood might be seen and touched. It was characteristic of her to have found these rooms and to be living in them. Although she had some good pieces of furniture and some rare and even beautiful stuffs, glass and china, this constricted abode had to contain the accumulated surviving belongings of an acquisitive woman who had formerly been used to much more space and many more possessions, a woman who could never bear to throw anything away, believing that everything may 'come in useful' some time, and who was governed by a sort of fetishism in regard to material objects. In short, the rooms were overcrowded and had evidently been like this for a long time. There were too many draperies, too many photographs, and too many oddments, especially on the mantelpiece — a jade cup to hold spills, two precious fans, a brass cow studded with turquoises, a row of *netsuké*, a Persian bowl filled with pot-pourri, and a cloisonné incense-burner now used as a receptacle for buttons. Each of these objects, if touched by a visitor, was apt to start its owner off on a long train of reminiscences, and each seemed to contribute something to the peculiar faded odour of this boudoir-like den, an indefinable, faintly disturbing, but not disagreeable odour, as of some stale sweetish fungus. And about Aunt Juliet herself there was wafted also a cognate aroma, as of an old sachet in a box of subfuse clothes, long unopened. One never saw a moth or even a fly in this establishment.

It seemed fitting that Aunt Juliet herself should tinkle as she moved, with amulets on a bangle, and a pendant knocking against a brooch, and that she should tend to wear collars of old lace or panels of old brocade which had nothing to do with fashion, but which certainly had a style of their own, or rather her own; and all these things went with her straight back; her fluffed-out, indestructible-looking grey hair; her eyes, into the faded blue irises of which, with oncoming age, a milky fluid seemed to have seeped; her evidently tight stays; the long,

A WEDDING GUEST

pointed toes of her shoes, dark bronze in colour and ornamented with paste buckles; her somewhat stately deportment; and her antique habit of saying 'comin'' and 'goin''.

Juliet Carloon was not in the least self-critical or introspective, so she had no compunction about her attachment to the past. The past had interested her, excited her, made her, and she did not choose to part with it nor feel any compulsion to try and adapt herself to the present. The war-time silence of the streets was a positive joy to her: it would have been a greater joy if broken occasionally by the clop-clop of horses' hooves. Bombs and all that sort of thing had merely acted as a fixative; she had been frightened, certainly, but it had never occurred to her to take shelter or to mind being alone in the house. 'If I'm goin' to be blown up,' she used to say, 'I'd rather be blown up comfortably in me bed.' She was the kind of woman who, if burnt at the stake, would have found time to remark that she had always thought there was nothin' to beat a real cracklin' log-fire.

Although her nephew was not a very articulate young man and had only the vaguest sense of period, he could appreciate to some extent the glamour of his aunt's past. He understood that it had been linked with high life in the days when high life really was high, that is to say, expensive, not open to all the world, and still marked by the remains of feudal grandeur. Her own origins were provincial and commonplace, but the comfortable evangelical home in which she grew up had seemed to her, from quite an early age, chiefly a place to escape from — not because she was unhappy, but because she was expansive. She was a clever, energetic child, with a flair for persons and things that were lively, fashionable and what in those days was called 'fast' — things and persons more or less under a ban, at home, of disapproval. She was ambitious, and had ideas about making a career: she once horrified her father by saying she wished she could go on the stage. Opportunity did not knock at her door, but threw it open and snatched her out into the great world for

STORIES OF ENGLAND

which she longed, for when still very young she married a young London lawyer of great promise and useful connexions. Her sister Jenny, an almost equally vivacious being, married soon after a young but successful gynæcologist already in practice in Harley Street.

All four of them were social climbers, not in the narrow and purely snobbish sense, but because they all wanted to get on and be well off and to enjoy themselves and to be in what they would have called 'the swim'. They were well equipped for both the climb and the swim. Both men were able, personable and shrewd, and apart from their professional successes, their social talents and ambitions were adroitly reinforced and even surpassed by those of their wives. The society in which they climbed was chiefly that of the clients, rather than the professional associates, of the two husbands.

Now Juliet felt, quite early in her married life, that it would not be enough for her to give charming little dinners (a good cook, her husband used to insist, was the very foundation of all things), to dress smartly, to be playfully 'clever', to know a little of everything that was going on in public and something of what was going on in private. No, she must launch out in some new direction, so that her name, and her husband's name, might be associated with some interesting activity, something up-to-date, modish, sought after. The way was clear, for she was childless, and she had a particular talent which she now resolved to turn to account. Juliet had always had an extreme interest in the chairs people sat on, the carpets their chairs stood on, the fireplaces by which they warmed themselves, the lamps that lighted them, the curtains that framed the weather they looked out upon: even as a child she had been in the habit of planning the decoration of imaginary rooms and houses.

And so it happened that, at the turn of the century, she had succeeded in setting herself up as an interior decorator. She called herself Madam Cardoon, opened a combined office and show-

A WEDDING GUEST

room (which she called her *atelier*) in Davies Street, filled it with an assortment of choice old objects and startling new ones (some of them imported from Paris, Munich and Vienna), obtained the services of a capable young sissy of good family as manager, left the management of her own house to a housekeeper, and then set to work. An interview which she gave to a fashion journal and in which she spoke with more confidence than she actually felt (though that was not small) was seen by Mrs. X, at that time a 'great friend' of the Prince of Wales. Mrs. X, reading the interview, remembered having lately met Mrs. Cardoon at a garden party, remembered also a useful service performed for her by Mrs. Cardoon's husband when she wished to arrange a legal separation from Mr. X, and decided to get Mrs. Cardoon — or 'Madam Cardoon, Adviser on Decoration', as she now called herself — to do up the house she had taken in Great Cumberland Place, and to do it up so effectively that women who saw it would be envious and men would be bewitched into seeing it as part of Mrs. X's personality, like her clothes, her jewels, her scent, and her voice.

Juliet let herself go, and the drawing-room in Cumberland Place became a nine weeks' wonder. She painted the ceiling black, which was unheard of, and the floor white (so was that), and covered it with plain mauve rugs (their plainness, even more than their mauveness, was a startling novelty), and planted upon them a sofa so commodious that if Madame Récamier had been the Dionne Quintuplets she would have been quite at ease upon it, and so comfortably upholstered that sharp tongues speculated on the uses to which it was likely to be put. Little more need be said about that room except that above a dull gold dado the walls were covered with a satin paper in which broad black stripes alternated with mauve stripes, both being sown with little white and gold hearts, and that a prodigious electrolier hung from the ceiling in a wealth of sinuosities representing nymphs apparently caught in a cataract of melting toffee that had congealed for ever:

STORIES OF ENGLAND

in the palm of each hand of each nymph was a socket, and in each socket was an electric light bulb. The rest of the house, as decorated by Madam Cardoon, is described in the pages of *Milady at Home* for the year in question; it is enough to say that the bathroom was the first in London to be entirely lined with looking-glass for it to be understood that Madam Cardoon was, as they say nowadays, on the up-and-up. Emulation is the sincerest form of envy, and the 'atelier' in Davies Street and the young man with the very tall collar and very narrow trousers soon had as much work as they could cope with. In brief, Madam Cardoon had made her name.

'You ought to write the story of your life,' the nephew-by-marriage had more than once said, after his aunt had been in a reminiscent mood. He was quite right; particularly as in the course of her career as a decorator Juliet Cardoon had sometimes found herself called in not merely to 'advise' socially eminent women about their new chintzes and wallpapers, but to listen to their confidences. They saw that she was young but they regarded her as already a woman of the world, and the fact that she was not, or rather had not been originally, a woman of precisely *their* world made them in a way more ready to confide in her: besides, she had charm, she listened with every appearance of sympathy, she had good sense, was discreet, never gossiped unkindly (it was noticed) about her other clients, and had (what was more) a shoulder positively formed for weeping on — it had been saturated, quite early on, by a lonely celebrity who thought she had been wronged and was glad to seize a chance of relaxing the tiresomely 'brave' smile with which she faced the world.

The transition from Edwardian splendours to the Bayswater hide-out was neither abrupt nor recent. First came the sudden death of Cardoon from heart-failure, then the revelation that he had made such ample provision for his two children by a mistress whose existence Juliet had not even suspected, that very little was left for Juliet herself. Juliet could have gone on with her 'atelier'

A WEDDING GUEST

and made a very good thing of it, but she had lost heart, so she sold out, took up Christian Science, put it down, and went to live with her sister Jenny for a time; then, after the first world war, she lapsed into Bayswater and a reclusive life.

'No,' she told her nephew, 'I shan't be writin' any memoirs. If I put in only the pleasant things the book wouldn't be true, and if I put in the truth it wouldn't be pleasant. I'm not grumblin', I've had a good life in some ways, better than most as far as I can see, and I've got me friends, and very old friends, some of 'em — otherwise I shouldn't be goin' to this weddin'.'

And all the trinkets at her wrist rattled and tinkled as she made a vague, slightly helpless gesture — as if she were accepting the truth of some proverb — that it's a long lane that has no turning, perhaps, but no —

'Things aren't always what they seem,' she said, with such a strange emphasis that this trite remark had an almost startling effect. 'I'll tell you a story,' she said, 'but you mustn't breathe a word of it to a soul. You promise? . . . Once upon a time, in the days when I took an interest in other people's houses, I went to stay at a small country place belongin' to Lord and Lady Crotchester. It was full of dreadful Victorian stuff (though I'm told people are collectin' it nowadays) and they wanted it freshenin' up a bit. I could see that Connie Crotchester had somethin' on her mind, but I couldn't imagine what. She and her husband seemed to have all the luck — looks, health, money, position. But no, they wanted a child, and they couldn't bring it off, and she was haunted by a fear that her husband would get to hate her if she failed to present him with an heir. I asked her if she thought it was her fault or her husband's. She said she was sure it was hers, as there had been no want of tryin' on his part. I can see her now, wringin' her hands and turnin' her beautiful head away as she spoke. "Oh, nonsense," I said. But I asked her all the same why she didn't see a good doctor. She hadn't apparently thought of that. So I told her about me sister Jenny's husband. I said he was

STORIES OF ENGLAND

a gynæcologist, but that all sorts of people went to see him about their private troubles, men as well as women. So she said she'd think about it, so I said it was no good thinkin' about it, she'd better *do* somethin' about it. Well, she went to see him, and within a year she was the mother of a beautiful boy. . . . Now don't look so cynical, you wicked boy! Me brother-in-law wasn't that sort of man. In any case, he wouldn't have been such a fool as to jeopardize his professional standin', and he had his own children to think of. . . . I need hardly tell you that Connie Crotchester spoke very highly of him.

'A year or two later another couple, whom I didn't know, Sir Portland and Lady Place, were also troubled at bein' childless. In this case, I believe, there was no doubt that the fault (or shall we say disability? — it seems unkind to call it a fault) lay with the husband. Well, Sir Portland went to see me brother-in-law, and again a child was born — only one, a daughter, but still that was better than nothin' . . .

'Well, Jenny's dead, and her husband's dead, and as you've promised to keep this all to yourself, I'm goin' to tell you a consultin'-room secret. When Jenny was a widow, I asked her, for I was dyin' of curiosity, how these two miracles were done. The explanation was quite simple, but a bit startlin'. It was Raikes.'

Again the gesture, the tinkling bangle.

'Raikes?' said the bewildered nephew, curious but faintly embarrassed. 'What are they?'

'Raikes was a big, handsome young man with a heart of gold. He was their butler in Harley Street . . .'

'Gosh!' said the nephew.

'Now the funny thing is that the weddin' I'm goin' to next week is the weddin' of the young Lord Crotchester and Miss Place. Of course *they* don't know, and Raikes himself doesn't know now — he was killed by a bomb, poor fellow, in '41.'

Again the twisted smile; and perhaps because there was something entirely shameless in it, the nephew, in an access of boyish

A WEDDING GUEST

pudeur or shyness, hid his face for a moment in his hands; and as he did so he felt almost suffocated by that sweetish, unchanging, pervasive odour, in which his aunt's outrageous memories were preserved as if in some embalming fluid suddenly become transparent.

