

PAGEANT

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By G. B. Lancaster

THE WORLD IS YOURS

JIM OF THE RANGES

THE HONOURABLE PEGGY

THE SAVIGNYS

THE LAW BRINGERS

ALTAR STAIRS

SONS O' MEN

A SPUR TO SMITE

PAGEANT



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THE WORLD IS YOURS

JIM OF THE RANGES

etc.

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Part One

COLONIZING

CHAPTER ONE

I

ON August 3, 1846 (it is dated on the back), Robert Snow, convict servant in the employ of Captain Comyn, Clent Hall, in the county of Somerset, Van Diemen's Land, brought Madam Comyn the picture which he had painted.

"Place it there," commanded Madam, standing afar off in the sunny quiet of the flagged colonial hall. Convict servants, like spiders, droughts, unruly lovers, and other whimsies of *le bon Dieu*, were inevitable in this so savage life, and must be dealt with somehow. Madam, who had married the Captain at fourteen and followed the drum (and him) through the Napoleonic Wars, found few things incapable of being dealt with so long as one kept one's head. It is the first step which counts, she was already beginning to tell Jenny. And here was Jenny, prim and pretty as paints and Robert Snow could make her.

Madam, dipping her black ringlets this and that way, advancing her lorgnette, said negligently to the painter, "You may go."

He stayed. From a fond and smiling grandmother Madam became instantly the great lady, although standing only five foot one in her kid sandals. Convict servants when provoked had been known to behave as one could not have expected even them to do, but Madam was not to be cowed. She fixed Robert Snow with her bright, sharp stare, and then something in the young hungry eyes, the twitching lips moved her. Or it might merely have been because he was male.

"I am pleased," she said royally. "You shall paint Mr. Mabile to companion Miss Genevieve. . . . You may go."

His bow was a gentleman's, and that too was an impertinence in a servant. But Madam's eyes followed him out almost kindly and for the first time she wondered what sin had been Robert Snow's to bring him in a convict ship from England. But the colonies, said England—who always had her own ideas—must be

peopled, and if England chose to do it in this extraordinary fashion . . . well, it was no worse than other fashions which Madam had known.

In any case, convicts were better off than they had been twenty years back when the gentlemen, it was said, would tie them up by the thumbs and bet on their bodies in the hearty manner of gentlemen everywhere. As for the females of twenty years back, one did not inquire into the matter, although such knowledge as came one's way decidedly added a spice to the past. Convicts now had privileges: rights of appeal, one pair of trousers and other amenities. For example, this young man who had painted Jenny. The Police Register in Hobart Town had him as *No. 17006, remain-servant to Captain Comyn*, and had seemed glad to get rid of him, what with the swarms of convicts pouring in by every boat and the necessity of finding homes for them. But himself must know that it was an especial privilege to be consigned to Clent Hall, and worth many pairs of trousers.

There was another painter convict in the colony. One Wainright who had poisoned his cousin because she had thick ankles. And this so pleased Madam that she had had him draw her portrait along with those of all the prettiest young ladies of Van Diemen's Land. . . . But I will tell James Sorley to let Snow paint Julia, she thought. . . . Madam did not need Julia, who had just returned from England to become the toast of Hobart Town, as a ladder into society, but she needed very much to make the ladies there jealous of her new discovery. Life at Clent was dull in these days.

Robert Snow went down between the box hedges feeling desolate. Jenny was only six and a bit, but she had been an exquisite thing to paint, a delicious thing to breathe the air with. For years he had been trying to become one of those stoical creatures who ignore yesterday and to-morrow, but there had been some quality in Jenny that constantly persisted in turning him into a man again. Every time she sat for him, with some woman of the household to keep watch on him, his lips had ached to kiss those delicate quicksilver limbs, his eyes had ached to close their tired lids in her shining hair. Now he would probably never speak to her again. Certainly never touch her.

Near the stables which the Captain had built after the manner of an Italian casino, with cupolas and turrets, Snow met William who, besides being the eldest son of Captain and Madam Comyn, was Jenny's father and usually dangerous when one did not expect him to be. Because Snow was not thinking of it now—and showed it—William naturally became dangerous. Swinging his cane, a very devil of a fellow with his high-shouldered velvet-collared coat and light jutting eyebrows, he stopped Snow. "Didn't I tell you to paint that gate by the water-hole?"

"Madam wanted the portrait finished first."

It was suicide to miss the "sir," but with the heady glow of the creator still on him Robert Snow felt suicidal. William had created nothing, except Jenny, and even his egoism could scarcely deny Susan his wife some share in that. William's lips contracted.

"You have neglected my orders," he said; wrote something in his pocket-book, folded the leaf, and gave it to Snow. "Take that over to Major Sorley at once," he said. Snow did not need to read it. Such notes, although not so common as they used to be, were well known among convicts. It was a formula—*Dear Sir: Please give bearer two dozen hard and return him. Faithfully yours,*—and Snow had carried them to the current magistrate before now. At Clent he found some dour comfort in the knowledge of how William hated to send them. But because the Captain would not bestir himself and become a magistrate, there was no help for it. William had even gone so far as to rig up triangles behind the wool-shed, yet even that did not stimulate the Captain with his little trotting legs, his scandalous experiments in sheep-breeding, and his genial faculty for setting people by the ears without losing their affection.

Although she had married the Captain at fourteen, it was amazing how soon Madam came to understand him. And she understood William, dull, painstaking William who kept casual Clent together and was always stern in the wrong places. Oliver, her second son, she understood. Alas, poor Noll; so bored by the pleasures he chased with both arms out! How *les bêtises* disgusted his fastidious soul, and with what ardour he invited them! An enchanted child was Oliver, always picking up dust where he saw jewels.

Mab, her youngest, she did not understand. Because she loved him, so exquisitely loved him, he would probably break her heart, conceded Madam. Meantime she would do what she could with Jenny, who came, very uncomfortable in stiff green tarlatan and white collar frill, to stand with Madam under the new portrait.

Jenny, rebellious and scratched, demanded straightway, "Why does people have to wear clothes, Grandmamma?"

"It is the fashion, *petit chou*."

"Wouldn't we if it wasn't?"

"Assuredly not."

"When I am a big missy and dance at Government House and lead the fashion, I won't let any of us wear clothes."

"*Mon Dieu!*" said Madam, envious of a largeness of vision beyond her own. "May I be there to see! And your father," she added, reflectively.

Decidedly, she thought, Robert Snow had done well by Jenny. With the same puckish pointed chin the painted child looked down; the same brown eyes, large and long under thin arched brows, the same unruly tumble of chestnut curls. Just a hint of the fathomless wonder that is in all child faces the artist had caught, but his seared and sorrowful spirit could go no farther. That indefinable sweetness was the living Jenny's alone, and so was that gay spark of humour which in sorrow helps more than many prayers.

"Most truly, Susan, one would never take her to be the child of yourself and William!" cried Madam as Susan in broad hat and gloves came in from her walk round the garden. And although she refrained from adding verbal rejoicings, even Susan heard them in her voice and told William about it later in the new wing which the Captain had built when William married.

"I fear," lamented Susan, replacing her tight prune-colour evening silk with a roomy calico nightgown, "that Madam will teach Jenny vanity."

"My dear," said William, properly shocked, "I beg of you to remember that she is my mother."

"Yes, love," murmured Susan, instantly submissive. Like most wives of the 'forties, she knew her place and rarely let herself wonder why God had ordained it beside William. God, so far as

Susan understood from the extempore sermons which William sometimes preached on Sundays, ordained everything while leaving detail in the safe hands of his gentlemen friends.

William brushed his sandy hair delicately, wondering why on the edge of thirty he should be going bald, and added gloomily, "Nor is she likely to think of vanity, with the country in this unsettled state."

"No, love," murmured Susan, tying the plain nightcap over her curl-papers. What with bush-rangers, floods of convicts, experimenting governors, and maids promiscuously marrying, the country always was in an unsettled state and would have to remain so, since the Captain declared the London Colonial Office to be a Bedlam of wild asses and each succeeding governor a worse time-server and lick-pot.

It was over the governor that the Captain and Major Sorley had last quarrelled. Or perhaps it was merino rams. . . . Susan sighed, pulling apart the maroon curtains which hung stiff and heavy as leather from the six-foot tester of the bed. Within that stifling seclusion Humphrey had been born seven years before, Jenny six, and two others that had died. Susan hoped the next would be a girl. . . . And all a Merrick, she thought, with a sudden weak defiance of Fate and Madam as she heaved herself up the high wooden side and in among the billows of goose-down. . . . Humphrey is a Comyn and Jenny a du Nesle. Surely this one can be my own—if it lives.

"And besides," continued William, fitting the extinguisher precisely to the candle, "Jenny has always the corrective of your example so long as you do your duty by her."

"Yes, dear. I will teach her some more verses. Dr. Watts is so helpful."

Murmuring those most likely to chasten a small Jenny encouraged by Madam in peacocking, Susan fell uneasily asleep.

II

In 1826 (date and fact, with courtly additions somewhat like those then fashionable on tombstones, are engraved on two loving-cups presented by Sorleys to Comyns and Comyns to

Sorleys) Captain Comyn and Major Sorley chartered a two-hundred-ton vessel—schooner-rigged, Captain Barnes master—and left England for Van Diemen's Land, where they arrived some ten months later. Depositing their ladies and all impedimenta, including a lately increased family, in Hobart Town (then little more than barracks, prisons, and whaling-station), they rode inland with a surveyor and a handful of convicts to select the fifteen hundred acres granted each of them by the Crown.

Madam danced a private *pas seul* when she saw them go. Ten months of James Sorley who, great moon-calf that he was, had fallen into an admiration of her which caused him anguish worse than colic, had been almost as hard to bear as ten months of the Captain's very appreciative constancy. . . . I could rid myself of them both in a duel any day, she thought, helping distressful Louisa Sorley administer dill-water to her latest addition. And yet it is said that men rule the world. My faith! it is well for the world that we women stay our hands! . . .

"Hold him up, Louisa. He is full of wind and strange mouthings, like all his sex."

"Oh, Genevieve," wept Louisa, sitting soft and broad on the hard edge of a stretcher, "what should we do if our dear ones were speared or shot or eaten by wild animals? We in a strange land——"

"Marry again," said Madam, promptly. "There are some fine eyes and whiskers at the barracks. *Dame!* how they would be grateful to blacks and bushrangers!"

"You jest at everything," cried Louisa. "When I think of my poor Sorley sitting a saddle for days on end . . . and he forgot to take the salve I had provided."

Madam kissed the dandling child for the first time. Her bright eyes twinkled. "May Providence see to it," she murmured.

With as little knowledge of land as possible to gentlemen who had been fighting in the wars almost ever since they were breeched, these two apparently did manage to attract a Providence which must have had little to do in a penal settlement. Like babes they were led to select excellent sheep country with good river-frontage and to get their titles clear. Then, it seems, Providence yawned and made off, leaving them, with a disregard

of future complications possible only in a race civilized out of its natural instincts, to choose their home blocks side by side and to erect their wattle-and-daub huts with only a split-rail fence between.

"How nice!" cried simple Louisa Sorley when at last she arrived there and saw gold wattle bloom reflected in the shining river and the English servants brought out with them already unloading about the long clean buildings of split shingles which would house them. Madam said nothing. But she took the Captain's heated eager face between her palms and kissed his nose, a little remorsefully, as one might with an honest dog.

Without dear simple Louisa Sorley, who never tried to grasp any but the most domestic principles, Madam could barely have borne those first five years when the Captain smelled forever of sheep or horses, and James Sorley went almost mad with jealousy because Madam dined with the governor in Hobart Town and danced in a barn with sprigs of the military. Indeed, some of the military were eternally dropping in on unspecified expeditions; and because women were rare in the colony—fortunately for men, women like Madam are rare anywhere—she could have gathered baskets of hearts as one gathers beans from a row.

"It is iniquitous!" cried Major Sorley, glaring over the split-rail fence one twilight.

Madam raised one of those little brown ringed hands which rarely carried anything heavier than a fan or a scent-bottle.

"They must love someone, *les pauvres*. Why not me?"

"You are a married woman," said the Major, who even yarded sheep in a silk hat. He was that sort.

Madam nodded slowly. "*Bien*. So it appears. And you, *mon ami*, have at length discovered it?"

The Major went very red. During the first year in those huts he had entreated Madam to fly with him. During the second he had threatened to fly with her. During the third he had returned to his Louisa and produced a daughter who was even now sucking the finger of a somewhat older Mab Comyn at Louisa's feet.

"Madam," said he, with ponderous sarcasm, "you do not wish the fact to be discovered? You are right. I will not publish it."

With that he made her a bow stiff from the waist and went

off, leaving Madam rocking with laughter, like a Paris *gamin*, against the fence. What the devil could one do with a woman like that?

Madam, it seems, contrived to do little with herself through these years but laugh, sing to her harp, and float over the rough tussock grass in silken or muslin billows, protected from an almost tropical sun by absurd little parasols.

"But I leave labour to the servants, *moi*," she lightly told an exhausted Lousia Sorley up to her pale eyebrows in the rendering down of candle-fat. "Why not you also, *chérie*?"

"They do it so badly," protested this born housewife.

"I should do it worse. And for what else is that class created?"

She steadily advanced the belief that no lady could possibly know how to make a bed or sweep a room or wash a clout, and because she never made the mistake of trying she had the homage of her servants—even the French maid who dressed her daily and fluted her ruffles and screamed to God for help at sight of a tarantula. Madam kept a special stick for tarantulas, and on warm rainy evenings the hut would often echo to her piercing: "Celeste! But *un monstre, par Dieu! Vite! Vite!* At him, then!" And re-echo to Celeste's shrieks and prayers and stick-thumpings.

The Merricks ("Not of the Two Services, unfortunately, but estimable people, oh, quite," considered Major Sorley) settled just across the river in the same year; and Mrs. Merrick, who wore black-stuff gowns in the height of summer, in the belief that the more she suffered the more the Lord would love her ("And *bien sur* she has need to attract Him in some way," said Madam), gave it out that the Lord would one day chasten Madam's proud stomach. And when that day arrived with the marriage of young William Comyn to Susan Merrick, Madam remembered, and sang all the evening to her harp French songs which made even the seasoned Captain raise his eyebrows.

"My dear!" he protested.

But Madam said: "There are times, Guillaume, when I must be wicked. Go away if it embarrasses you."

But this was long after the early settlers had consolidated their domains according to the spacious colonial fashion. From the prisons in Hobart Town came endless gangs of convicts. (Two

shirts, two pairs of socks, one jacket, one pair of trousers, and sufficient food hired a man, said the regulations, for an indefinite period.) And then, quarried from the soft brown freestone of the hills, there arose throughout the colony those absurd and utterly splendid blocks of barns, stables, wool-sheds, dove-cotes, and what not which always like an army of courtiers preceded the house proper. John Hatherton of Weir had an attack of conscience (or penury) on the completion of his outbuildings. He refused to allow men to sweat unpaid for him further, and lived on in the old wattle-and-daub until the long arm of luck grew tired of him and bush-rangers burned him in his house one winter night.

Madam's generalship managed the erection of Clent Hall on a hillock a mile from the split-rail fence, and Major Sorley, possibly in dudgeon, retired behind a patch of heavy bush—honeysuckle, shining blackwood, and wattle—to build Bredon. The huts that had ushered in an epoch became homes for possum and bandicoot and the big owls which the Comyn boys and young Henry Sorley dragged blinking from the rafters. The split-rail fence dozed bleaching in the sun, forgetting the days when two gentlemen discussed across it such vital matters as the best colour to paint piggeries, the chances of silkworms brought from England awaiting in cocooned retirement the leafing of the new mulberry trees (which they never did), the value of windmills as against hydraulic rams, and a sight more, until they began to stride up and down the fence with raised voices, the Captain with a velvet cap over his ear and a dozen dogs at the heels of his gaiters and the Major erect and elegant in blue surtout and top-hat. By now it was time for Madam's English nurse to gather the three little Comyn boys under her apron and bawl in lusty Dorset :

“Pillowed in peace let the little heads lie,
And I will sing them lullaby,”

and for placid Mrs. Sorley to shut the windows and comfort Baby Julia.

It was over Baby Julia that the gulf between Major and Captain first opened, although the Captain never saw it until he fell into it. Incurably sentimental and innocent, he offered the

three-year old Mab as Julia's spouse before she was five hours old, thereby deeply shocking some oblique morals of the Major's. That a man whose wife had been adored by another man could suggest that his progeny and the other man's progeny . . . 'pon my soul, it was indecent ; and if he, James Sorley, had really run away with Madam four years before it couldn't have happened and . . . well, put it how you like, it was all very confused and improper, and the Major would have none of it, by God !

He eluded the Captain for some weeks, with a skill which increasing practice as chairman of the Road Board was fostering, but kneeling stiffly by his bed one night he found the ritual of his devotion seriously interfered with. Little French sentences which had certainly no right in any devotions came tinkling about his ears ; there was the ghost of a scent, a sweet palpitating stir . . .

He got hurriedly to his feet, unknowing that he cursed, until he saw his wife's mild eyes within her nightcap as she sat in bed.

"Did you hurt yourself, James ? I thought you stumbled . . ."

"I . . . stumbled. But I shall not stumble again, Louisa."

Mrs. Sorley cuddled her soft bulk down among the softer pillows. James could be impressive even in his nightshirt. She was certain that if those who said he would go far toward ruling this country were to see him now, they would be impressed. Dear James !

III

As time passed, dear James became conscious of ambition and went for it, as Madam said in Paris slang, bald-headed. And indeed the silk hat was now making this more than a figure of speech. He became a Person in the district which was confusedly shaping out of this grey shining immensity of gum bush and loitering rivers and half-cleared flats already filling up with merino sheep. He wrote guarded letters to those newspapers which governors still suppressed whenever they wanted to ; instigated and then adroitly withdrew from a political association snubbed by Governor Arthur (who insisted on treating the growing colony

purely as a penal settlement), and generally behaved like a promising politician. He was a member of the historic company formed by John Batman in 1835 to found what later became Victoria, on the great Australian mainland, and seized the occasion of a mishap of poor Louisa's to build a family vault at Trienna.

Madam had no more children and a Comyn vault was not then called for. But the Captain had no mind to be beaten by Jim Sorley, damme ; and also a vault as an antechamber to the next world or an anti-climax to this was inevitable among the old colonial families who, with half the horizon to choose from, raised their tall houses from area to attic as was the English way and would not until a much later date stoop to veranda shelter from the dazzling broadsides of the sun.

If Madam found the focus of her own fierce ambition alter as time passed, it is certain at least that she did not quail. Hopes of the Captain had not outlived the honeymoon. He loved everybody, even those with whom he quarrelled. William declared himself as without humour while still being powdered on his mother's knee. Oliver promised dizzily, but that bright flame was too avid. It soon ate up everything about it, including Madam's pride, so that when James Sorley became a councillor in Hobart Town and Oliver elected to go with him as secretary she put up a very poor fight.

"He wants me because I am a gentleman and can steer him away from social *faux pas*," explained Oliver, with his charming ease. "And I want him to climb on, *chère maman*."

"You will not climb," said Madam, with dark decision. "You seek but a cloak to play beneath, *toi*."

Jenny, a pink bewilderment of frills, looked up from a bright lapful of Madam's ivory spools and gold thimbles. "Nursey makes me d'ess and und'ss beneath my nighty-gown now," she offered.

"The devil she does ! Why, then, imp ?"

This exquisite and detached uncle who never kissed and hugged her as Mab did had the value of remoteness, and Jenny warmed to the sensation, saying : "It is modest, sir. Mamma wears a chemise in her bath."

“Is such virtue possible!” Oliver turned bluely dark and long-lashed eyes on Jenny. “And what does Papa wear?”

“That is enough,” said Madam, sending Jenny away. She groaned slightly. “Some day I shall kill that stupid Susan.”

Oliver applauded this. A dull thing, when you came to think of it, Susan’s continued encouragement of new lives. Himself, he felt, would have adored restraint, ethics, little flowers in green fields if he ever had time to think about them. As it was, he never wrote love-letters. Considering his brother, who was probably at the moment hanging about the servants’ huts beyond the wall, Oliver wondered if Mab would be equally cautious and thought it unlikely. Mab’s trusting human soul was almost as unnatural as the Captain’s.

Oliver lounged about the room, seeing himself very elegant in bottle-green, slim-waisted in oval mirrors with dim gold frames. All things in Madam’s private rooms were delicious with a French and stately ancience which perhaps he only of all her acquaintance was fitted to appreciate. But would Madam appreciate with him Mab’s pursuit of little Lucy Durbin? He feared not, and presently lounged away into the warm gloaming, leaving the ghost of a kiss on Madam’s hand with its lace kerchief between the pointed fingers. There was no woman in the colony carried the inevitable kerchief as Madam could.

A little precious and unreal, this atmosphere he shared with Madam, and outdoors the hearty smell of hayricks and stables revolted him. This bucolic air was Mab’s breath, his father’s, William’s. As for Oliver, he would return to town, pitying Madam a little. But, if reports were true, she had had her day, and not to any do such days come twice.

Lounging over the terrace balustrade, he saw Mab come riding in from the village, radiant in high-collared mulberry coat, white tight breeches, and spurred half-Wellingtons, his dark, warm-coloured face glowing. There was no prettier fellow in the colony than Mab at nineteen, thought Oliver, who took an æsthetic pleasure in his family’s good blood, while fully realizing the license such a possession generally brought with it. If Mab didn’t go to the devil, if Jenny didn’t become wanton, then he, Oliver, was no prophet. Occasionally he envied that flame of life in them

as it had been in Madam. For himself the desires of the flesh had so few attractions, so few compensations for the results of its reckless indulgence.

At the stables Mab flung his reins to a groom and walked with his impatient young-man step round to the servants' quarters, the scent of fresh earth sweet in his nostrils. There was an hour yet before Lucy Durbin put on her black-and-white and carried plates to the dinner-table, where through these last strange weeks he had felt the tremors shake his body at her approach, seen her little red thumb twitch on the edge of the dish as she offered him potatoes.

It was not the fashion of the colony to discipline its young men. Untaught, unchecked, hot with strong blood and freedom, they ranged where they would, and when at last brought to heel by marriage they made no worse husbands than most and rarely found their mistakes rising up to condemn them. Some abysmal innocence and sweetness in Mab had so far kept him honest. He still believed that there were things a Comyn could not do, still believed cheating at cards and the betrayal of servant girls sins of an equality. Swaggering a little, royally sure of himself, and more than a little flushed with wine, he went to sup kisses from Lucy's firm red cheeks and arms and, boy-like, thought himself a devil of a fellow.

The grey gum leaves hung glassy in moonlight, pungent with scent. Under them and among the dark sassafras clumps hid the little stone cottages of the Clent servants. They blinked bright eyes, beckoning. There were whispers and murmurs, the stealthy passing of dogs, of cats about their business. The tall brown rampart of Clent stood to the right behind its walls and the great iron gate locked at night against bush-rangers. Smell of bush smoke and cooking from the cottages was turning into grey smoke drifting, groping with seeking fingers. Mab went, unconsciously stealthy as the dogs, past the long stone hut where the ticket-of-leavers lived.

Through some strange element of courtesy, convicts were now called ticket-of-leavers ; but Robert Snow, on a tree stump near the door, with light from the slush-lamp flickering over his torn and naked back, was pure convict to-night. He cowered as Mab

went by. This young man's brother had sent him to the triangles and would again. By the law of the land he could demand investigation, but what of that? In revenge William would probably goad him into some deed that would send him back to Port Arthur, with all hell to go through again. Now, unless he called down the thunderbolts upon him, in five years he could be a free man. Silence, he thought. Eat the black bread, drink the blood. Wait.

Mab's glance slid over Snow, slid off again. He had sucked in such sights with milk from the breast and they did not move him. They belonged to the approved order of things—like old Braxey who milked the Clent cows and was now turning slowly round outside the hut, unwinding his sins for the day. Nightly he had done that ever since Mab could remember, and now his long grey hair and beard almost hid his sunken body. "Ha' maircy, my Lord God," he chanted. "Lord, ha' maircy onter me."

Men slouched in and out of the low door, unheeding Braxey, unheeding Snow. Four played with dirty cards on a tree stump. All touched their forelocks as Mab passed. He was the young lord going to his pleasure; and if they guessed what that was, their coarse grins did not widen until they saw his back.

Durbin's cottage had a neat paling fence. Foxgloves and canterbury-bells peered tall and pink above it. The scent of violets was too urgent, too sweet. Mab whistled a soft robin note; then another, and saw the light fade from Lucy's attic. He went on swiftly into the bush where sassafras, honeysuckle, and myrtle made strange warm darkness. Always the bush at night excited him, and to-night he had drunk more wine than usual among the young bloods at Trienna. He walked a little uncertainly, thinking of the talk down there in the gentlemen's private room at the King George, thinking of Lucy and these hot unusual quivers of his blood. Birds dipped through the scrub, seeking their mates. Somewhere a fox barked. A thin scream came from a distant wild cat. The winter chill was in the air, but the bush was avid with life for many a hundred miles of unbroken mystery and secret doings.

Uncertain and yet conscious of impelling danger, Mab waited on the edge of one mystery for Lucy. And when she came running, her black shawl like flapping wings about her, and he felt

his arms go round her firm young body, he was suddenly giddy, sick with desire.

"Lucy! Lucy!" he gasped, tightening his hold. But her lips were wet with salt tears when he sought them, and she was panting, grunting like a little angry pig. Dimly he felt his tremendous moment escaping him and struggled for it. "Lucy . . . kiss me. I . . . I . . ."

Lucy shook herself free, the tears drying on her hot cheeks. "Madam says as I'm to marry Tom Jerrold to wonst," she cried shrilly.

Mab stepped back, his eager hands falling away. Madam? So she knew? Was there anything she didn't know, couldn't find out? Already he felt that haughty power of hers shadowing over him, weakening him. "Why?" he faltered.

"She says I be goin' on sixteen an' by then she had one baby an' was thinkin' of another. An' I says as I dun't like babies. An' she says as I mun be learnin' to like 'em, for what else is there fur a gell? An' I dunno what else there is, nayther," cried Lucy, sobbing.

Mab drew a deep breath, the blood pounding in his ears. Confronted like this with Madam's Homeric facing of facts, he did not know any more than Lucy. For himself, he knew that Madam had not taken the matter in hand a moment too soon. But she had taken it. She had put out those tiny brown heavily ringed fingers of hers and neatly tipped over the crystal chalice of his boyish vision, leaving naked the ugly thing behind.

"Muster Mab," whimpered Lucy, nestling close.

"Yes?" He hesitated and then put his arm round her slackly.

"Don't let me marry Tom, wull 'ee?"

"I . . ." Where was the moment of high passion, of great emprise that should bear him and Lucy together to the skies? Instead he felt a sharp sick distaste of this vulgar intrigue, as though he saw it through Madam's eyes half amused above her fan. "I don't see what I can do, you know," he said awkwardly.

IV

He still did not know what he could have done, said, as he sat later at the dinner-table and kept his eyes from Lucy's nose swollen red with crying, and from Madam's buoyant ease. Undoubtedly Madam saw all there was to see and probably more, but she would never speak of it. Let us bury this foolishness, *mon chou*, her manner seemed to say. It is but growing-pains. And half ashamed, half relieved, Mab knew that she was right, and, like the boy he was, ate little and drank much and did not talk at all.

The Captain, his table full of guests, could not keep off politics, No one could in these days. And what wonder, with this burden of increasing debt and decreasing revenue, with the governor imposing tax after tax by order of Downing Street—which knew nothing about colonial conditions—and the duties on everything going up from five to fifteen per cent? Madam would have been as irritable as her man if she had not formed the habit of leaving all annoyances to Susan.

“Damme, sir!” cried the Captain, rumpling up his shock of grey hair. “Even a blind man knows that a country can't progress without its own parliament. So long as we are governed from that cursed Downing Street, there is no hope for us.”

Madam collected eyes and withdrew. For the next hour Susan and Mrs. Wytcherley would be painful and pertinacious at the piano while the men told, over their wine, stories which she would have relished. The unexplainable, the untidy ways of these English! They could not even colonize according to rule. Forty years back the French *tri-couleur* would have flown where Hobart Town stood now if the English had not suddenly flung on the shore a handful of convicts, settlers, what-nots grabbed out of Botany Bay, while the French were still systematically marking out the channel as they passed up it.

And what had the English done with the country since? Stuffed it with redcoats and yellow convict jackets. Bribed with convenable grants of land such of the gentlemen adventurers as were on their beam-ends at close of the wars (plenty of these, thought Madam, grimly) and then put—what was it?—spokes in

their carriages by causing the name of Van Diemen's Land to stink in the nose of the world. A dangerous jest if many like her Captain got together to throw her yoke off. When Mab became viceroy, governor . . . whatever title was in vogue later, *he* would show them. He was behaving well over this Lucy affair, and Tom Jerrold's cottage should be built immediately. Madam, having got the whole business out of Lucy in two minutes before dinner, felt her mind at rest, except for the horrible sounds of Susan and Mrs. Wytcherley at the piano.

She moved about, touching the flowers in their tall vases, glancing in the long mirrors, and hating the heavy velvet curtains veiling the shuttered windows. Bush-rangers made shutters needful, but many times Madam desired to fling them wide and scream into the night scented of box and trodden gum leaves and distant sheep-trampled grass: "Come then, devils! We have no fear of you."

She had fear, though. It was no more than a month since the Captain, riding over his land, had found a dead man laid at each of the five gates. Himself might be the next.

Well, it was all in the game. He had warned her before that queer, romantic hegira of the gentlemen adventurers began. And when had fear ever blocked adventure? How they had gone about it, were going about it still! Majors, admirals, captains of the line ordering their *dessous* of fine linen, their frogged coats, their dancing-pumps, their pistols packed into the great hide-bound chests that had seen service with their masters about the world. Their ladies with fair bosoms flushed above the straight gowns and kerchiefs to their eyes but courage in their hearts—how they, too, had gone about it! How they had clung, with the desperation known only in women, to their household gods: the Chippendales, the Louis Quinzes, the round gilt mirrors with the fat cupids, the samplers, faldstools, and tester beds, the brass preserving pans and crimping-irons. "Never shall I return," cried the Captain, maddened far beyond what was proper by the baggage.

One does not colonize without a heartbreak. The old world was forever gone, and the new stood stark about her; a queer sour devil of a world, where the brutish eyes of beaten men came and went in the deep bush, watching, watching, and gentlemen and

ladies, proud in silk and broadcloth, drove their four-in-hands, gave rollicking toasts, loved, bred up their children . . . and never forgot those watching eyes. Madam was concerned that William had sent the painter Snow for punishment. Such fine-drawn wires snap easily and then something is hurt in the recoil. She began suddenly to fear for Mab, for fear always is strongest, like some misbegotten goblin, where love is strongest, too. She beckoned him as he came in with the gentlemen, defiant and flushed.

“Will you perhaps take out some salve to the huts, Mabile? A man was beaten to-day.”

Mab stared under his thick brows. Madam, provocative in ringlets and laces, was not given to troubling her head over trifles, and he could not know that, like other fond women, she was offering a sacrifice to those barren gods who so seldom hear.

“Snow, you mean? I saw him,” he said. “He was all right.”

He was sullen and shy of Madam; too sore even for courtesy. Madam rose. “Come,” she said. “I will give you some.”

Mab in his dark temper appeared to her more beautiful than the angels; and so, naturally, unless she interposed, the gods would wake and destroy.

Up in her room he took the little box from hands that it pleased his mood to see tremble. Sorry, was she, now that it was done? For weeks he had been living in some fantastic dream too delicate for passion. To-day some word down at the hotel, some quickening of his blood had awakened lust. Now all was dead and his mother had killed it, and he was like a tired man who has come to his house at the gloaming and found it desolate. Too young to forgive, he went down the stair in silence and down the long back passage and out into the square courtyard. In the shadows under the row of bells on the kitchen veranda one of the grooms was courting a house girl. He heard her shrill giggle and felt his face burn red. Two cats flickered across the yard under the cold moon, went up the big mulberry tree, and so to the roof of the New Wing, where a light burned in the children's nursery. A bat sheered past his cheek, followed by another. The foul smell of them was in his face as he walked sharply across to the tall gates and out into the dark.

The bush, waiting, expectant, seemed to hold that giggle, that foul smell. Elemental presences, the lurking beginnings of things . . . Mab felt them stirring in him, and he set his knee to the door of the long hut when he came to it and drove it open imperiously.

The convict servants, squatting round a great fire of burning gum logs, sprang apart like wolves disturbed at a feast. Then they rose sullenly, standing dumb with their schooled faces, their haunted eyes. Mab suddenly felt a fool. He held the box out.

“Snow, Madam Comyn has kindly sent you this for your back.”

Snow did not move. He was still shirtless and on his thin young body the ribs stood like a cage. The men, becoming more human in their surprise, looked with curious grins at the haughty youngster in the door with his ruffled shirt and shining pumps, looked at the half-naked man with his sweat-streaked face who stood half-crouched against the wall. There might have been five years between the ages of the two. There was all eternity between their souls.

“Take it, you!” commanded Mab, suddenly more brutal than he had meant to be. Snow shuffled forward and received the box silently. Then Mab’s hot temper blazed. Already to-day he had borne enough. Too much. Too much, and he saw the tragedy of the hour not as Robert Snow’s but as Mab Comyn’s. He cried:

“Damn you, you cur! Can’t you say ‘Thank you’?”

“Thank you,” said Robert Snow, and Mab knew suddenly that curses were childish beside the concentrated passion of that quiet voice. He turned and went out, banging the door. And behind him the coarse laughter of the men rose up in a wild yell to the heaven that had forsaken them.

Snow walked back to the fire, dropped the box into the flames, and with arms folded over his narrow chest watched it burn. He did not hate William as he hated Mab Comyn, and that was natural enough. Mab had all that had once been Snow’s, even to his young lack of pity, his young and lovely dreams. Snow’s youth, beating a broken wing, watched Mab’s soar careless against the light. It was quite inevitable that he should hate Mab Comyn.

Over the fire the men were back at their whispering; their

faces half human now, furtive, eager. . . . It can be done, they whispered. Once we got in the bush . . . with guns . . .

V

William, being the only person who ever attempted to keep jovial, extravagant Clent together, sat late that night over his accounts. Very neatly and accurately his quill pen travelled the large blue sheets of paper, but its accuracy only made matters worse. Madam's expenses. The Captain's simply mad expenses. Advances to Oliver. Mab's allowances—for which he never dreamed of doing anything. Two new racehorses. A new lining of stamped maroon velvet for the barouche . . .

"Dear me," said William, who had stopped swearing when he became a lay reader, and thereby started Mab doing it. "Something must be done."

Once life had been so simple. Convicts laboured endlessly, while over the old mahogany gentlemen threw mains, drank old Burgundy, and generally conducted themselves like gentlemen. Then, by a cantrip of Lord Stanley whom nobody loved, the men were withdrawn in their thousands for public works and a great search went out by the disturbed gentlemen for free labour, which came high at a pound a week and "kept." "Especially kept," William was wont to say. "With sheep worth their weight in gold and labourers refusing kangaroo-steamer, even with onions." Better times had followed with the foundation of the new colony across Bass Strait. William could and did give you full statistics of prices when dealers swept the country for stock and goods to ship down the Tamar, and Clent had made four thousand pounds on potatoes alone in one year. But now the boot was on the other foot, with Port Phillip grown self-supporting, and Clent too large to be worked except at a loss.

And the country! Good—I mean, dear me! The country—God help her! Convicts from all the British Empire pouring in by the thousand in one damnable hotchpotch which under this more damnable Probation System bracketed the worst Newgate criminal with the starved boy who stole a hen's egg. What brain in Downing Street had conceived the notion of putting them all through

the same mill? First labour in the degrading road-gangs; then labour for contractors on a payment basis arranged with the Government; and then the third-class ticket which freed them to work where they chose. In elder days you could ride into town, pick an honest face straight from the ship, and ride back with the fellow. Now all were beaten into the same mask, and how then did you know what you got? Some ruffian, possibly, who would murder your children if they strayed for an hour in the bush.

Prisons at Oatlands, Jerusalem, and a dozen other places were simply bulging with convicts. William had seen 'em. Males and females armed with passes, tickets of leave, and conditional pardons to the tune of some ten thousand were set adrift on the road because there was nowhere to keep them. They were turning bush-ranger and driving the settlers' cattle; they were stealing when they couldn't get work, lusting, marrying . . . 'pon William's soul it was a scandal to see the *Gazette* crammed every week with "His Excellency is pleased to allow . . ." And where would we be when that lewd spawn grew up to choke our own children of the dragon's blood?

Many of the settlers were asking that now. But when two thousand specially brutalized convicts from Norfolk Island were recently shipped them, His Excellency had met the deputation of protests with shrugs.

"My dear sirs, what am I but England's servant?" he said.

So the bush and the barren hills and the dusty roads swarmed with the starving wretches, who begged and stole and sickened, and, when pursued by guns and threats, took to the bush and murdered. Emigrant free labour crossed the strait in a body to young and clean Port Phillip on Australia's mainland, for there they found no jailbird competition, no danger of being knocked on the head for taking the bread of labour from ravening mouths. So there was no more emigration. There were no more land sales, and this was the country's chief source of revenue. And the Home Government chose this moment to withdraw its parent grant toward the upkeep of the convict system, throwing the burden on the settlers, who, in spite of the heavy taxes, were already learning the meaning of a national debt.

Gentle women prayed over the family Bibles at this time, "God

forgive them, for they know not what they do." But their husbands, thinking England was meant, said, "Then we'll show them," and wrote off many fiery letters for the Downing Street clerks to pigeonhole.

Eleven sounded from the cuckoo-clock which the Captain had picked up in Bonn and Madam had banished as a *gaucherie*. William liked it. Firmly and without false modesty it did its duty, as he did. William really hoped that he could say "as he did." With precise movements and pursed lips he put up his books, his shadow high-shouldered and thin-legged on the wall. And then the old house came about him as it often would at this hour, reminding him of the mortgage. Many fine estates cleared with such eager hopes were mortgaged now, and Councillor Sorley held a mortgage on Clent, although William had almost gone on his knees to dissuade the Captain.

"Borrow from the banks. From the Jews. From any but a friend," said William. And the Captain, shocked almost beyond speech by this profession of faith, cried :

"Damme, sir ! I'll go to old Jim to-morrow and be damned to you. Upstart puppy !"

He apologized later, being of those men who light-heartedly say through half their days what they retract during the other half. But old Jim took up the mortgage as he was taking up so many things now.

"He'll get on," thought William, starting down the dark passage with his tall silver candlestick. "He has the knack of it. But we . . ."

CHAPTER TWO

I

FROM the top windows of Clent, across the brown paddocks of feeding sheep, the young English trees, one sometimes saw the glint of steel from chain-gangs working on the Main Road, from guns and swords of the guarding soldiers.

Then William was glad because at last they were mending that bad corner at Black Gully, and the maids would crane their necks and big bobbing caps and think how there was much waste man-flesh which could be better employed, and the Captain would ride off hurriedly into Trienna to buy twists of the strong black tobacco which he dropped secretly in the dust among the striving workers while talking in his loud and genial way with the guards.

Jenny watching the dance and flash, from the sunny nursery window with its flowered chintz curtains and lavender smell, saw troubadours and knights riding the world's edges, and sang to them cozening songs which grew in her mind like little half-open buds. Some day a real troubadour would come riding in light, like God, and she would love him with both arms and be cruel with her eyes like a lady in one of Grandmamma's songs. "I love you. You are the sun and moon," she crooned to the quickening flashes where some unseen prisoner was being goaded along. "I think you are pink and crimson and blue like a galah parrot," crooned Jenny, her peaked chin on her brown fists, her long eyes full of dream.

And then Susan came in with her sister Ellen, and Jenny stood up like a good little miss and smoothed her pinafore. But she thought them both very tiresome.

"Good morning, Jenny," said Mamma, kissing her with damp lips. "Say your new verse to Aunt Ellen."

Jenny put her hands behind her, trying to keep off the lilt of "Mary, Mary, quite contrary" which alone made the doggerel worth repeating, and said meekly :

“Asleep I sin, awake I sin,
I sin wiv every breaif.
When Adam fell he went to hell
And damned us all to deaf.”

“Now,” said Mamma, “I want you to think of that every time you see your portrait down in the hall. Then you will remember that fine feathers don’t make fine birds.”

She smoothed her cap with heavy moist hands, cast an anxious look about the room, and then, having done her duty by one of her family, hastened off to hurry the maids over their bed-making. Without herself and William, she often felt, Clent would simply drop to pieces ; for the Captain thought of nothing but politics and entertaining, and Madam, of course, was just a spoiled fine lady. Susan would have hated Madam if she had admired her a little less.

Ellen Merrick put her arm round Jenny standing at the window, and Jenny suffered it uncomfortably. She dimly felt that Aunt Ellen was somehow younger than she, for all her big body ; and her own stories were much better than those Aunt Ellen told, with all the princesses called Ellen, so that Jenny could see nothing but a procession of big pink-and-white baby faces with small noses and foolish mouths and wanted to get back to her own brown thin-lipped one who sparkled like Grandmamma and loved with her arms while she was cruel with her eyes. Aunt Ellen’s princesses could never do anything like that.

“I think your portrait very beautiful, Jenny,” whispered Ellen. “Don’t you think Robert Snow is a genius ? I wish he would paint me.” Then she suddenly giggled, hiding her face in Jenny’s shoulder. “I beg of you never to suggest that to any one, Jenny. I should die of shame if you did.”

The idea of her suggesting anything to any one made Jenny laugh. And then Ellen clutched her tightly, crying :

“Jenny, Jenny ; this is a hard world for us women.” And again, in a queer little whisper, “Don’t you think Robert Snow has wonderful eyes ?”

Jenny was too surprised to answer. Aunt Ellen spoke as though Robert Snow were really a person, whereas every one knew that he was a convict. “He’s a convict,” she reminded Aunt Ellen.

"He is a tragedy," said Aunt Ellen, in her hoarse whisper. "If he were dressed like your Uncle Mab he might be a dethroned king. He has a wonderful face. All the tragedy of the world is in it."

Jenny was more and more surprised. It had never occurred to her even to think of Uncle Mab and Robert Snow at the same time, any more than she would have thought of a dog or a cat. "Convict servants aren't really people, are they?" she asked.

"My child, they are God's own people, but the world doesn't know it!" cried Aunt Ellen, coming suddenly out of her whisper with a loud bellow. Then she put her finger to her lip. "Don't tell any one I said that. It was quite shocking of me," and she tiptoed away, making the floor creak.

But she had taken all the riding knights with her and, much occupied and rather upset by this new side issue, Jenny went down to watch candle-making in the back kitchen. None of the house servants was a convict. Grandmamma wouldn't allow convicts within doors, and this in some way always made Jenny connect them with pigs and horses. Robert Snow had even had to paint Jenny on the veranda with Nurse or Aunt Ellen always on guard. Candle-making, thought Jenny, was very comfortable after Aunt Ellen. Scarlet flames licking under the great copper. Thick fat steam rising out of it in wreaths that might turn to a genie up in the dark rafters at any time. The wicks hanging in rows like pale thin bodies until they were lowered into the moulds and killed dead by the rush of boiling fat. The big caps of Cook and the maids moving in the steamy mist like mushrooms sprung up in an hour. The heavy meaty smell. . . .

Humphrey looked in at the door with a wooden spear, and a bunch of bracken round his waist.

"Come and play blackfellows," he said. "There are fifty bush-rangers behind the stables. All with prices on their heads. We'll spear 'em."

Jenny knew that bush-rangers always had prices on their heads, although Uncle Mab's explanation of how they kept them there was not very convincing. She asked, following Humphrey, "What's prices look like, Hump'ey?"

"Oh," said Humphrey, carelessly, "just like prices."

Jenny sighed. So few questions ever had any real answers, it seemed.

Uncle Mab passed them, galloping down the avenue under the tall bare English trees. Uncle Mab always galloped and never opened gates. For much of the year he rode in all the gentlemen events at the various race-meetings up and down the country, and for the rest of the year he apparently thought he did. Jenny could understand that. Always she thought she did many more things than ever she did do. Insidiously the fifty bushrangers led them through the bush to the grassy clearing burned out by the blacks, long ages before, for kangaroo. This was now the ram-pasture and forbidden ground ; but neither of the children dared remind the other of that and be jeered at, and so they played among the young wattles and grass-clumps until the sun was suddenly gone and all the dim bush full of ghosts and strange noises.

"Come home," said Humphrey, remembering with a quake of the heart that Collins's Gang was reported down from the Western Tiers. Jenny sat tight. For once Humphrey had given in first and she felt herself reinforced by seven cheerful devils.

"You're afraid," she taunted him.

"'Fraid yourself," said Humphrey, which was a poor answer. "I see a kangaroo," he cried untruthfully, and charged off in the direction of home. Left to herself, Jenny rapidly knew what the last man may feel. The world grew enormous, amorphous ; a mad fatalistic concourse of writhing ghosts, witches, monkeys with unblinking eyes, bottle-brush honeysuckle men without heads, turning back the cuffs from their black withered hands that were last year's flowers and advancing with mincing feet to seize her. For the first time she faced life unprotected by adult petticoats. For the first time she was conscious of Powers beyond those which ruled in her nursery ; Powers at once terrible and glorious, inviting.

She stood braced, ready to fly and shriek at a sound, and yet savouring a new taste that was intoxicating. For the first time in her small ego *I am I* sounded its profound trumpet. She could never again lose that. Even when the next moment a cow bellowed in the distance and she fled with the salt tears of terror running into her mouth she was conscious that she had found something,

that for a brief moment she, Jenny Comyn, had stood her ground alone against the world.

Nurse, airing red-flannel petticoats and white-cotton stockings before the nursery fire, opined that Jenny's disobedience was a case for William, who presently came with a long strap and a longer lecture. At once the two were involved in one of those cataclysmic interludes which so ironically belittle the human amenities. Jenny, required to *Say you're sorry*, laughed. She held a new and priceless treasure in her breast and William was not going to get at it. William, honestly shocked, applied himself with the energy of one who faithfully carries out a repellent duty, and kissed her solemnly when he left, never knowing that Jenny promptly rubbed his kiss off with the tail of her frock. He hoped, he told Susan as they dressed for dinner, he trusted that this deplorable seed of obstinacy might be eradicated by a firm hand aided with prayer. Susan also hoped it. It frightened her sometimes to see so much of Madam in Jenny.

Humphrey came creeping to the cot where Jenny lay supperless, and called her a fool to tell. But his voice did not ring true, and when he added awkwardly in his slow stocky way, "I'm obliged to you for not telling on me, anyway," Jenny recognized her superiority. But she was sore, and not liking Humphrey much, somehow.

"See here," whispered Humphrey. "It's no use standing against Them, you know. They'll always keep on till you give in."

"I didn't give in."

"*Didn't* you? Didn't say you were sorry?"

The awe in his voice was balm beyond belief, but Jenny was still unrelenting. Humphrey shouldn't have left her to bear it alone. "No, I didn't. Now I'm going to sleep. Good night."

Later Susan's creaking silk—Jenny had learned that Mamma creaked and Grandma rustled—and a strong odour of orris-root invaded the dark. Jenny opened a cautious eye.

"You are a very wicked little girl," said Mamma, promptly. "You might have been killed out in the bush and then God would have punished you, instead of poor Papa having to do it. You shall have no supper, Jenny, and to-morrow you shall learn two hymns and stay indoors all day."

"How would God have punished me?" asked Jenny, doubtfully considering future eventualities.

"Never mind. Much worse than this. Now, go to sleep."

Jenny lay quiet, wondering a little why such a sinner as herself should secretly feel so happy. She hugged her treasure, recognizing it in some dim way for a lamp to guide her path. And then came a real lamp, the imperial rustle of silks, the faint odour of sandalwood. But Jenny was wise this time. She did not move.

Madam set down the lamp and offered two scones on a honey-gold plate. "*Voilà, ma mie.* Why would you not be sorry to Papa, then?"

She smiled, black curls and eyes beautiful in the soft light. Jenny felt a rush of comfort far beyond that suggested by the scones.

"Oh, Gran'ma . . . I . . . I . . ." Helplessly she struggled to explain. "I was out there. And I was by myself . . . and I didn't know I could *be* by myself before. Not all *only* myself."

"'And I was King of Tartary. Me, myself alone,'" murmured Madam. She touched Jenny's cheek with a delicate finger. "An unforgettable moment? *Chérie*, if already you can experience that, there is much before you. Much," said Madam, slowly, "of glory and of pain."

She stooped, laying on Jenny's lips a strange, soft, lingering kiss that seemed somehow to come out of the past, regretfully, shyly, like the confession of a young girl. Then she floated away, globed dimly in light, seeming to Jenny's sleepy eyes to mount straight up into heaven.

II

The sheep were down from the hills for the lambing, and the bright spring days were brittle with young sounds and the sharp nights strange with the red eyes of moving lanterns about the shepherds' huts in the misty valleys. Mab stayed at home more, to help William ride the rounds, for Clent land sprawled far and angularly among the hills, and all the settlers along the rivers were too busy for play. In the hut under Phantom Hill, Robert Snow had two men to help him. He was clever with the yeanning

ewes, and his long firm fingers seemed to ease their pain as the other men could not do. He was on his knees holding a weak young lamb to the bursting udder for the first time when Mab rode in one midnight, and even to Mab's careless vision there was something lovely here.

The lantern, set on a tree stump, circled them in red light: the standing mother, moist-eyed, dark-eyed yet with fear and pain, her long mild face turned to the staggering creature which nuzzled her, upheld in the man's gentle hands; the quiet kind look on Snow's face; the hut behind, dim promise of home such as each man must hold in his heart or die. Mab felt the strong-beating life in him rejoice in these times when Nature with fierce lavishness created—created, out of nothingness, out of inexplicable urges, out of the intolerable patience of humankind. Her impulse is equally to destroy, but Mab forgot that, as Snow never did. It was so easy to forget things in this crowded life of riding, laughing, going here and there, drinking with friends round one jolly house fire and another. Except for an occasional stinging shame he had quite forgot Lucy, and this was the easier because Madam had skilfully removed her from Clent Hall, saying that she must learn cooking of her mother before she was wed.

So the gods made Mab's way smooth for him, recognizing a gentleman when they saw one, and now he sat his flighty young mare gracefully and looked down on the convict with the scarred back and the soiled hands.

“A fair lambing?” he said pleasantly.

“All one can expect, I suppose.”

Mab bit his lips. The Captain's experiments in breeding were notorious, and William had insisted that those Lincoln rams were too old. But it was not for this fellow to criticize. “Where are the other men?” he asked sharply.

“Doing their work, as I am.” Snow laid the satisfied lamb gently down, folding the long stiff legs under it; coaxed the mother down at its side and picked the lantern up. “I have three in the hut that must be fed now,” he said, and went in, shutting the door.

Mab rode slowly away. The murmur of the sheep, the good smell of them and of the close-cropped grass rose about him in

the dark. Had it not been for that picture just now he would have given Snow something to think about for his insolence. But the sacredness of birth, of mystery had gathered round the fellow, somehow shielding him. Along all the shadowy places of the hushed hills mystery and birth were abroad to-night, for miles and miles and miles of this new land which was raw and savage yet. Everywhere new lives were coming with faint cries while the stark grey gum bush watched the pastoral, rebellious because its wild day was done. Everywhere men with fagged faces and guarded eyes were giving service to the imperious need, and for the first time it struck Mab as a strange jest that these helpers alone could never gain anything by their toil. What was there for them, he thought, but labour and an unhonoured grave at the end?

Across the river a lantern was moving on old Jasper Merrick's land. That would be Susan's brother Joe, and he would get no gain, either. Kept Joe tied up as tight as a convict, old Merrick did. Mab yawned and rode home to his easy bed.

Robert Snow finished his work in the hut and went out to stand in the door. Mab acted on him always like a poison, stirring up the devil until he feared what he might do. He too saw Joe's light across the river and thought how in the Merrick house lived the one woman who realized him as human. Ellen Merrick with her saucer eyes, her foolish mouth, repelled the artist in him while her very softness drew the man. She had looked at him. On rare occasions she had spoken. Once when he crossed the river on a message to her father she had brought him a glass of milk and their hands had touched. It was so long since he had touched a lady's hand—only the coarse flesh of the women who gathered at Henny's, that vile bush road-house where alone the ticket-of-leavers from the various big stations might go. "Making us worse brutes than we are," he muttered.

Sheep moved softly, cropping the spring grass. Under the coming dawn their wool showed spangled with bright dew. Dawn wind passed, full of the smell of earth, of water, of the gum leaves pungently keen. The fierce hungry look which thought of Ellen had brought to Snow's face faded. As he stood there, Nature found him and comforted, taking him for a short space

for her own. Weary beyond thought, he let her soothe him, leaned against the slab hut in an ecstasy of peace.

III

When Madam in a brand-new brown-silk paletot went to Hobart Town for her Christmas shopping she called on the just-arrived governor's wife, marvelled what any man could have seen in her, and drove on among her maroon-velvet cushions to the Sorley house, where dear Louisa came running out with embracing arms and James Sorley followed, looking as self-conscious as a misbehaved dog. James was now Councillor Sorley, and standing so solid with the governor's party that any plain man—such as the country farmers—must both hate and fear him. But he was, unfortunately, never quite able to forget that he had once implored Madam to fly with him, and that naughty memory troubled his impeccable present. Councillor Sorley's narrow face was as bland now as neat little supporting side-whiskers could make it; but the moment he met Madam he realized that dear Louisa had grown fat, and Madam saw him do it. She regarded him gravely over her fan, for the day was hot.

"But how excellent that you should have the ear of this good governor, sir!" she said. "Together you will stamp out immorality all across this unhappy country."

"Eh? Oh, yes, certainly," assented James, nervously. Now that he had so much at stake he regarded Madam always as though she were about to throw a bomb. "Yes, there is much to be done for the country."

"Mr. Sorley does not approve of the movement to stop transportation. Do you, Mr. Sorley?" cried his wife.

"My love, we do not talk politics before such a fair visitor. And here is our Julia, returned but this week from England. . . . Come, my dear. Make your curtsy to one of the first ladies of the country, whom you, I trust, remember as Madam Comyn of Clent Hall."

James always would talk like a Sixth Reader, thought Madam; but she kissed young Julia warmly, for she ever loved pretty

things, and this thing was like a half-blown daffodil. "*Bien*. She should remember me. . . . It is not four years since I slapped both Mab and you for breaking my Douulton bowl."

"Oh, yes. And how is Mab?" said Julia, with a blush like dawn.

"Do you notice her English accent?" cried Louisa. "It is a little different from ours, I think. And she has finished her education now, Genevieve, and so she has got to come out and be married. . . . Haven't you, my love?"

Finished her education? thought Madam. Don't you believe it. With that face men have everything to teach her yet.

"We will have no talk of marriage, I beg," James said stiffly. "Noll goes home with you, I suppose, Madam? I should regret it but that we follow in a few days."

"And then you will *all* see Julia," cried the irrepressible Louisa. And although Julia very properly cast down her eyes and said, "Oh, Mamma!" like a pretty doll, she had a side glance for Oliver coming in which Madam appreciated. . . . Well, if he can get her, good luck to him, thought Madam. But our James will try for a title, if I know him.

Oliver, occupied with saddle-bags, pistols, tall glossy boots, and a tasselled cane or two, pulled from the breast of his buff riding-coat a small gold-chased English revolver, his latest toy. Drunk or sober, he was a fair shot, as a young man needed to be in these days of duels and bush-rangers, but he had not Mab's reckless genius with any weapon. James Sorley had ordered the revolver by Julia from England, and Oliver's pleasure and gratitude had that perfect touch which none other of Madam's family could reach. She savoured it luxuriously, just as she savoured the entrancing smell of town, the swagger of military officers in the crowded streets, the white shower of invitations which descended on her in the next few days.

"But how may I accept all!" she cried, clasping her eager hands at dear Louisa, immersed in good works. Louisa said ponderously:

"On Friday there is the guild meeting for the Girls' Home."

"That for your Girls' Home!" Madam flipped her fingers. "On Friday I drive with General Le Clerq to the rout at Brown's River."

“How reckless you are, Jenny!” sighed Louisa.

“This cursed country has not yet made of me a cow or a sheep, thank God,” said Madam, stoutly.

She said it again, but regretfully because the parting hurt, when a week later the Clent coach with its four well-matched bays dragged her off from her fleshpots; from the gentlemen bowing with gloved hands on hearts; from the blue harbour where the white ships commerged; full of good tarry smells and foreign shipping was Hobart Town Harbour in these rich days of gold and grain and wool and the American whaling fleet with its brown hard-eyed captains. Much of the wealth now pouring into Boston and Cape Cod came out of those smoking seas around Van Diemen's Land.

“Eh, the shops, the shops,” she sighed, although the coach was full of cardboard boxes. But it was less of the shops she thought than of the pressed hands, the ardent glances and other trifles which she had collected along the way. Praise God she was not so old yet. Like a golden fan she spread her memories, furled them, smiled and looked across at Ellen Merrick, who had been down to the dentist and was glad of a lift home.

With that great bosom and those hips it was full time Ellen married, though Susan would never arrange it and the Merrick woman would naturally desire to keep her last daughter at home. Some amusement might be gained by thwarting the Merrick woman. Madam cast about in her mind among the young sons at the houses she knew. In later days she would do a like office for Jenny. And suddenly she knew that, all unknowing, it had been the urge to establish this seed of hers in high places that had driven her out across these endless wastes of wicked water, carried her through denials, desires, and privations, set her down in the wilderness as head of a name that already rang in the land. Her man with his fiery espousals of rights, his letters to the papers, had gone some of the way. Mab would go far. But little Jenny, with that flame which was Madam's bequest to her, would burn on the topmost beacon of this new land.

Men, left to themselves, went so far and no farther. It was the woman behind the man who lit the spark, the fire. Madam considered the mistresses of kings and regretted that such were

not *convenable* here. With herself as mistress of Louis Seize, she flattered herself, there would have been no revolution. One had but to keep one's finger on the public pulse.

And so the long litany of life would go on. The establishing of the name, the conquest of the land, the conception of the soul, the crucifixion of the individual will. This is the human instinct, even as the animal instinct is to sleep and eat and to beget and sleep again.

"I am the first note where Jenny will be the full chord and Jenny's children the diapason," thought Madam, sitting up straight and looking out on the Main Road made hard and smooth by the blood and labour of convicts, by the dragging feet of homeless families who passed up and down like blown leaves. The bush still came close to the road, with green bush parrots and bright galahs like strange flowers half hid in the greens. Here minahs swung in the gum trees, whistling. There a bandicoot, blinded by day, ran out with its slender snout and its fragile paws like a mouse. The dog of some bush-cutter leapt after it, and now came a frightened kangaroo, guarding the joey in her pouch and looking back with large, soft, lovely eyes.

The Main Road had been no more than a half-stumped bush track when Madam first passed up to it to her destiny. In a tapestry chair set on a feather bed with the whole lashed to the sides of a bullock-dray she had endured—*ciel*, but the endurance!—never lifting her feet in their green-morocco sandals from their silken cushions except at the halting-places. Celeste had held above her a green parasol with white ruchings, and James Sorley had ridden so near the wheel that his horse lost hair at the shoulder. And what had James lost while the Captain rebelled at having to use his own razors daily? "Among barbarians we set fashions, not follow them," she had said, ordering the hot water. But not even for bush-rangers would James appear before Madam unkempt. Ah, the wise James, now buttoning up his passions in a long black coat like a Nonconformist minister!

Over this bridged river the Comyn and Sorley cavalcade had once ferried on rafts, huddled together in a common misfortune, a common daring: with the white caps beneath the women's bonnets a grief to see and the smocked labourers handling their

muskets like pitchforks. But about the red camp-fires, through the dark nights terrible with curious odours and that awful silence of the bush, if they handled other matters who could blame them? Not Madam, who managed to marry off most of the maids and men before much harm was done.

Here they had come, the little handful of pioneers, as no pioneers had come in all the history of men. Not, like the Pilgrim Fathers, flung on a foreign shore with each acre to chop and wrest from the Indians and the wilderness, but as gentlemen with land already their own and a thousand convict slaves to run at their bidding. These settlers of the Two Services never needed to soil their hands, and they spent money like water, and always there was more, and almost the first houses they raised were mansions. To be sure, there were dangers when the blacks came down and the spears sang and camp-fires were hurriedly trodden out and the men stood round the women in the bullock-carts. There was danger yet from bush-rangers, who increased daily. But the greatest danger of all, agreed the gentlemen meeting in their clubs, was the Colonial Office in London, who insisted on running this least and farthest portion of England's empire like a county town with a smug mayor.

The Colonial Office, whether they pigeonholed the increasing tide of letters from colonists petitioning for their own government and forgot Van Diemen's Land unless a new convoy was sailing for the penal settlements, or whether they remembered too heartily, as when Mrs. Fry and other fools sent out the female sweepings of a dozen institutions to improve the morals of a land of males (and most of them had to go into the Girls' Home straight off the boat), was making a hopeless mess of it. Mr. Keyes, who had just returned from England to his run below Clent on the river, had gone to the Colonial Office and said so. And the Colonial Office had called them a hybrid. What the deuce can you do with a hybrid State governed politically out of London, theologically out of Calcutta, and practically out of the hotheads on the spot who are never content? asked the Colonial Office.

Then, for God's sake, give us our own government and stop transportation, said Mr. Keyes. The Colonial Office had put up

its eyeglass at that. My dear sir, you are a penal settlement. What on earth do you think we annexed that damn country *for*? asked the Colonial Office. So Mr. Keyes had gone away talking of how the United States had cast off England's hated yoke, for he was a scholar in his spare time. But that, thought Madam descending for the midday halt at a small stone inn with red geraniums and fan windows, had not in the least intimidated the Colonial Office, which continued to import governors who clapped on endless taxes and made ridiculous laws, and convicts who had to be kept according to England's standard and shot if they rebelled against it and took to the bush where they made life very uncomfortable for the settlers.

IV

The Main Road was stark under the sun, brooding on its memories. Bullock-drays went lurching through before the century reached two figures. Broad blunt masses of red-and-white flesh and creaking wheels hauling straight up and down hills through ancient raffle of rotting timber and lushly choked creeks. Foul language on the startled air, it had known, and foul doings, for those early convict bullockies came out of foul ships with the women who had been their companions the whole long hideous voyage through. Half-naked wild-haired witches these, whose dreams within their ruined souls found vent in God alone (and the Road) knows what travesties of nature, of love.

They were long gone, those blind experiments of the earliest stage of all. And gone the woolly-haired blacks daubed with soot and grease and dragging extra spears between their supple big toes. The Government had put them all away on Flinders Island, where they died fast of homesickness for the Road and the bush which had already grown in on their camp-fires and forgotten them as everything is forgotten, so very soon.

Before the Road was surfaced King William's troops patrolled it; unhappy ramrods buttoned and burdened under a blazing sun; bright marks for black and bush-ranger; loosing their long Brown Besses helplessly into thick symmetrical native cherry and

impenetrable tea tree ; lunging with heavy cutlasses at the bullets which spat out of the night. *Butts of Empire*, the Road took them to be, remembering many such.

Shakoed and stiffened and sweating soldiers had come again to guard the convicts who built the Road as it stood now. That was in the early 'thirties when they tore the bowels from the soil after the Roman manner, and laid stone and wood, mixing it with sweat and blood from the ready lash. Like beasts they dragged their hand-carts from the brownstone quarries. Like beasts they herded together of nights between tall sod walls. Of what they spoke then the Road remembered a little. And that was the kind of talk beasts would have.

Heavy balls rolled on the new face of the road, chained between the legs of the special-punishment men. The road would yet recognize the Cain's mark of that straddled gait on a ticket-of-leaver, although it might be twenty years since. There had been much colour on the Road then. Scarlet troops and raw blades of broadswords controlling the gangs of "canaries," or yellow-clad life-sentence men ; of "magpies," or the parti-coloured clothes of the lesser terms.

Now civilization was over all the land, although yet somewhat timid. The crowded stone gaols of Oatlands and other small towns stood on the sites of many a camp-fire, many a bloody battle. Across the relics of a thousand corroboree feasts settlers had ploughed ; at first no more than a scrape of the rich soil, a harrowing with gum boughs to produce a crop, but now in an orderly way with shares and Percheron teams. Step by step this ancient unknown earth grudgingly acknowledged its new masters. Now a chaise cart emblazoned with the royal arms had followed the pony-post, and soon a mail-coach running from Hobart Town to Launceston in a swift twenty hours. Man, grasping by tooth and claw, was holding on.

Through the hot hours Ellen, avid for that love she could not find, fulfilled her need with thoughts of the convict Robert Snow. Madam, upright in her corner, kept off the threat of the interminable bush stretches as she had always done, and defied possibility with her plans for Jenny. And Oliver whistled and rode silently, thinking his thoughts that placed no great value on

anything. For he had tasted here and there, and now there was not much left but to marry well.

Beggars, scratching the vermin from their clothes, ran beside the great folk, sending prayers or searing curses after Oliver according as he chose idly to toss them a coin or not. A half-naked girl with wild eyes held to him the child in her breast. In some strange way her soiled and trampled maidenhood was so beautiful that he turned in the saddle to look back at her in the golden light. A Madonna who had drunk of the witches' brew.

Now he smelt the bush-burning on distant hills and heard the hunting owls calling their mates. And robins called, and frogs among the maidenhair down in the gullies. A good earth this, if England would leave it alone.

V

Ellen went back to her father's home, her unsought bosom heaving with sighs. She had hoped much from this her first visit to town, and perhaps she had hoped a little from Oliver. But the grim house over the river received her with its old darkness, its old stuffiness, and that night she climbed on a chair and looked from the window with desperate eyes. Jasper Merrick had purposely fashioned Lovely Corners like a fortress; purposely placed the windows so high that no self-respecting daughter of his could see the goings-on of those gay young sparks in their long-tailed scarlet coats at Trienna Barracks across the river. Ellen met stray ones at Clent; had even hinted to them of a system of signals. But the young sparks were obtuse, or the land was too full of pretty girls. Anyway, nothing came of it, and Ellen continued to tend her mother, who, considering her immortality assured by a life of making every one and everything uncomfortable, was setting about meeting her latter end in an enormous quantity of black shawls accompanied by four volumes of *Robertson's Sermons*.

But to-night the magpies crying to the moon, the hot smell of the teeming earth turned the mawkish sentiment in Ellen to a power so strong that it frightened her. She was too shaken by life to wait any longer. Since none of her own class came, she

would take Robert Snow. Somehow, somewhere she would take him.

In the morning Susan came, brought over the river by Mr. Merrick, who had had a good morning on the Bench in Trienna, sentencing five absconding convicts to fifty lashes apiece and a sixth to the treadmill. Susan sat with her mother, and talked of Ellen.

“It is my great comfort that you will always have her with you, darling Mother. She is not likely to marry.”

“Why should she? She has *me*,” said Mrs. Merrick, poking her sharp yellow nose out of her shawls. “I can’t think what else she can want.”

“No, no. I’m sure she doesn’t,” said Susan dutifully. “And so we shall see you all at Clent for Christmas as usual. That is nice.”

“You’ll see me unless I’m in my coffin. If I’m not it won’t be the fault of my daughters, letting all the cold air in on me. Please don’t slam the door, Ellen. I suppose your father will manage without me somehow, and Joe will marry the cook.”

“Oh, Mother darling, how can you!” said Susan, getting up thankfully to go. Beyond the door she spoke to Ellen: “I am so glad your teeth are done. Now you won’t have to go away again for a long time.”

Ellen said nothing. She went back into the room with its heavy curtains like blank walls and sat down on a horsehair chair to read to her mother from *Robertson’s Sermons*.

To the old colonials hospitality was more than an obligation. It was the air they breathed; but the Captain, always with a splendour of vision unshared by William, usually went one better than his neighbours. Two nights in each week the long table in the outer kitchen was heaped with hams, pies, bread, cakes, and wine, and the gate of the yard stood open to welcome travellers by the mail-coach passing up the Main Road, passing down. It was the excitement of Mab’s boyhood to look from his window on the steaming horses, the descending passengers whose wrapped-up faces he would never see and to picture an escaped convict, a bushranger or two among them. Later he had an eye for a slim ankle, a small hand holding a cloak together, and loved

these flitting ghosts of which he would never know the names or shapes ; those birds out of the night come to his father's table for an hour and gone again. Many of the rootless romances of youth Mab gave to those half-seen women.

Susan complained that the house at Clent was always knee-deep in people who came for a day and stayed six. At Christmas-time it filled like a boiling cauldron to the top of its stout old walls, brimmed over and washed the sons of the house out to the attics above the store-rooms across the courtyards. Then all the best linen appeared, fragrant with lavender ; the big silver trays came out of their baize covers, the loving-cups had a fresh polish, and the grooms an extra lick of pomatum to the hair. Then the house roared with laughter and calling and the clatter of children. Then barriers were down and carpets up in Madam's salon, and after hot turkey and blazing plum-pudding, with the thermometer standing at 100 Fahrenheit, elders played Puss in the Corner and Kiss in the Ring with infants and went gallantly at the round dances until midnight. "English tradition dies hard," said James Sorley. But the Captain always swore that it never died at all.

Until this year Mab had seen Christmas very much as Jenny and Humphrey did. He had exulted in the long hot days filled with shearing, dipping, the rounding-up of sheep on the scrub hills. He had dawdled happily in the store-rooms with their spicy smells while William and old Durbin portioned for the men the Christmas rations of plug-tobacco, a cask of beer, extra bags of sugar, currants, flour. The convict servants came in from the out-stations then ; fished in the river through the long twilights, and played monotonous tunes on concertinas before going off to Henny's Road-house. Mab liked those tunes.

"They sunk her in the Lowlands, Lowlands.
They sunk her in the Lowlands, low."

And that other with its subdued mournful chorus :

"Goodbye to you, father. Goodbye to you, mother.
Goodbye to you, sister Mary Anne."

Full of wandering loneliness, those voices followed by the halting squeak of the concertina.

But the innocent interlude with Lucy had closed the period of Mab's boyhood. He was restless now; speculative, driven into strange moods which annoyed his elders and brought trouble on him. Then Julia came walking over the path from Bredon one golden morning and stepped with dainty feet straight out from among the scented haycocks into his heart. It was less a conquest than an annihilation. He ate, drank, breathed Julia. All the urgency of his growing need accepted the fact that the altar had been prepared and the goddess had come.

Julia, French-polished, English-finished, received her due serenely. In Hobart Town she had already "arrived" among the whiskered military at the barracks, the courtly visitors to her mamma's drawing-room. But Mab, allowed a license forbidden them, had proceeded to be dynamite; shocking her out of her smugness, shocking her into protesting love. On Christmas Eve he stood with her under the Bredon apple trees near the sycamore where the young owls sat, and experienced romance until his bones turned to water. Julia, in white muslin with a blue waist-ribbon and the apple-tree shadows falling on her fair shoulder, her arms. She was binding a wreath of the tight little yellow Banksia roses for her yellow head, and Mab snatched it from her and flung it on the ground.

"Look at me!" he cried imperiously.

But when she looked he was afraid of her beauty, and ran out of the orchard through the lush grass, and home past the crying lambs in the yards to Clent. There he leaned from his window with disordered hair and his ruffled shirt all crumpled, and cried, "Julia! Julia!" to the moon. He remembered with a sick shuddering that he had been used to pinch her legs before she went away, and prayed the gods not to smite him dead for the impiety. He slid down on his knees, hiding his eyes, remembering Julia's legs.

Later he looked again down on the courtyard. It was very pretty to-night, spangled with light like a fair. In the dairies under the pink may tree the maids ran about with kilted skirts and bobbing lanterns. The feathers of the great limp turkey Jerrold

was bringing were a sheaf of changing colour. Cook at the kitchen door was outlined in poppy-red, and the good odour of roasting meat, spices, and strawberry jam hung about her like incense. Everyone was laughing, talking. A stable-boy was whistling, clear and high :

“ ‘ Noël ! Noël ! ’ The Angels do sing.”

Lucy ran across the yard. Her arms were heaped with native mistletoe, her neat ankles twinkled. Tom Jerrold went after her, his stolid face intent, his thick hands rapturously reaching. They vanished under the lilac tree, and Mab heard a little squeak of laughter, of protest. Indifferently he drew his head in and closed the window.

CHAPTER THREE

I

TWENTY years back a Yorkshire man who had been a convict built a slab hut in the gum scrub and fed and rested the pony-post passing from Launceston to Hobart Town on the Main Road. Stages were uneven then and this one, midway between Clent and Bredon, grew popular; later the Captain and James Sorley took over the slab hut, which was becoming a nucleus for bushrangers, made a comfortable inn of it, and established a blacksmith's forge alongside. In the next year they cut more scrub, obtained permits from the Government, and put down a small mill plant to handle the vast reserves of black wattle bark on the hills. Labourers came then, and so Trienna was born, much as other townships were being born up and down the country.

But it suited the bush-rangers still, being just at the foot of wild country thick with bush and sodden with creek-filled gullies and ragged with naked rock. And Henny, that mysterious old witch who had come out in an early ship, had her road-house for ticket-of-leavers only two miles away. The road-house was supposed to be under close supervision from the military post in Trienna, but there were a hundred dark trails through the scrub to it where silent riders might pass. And a hundred dark caves in the hills behind where rum barrels could be hid along with such other things as guns, absconding convicts, goods stolen from the big houses, and even bushrangers themselves.

No gentleman sat at home in these days without his pistols to his hand, and none rode out unless they were loose in the holster. Comyn men, Sorley men, taking their families to church in Trienna on Sundays, looked first to their primings, and Mab rode on ahead of the Comyn coaches, to open the gates. A gang down from the Western Tiers or over from the coast generally liked to announce its coming by laying a murdered man where he could be easily found.

But there were no dead men this Christmas morning, and barouches, gigs, and riding parties came up through the dust and the hot sun to the trampled grass round the bare wooden church where the townsfolk waited already for the bell to ring. It was a matter of pride for the township folk to be there to greet the quality coming in from the big stations with their house servants and "Government men" behind them. "Government men" was the new name this year for the ticket-of-leavers, and there was a scatter of them in Trienna too, working in the bark-mill. Mab and the Captain knew everybody by name; and maids bobbed shyly in a flutter of flowered calicoes and fluted bonnet frills, and men in thick tight cloth with monstrous collars and cuffs pulled forelocks sheepishly, with many grins. The Captain had a word and a coin for all; Susan inquired of the matrons after babies, and the Christmas spirit was well and jovially established before the blacksmith's son began to pull the bell.

The quality chattered and laughed in little knots and groups; their spread silks and lace bonnets gay as peacocks; their high bright stocks and strapped trousers and curly-brimmed beavers a dazzle to township eyes. Madam had a wicked little curtain to her new bonnet, and Ellen Merrick a striped silk and Mrs. Keyes, who had been up three nights with a sick maid, looked in dove-grey like the gentle saint she was. The Keyeses had come up from Tane Hall the night before to sleep at Clent. Baxters were there from Snake Hill, Corrigans and Boyles, Beverleys from Tingvalley, whose towers rose at the end of a grassy street near the mill, Maclures from New Barns, Ushers from Ancient Way. All stout men of substance in the country, but the Captain especially meant Keyes and Beverley when he wrote to the papers about "backbones of this new land of ours" and "the brightest intellects of our time."

Robert Keyes's keen intellect had been able to do nothing with the Colonial Office, all the same, and those who had not seen him since his return were asking in disappointment, "But couldn't you make them understand?"

"They do not wish to understand," said Roger Keyes. "Gentlemen, we must be prepared to go on as we are."

"Damme!" burst out the Captain in his turkey-cock phase. "Gentlemen, we must be prepared for war!"

"How do you propose we should do that?" This was Baxter with his burly sneer; and Conrad Beverley, the fair-bearded Viking, said gravely: "Comyn is right. We must find a way to put an end to this injustice."

"Infernal injustice," amended the Captain, growing redder. "Are we, who have settled and developed the country at the risk of our lives and the lives of all who are dear to us, never to have any say in the government of it? Are we to submit forever to the foisting upon us of England's offscourings, to pay forever for their upkeep, to lie down to sleep each night in the knowledge that our roofs may be burned over our heads before the morning?"

The Captain enjoyed letting rhetoric run away with him, but the men nodded gravely. There was a good stiff element of truth in it.

"I lost six head of cattle and had a man peppered in the leg last week," said Corrigan. "The police say Collins's Gang is down from the hills again. Baxter had a mare stolen; didn't you, Baxter?"

"She was on the out-station flats," said Baxter. "They haven't been near my house yet." He looked across at his three daughters. "But one never knows," he added.

"None of us knows," said Roger Keyes, with his dark, delicate smile. "I am losing sheep. I suppose we all are, and with so many poor devils walking the roads we must expect it. They can't help themselves, when it just means a climb through a fence and a knife-slash. And they can always sell the skins."

"There were ten beggars at my door this Christmas morning," said Beverley. "Each of us here might wring ourselves dry for them, and it wouldn't do any good."

"We have given too much," cried the Captain, who emptied his pockets along the Road every time he went out, and always would. "Now we must make a stand. We have a precedent. America stood. She took steps to rule herself."

"Quite. We are hardly America's size. . . . Here are the Sorleys at last, and the bell has stopped ringing."

As they crowded into the hot bleak building Mab saw only Julia, fresh and pink as a bunch of roses, with a white lace veil to her bonnet. But Madam saw a black young man who, Louisa was gasping in her ear, was heir to a baronetcy and had come up from Hobart Town on last night's coach. "To see Julia," whispered Louisa, who always drove her nails home. "Don't you think him very handsome?"

Madam sailed to her seat in the tall pew, knelt, and through white kid fingers had a good look at this Captain Berry. His trousers of large pale checks were so tight that he did not kneel. His gay double waistcoat with the glittering fob was finer than Oliver's, and he had a pair of magnificent black whiskers above his throttling neck-cloth. Now the rustling, the opening of prayer-books ceased. Captain Berry put the knob of a gold-headed cane in his mouth and stared out of solemn black eyes at the Captain who, with one arm not yet in his surplice, was crying, "Let us pray," while the clerk pushed him up into the pulpit.

"So that is what James would be at," thought Madam, piqued. James also intended to establish a family, did he? But, *ma foi!* With that so imbecile young dandy and snub-nosed Julia what a family it would be! Madam raised her voice defiantly in the first hymn. To the very end of the road Sorleys would be led by Comyns.

II

With Mab there were never any half-measures. Four years ago he had pinched Julia's trousered legs. Now, leading her to the barouche when service was over, he found himself all but dumb before this inscrutable mystery, this heavenly glory which was Julia.

"You'll come over early?" he stammered. "I'll come for you." Sorleys and Merricks, Beverleys and Keyes would take their Christmas dinner at Clent, but Mab could not wait until then. Five hours! A lifetime! An eternity! "You will come over earlier?" he implored.

Julia shook blond ringlets over her face. She managed her crinoline delicately, stepping in. "Sometimes," she murmured,

not looking round, "I take a book over to the old hut on a hot afternoon."

Mab flung himself on his chestnut mare and rode home across-country. Nothing but those flying leaps through the hot clear air could ease his charged heart. "Burn your incense," he murmured, trying to remember the only possible words to fit this tremendous moment, "burn your incense at that shrine." And so he came home, unaware that just then the shrine was making demure eyes at Captain Berry.

The two wattle-and-daub huts by the boundary fence where Comyns and Sorleys had first lived were frankly disreputable now, pagan temples where birds nested and little animals brought forth their young much as Madam and Louisa Sorley had done. And it was Julia who had been born there. And it was Mab. This appeared to Mab as the most extraordinary coincidence that had ever happened in the world. It held colossal imports, colossal significations. Under some bright heaven this thing had been planned by beneficent gods, the enchantment laid.

"We were meant for each other," he said, almost helplessly. "We must have been, even before we were born." Then he thought of the years he had wasted. Years when he and Henry had gone birds'-nesting, leaving Julia in a flat hat and frilled pantaloons to cry on the ground. He thought of a thousand uncouthnesses toward her, and, doubting if she could ever forgive, went on faster to find her.

Under the weeping-gums by Clent wool-sheds some station hands were sprawling, chewing the hot coarse tobacco they loved, making their endless rootless plans in their prison slang. A few would escape in the next months when nights were clear and warm, be betrayed by some mate for the two-pounds-sterling reward, be thrust back into some choked jail, and bartered out again on the same old round with a black mark against them and probably a worse master. Not worth it, Robert Snow was thinking, lying on his back with thin muscular legs drawn up and those dark brooding eyes Ellen admired staring half shut at motionless scimitar-shaped leaves against pale sky. He was thinking that, and yet he was thinking of Ellen. Once he put his hand in his shirt and brought out, damp from his body, what

under the circumstances was surely the strangest letter ever written even by an untaught and love-sick girl.

Mediæval ideas about women died hard among the colonial gentlemen, and Jasper Merrick differed from his neighbours only in that he had not educated his son either. But Robert Snow the convict, lying on his scarred back, winced at the lady's scrawl and her shocking spelling: "I do not think of you the way other people do," Ellen had written. "Do you remember wen I gave you the milke I am at Clent 4 days. I will sea you." It was unsigned, for she had had that much sense, but he had never doubted the origin of the missive, and since this morning he had worked out all its possibilities. Before he had left England he had not neglected opportunities with women. It was one of these which, with a young man's foolhardiness, he had let crash into the gay year of university life so deeply that his people, with that deep-rooted horror of shame which seemed indigenous to some old families, had thankfully helped England's laws to blot him out.

He had cursed God after that. And he had cursed man. But he had not died; not even in the Dumb Cell at Port Arthur, which took away so many men's wits forever. He had held on, even if for years he had not been able to do more. But gradually, with wrenches of agony, life had reasserted its power. Clean hard living and commerce with the patient animals and with nature on the hills had helped. His blood was running full tide again; there was a constant flutter in his spirit like a bird trying to be free, and the ugly underground knowledge filtering through his companions' rough talk kept it fed.

All over the country there was unrest, dissatisfaction, even fear. The settlers were rebelling against the system which, they said, was destroying them. Regiments were being withdrawn to help in New Zealand's wars against the Maoris. There were rumours that they soon would be withdrawn for India. The jails were swarming, and food short, and supervision slackening, and still the convicts poured in. Yet, with the freed men, they already outnumbered the settlers, and if many were just brute beasts without direction there were a few like himself, results of England's misbegotten political system and sharpened, not blunted, by it. And—he felt a queer hot pride in his English blood to think

of it—men and women still feasted, still laughed and bred up their families in the big houses, defiant of the ground shaking under their feet.

For months he had had a dream that worked like a powerful spell. If the convicts rose, not sporadically like bush-rangers, but in one great wave. If they rose altogether they could have the country in a week. And England . . . one never knew what England might do. Perhaps she would withdraw her troops and leave them to it, glad to pull such a thorn out of her flesh. It was possible. All things were possible. As he thought of Ellen's letter, new and staggering possibilities raised eager faces. . . . She would hide me, he thought. And then: She could get me money. That old hog must be rich. . . . And then he went on thinking, his denied unslaked body quivering at the thought. Her mouth would be soft . . . and her shoulders . . . and her breasts.

Mab forgot the men under the trees as soon as he passed them, walking fast on the well-trod track to Bredon. With the sun white-hot in a white sky the land seemed like a pale virgin not yet stirred into life. Tawny Clent was asleep on its green hill, sheep were asleep on the sparse yellow tussock lying for miles and miles under the scattered grey gum trees. In the distance the ranges floated like mirage. Even the native odours of hot trodden grass, of the gum trees, bush-burning, sheep, seemed vague, unreal. Mab walked through them with hushed steps. He had a sense of listening to something very far off. Laughter, mocking, glad, pitiful . . . he could not hear.

Sometimes when he had gone to those old huts at night he had felt a goatish jovial spirit in them, as though now they leaned together and talked in contented dualism of things that may not be thought alone. And sometimes he found magic there and stood awed while a veil twitched, the ineffable Beauty shadowed. And sometimes he just sat on one of the broken beds, and smoked, and smelt the possums scrambling on the roof, and threw gum-nuts at the rats.

He pushed open the sagging door of the Comyn hut and went in. There, in the shadowy warmth, sat Julia on the side of an old couch; her sandalled feet prim together, her blue eyes prim on her book. But she looked up when Mab came in, and

then she was prim no longer. With a scatter of books, scarfs, gloves, she ran laughing from him through the echoing house. Through empty rooms with dropping plaster and broken windows she went like a glowing lapwing, darting in and out of the light. And now she was silent, and that wordless pursuit quickened in Mab something which never quite died away.

He caught her in the attic with a scolding possum up in the rotting beams and sucked birds' eggs on the floor. He held her hands roughly, and suddenly did not know what to do with this lovely half-averted thing, her slim bosom heaving under the gold ringlets as she strained from him. He said, half bullying, half in prayer, that they had been playmates once. "You haven't forgotten, Julia? You couldn't forget. I . . . I've never forgotten."

"My goodness!" cried Julia, thinking how Mab was much handsomer than Captain Berry. "Is it a French verb the man would be at?"

"You're so wonderful," cried Mab, despairing. "I didn't know. I had forgotten."

"La! He's forgotten and he's never forgotten. What a weathercock," laughed Julia. Then, suddenly remembering that no young miss of the 'forties should make so free with a man: "Mab, you are behaving unpardonably. Let me go."

Mab was young at it yet. Younger by far than Julia, who was already the toast of Hobart Town at sixteen and therefore as far above him socially as the stars. He obeyed, which was perhaps more than she expected or desired. But it was to go down on his knee in an unspeakable trembling onset of adoration and joy. Silently, as though pledging himself to something, he lifted and kissed her hand.

III

The large drawing-room at Clent was Madam's salon, where she sometimes sat in the long twilights, dreaming of Paris, of Brussels, of the wonderful days when she was young, and steeling herself as though to some inescapable menace, against the native sounds of her new land: dogs barking behind the murmuring

sheep, wild duck crying down the river, the beat of loose bark on the gum-tree boles, men's rough voices down at the huts.

There was a rosewood grand piano in the salon; a pool of light on the polished floor where her tall harp stood; screens worked in fading silks; a vista of dim pictures; thin curtains stirring at the windows open to the floor. Fugitive scents haunted it—sandalwood, potpourri, violets—and here Madam entertained like the great lady she was, keeping all domestic matters for her own private rooms.

On Christmas night the most vital and pressing matter was the trousers of old Mr. Merrick. "But is it not, then, possible to persuade him into evening ones, my Susan?" asked Madam, sitting very upright while Celeste arranged the fragile lace over her still black curls. "Assuredly he has sat many a saddle and many a fence in those brown ones before he grew too old."

"I have tried," apologized an always hot and perspiring Susan. "You see," she stammered nervously before that small high-bred regard, "Papa believes in the equality of man, and this is one of his ways of showing it."

"Strange that the equality of man should so express itself in inequality of costume," said Madam, tartly. "That will do, Celeste. I am not a nun, that you wrap me up this way."

She had never felt less like a nun or more like vulgarly spanking old Mr. Merrick on those brown trousers. With a toss of her head, a swish of her skirts, she descended the stairs prepared to send the maids flying if the dining-room table was anything short of perfection. But the great length of it lay shimmering in its beauty: old silver and crystal and Sheffield plate; low broad bowls of roses crimson and pink; clusters of slim yellow candles of the best sperm bringing shining reflections from the cedar-panelled walls.

"*Dieu!*" lamented Madam. "Had we but a company to suit!"

At the head of the stretch of shining damask she worked hard to keep the men's talk off politics and sheep and cattle, the women's away from convict servants and ailing children. None such banalities at her table on a Christmas night. And Oliver in his young-buck elegance caught her mood. They bandied quips

and puns between them. By sheer force of will they struck sparks here and there down the long table of docile wives, preoccupied men. Julia, all a green mist with white shoulders, laughed until Mab wanted to pour sacrificial wine on himself, cut himself with sharp knives at her altar. Berry's round black eyes grew rounder as he silently absorbed turkey, crisp brown sausages, new potatoes and peas. James Sorley's neat grey side-whiskers became quite disordered. Mr. Keyes woke up and made some incisive retorts. Old Mr. Merrick gave up his attempted reminiscences about his prize boar, and the Captain kept old Jerrold circulating with the wine.

Madam's eyes shone. Her party was a success, after all. She threw Oliver a bouquet for his last story. "Noll, I suffer shame for you. You have no heart. Only a gizzard."

"Gad, ma'am," agreed Oliver, in his latest town drawl, "I've had plenty of cause to thank Heaven, and you, for that same."

"Ha, ha!" roared the Captain, proud of this wife of his who made all the other women look nothing. "Shall I call the young puppy out, my dear? . . . Jerrold! Wine to your mistress."

By now James Sorley's eyes were scarcely those of the astute councillor. He murmured at Madam's ear: "To call out the whole world . . . to die in your defence. What joy!"

"Live in it, *mon ami*," said Madam, with a melting glance. "Live in it as you always have done."

"H'm," said the councillor, blinking. He would have gone less far in life if he had been able to see farther. Madam was dangerous but delicious. Lord, Lord! he thought. If I could but have my time over again!

Oliver, bored with dragging these dull people up with him, leaned back in his chair and leisurely cast a bomb: "I hear that Collins's Gang were seen near Oatlands last night. They shot a tavern-keeper in the leg. But they are out of practice. They'll improve."

One or two of the younger women screamed, sensible of what was expected of them. Louisa Sorley said, sipping sherbet: "Well, what else can you expect on roots and turnips and bandicoots back in the ranges? When they get at some of your sheep, gentlemen, I suppose we must prepare for trouble."

“But someone must prevent it,” cried Henry Sorley’s young wife, terrified for her babies. “The military . . . Captain Berry, what are the military *for*? And Police-constable Quane so brave and good-looking.”

“Good looks won’t keep off bush-rangers, ma’am,” grunted old Merrick. And then Ellen delivered herself of an opinion for the first time in her life :

“There shouldn’t be bush-rangers. There wouldn’t be if you did not punish the convicts so. Oh, oh, oh!” wept Ellen, her big baby face screwing up. “Everyone is so cru-el.”

“Jerrold! Wine to Miss Merrick. . . . My dear young lady, the cruelty is yours for depriving us of the smiles of your bright eyes.” The Captain lifted a courtly glass and drank to Ellen, privately cursing the girl for a damned fool. A man who has had his best cattle driven by bush-rangers and twice defended his house against them might be allowed to differ with Ellen.

Madam could have scratched Oliver for designing to spoil her party. But bush-rangers were a subject on which everybody could talk—and did, over the blazing brandy fumes of the plum-pudding; over the steaming mince pies, melting and golden; over the ruddy raspberry tarts, the tansy shortbreads, the queen-puddings frail with white of egg. There were strawberries in great silver dishes, and clotted cream in Doulton bowls, pale lakes of gooseberry-fool, yellow custard in fat cups of cut glass. Madeira and port took the place of sherry. The company grew mellow. Madam was happy again, and husbands looked at wives down the table-length and smiled. Danger might come with the morning, their eyes said, but we will take what the gods give to-night.

James Sorley was advancing by steady degrees to one of his more spectacular squabbles with the Captain, and dear Louisa made one of her usual efforts to be adroit: “He don’t mean it all, Captain. Nowadays my poor Sorley has to be like Cæsar’s wife—all things to all men.”

“My dear,” said the councillor, his sallow cheek reddening, “I think that quotation has gone farther than you intended.”

“But not so far as the other lady went, apparently,” remarked Oliver, and Berry, who had not spoken for three courses, burst into a loud guffaw.

The Captain hastily ordered wine all round, but Madam had not done with James: "Can there be doubt in any minds, even the minds with which you are now accustomed to deal, that everything always does go farther than was intended?"

"H'm," said James, again distrustful. "If my old friend here had your perspicacity, my dear lady . . ."

"But no. To be a friend is to be blind. To become used to anything . . . as your wife is used to you."

"I never become used to him," cried Louisa, proudly glowing under her red turban. "To me he is a perpetual feast of nectared sweets where no crude servant reigns."

"'Surfeit', my dear. Not 'servant'," said the councillor, testily. Louisa always made a fool of herself, and she was grown so monstrous fat.

The cloth was drawn and the children came in with the dessert, a round dozen of frilled daughters and awkward sons in nankeen trousers. Proud parents passed them round, and the girls bloomed, the boys squirmed. Jenny, like an anxious little dog, had attached herself to Brevis Keyes. He was three years her elder, but his dark, delicate face with the strange eyes so roused her pity that she wanted to love him with both arms, while kicking vigorously at freckled Adam Sorley who had torn the lace from her best pantalets. But Brevis avoided Jenny and retired to eat apples and nuts with the other boys in corners, while the girls sat on gentlemen's knees and pretended to like the walnuts dipped in wine for them.

To Jenny this was an occasion, and already she had Madam's nose for an occasion. Like an epicure she sipped from Mab's glass. Like an epicure she laid her chubby arms on the table.

"I like wood," she announced, clearly. "It's hot when you want it hot, like sitting on a fence in the sun, and cold when you want it cold, like the table."

"And therefore unlike your sex, my love," drawled Oliver, who by now was frankly bored with his company. "They are never what you want; nor where you want 'em, neither."

"Never mind, Uncle Noll," said Jenny, always anxious to console, "P'raps you wouldn't want them then."

She turned white at the shout of laughter, but faced it

valiantly although Mab could feel her heart leaping wildly under his hand.

"Brave girl," he murmured, rubbing his chin on her curls and almost forgetting Julia for the time.

"Little lady, I swear you'll be a toast yet," big Mr. Beverley cried. "Will you come and give me a kiss?"

Jenny, used to playing round his feet with a small Sigurd and a smaller Maria, found his huge beard seen on a level the most terrifying thing yet. But she tried to remember her manners.

"D-do all ladies have to kiss you when you go to their houses, sir?" she inquired, trembling. But that roar of laughter sent her to earth with her head in Mab's shoulder. . . . I do love you, Uncle Mab, she thought as he held her tight. Oh, I do love you!

"Damme, you deserved that, Beverley," said the Captain, delighted.

"Miss Jenny knows the value of her favours already, as is but natural with such an example," James Sorley said.

He bowed to Madam as she rose, and she laughed over her shoulder, well pleased with Jenny. The men took up their pistols and went out to the veranda, covering the stately parade of bright silks and floating streamers along the flags to the door of the salon. This was a nightly custom, with bush-rangers always possible beyond the frail edge of light, and Madam enjoyed it. She had not followed an army through the Peninsular Wars for nothing.

Billowing, glorying, she led the way, and Mab kissed Jenny as he put her down. "Presently," he whispered, "there will be games."

IV

The men, drawing up to the table, were growing a little shy of James Sorley in these days. Vulgarly speaking, he knew that the governor could butter his bread more thickly than his friends could, and quite evidently the governor was willing to do it. Sorley had lately been made a member of the Legislative Council, and that didn't happen for nothing. Quiet Roger

Keyes looked at that narrow face and close mouth between the neat side-whiskers, and hoped that dear old Comyn would not be too incautious.

But never in his life had the Captain been anything else. Now he unbuttoned his waistcoat, loosed his stock. No drawing-room for him to-night, damme, whatever the young cubs might do.

"Pass the wine, Mab. . . . Gone, has he? Well then, pass the wine, Noll. . . . Wine to you, Joe. Damme, man, can't you mix your liquors yet? These young folk! . . . How you fellows can take a pipe when one can snuff good rappee . . ." He shook his head as the long churchwardens lit up about him. "Country's goin' to the dogs," he said.

Oliver had promised Madam to get them all away soon for the dancing and games, but he was somewhat uneasy. The Captain, a four-bottle man, only mellowed with liquor, but old Sorley hadn't the breeding and his long grey face like a horse's was showing a mental looseness already. He had edged up to Berry and was telling one of his endless stories of earlier days, blinking an eye round now and again to hold the others. Oliver heard:

"First Hobart Town Regatta six years ago. . . . Ladies' Purse presented by Lady Franklin . . . open to amateurs, y'know. I vow I shall never forget my pride as she put the trophy into my hands."

"Yes, yes," broke in the Captain, who had never believed that story. "D'you remember when the two whale-boats collided off Macquarie Point and the rascals went to fighting in the water? And all of us running up that marshy foreshore yellin', 'Go it, ye cripples!' fit to burst. Damme, those whalers could pull! I never saw a prettier set of oars than the *Try Again* . . . You remember her, Keyes? . . . American whaler just back from the Japanese Banks. Got the cup——"

"The *Sechem* got the cup," cried Sorley. "Green, with white nose and——"

"Damme, sir! I should remember, seeing I dropped a pony on her. The cox was that monstrous proud of his tattooing that he took off his shirt before the race."

"It was the *Sechem*," said the councillor with a stubborn eye.

"Well, well, pass the wine. There'll be no regatta next year

unless things look up. I tell you, gentlemen, the country has never been in worse case than it is to-day. . . . You would have your eyes opened, Jim, if you went out and talked to the ordinary settlers about it. Yes, I vow you would." The Captain chuckled. "They are mostly old Peninsular men and you know how England's army learnt to swear in Belgium."

"Who says my eyes are not open?" demanded Sorley, sitting up.

Keyes and Beverley looked at each other. The Captain's championship generally did more harm than good. Everyone knew their troubles. Everyone knew how the governor interpreted Downing Street orders by imposing tax after tax and charging increasingly heavy license fees on all trades and callings. Everyone knew the confusion of the convict system, so that the settler might one day have thirty men on his pay-sheet and the next day only three. Everyone knew how men were taking to the bush daily and being screened by sympathizers up and down the land. And where was the sense in abusing the late governor, abusing Gladstone, who had recalled him, and abusing the new man appointed in his stead?

"What all the world wants is a little common sense," said Conrad Beverley.

"What the world wants is fair play, sir!" cried the Captain. His blue eyes blazed under his white brows. To this land of his adoption he was a passionate lover. "But damme! I suppose one doesn't expect fair play from a bloody civilian like Lord Stanley." Lord Stanley, from some safe corner of England, had sent an ultimatum that Van Diemen's Land, being primarily penal, was to remain so. It was this message which was stirring the country from end to end.

James Sorley, fingering his whiskers, said nothing. And they all remembered that he was not one of those councillors who had resigned when the governor lately forced measures through the Assembly in spite of them. . . . A lick-pot, I fear, thought Roger Keyes.

The Captain, who, like many more, wrote ferocious and quite futile letters to the Colonial Office, began again. Now, as a breeder, he ranged himself with the V.D.L. Syndicate which had

brought from England some of the earliest blood stock and gone magnificently to farming among the wild bush of the North-West. And with Mrs. Furlonge, that valiant Scotswoman who so intrepidly annexed a ship-load of Saxon merinos on their way to Sydney and so laid the foundation of the country's greatest asset.

"How, I ask you, is it possible for us to raise the flock standard with the country in this state? If the dealers that travel now between London and Hobart would bring out a bit of sense for the Governor instead of pedigree stock which we may have to put in the pot next year to feed our fam'lies on——"

The councillor, who had been drinking steadily, had gone through a period of slurred speech to a precision stiff as clicking wheels. Sitting very straight, he clicked into one of those diatribes which Oliver knew too well. Apparently he had been following his own line of thought, for it had nothing to do with the present question.

"No, sir. I shall never comprehend the objection of educated men such as yourself to convict importation. Granting that to visionless minds any restriction is abhorrent, any rebellion such as tore the Americas from us is welcome, I still cannot see, I really can *not* see how we could colonize without them. Putting aside England's necessity and the merciful opportunity given these poor creatures of retrieving their fortunes in a new and smiling land——"

"Merciful my eye!" shouted the Captain. "Have you ever been to Port Arthur?"

James turned stiffly. He repeated, "The merciful popportunity," hesitated, picked up his thread, and continued: "Such as yourself . . . myself . . . Mr. Beverley brought out with us a handful of body-servants, and you still keep yours. I . . . ah——"

"You couldn't keep yours," said the Captain, like a naughty boy.

Berry, who had been gradually sliding under the table, pulled himself up, beginning to stare with interest. Sorley, again side-tracked, again found his feet.

"I considered that in my position . . . ah . . . tenets implied by Her Gracious Majesty's scheme . . . I ask you . . ." He fumbled at his fob, where the faint chill of seal and trinkets gave him fresh impetus. "Who builds our roads, our bridges, our public institutions?" he began on a higher key. "Who are our

ploughmen, our stockmen, fencers, shepherds, harvesters? Who but those government men whom you affect, so unjustly, to despise?" He attempted to sit down; was somewhat embarrassed to find himself already sitting, and stared coldly round the table.

William, who was always dreading some reference to the mortgage, said suavely, "We acknowledge that, sir."

"Damme! Who said we didn't?" exploded the Captain. And old Mr. Merrick began in his slow wheezy tones:

"Ain't we always done our share by the ruffians? Ain't we had to feed and clothe them . . . regulation rations. And trousers. And shirts. Ain't we had to nurse those hairy sinners like we was an orphanage? Ain't we——"

"We don't have to do it under the new Probation System," said Roger Keyes, trying to pour oil.

"That Probation System stinks in the eyes of humanity," said the Captain. "Noll, pass the wine to Mr. Keyes."

"Ah, just so." James Sorley's eyes were glassy with displeasure. "I protest that the arrangement is inevitable, all the same. And what right have we to dictate to Mother England? Shall she not purge her shores?" It was a phrase with which Oliver was very familiar just now, with the Government trying to excuse itself. "Shall we not purge her shores?" he repeated, looking round with great dignity.

"If you ask me," said Oliver lightly, "a passion for colonization is the real motive, isn't it? The nature of the material don't appear to matter."

"Of course we must colonize," said Mr. Beverley, who spoke to the point on the rare occasions when he chose to speak, "but not with tainted blood. England will have to understand that. This new colony of Batman's across the strait has no criminals——"

"Because they have called it Melbourne after an English Prime Minister," burst in the Captain. "If we had chosen to toady in that way——"

"We had not the choice. Sydney is agitating for more free immigrants to be paid a decent wage for their labour. We must do the same. And we must realize that it is useless to be content merely

with agitation." Mr. Beverley felt the councillor's watchful eye on him, and ended suavely : " Those are the tactics of children, and these, I fear, are not the topics of Christmas. Forgive me, Comyn."

" I think," said Oliver, who had been waiting his chance, " that games are to be our present topic. Gentlemen, shall we join the ladies ? "

V

Mab had already joined one of them. When he put up his pistol he stood still on the veranda in the quiet night that was busy as usual about its own affairs : drawing out sharp fragrance from flowering broom, geranium leaves, myrtle, touching with moonbeam dead-white trees on the near hill and the sundial between flower borders ; pausing to listen to the bark of a possum up in the she-oaks, the crisp clatter of hoofs far off on the Main Road, and then waking the breeze over the river that rushed round the bend below, flaring a pale ripple.

In the salon Madam sang joyously to her harp :

" Ce petit homme tant joli ;
 Qui toujours cause et toujours rit,
 Qui toujours baise sa mignonne,
 Dieu gard' de mal ce petit homme."

Mab quailed, the shy and passionate adventurer in him suddenly sure that any easy laughing and kissing the girl was not for him. A man who dares love a goddess, he reflected, is punished aforehand. Down by the summer-house was now a gauzy fluttering, a white gleam which disappeared. Mab was parting the vines above the door before Julia had sat down on the bench as though quite sweetly unconscious that even her easy mother would cry out at behaviour so shocking in a young lady. At Mab's arrival her agitation was so exquisite that the poor fool had no words. She faltered : " It was so hot within. . . . I never dreamed . . . I must go."

“Julia, I think God brought you here,” said Mab then, annexing the Deity as firmly as he would have annexed anything else which might hold her there. “Oh, my darling, can’t you give me one little moment . . .”

CHAPTER FOUR

I

A MAN rode up one of the dark winding trails to Henny's Road-house, whistled twice a clear call, and waited, still as a tree. The back door opened with a thin thread of orange light and a woman slipped out. Their meeting together was as silent as the meeting of animals, and something of the animal sense they must have had to see at all in this vague blackness that abolished outline. But he stooped at once from the saddle, lifted a burden out of her arms, and laid it across the pommel.

"The grub, is it?" he murmured.

"Aye. An' here's the bloody powder. I can't git no more, Collins. It was near as much as my life's worth to git that."

Henny inlaid her speech with words of prison slang that were obsolete to the man. She had left Port Arthur while Collins was still a twelve-year-old youngster being "disciplined" at Point Puer. Of the other children who had come with him on the boat from England several had disciplined themselves into suicide, but Collins had always been fond of his life. He was no less fond of it because it was now forfeit. Twice he had killed his man, and some day he would be killed: by one of the hunted half-scared rabble he led, by a gun in the hands of some pursuer, or by the gallows down in the prison at Hobart Town. It was only the last he dreaded. Other endings were all in the game.

"Got a chew, Henny?" he said hungrily. "Carn't git the taste o' them bloody leaves outer me gullet. We been livin' on leaves an' possums this larst month."

Henny broke a plug of tobacco and handed a piece up. Her dim gaunt shadow had a grotesque head which was the beaver bonnet no man ever saw her without. "Now you vamoose, Collins. There's more folk than I likes about, to-night."

Within the hut sounded the mourning notes of an accordion clumsily played, the rhythmic stamp of heavy feet.

“They got a roof over ’em, anyways,” said the man who would never walk freely under a roof again. “How much, yer bloody old witch?”

She told him, and he pulled out a gentleman’s silk purse, running the rings and selecting gold pieces. “There’ll be more to-morrer,” he said with a chuckle. “Clent’s a rich place, and there are rich folks there to-night. Military gent too.” He patted the pistol on his hip. “That’s fur him, blarst him.”

The mare backed away under his hand, dainty as a lady. Henny held his leg with her hard old claw. “Don’t kill Comyns,” she whispered.

“Let ’em not git in my way, then. We must have the loot.”

“I’ll niver help ’ee agin, Jack, if tha kills Comyns.”

“Curse it! We gotter live,” the man responded violently. “An’ we gotter git enough to-night to live on for months. The hull country’ll be up on us arter this.” He stooped to her ear. “You starve in the rain an’ cold in them bloody hills till yer do’ know you’re a man no more an’ yer won’t be too pertickler how yer takes what yer has to have,” he said, and melted into the dim trail, the imported blood mare stolen from Baxter moving over dead sticks and leaves delicately as a ghost.

The woman stood still, staring into the dark where he had vanished, as though he drew her mind after him. She glanced once over her shoulder in the brainless terror of a brute, frightened at he knows not what, gave a long hushed gasp as though some spell worked in her, and then threw it off with a shudder. For a moment she had been tempted to send one of her visitors over to warn Clent, but fear of what Collins would do if ever he found out overwhelmed her. She put her skinny hands to her mouth and bit them in a transport of fear. Fear such as the Ancients knew, bodiless, unescapable.

“No, no. They must take theer chanst,” she muttered, and went back, dragging her heavy man-boots into the hut.

II

“Gentlemen,” said the Captain, “I give you ‘Dear Women’.”

They were all on their feet now, and as sober as could be expected. Oliver, very tired of being watch-dog, was eager to

hand them over to the ladies, who would have to make what they could of Berry's blank black stare and Joe Merrick's dropping underlip and old Sorley's ramrod rigidity. And they'd do it, these excellent, adaptable Dear Women he thought, with a thread of wonder running through the sneer.

That toast was never drunk. From the rear of the house came a sharp angry banging of muskets, shouting, one frightened squeal from a woman. In some houses that would have been enough to send the men pelting down to the kitchens while the bush-rangers got in through the front and held them up from the rear. But in these who had been raided before, instinct worked quicker than thought. Beverley and Keyes slammed and fastened shutters, William bolted the front door, and Madam had her brood out of the salon and down the back passage into the hall before the red wine had stopped running over the table-edge.

"Pillows!" cried Susan, stumbling up the stairs. "Feather beds. Cushions. Annie . . . Nurse . . . Celeste!"

In a few moments, finding their feint had failed, the bush-rangers would begin shooting all round the house, and barricades could not be set up too fast while the Captain was dealing out muskets from the gun-room and Oliver guarding the big iron door to the kitchen veranda. Cook, the maids and men out in the kitchen, must submit to force. But they would not be hurt if they kept their wits. It was Clent these ruffians were after: its silver, the gold in the Captain's safe, the jewels.

Gad! If I could get off for the police! thought Oliver. They mean business.

The Captain came plunging up, his shock of white hair defiant. "We'll make a siege of it, anyway, damme! Mab . . . where's Mab?"

But no one had seen Mab, and all but Louisa Sorley had forgotten Julia. She ran crying through the upper rooms, where Martha Sorley was wrapping up her babies in some wild sense of protection and Celeste bringing Mrs. Merrick round with burnt feathers. Most of the lights were put out for precaution, and Clent seemed like some dark ship labouring uncertainly in black uncharted seas.

But there was no panic. These pioneers had faced too much

for that. The psychology of courage ran through the house like a flame, and the children were hopping everywhere, laughing, clapping their soft little hands. The women went with strained faces, silent, blocking up windows that were not being fired from, biting back cries when a bullet got past their defences and cracked into the opposite wall. Collins and Wingy, mad at this resistance when they had expected an easy descent on drunken men, would do their most devilish. Burn the house down, perhaps. Murder the women rushing out in the flames. Already their hatchets were splintering shutters here and there, and when the defenders rushed up they were met with a volley.

“Should have iron grilles like me,” grunted old Merrick. “Wood no damned use. . . . Ellen, tell your mother to stop that damned screaming.”

“Oh, dear Papa, she won’t stop!” cried Ellen running. “Oh, dear Mamma, do stop, please.”

Long afterward Jenny remembered that poignant night, when she and Brevis sat on the stairs in the strange unfamiliarity of the banging dark. Their little ghost-like bodies in the gloom were held together by his arm about her neck and together they snuffed up the choking smell of burned powder, the greasy smell of blown-out candles, the hot smell of blood where Susan was binding William’s bleeding neck with a table napkin. “Keep calm, my dear,” he was repeating urgently. “Remember your condition. I beg of you to keep calm.”

“I like these smells,” confided Brevis. “It makes me feel . . . I don’t know . . . different, somehow.”

Jenny, too, felt different. But it was the red flashes springing out of the dark that excited her, the sudden visions out of nothingness, exposing souls, not faces. Captain Berry’s black round eyes with a new evil light behind them; Oliver’s pretty features twisted in a mirthless grin; Conrad Beverley wildly glad as a berserker; William passing a nervous tongue over dry lips; Madam alert and angry as a bird; Susan with the sweat pouring down her pale face where the gauze turban hung draggled. Like that their elders came out of secrecy for a moment, unconsciously making a gift of their souls to one another, and faded again.

The house was too big to be defended by such a handful. The

salon shutters had been wrenched from their hinges and the bush-rangers were in, beating on the door barricading them from the passage. They were along the veranda, shooting under the heavy hall door. They were in through a pantry window, where old Jerrold and Oliver drove them out after much determined fighting among the glass and china.

Oliver came to have an arm bound up. "I think we settled one. But they have the advantage. We're shooting into the wide. And they outnumber us, I think."

"Where in God's name is Mab?" cried Captain, reloading his musket from the powder-flagon Nurse brought.

"Gad!" said Oliver, suddenly remembering. "I fancy he went to the stables. Why, ten to one he'll have the police here in a minute."

"If they have not already killed him," thought Madam. But she would not kill the gleam of hope around her by saying it.

"Damme, that will be it!" said the Captain banging away. "What? What do you say, Keyes?"

From the stair window, where his pistol was preventing the bush-rangers from setting up a stable ladder, Roger Keyes called down: "They want us to throw out the silver and the ladies' jewels or they'll fire the house. They are bringing straw from the ricks."

Madam came to the stair-foot with a candle in her hand. Under the frosty lace on her head her eyes gleamed. "Madam Comyn's compliments and they can have the jewels when they come for them," she cried, and laughed.

Mrs. Merrick, like a yellow-beaked hen in black feathers, scuffled down the stairs. "Give up your jewels, woman!" she shrieked. "We shall be burned like rats. Would you burn me . . . murder me?"

"*Avec beaucoup de plaisir*," said Madam, politely, and young Martha Sorley with a baby on each arm, said, quavering:

"I don't think I'm a coward . . . but with the babies . . . oh, couldn't we give up the jewels and send them away?"

"My child, do you think they'd go? Do you not think it would be oil on fire to show the white feather? Besides, Mab . . ." she brought it out roundly as though she believed it, did not see

him lying dead among the trodden hollyhocks, "Mab will have the military here directly."

The Captain said in her ear: "Get the women and children into the study, Jenny. It's the best protected. Lock the door. We may not be able to keep them out much longer."

Madam shut her eyes. The horror that walks by night invaded her soul. When blackfellow spears flew around the bullock-drays, when Day's Gang had attacked the boundary-fence hut and Garney come down on Clents, she had stayed by her man. Now she must leave him.

"*Soit,*" she said, and drove her flock in like chickens.

Mrs. Merrick, half blinded by the brown-silk turban that had slipped over her eyes, carrying the front of stiff brown curls with it, slapped at both her dutiful daughters who supported her with pillows, and cried: "I vow I'll never come to this vile place again. Something always happens. Last year Susan left the warming-pan in my bed."

Louisa Sorley, spent with looking for Julia, said hopefully: "She may have hid in the linen-cupboards. . . . Adam, come here and let me wipe your nose."

In a corner of the study the maids huddled together, whimpering. Their mothers were out in the cottages, their fathers and lovers perhaps tied up in the kitchens or dead among the bullets. Madam sat still, head on hand, listening to the ebb and rise of the fight. So, it was said, Mrs. Hatherton of Mains had sat one night last year while bush-rangers killed her husband.

Conrad Beverley, half stripped and blackened by gunpowder, was in the scullery, stamping out burning straw thrown in through the broken windows, while Oliver, at the stair-opening, tried to pick off the flitting figures among the sunflowers and great dahlias down below. A loud crashing at the salon door brought the Captain with Joe Merrick and Keyes; and he actually had his hands on Collins, with that famished wolf face near his own and bullets flying all round, before something cracked him over the head and Keyes pulled him back.

That breach was patched up somehow, with a sofa pulled out of a side room, but it would not hold. And the fight was too hot to last much longer. Roger Keyes, his consciousness sharpened by

strain as often happens to finer natures, saw more in this than a mere battle of man against man. Indestructible forces were at work here : the basic need of the crushed and half-paralyzed ego to regain its human power ; the subconscious savagery of the brute whom man has made bestial and Nature has prompted with her heroic forces.

“ It’s not Collins’s Gang we are fighting,” he thought. “ It is the system. It is what began with the beginnings of tyranny and was carried on through Egypt and Rome right up to the Spanish Inquisition and the Fleet and Marshalsea and the floating hells of the Thames hulks. It is what we did at Port Arthur and Fort Macquarie, and what men always will do to their feebler brothers. We are fighting that elemental something in humanity which makes of the purely personal equation a thing of mere shreds and patches.”

“ Hear ’em howling out there, the dogs,” said the Captain, rubbing a torn sleeve across his wet forehead. “ I think Sorley’s hit, but it was too dark to make sure. Damme, it’s about time Mab did something ! ”

III

A part of Mab knew with the first musket-shot that he should leave Julia there in the summer-house and ride at once for help. But only a part. That profound thing which some name love and some lust had hold of him. He was possessed by Julia, although—or perhaps because—he had not yet dared do more than kiss her hands, bury his hot face in their curving coolness, gasp out the uncouth words of adolescence which to these two young things seemed the very miracle of meaning. The manners of the time required that this mistress should begin as the goddess, and worship came naturally to Mab’s eager blood. But presently he was listening. He was on his feet.

“ Darling, I can’t stay. I must go to Trienna for help.” Julia, thoroughly frightened, clung to him. She prepared to faint with the current adaptability of the time, so that Mab was for a little too distracted to think of anything but reviving her with prayers, with frantic hand-pattings and one quick stolen kiss on her forehead.

“ You do love me ? ” she opened an eye to say. “ Don’t leave me. Don’t.”

In Clent the lights went out. It was turned into a beleaguered fortress vibrating to the whine and crack of musketry. In the dim starlight dark figures were running, weaving about it a spell. . . . Mab drew Julia up in his arms.

“ Come with me then, dearest . . . beloved. I daren’t try for the stables now, but we could get across the fields.”

“ I’ve only got slippers on. I couldn’t. Oh, hear the guns ! Darling, let us die together.”

“ Be hanged to dying,” said Mab. “ I shall carry you.” He bundled her, all foamy green and gold head, up in his arms and ran down the garden beneath the pale lilac trees. Duck on the river heard them coming and rose with a harsh beat of wings. In the paddock feeding sheep sheered off like ghosts, stamped their little sharp hoofs, stared, and began to crop again. The shots were distant now, far apart, like something heard in a dream. At the slip-rail Mab stopped. Julia was a well-grown wench and his unset limbs could do no more. He leaned on the post, too spent for speech, and Julia, relieved from present terrors, began to think of the future. Reputations were delicate things in the ’forties, easily “ blown upon.”

“ I mustn’t go into Trienna, darling,” she said quaveringly. “ You must go and come back for me and never tell any one I’m here. But do, do come soon, for I’m so dreadfully frightened ! ”

In his male blindness he would have argued, but now she was frantic for him to go and be back. So he set off again, running. And the fear that the bush-rangers, routed and scattered, might come on her there at the slip-rails, ran beside him to hound him on.

IV

Half the township turned out to the aid of Clent and they did not come too soon. Heaped straw was blazing against the north wall. Ladders at the windows told of hand-to-hand fights inside. Constable Quane and young Lieutenant Anderson led their men up, tumbled inside, and nearly killed Joe Merrick in the darkness.

With one man left behind, Collins's Gang got away, taking every horse in the stables with them. But Mab's racer, Vanity, came home next day, wild-eyed and sweating and scored with long lash-cuttings.

In the kitchens, grooms and maids were found trussed and gagged, and Cook's very wedding-ring and gold chain had been raped from her plump indignant body.

"But, damme, that's all the loot the rascals got!" exulted the Captain, industriously getting in the way of the doctor who was extracting a ball from James Sorley's leg.

Julia, smuggled into the house about this time, ran straight to her room, where poor weary Louisa found her later, very properly and conveniently in hysterics; for if young ladies of the 'forties had few rights, they had many refuges denied to those of later years.

"You shouldn't have hid in the linen-cupboard," said Louisa. "I am sure it must have been worse there, and now your father has been shot. Drink this up, dear, and do stop kicking."

It was grey morning now, and Mab followed his mother to her room and shut the door. The story he had given below had contented the Captain, but Madam must have the truth. "I was out with Julia," he said at once.

Madam had dropped into her high-backed chair. Now she gave a little shiver and her hands moved together in her lap. "I guessed it. And what then?"

"She is mine. I shall marry her."

Madam looked at him. "I know what men mean by that. What do you mean?"

"I mean," cried Mab, glowing, "that she is the most perfect and most pure of all God's angels——"

"Bah!" said Madam, sitting up. "You are only a boy, after all." Some obscure feeling of disappointment edged her tongue. "What do you think Mr. Sorley will have to say to you?"

"He must give her to me. We love each other."

"Is that all?"

"What more can there be?" asked Mab, innocently.

"*Bien!*" Madam shrugged. "If you don't know yet, you will some day." She put out her little heavily ringed hand and

drew him close. "Mab, *mon petit garçon*, there can no more come of this. James Sorley will not give the toast of Hobart Town to such as you. He means her for that oaf Berry, who is to have a title some fine day."

"But she *loves* me. Mother, you don't understand. We love each other. We are pledged."

"Do you mean to tell Mr. Sorley about to-night?"

"But of course! It was only to-night that we discovered . . ."

"Then tell him soon," said Madam, leaning back and closing her eyes. "They have taken him to Bredon, where he will be in bed with his side-whiskers and the faithful Louisa. Tell him soon, *mon brave*, before he has a leg to stand upon while he kicks you."

Mab walked over to Bredon in the afternoon. To his shocked disgust he had slept until midday, like any man not consumed with passion, and already old battered Clent was putting itself in order, with Durbin and William taking down the splintered shutters, and a boy out on the drive picking up the spent cartridge-cases and sweeping away the bundles of charred straw where the children were playing.

The day was reckless with sun, sweet winds, and birds singing. There were grasshoppers in the paddock grass and white butterflies drunken over the tall purple flags by the river. Ugly things of the night were forgotten, as ugly things should be. With the dance of yellow wattle bloom against blue sky Mab's heart went up. He dreamed, walking the well-trodden way. Titles, position, wealth . . . all that he did not have . . . the magnet of his desire drew to him and they surrendered. Having Julia, all the lesser things would come, must come.

His setter, ranging after rabbits in the patch of bush by the boundary fence, lay down on the broad Bredon veranda with the dogs already stretched in the sun, and Mab went into the familiar sprawling house with its bastard architecture, which James Sorley called pure Tuscan, feeling an enormous friendliness to every one.

Martha Sorley, her baby on her arm, met him with surprised eyes in her tired face. "Are you not after the bush-rangers like the others, Mab? Henry went off at dawn with most of the men. He was to meet Mr. Corrigan."

Mab had forgotten the bush-rangers. He said, stammering :
“ I came to see Mr. Sorley. Can I see him now ? ”

“ Oh ! Is it a message ? I’ll inquire.”

In the cool hall with the long rooms opening out of it Mab stood, laying stick and hat on the carved table. All his palpitating young body called for Julia, but she did not come. Only Martha, leading him into the brown library where the councillor lay like an old grey fox in a brown-leather chair, his raised leg covered with a red-and-green shawl. Louisa Sorley, whose crisp white cap with tartan ribbons could not disguise what last night had done to her plump comeliness, kissed him on both cheeks.

“ You look as fresh as hollyhocks, Mab. How is Madam ? And poor Susan ? A few more nights like that and I assure you I would begin to lose my nerve. And Julia in the linen-cupboard all the time, and bullets in Mr. Sorley’s leg, and my knitting-needles gone . . . ”

Mab seized his chance with the clumsiness of preoccupation :
“ Julia was not in the linen-cupboard. She was with me.”

“ My dear boy ! What are you saying ! You were outside, and a mercy you were——”

“ Let me speak, Louisa.” The councillor lifted himself in his chair. “ What is this, Mab ? What do you say about Julia ? ”

Mab told in a dozen words. “ She hasn’t caught cold ? ” he asked anxiously. “ I did all I could, Mr. Sorley.”

“ Wait.” The councillor was sitting up straight now. His whiskers seemed to bristle. Mab was dimly aware that he had become portentous. “ Wait, I beg. You are speaking of Julia ? Do I understand you to state that you and my daughter were out together all night ? ”

“ Not all night, sir. It couldn’t have been much past one o’clock——”

“ Am I to understand that you and my daughter were out together, alone, until one o’clock at night ? ”

“ Yes. But we love each other,” cried Mab in a burst of feeling.

“ Oh, dear ! ” said Louisa, and sat suddenly on a faldstool.

Her husband glanced at her. “ My love,” he said, “ please leave us.”

“ Oh, dear ! ” said poor Louisa again. She rose, hesitating.

“ Mrs. Sorley,” cried Mab, “ tell him how much we love each other. She must have told you. Tell him how I worship . . . adore her.”

“ My love . . . ” said the councillor, inexorably.

“ Yes, dear, yes, I’m going. . . . Julia has told me nothing, Mab. She had hysterics, and then she had sal volatile, and then she had a bath——”

For once the councillor had ceased to remind himself that he was a gentleman. “ Go, will you ? Damn you ! ” he shouted, and Louisa bustled out in startled disarray. But she closed the door gently. James disliked noise unless he made it himself.

“ And now,” he said thinly, “ let us get to the bottom of this.”

Mab saw with surprise that the man’s narrow forehead and long upper lip were wet. He began eagerly to explain that there could be no bottom to the bottomless, the overwhelming love . . .

The councillor set that aside with a jerk of his lean neck. His hard eyes probed. He chose his words deliberately : “ I ask you what I am to understand by all this. What have you done to my daughter ? Have you ruined her ? ”

Mab stared blankly. The colour burned up in his face and his eyes filled with a rush of hot tears. A sudden lump came in his throat as though this inconceivable, this impossible accusation were concrete and stuck there. “ You . . . you old hog ! ” he cried, half-sobbing.

James Sorley relaxed. He would not have been where he was if he had not been able to recognize sincerity when he saw it. “ You have both been extremely foolish,” he said more mildly. “ But so long as no one knows of this escapade, there is not much harm done. I suppose no one knows ? Others might not be so ready to believe . . . ”

“ Others would never suggest such a . . . a . . . ” Mab’s voice broke on a sob. Like the high gods, he had built a magic palace for his lady, and this man had defiled it.

“ You are a man, I suppose,” said James Sorley, with compressed lips. “ I have had some experience of young men. Have you spoken of this matter ? ”

“No.” To Mab’s sensitiveness it was as though the man had asked, “Have you walked naked through Trienna?” “How could I until I had told you, had your consent——”

“That you will never have,” said James Sorley, with such deadly quiet that it seemed to kill all the words he spoke after. He had spoken a number, Mab knew later, refusing all the prayers that Mab had poured out; refusing to listen; refusing to let him see Julia.

“Just for a minute. My God! You can’t deny her to me just for a minute.”

But, it seemed, James Sorley could and did. Mab went away empty; staggering and hatless in the hot sun. By the open door of the hut by the fence he hesitated; went in blindly and flung himself on the bed where Madam had borne him, where Julia had sat. What he did there he never remembered, but it was dark when he came back to Clent.

Oliver met him in the door, having just seen the great wine-red Sorley coach, swinging opulently on its leathers, pass down the Main Road on the first stage of its journey back to town. The councillor had asked for no pledges, being, like all men, incapable of judging others by different standards than his own. He had merely removed his lame leg, the round-eyed Berry nodding sleepily in the saddle, and Julia weeping on her mother’s shoulder, from agitations. . . . Next week, thought Oliver, a little sorry, for when he had presented Berry for James’s inspection he had not thought of Mab . . . next week a fashionable engagement will be announced in all the papers.

Now he said lightly: “Our Susan is modest and considerate as ever. She postponed the adding of another female to a population desperately in need of them until this fracas was over.” Under Mab’s black stare he elucidated further: “Susan’s baby has arrived. You are an aunt this time.”

“Oh,” said Mab heavily, and slouched on into the house. Oliver stared after him with lips pursed to a delicate whistle. . . . I thought so. Yes, decidedly we shall hear of a fashionable engagement within the week, he mused.

CHAPTER FIVE

I

ALTHOUGH Madam carried a gallant air—for who would show weakness before one's family?—she was unhappy. In this world was too much food, too much drinking, too much love-making, too much politics. Breathings, babblings, odours. A world of nakedness and buckram shapes, with Susan effectually damning the new baby by calling it Charlotte Merrick after her mother, and her canaries in their new gilt pagodas refusing to sing, and Mab riding in races from Campbell Town away to Burnie, sending his horses at all the large fences with that ferocity of impatience which had been his ever since he learned Julia was to be married.

Because Madam had not wanted Julia to marry Mab she would never forgive James Sorley for denying her the luxury of saying so. But Mab was so wild, so *désolé*, and, William complained, so drunken. It was understandable. Lucy, the minx, had whetted in him the new appetites; Julia had allowed him to taste, had promised a full feast and abruptly withdrawn it. Now he knew that he was hungry. He was hankering. Had a sense of injury, of loss. In a young man love amounted to little more than that, but Madam would be glad if he would satisfy himself elsewhere and be done with it. A foolish half-animal creature, civilized man, but one must make the best of him, since there is no other.

It was almost harder to make the best of the Captain, who was full of indignation meetings and would not keep politics off the dinner-table or convict servants out of the wine. When a convict servant absconded he had turned out the country-side and actually had the police bloodhounds up from Oatlands. But nothing came of it. Nothing ever did come of anything now, thought Madam, while the Captain cut roast meat with energy and used the names of the colony's strongest men—Richard Dry, William Kermode, Anthony Fenn Kemp—like flails.

"They'll save us yet, damme," he said.

Roger Keyes, who had come up for the latest indignation meeting, hoped much from the new governor, but the Captain, his blue eyes all distress and fire, refused to hope. Life, no doubt, had moments of compensation, even of rapture. But not, he asserted, in Van Diemen's Land.

"This new man . . . Denison, do they call him? Damme, they're all Gladstone or Stanley under fancy names. Every consummate rascal of 'em trying to curry favour with his employers by screwin' a bit more out of us. Taxation and *ad valorem* duties on foreign goods, toll-gates at so much a wheel for vehicles and so much a leg for a horse."

"A little exaggeration clears the air," said Mr. Keyes, genially. "And Gladstone has now vacated the Colonial Secretaryship in favour of Earl Grey, you remember."

"They can call their cursed solemn puppies what they choose. Collins, Arthur, Gladstone, Denison . . . or Towser. All the same pack, yapping at our heels for what they can get."

"They won't get much. But I certainly think it a mistake to reduce the regiments. The convict element is so unwieldy; and though trouble among them is likely to be sporadic, one never knows what might happen if they could get together."

Susan tried a diversion, with her usual unhappy results: "Martha Sorley says Captain Berry is to relieve the commandant at Port Arthur so soon as he is married. I think Julia will find that very painful."

Mab laughed with the air of some wild thing who sees in every one a possible foe. "Why should she? She will be well shielded."

"Berry is an ardent lover," pursued Susan. "Martha says that though he might do much better, once he came into his title, he never thinks of that."

"What are the garters of a peer to the garters of the woman one loves?" said Madam, blandly, thereby silencing that *bête* Susan, who would never consent to having legs at all.

But it was all a weariness; and when a few nights later Oliver, who had come up to Bredon on the councillor's business, strolled into her boudoir for a little chat on finance she could scarcely

bear him. *Dame*, but he was devastating with his little chats, *le beau Noll*!

The Captain had long ago sworn that he would not pay the young rip's bills forever. But what can a gentleman do? asked Noll. He must live like a gentleman, and so few professions are open to him, especially when he has not been trained for them—or for anything, if it came to that. Madam agreed. A gentleman was naturally not trained for anything, and yet he must live. It seemed an impasse.

“It was you who provided the oaf Berry for Julia,” she suggested. “Has not James Sorley shown his gratitude?”

“Does he know the meaning of the word? But I must go with the ladies everywhere. That means . . .” He talked of embroidered waistcoats, perfumery, the latest in pantaloons and satin stocks, while Madam's hands tangled the silks on her tambour frame.

“You could sell jewels in town?” she asked suddenly.

“Of course.” Oliver was startled. He had not imagined it would come to that. There was no ready money left, then? “Naturally, one would cushion the business, but it is easily done,” he said.

With a gold key Madam unlocked the old cabinet set intricately with ivory figures on ebony that his childhood remembered; pulled out noiseless drawers and uncovered from layers of cotton-wool jewels that had come to her from her French ancestors. They lay there: diamonds in a sharp ripple, the calm moss-green of emeralds, opals, sapphires in dull-gold chasings, the moony gleam of pearls.

“And Collins required me to throw these from the windows,” she said, and held her hands out royally. “Take these. Jenny cannot wear emeralds. I shall dress her in opals and pearls. But these were given your grandmother by the Duc de Chaumay and must have value.”

Oliver felt this room in which Madam lived so keenly become suddenly accusing. Familiar miniatures of his ancestors deep-set in dim gold frames on the grey walls; stiff Frenchy chairs with their gilt and their hand-worked tapestry long-mellowed by years; desirable nude nymphs on crystal goblets; tall Cloisonné

vases in incomparable blues and crimsons stiff on the high white mantel between tight bunches of yellow tea-roses—coldly they accused the despoiler who could not earn his own bread.

He hated taking these things, just as he hated Madam for giving them. One should not relinquish what is one's own, and by doing it she became less just in the same degree as she made him less. Here was Madam the autocrat letting an adventurer fleece her.

By God! he almost cried. Why don't you kick me out, help me to stand on my own feet? But he did not say it. He kissed her fingers, bowed with a leg.

"*Je t'adore,*" he said gracefully. He could see himself coming to this well again, always the perfect courtier, the perfect beggar. And he rode back to town, despising himself, despising her, but realizing with an acute sense of relief that he need no longer fear the intervention of duns when accompanying Mrs. Sorley and Julia to buy those flummeries of laces, satins, and "super-fine French stays" (coloured) which the best of Sydney, Melbourne, and Hobart Town could provide.

During the days before his wedding, the blank-eyed Berry clung to Oliver, seeming to feel himself setting out rudderless on new seas. "I have never been married before," he said solemnly, sitting astride a chair and sucking his cane.

"Well, I suppose we must all come to it," said Oliver. "How about a night at the Fancy?"

He took Berry to all the fashionable haunts, allowing him to pay the bills, and they rode home hanging to a handkerchief tied in the head-stall. It was incredible for a young blood to return sober, and the horses knew their way back if they were not interfered with. Berry, having few ideas of his own, came to Oliver for entertainment, and liked best an evening in dressing-gown and smoking-cap over a fire in the rooms they were just now sharing. Oliver, who could talk of women with the best, respected Berry's present emotional condition—he really did adore Julia—and spiced his talk with the milder wine of Hobart Town twenty years back.

"Full of redcoats drunk or dry, but chiefly most amazin' drunk," he said. "And bullockies with hairy legs and chests, like

satyrs in yellow moleskins. Females went about with bodices torn and hair loose and arms round any one's neck, rolling along, singing. You can imagine the stuff they sang. Women convicts were just chucked ashore then for Chance to look after. It generally didn't have to look long."

Berry pulled black whiskers doubtfully. Nature had formed him to be the devil of a fellow, but had given up too soon. Oliver said idly :

"It's all in the records, though now we've grown chaste we forget it. Hunter's Island was an island then, with commissariat stores and a guard, and the sand-spit was covered at high tide. The women used to go along and cozen the guards to feed 'em while the tide was up. Wellington Street was all marsh, and stumps stood in Macquarie and Elizabeth. Folk used to fix placards on some of 'em. I was about six then, but I remember tryin' to spell some out while my nurse flirted with a redcoat. Such language, cursing everything up and down. Any one with a spite against the ruling administration put it on a stump. There were brothels and taverns at every corner then, with overproof brandy at eight shillings the gallon."

"The devil you say!" ejaculated Berry. He fixed Oliver with the inquiring eye of a puppy demanding more biscuits. He had not a touch of imagination, not a spark of that which in some way kept Oliver fine even in his cups, but he could savour brandy at eight shillings the gallon.

"Men could drink then," said Oliver ruminating. "Six men . . . once they drank seven bottles of sherry and forty-one of porter at a sitting. It's on record. I'll swear we have degenerated. Not even my father could come near it. The standard of intoxication is to-day exceedingly low, but even the clergy then . . ." He waved their memories an admiring salute. "It was said of some that although they had taken orders, they did not take them seriously. Eheu! We take everything seriously now. Even our debts."

"You don't," said Berry. Oliver laughed. He could not afford, anyway, to take insults seriously.

"Well hit. But I shall, some day. When I was seven a colonel in Hobart Town gave me a Spanish guinea. They called him

Bolting Bill, and it was said that he wanted to bolt with my mother. Even a little ruffian like myself saw how men admired my mother . . . had reason to. Egad ! the money I collected in those days from one and another ! ”

II

For Jenny a governess appeared about this time. A feeble, remote creature who knew as little as any grown woman could, even in those days, and who was supposed to prepare Humphrey for the Hutchens School, just opened for gentlemen's sons in Hobart Town. Humphrey and Jenny, whom Nurse had already brought up to three-syllable words in the New Testament, now embarked with Miss Bean and Peter Parley on strange seas where they encountered *The Child's Guide to Knowledge*, which told them among other things that a hiccough was a spasmodic twitching of the diaphragm, and “ Mrs. Markham ” with her obnoxious brood who fattened on dates and aphorisms.

They took their frequent whippings cheerfully, in the knowledge that even grown-ups like Aunt Ellen and Uncle Joe Merrick did not escape when Grandpa Merrick was cross ; and in between they pressed wild flowers, played with the baby, and rode out under windy skies when Mab brought in a mob of cattle from the ranges.

The pageantry of the day passed before the children's careless eyes. Ladies in wide gleaming skirts and absurd little parasols, come to pay calls in four-in-hand coaches. Government men with the sun pouring on their half-clad bodies as they sat in the stocks outside Trienna court-house. Julia Sorley and the Beverley girls riding together like a flock of bright parrots. Soldiers on the march down the Main Road, with throbbing drums and crying fifes and the long-tailed red coats swinging above the tight white trousers. A number of grave gentlemen in black frock-coats and tall hats standing against the violet of bare hills to greet the governor who was to stay that night at Bredon. Mab putting Vanity at the stock-yard fence on the day Julia was married, so that Madam ran through the frightened house with hands over her eyes, crying “ Does he, then, desire to kill me ? ”

Miss Bean took Jenny away after that, and talked about the soul. "Let us pray for the soul of your poor uncle, Jenny," said Miss Bean, and down they both dropped on their knees on the school-room floor.

III

Mab was now in a black world of his own making, and occupied with it to the exclusion of everything else. He had galloped off once to Hobart Town, haggard and sleepless, and so clamoured to see Julia that James Sorley had brought her in, half crying and half in a pet. With the easy adjustment of sixteen she had soon been taught to believe that Mab's behaviour had been nearly criminal and that Berry was the best of prospective husbands. Louisa tried to soothe her conscience—for she really loved all the Comyns—by immersing her daughter in gewgaws and then talking of extravagance. "Mab could never have kept her," she said, while James Sorley, who knew well when to be persuasive, spoke of a title and "all society at your feet, my dear."

But when Julia saw Mab's ravaged face she just ran to him, fragrant and lovely with curls, and crying, and the outraged James had much ado to part them. Mab defied him, but his heroics only did him harm. The Sorley door was shut on him; James sat down to get his breath back while the good Louisa pulled Julia out of hysterics, and Mab walked straight off to that dark part of the town where he had only seen others go before, and stayed there for two days. His devil, it seemed, was but a secondhand one, after all, with no new paths on which to lead him.

On the night Julia was married he went to Henny's Road-house. He had been shaken when Vanity fell with him at the stock-yard fence, but he had had no pity for her gallant effort. "Why didn't you kill us both, you bitch!" he said, and led her back to the stable, limping. His head ached terribly. Julia, the diminished Venus who had turned Circe, would not keep off his horizons. The reeling heavens were overfull with her soft pink fingers, her ringlets, her shining shoulders. "Circe," said Mab

with profound conviction. "And I'm the hog. I'll go and get drunk like a hog." So he went to Henny's.

Gentlemen went to Henny's when they wanted a well-bred dog or some information and nothing said. The station hands had ways about dogs and no one ever asked for pedigrees. Mab sat in a corner while a man from Tingvalley tried to sell him a lean wide-chester kangaroo hound of the undeniable Beverley strain, but he never bought it, although his purse was empty when he went home. He drank gin and rum out of a pannikin, yet could not be drunk, for he had never felt so clear-headed in all his life. He began to wonder if he could be God. It did not seem likely, but he was experiencing that intense remoteness from humanity which he had always associated with God.

Perhaps he was in hell. Yet hell had no right to look so familiar and he had seen these great blocks of red light and harsh wavering shadows before, when a similar fire of logs went blazing up the open chimney and similar dark figures wove mysterious lines over the trampled earth floor with its queer drenched look that came of twenty years' dregs of liquor, chewed quids, and other things.

Henny with her pink faded bed-jacket and rakish beaver bonnet moved with strident tones in and out of the weaving shadows. She was much more like a horse's shin-bone than a woman, but legend—encouraged by herself—told how once she had been a woman and beautiful when some long-past governor had her in Hobart Town. To this, then, must all women come. Even Julia. Even Circe. Even that red-cloaked woman now singing a song. She was coarse and vital as the earth. Stimulating. Yet to that she, too, must come. Mab sighed in profound sorrow.

To the government men Henny's was the Land of Promise. The time-expired, the probationer, the ticket-of-leaver there found a chance of adding to their meagre pay by the selling of something or some one. Perhaps an absconder at two pounds apiece, or even a bush-ranger with fifty pounds on his head and a pardon. Who among that scum, said Justice down in town, wouldn't sell his brother for a pardon? But it is not on record that many did. They sold dogs, though. And little trinkets fashioned by the more skilled among them from semi-precious

stones found in the ranges and much in demand as gifts to women. One man had constructed a foot-long model of London Bridge. That cost too much, but horny hands passed it round to be stared at by famished Cockney eyes.

Robert Snow often came to Henny's, as Hogarth would have loved to come. He sketched by the door now, his crayons beside him on the rough plank set on sunk gum poles such as made all the benches, all the tables. These squatting shadows in dark, in light, used the dialects of England, enriched by prison slang. They talked of love and women with a strange wistfulness that lent grace even to the ugliest stories. There was one Sal Newton, it appeared, who for gain had split on her own cove who had snavelled a prad. The Beak had sent him to the model prison at Port Arthur, where he would take exercise in a cage with a mask over his face and never see more than hands when his meals were given him. But Sal was a reg'lar plummy one . . . eh, a darlin' maid. Who could not but forgive the Sals of this world, the men said, and sang a song about her which one of them had composed.

On the wall there was a print of Queen Victoria in coronation robes. The men threw knives at it, betting hotly in pennies. Several had the cramped movements and straddled gait that results from the chain-and-ball and the trousers made in two pieces so that the irons do not come off at night. Crouched round the flames, they sang in tuneless chorus :

“ And now they yokes us up like hor-ses
For to plough Van Diemen's Land.”

One had ploughed that way on Maria Island. Ten to a plough, and one as was a genman had chucked hisself over the cliff inter the sea. So then they was only nine to the plough, and if they coulda got hold o' that genman they'd have given him what for. Nine to a plough in hill country, they agreed, isn't enough.

A big red Irish bullocky was chasing one of the girls round the room. They fell over some one's legs and the bullocky gave her smacking kisses as she lay. Robert Snow saw her face. So it was there, the crude thing, the lovely thing that men call

love ; and, wooing like animals, they would presently bow to the necessity of humans (*His Excellency is pleased to allow. . .*) and years hence would find them tramping the roads with their wild-haired brood.

Now Snow looked at Mab where he sat against the wall ; his beaver tipped back, his dandy legs outstretched, the chin of his amazingly good-looking face uplifted by the frilled stock. His expression was that of a drunken bitterness, a profound self-pity. Snow watched him with an immense contempt, this spoiled child who couldn't take his whipping silently. He thought :

What would happen to you, my boy, if they put you in the Dumb Cell ? If they locked you in, and locked you in behind three iron doors where you can tear your nails out, beat your brains out, scream your throat out, and no one will hear or know ? What would happen to you then ? What do you know, you baby, of the resistance of the will which you've got to provide for yourself or go mad ?

Some one lit an oil-lamp, and in the flicker of red-and-yellow light the men began to strip, betting against one another the tattooing and the lash-ridges on their bodies. Man is a vain animal, and tattooing was the fashion, as though they defied the crisscross lines on their backs by doing what they would with their chests and bellies. In the flicker, designs stood out like writing on a palimpsest : ships in full sail, flower wreaths, clasped hands in a heart, obscene detail, a whole prayer. The tattoo-marks of prisoners were filed away at Headquarters for reference and those of every absconder given weekly in the *Gazette*. "Giles Brown. Mermaid and whale on buttocks. Dragon on chest." No escape for Giles Brown if he were here.

The men were jovial, excited. They had created beauty for themselves out of unlikely things and they pored over the tattooing like artists over a picture. Their gnarled bodies glistened with sweat. The side locks hung over their ears in proud assertion of their exemption from the prison cut. The women walked round through the smoke, the heat, the stench of unwashed flesh, tracing with a finger some outline that took their fancy. Hogarth could have used this. It was beyond Robert Snow, but he worked away with fingers that trembled.

Mab stood up suddenly, every inch a young buck with his fine clothes and flushed high-bred face. Out of his brooding had come to him an instant desire to have tattooed on himself the obscene design he had just seen on a man's chest. He cried out for some one who could use the needles and they pushed forward Robert Snow. Mab blinked.

"You, is it? You'll do. Come on."

"If I begin you will have to let me finish," said Snow.

This young buck had run himself near to the end of his tether. His nerves were all of a shiver and quiver. Snow, implacable in his own strength, thought: In a few minutes I'll have him yelping like a puppy. He'll never stand the first touch of the needles.

"Damn you! D'you think I can't stand it?" cried Mab.

Snow shrugged, going to fetch his tools. Now he would make Mab take punishment for all that he had and wasted, and all that Snow had not. . . . And you don't know what I know of Ellen Merrick whose sister married your brother, he thought. . . . He had not pitied foolish Ellen, who came down of nights to meet him at the landing-stage when he swam or rowed over the river sometimes. He had no pity for any one in the world, not even himself. Life had beaten him into iron too strong for pity. If a man could not stand up to things, they would crush him; and that, it seemed, was as far as God's plan of the universe went. Like most human feelings, his hate for Mab was of obscure origin, but it was very real.

Mab had torn open his frilled shirt. He cried, "Are you ready?" and Snow saw the women gaping at skin that was whiter, softer than theirs, by far. . . . By God! I'll make you howl, he thought, setting the little fine needle into its frame.

Mab had sunk back on the bench, for his shaking legs would not hold him. The reds, the blacks, the grinning faces had all receded again. Down some distance of the years he saw Julia, lost, lovely, and forlorn. "Here," he said, "cut me 'Julia'. . . here, over my heart."

With slow and cruel deliberation Snow did; driving in the needle until the springing blood followed each stroke. But not in such ways could he make a coward of Mab, although Mab's

sweat dropped down to mix with the blood. It needed a subtler touch, and presently he gave it. "And clasped hands below?" he asked with a sneer.

Mab fell on him then with a kind of scream. Among the blood and the spilt gunpowder which Snow was rubbing in they rolled on the foul floor; alike enough in birth and age and temper to have roused the very devil between them. The men rejoiced. This was better game than they could have hoped for; but Henny went clawing for Snow's throat with her talon hands.

"Don't ee hurt Comyn!" she cried. "And theer's Port Arthur again fur ye, my man."

She had them apart at last, with Mab gasping over a bench and dabbing a cut cheek and Robert Snow putting his tools together sullenly. He had been a fool and Mab Comyn would make him pay for it. One was always having to pay for something in this world.

The fight had relieved some black pressure on Mab's brain. He looked at Snow almost kindly. He held out his hand. Since he had fought with the fellow he must, of course, treat him like a gentleman. "I began it," he said, shook the reluctant hand, and went out, having emptied his purse on the table. "Pay yourself," he added carelessly, and forgot the other before he had climbed into the saddle.

But Robert Snow went back to Clent hut, leaving the money untouched.

IV

Within the next few months the governor's new proclamation—known to many as "Denison's Damned Circular"—set the country in an uproar and shredded friendships out upon the wind, where, it seemed, that of the Captain and Councillor Sorley was already blowing. The Captain raged into the office in the New Wing where William was filing bills.

"Listen to this, will you?" He read aloud: "'First: *Do you consider it desirable that transportation of convicts to this country should cease altogether?*' Good God! I should think I did, and so does every right-feeling man! 'Second: *If you consider it*

desirable that convicts should still be transported to this country . . . what number would you consider adequate? ' There you are ! That's Sorley. I recognize his hand in that. Always steering a middle course and inviting the public to sit on the fence."

"Has he said so? Really, sir, I wouldn't be too ready to quarrel."

"Quarrel? Who wants to quarrel? I just tell a man what I think of him, and is it my fault if he resents the truth? Of course he hasn't said it is his policy; and that is his policy. Always yea-nay."

The Captain's policy was never yea-nay, and always dangerous. He took up William's remonstrance in a hurry: "No sir. You're wrong. England had no right to grant land to gentlemen if she meant the colony to continue penal once those gentlemen were established. It's a personal insult to us. Until we get an influx of free settlers, who'll put money into the country?—who'll buy and sell and manufacture with us?—how the unnamable deuce d'you imagine it's possible for us to go ahead? And we'll never get free settlers until the convict element is scotched. They're afraid, and, gad! I don't blame 'em."

"Many convicts are very decent fellows, sir. And they make good servants."

"Servants? How long d'you think they'll be content to remain servants? Have you the foggiest notion of their number in the colony now?"

"No, sir. But——"

"Of course you haven't," triumphed the Captain, who happened to have heard that morning in Trienna. "Well, I have. Our present population is about forty-four thousand free people and twenty-four thousand convicts. And about thirteen thousand out of the forty-four are time-expired, which makes the criminal quantum outnumber us. To control them in a country almost as large as Scotland—twice the size of Belgium, anyway, and that was big enough to give Napoleon his Waterloo—what troops have we? About two thousand military and constabulary all told. The thing's a farce! Why, sir, if England directs upon us the whole of her convict importations, as she is always

threatening to do, are you so utterly imbecile that you can't see what will happen? They'll take charge. One bloody day we'll all be murdered in our beds and our women outraged. Don't talk to me!"

"But," said William, continuing to talk, "granted that the country would be better without them, I can still see that it might not be politic to get rid of them all at once."

"If you had a boil on your neck, wouldn't you consider it politic to get rid of that all at once? You never could argue, Bill. No, I've put my last penny into the country, and it's going bankrupt. I hear that the Government will soon be flying paper kites, and even you must see what that means. With no credit and no specie to foot our bills, we're done. Finished."

He felt his hand shake as he took the circular out to the veranda, crushed it, and dropped into one of his brown barrels. He felt his eyelids twitching as he looked through the glass on his hardly won paddocks where his sheep fed. Finished, by God! He was finished, he who had given to England his young manhood and to England's colony the young manhood of his sons. And she was repudiating the gift. This kind of thing (he sat on the edge of a barrel, his little legs just touching the floor) made a man old. The smart of this was worse than any he'd felt when the blacks speared whole teams of his bullocks, when bush-rangers carried off his sheep and horses and threatened his life, when privations and bad harvests and scab in the sheep and other damnations of colonization had dogged him. Those were understandable. But this, damme! this . . . They must get together, that was it. The country must get together. He would call a meeting at Trienna to-morrow and Mab should ride round the country at once. He'd give old Sorley some medicine to swallow!

Oliver, of course, read all about it in the local Trienna paper (a consumptive young Oxonian with a need for self-expression ground it out on a hand-press for nearly six months before Governor Denison squashed them both). The paper extolled the Captain's gallant stand against tyranny, hinted that "one Major——, to give him a title which honours him far beyond his merits," was indulging in personal rancours which would presently deluge the country in blood; became plaintive over

exquisite young females and gallant but discarded lovers, became portentous in its invitations to "a gentleman who shall be nameless" to bring "one of his so-called skilful and reasoned speeches on the subject of Transportation" to Trienna Town Hall and see what would happen to it. Oliver (but one must never let men see themselves for the puppets they were) for long prevented Sorley from answering the challenge. But answer it at last he would, the old fool, and Oliver (just by the skin of his teeth) got him packed off home in Henry's charge as the Captain leapt upon the platform. "Tell him he has pulverized the opposition. It's all over, bar shouting," he whispered. Henry nodded (he never wanted open warfare, either) and took the tandem through the grazing cows on Comyn Street at a gallop, while Oliver settled down in a back seat, supporting his chin with the gold knob of his stick and wondering what the deuce would be the outcome.

The hall was full of station-owners (mostly lazy-minded sporting fellows very much with the Captain) and tradesmen and cockatoo-farmers rather afraid to lift their voices as yet. The Captain, chipper as a tomtit, was bawling:

"Gentlemen, I do not intend to bore you more than you have been already bored, although I may regret that the limits of courtesy have been so far overstepped. I wish to say that I will fight for Cessation while breath is in my body. No friend of Transportation is any longer a friend of mine; and regarding the speech which we have just been forced to listen to, I think the last word is with the immortal *Punch*, which has just summed up the situation with:

'Then shout for the troupe of sublime Thimble-rigs.
Hurrah for the jolly old Downing Street pack!'"

Good God, thought Oliver (the old chap had delivered it like a slogan), the fat was in the fire right enough now. And here was everyone laughing, streaming out into the sunlight, patting the Captain on the back; the young Fremps, sons of the blacksmith, skylarking, shouting, 'Hurrah!' Going back to their bellows with more windy notions. Of course their class wanted

Cessation, though it would put prices up. The Captain was flinging a shilling to the grinning vagabond in the stocks by that little stone box Trienna police station.

"See him, Lascelles?" cried the Captain. "Keepin' the place warm for our friend, eh?"

Lascelles of Leigh, a very nice holding twenty miles down-river, was a comfortable old gentleman who let anyone do his thinking for him. You could see him ruminating, puzzled. He grunted, "Why . . . why, thought Sorley made a dashed good speech, didn't he?"

"Claptrap! claptrap!" (Heavens! would nothing teach his parent to hold his tongue? What was he saying?) Sorley could only line his pockets by keeping in with officialdom . . . knew which side his bread was buttered. Old Merrick, rolling up under the line of gums for his horse, got hold of that, looked pleased, "Ur . . . 'pon my soul . . . ur, bloody near libel that, ain't it?" he wheezed. And now he would drive about the country everywhere with his fat pony and gig, asking everyone if they didn't agree with him. "Are you ready to come home now, Father? You made 'em laugh, didn't you?" . . . "*Ride si sapis*," said the Captain, climbing into the dogcart.

Back in town, Oliver (with Mrs. Sorley's help) repressed that copy of *The Trienna Clarion* describing the meeting. Better temper the wind to the shorn lamb (for certainly the country appeared to be plumping strong for Cessation (you could taste it in the air), and Oliver, with Madam's earrings barely paying his gambling debts and a salary that did not pay for his clothes (certainly it was never asked to), had no mind to leave old Sorley. When one seasons one's meat too early, it is the deuce and all to have to return to plain fare; and now the battle was joined in Council and Governor Denison taking firm hold on a hundred thorny questions (a great fighter, this hard-faced Denison), surely there would be pickings for Oliver, even legitimate pickings. Few, he felt, could turn a neater compliment or *pas* in the dance than himself. And if many young ladies treasured in velvet-bound albums his elegant verses and acrostics, it was a fact that he never treasured one of the flowers, glossy curls, poems, and other bibelots which came his way. No

marriage for him, though Berry, grimacing with sentiment, urged him all the time.

Berry, who with that foreign air which a moustache gave among black whiskers and loose black locks was not nearly such a devil as he looked, spent whole nights smoking cheroots with Oliver. Pleasurable emotions, those experienced on the verge of matrimony, apparently. Oliver, lounging at the open summer window, hearing a woman singing on the pavement below, let him talk himself out. Rich in all but intellect, this Berry. A useful friend.

“ I will wear no red sarafan,
So, mother, cease your sewing,”

sang the woman, with a vile twang. Julia would presently wear bridal satin, and lovely she'd look in it. Berry said in his soft hesitating voice :

“ All the foolishness . . . that's done with. Candles, boot-jacks, and warming-pans . . . and presently pap-spoons and syrup of squills.” He grinned ; looked idiotic. “ That's the way your old friend's headed, Noll, and I swear I don't care. She's as sweet, pretty a creature as ever was.”

She is. But not the stuff to hold you, my buck. Oliver fancied himself saying it, fancied Berry's angry dismay. This youthful Julia cozened and flattered and excited by fine clothes ; this gossamer Julia, pliant and pretty and palpitatingly nervous about the future . . . Lord, what a mess they'd make of it ! But since marriage is the refuge of the poor and the escape of the rich and Love all my eye and Betty Martin, Julia might get some fun out of it, Oliver thought, reasonably. Berry, rising to go to his bedroom, said sheepishly :

“ 'Pon my soul, I wish I'd been a better fellow, Noll.” Poor devil. And Julia . . . Julia blushing pink under her pink Pamela bonnet . . .

CHAPTER SIX

I

EVEN when a country declares itself on the verge of ruin, even when a young man calls moon and stars to witness that his heart is broken, things somehow continue to happen in steady revolution of days and months, and climaxes refuse to occur.

The Captain suffered a slight stroke on hearing of Governor Denison's advice to England that the colony was in favour of extended Transportation—with qualifications. ("That miscreant Jim Sorley is at the bottom of this.") Susan added Fanny to the Clent nursery and prepared to add others. Humphrey went to the Hutchens School, where he wore long trousers and short tight jackets and caps with a loose peak that sometimes slid over the ear; and Miss Bean still moved like a boneless ghost about passages, instructing Jenny in religion and producing marvellous pictures by moving white paper above the smoke of a tallow dip. The pictures, said Miss Bean, who in later days would have been called psychic, had to make themselves. "You and I, Jenny, are only *used*."

"Do you think we might get a picture of God or even Satan some day?" asked Jenny, glowing. But Miss Dean didn't like being asked for opinions, rarely having any, and went on striking those thick yellow-headed matches which each settler made in his own house and which took so long to light that they were called wait-awhiles.

Collins's Gang retreated with a few rear actions to the ranges, whence some of the weaker spirits presently crept down and gave themselves up. But Collins and Wingy hung on, as Robert Snow was hanging on, although he had not got as much from Ellen as he hoped. Ellen, submerged as she was in sentiment, had still some morals. She would not bring Snow into that grim fortress of Lovely Corners where Jasper Merrick kept his gold. "Never trusted banks," he would grunt. "But there's no bush-ranger in the world can get into my house." She would not steal

for him, herself. "How gladly and thankfully would I help you all!" she cried. "And the money belongs to all you who have worked without pay for so long. But I owe a duty to dear Papa, my Snow. I am his daughter."

Ellen talked always like the *Keepsake* and *Ladies' Journal* which were her only reading. Her diction gave her in the man's eyes an unreal delicate charm, and he still loved her with almost a fierce gratitude. This foolish creature could put out her hand and lift him momentarily into heaven. And standing so, her broad face upturned in the moonlight, he could see her as wife, as mother, as some soft peaceful thing like a good bed for a man to come home to of nights. But between that dream and the reality stood, as he knew well enough, every free settler in the country. . . . If William Comyn knew, he thought, kissing her . . . If young Mab knew . . . And he kissed her again.

His other dream obsessed his days and nights. The country, with all the gentlemen at loggerheads over Transportation and the Governor juggling with them both, was ripe for counter-revolution. He believed that with money he could do it. A sudden uprising: turn on the prison-guards everywhere; combine; march on Hobart Town and startle the Governor into compromise. . . . We don't want much, he thought. We only want to live and work like men instead of animals. God! That's all we want; and it could be done.

He believed that it could be done. With money. But how to get money from Ellen, who owed her first duty to dear Papa? . . . If I were her husband she'd owe it me, he thought. . . . And then he thought it again. Why not? Plenty of unfrocked priests along the Main Road, and Henny and her women would tire the bride. The ugliness of his thinking shamed him, and his cruelty to her shamed him. But he had given her the love and life she craved, and what consideration did he owe to any of her class?

"Ellen, will you marry me? Could you bring yourself to it?"

She wound her arms round him in sudden ecstasy. "Oh, my Snow! I have been praying for this moment. But a lady cannot suggest the most secret of her heart's desires," she said.

II

It is the habit of warm and overwrought natures to oscillate violently for a time and then come more or less to a standstill. Mab presently discovered that by trumpeting his griefs to an amused world he was falling in his own estimation—he never cared enough about the opinions of others—and went back to work with William.

There was good medicine in galloping after cattle on the ranges, with the brown bracken crackling like a fire underfoot and the long rocky gullies echoing like thunder to the whip-cracks. Good medicine in sweating from dawn till dark at crutching and drafting in the sheep-yards. A sick mare absorbed him for three days, for he had a genius with horses, and he brought in two young ones to school for the winter steeplechases. The Captain, playing backgammon with William or reading aloud from the yellow-back paper volumes of Mr. Dickens in the evenings, was more than usually quiet, and Madam sang often to her harp the little rakish French songs that would make Mab go over and laugh with her comradely, and kiss her still smooth forehead between the ringlets. He played with Jenny sometimes and with his dogs often, and was generally experiencing one of those grateful stretches of serenity which are inevitable after great stress, when Julia Berry came back to Bredon with her baby for the hot weather.

Julia had left him a distracted boy. She found him a personable man and, having by now her own notion of the equality of the sexes, went at once to subjugating him again. Mab, a little bitter, stood off with a doubtful eye, and Julia sent a pretty pink note, asking him over to Bredon.

“To-morrow we are making a picnic for all the children,” she wrote. “Bring Jenny, please, Mab. I am afraid Charlotte is too young, but I am taking Almeric. Come and help him to see the bush and hills for the first time.”

Reading, Mab hesitated. Then dropped the note at Madam’s elbow and went on plaiting a stock-whip lash. The thin well-soaked strips of silk twitched in his long pliant hands. Madam

said crisply : “ *Eh, bien !* This Julia ! And are you still a fool there, my son ? ”

“ I don’t know,” muttered Mab. He was wishing he did.

“ *Mon fils,*” said Madam, suddenly tender, “ do not mistake me. I am no nun. There were the wars, and I learned what men are like. And there has been this colonial life, and I have learned what women are like. There are few of us keep Lent but with our eyes on the feast to follow.”

“ There’s no feast for me. That’s done,” said Mab, suddenly very young and bitter.

“ With Julia I doubt if there will be Lent, either. I have heard that she must have a man at her heels. But, *mon Dieu*, you are not to be that man ! ” cried Madam, sitting up. “ You know my wish for you, Mabelle. I have some influence and I can procure more. I would see you, my son, bring up our name to power in this new land. Your father could not and Noll will not. You could, Mab . . . if you would.” She stretched her hand to him, and her bright bird-eyes dimmed. “ You will not waste yourself again, my son ? ”

Mab took the end of the lash in his strong white teeth and began to plait. He was thinking : I don’t know. . . . He was thinking that he had not known how the whole of him would tingle again at the thought of Julia. Madam watched him, and then he got up and kissed her and went out. Vaguely that shadowy experience out of the past which men call instinct was telling him that the choice would not lie with him, and perhaps not with Julia.

Possibly the picnic day was the hottest of a hot summer. Julia, in white and looking frail still, sat under a great green umbrella in the bullock-dray with her baby in a basket at her feet. She looked as remote there in the green shadow as a mermaid ; as lovely and as cool. Martha Sorley was on straw in the dray-bottom, tatting lace. Her capable hands were never idle, but Julia’s small gloved ones lay in her lap. Mab walked with the bullocky as the four red-and-white bullocks heaved up the rough hillside, crushing the scented heather ; and the children hummed about like bees, darting on the honeysuckle blooms, the long white tea-tree flower wreaths, and bringing armfuls of ferns and clematis to the dray.

"Snakes, children. Do look out for snakes," said Martha, tating. But Julia did not speak at all. Sometimes she sang small soft catches to her child. Mab, tramping in the shimmering heat, thought of the journey to Jerusalem and did not feel profane. When they stopped on lush grass where tall fern trees stood by a creek he reached his hands to help her out. But she put her baby into them, still silent, and stood there, looking down. For perhaps half a minute they looked at each other while Martha bustled about and the children splashed and shouted and the man unyoked the bullocks. They did not hear all that. They were momentarily in supreme oblivion of everything but themselves.

Then Mab turned away and laid the baby in the basket, and Julia came fluttering down and laughed a great deal and chattered. But both knew what had been done, and Mab went about building the fire, with a strange numb sensation that neither his hands, feet, nor anything else were fully under control.

Up the slope behind, the bullocks were hobbled and stood chewing their cud and flicking off the flies with their long tails. The driver got out bread, cheese, and a clasp-knife and flung himself on his stomach on the warm heather. The children, leaping and shouting like fauns, brought water in a dripping billy. Martha did everything at the right moment and Julia nothing. Mab, keeping on the lee side of the flames, adjusted the billy on the stick tripod and dropped in the little muslin bags of tea. The fire was pale in the strong light and the billy shone like silver. There were bannocks and scones and chicken sandwiches and several kinds of cakes.

"I think," said Julia, sipping delicately from a pannikin, "that billy tea is the nicest in the world."

"I must say," said Martha, brushing off ants, "that I prefer a table. Put the lid on that tin, Mab, or they'll have it all."

Mab obeyed lazily. He was drugged yet. What one preferred or did not prefer could not matter. The thing happened, and there you were.

Jenny, always the vagrant, went tree-climbing with the two elder Sorleys. Little Maria Beverley, always in trouble with her long pantalets which fastened above the knee and again at the ankle, went to sleep with her head in Martha's lap, and presently

Mab and Julia were walking by the brown creek under the cool shade of the bush. The bush smelt harsh and clean and hot ; full of strong aromatic savours that quickened the blood while clouding the brain. Julia's hand hung by her side. Mab took it, and they went on together into the shadows.

There was a new acrid tang in the air presently, and Mab's bushman senses recognized it before his brain did. Now in the far distance Martha was shrieking : "*Fire ! Fire !*" and that unlocked them from their spell as though she touched a spring.

Julia picked up her skirts and fled over the slippery gum leaves and the close green moss. "My baby ! My baby !" she gasped, and Mab, running with long strides ahead, felt his heart in his throat, his stomach weak with fear. A bush fire in dry weather may run fifty miles before the wind turns it to run as far in another direction, licking up flocks, homesteads, and grass-land as it goes. The roar of this one met them before they saw the red flare through the scrub. . . . My fault, thought Mab, helplessly. . . . I must have left some ashes burning.

It was little Mark Sorley who had blown on the camp-fire and carried a smouldering twig into the bracken. He was howling now, his head in his mother's skirts where she stood holding Maria. And all about her the bracken spouted and popped like small guns, sassafras curled and burst into blaze, long tongues of flame raced up the tall gum trees and tossed out their dry leaves in red banners. Fire began to run both ways, and Martha cried : "Adam ! Kay ! Jenny ! Oh . . . where are the children ?"

On the slope the bullocks suddenly stampeded, clashing their yoked heads together, stumbling in the hobbles. Their driver ran after them and a thick down-rush of smoke hid them all. But far off those by the creek heard the frenzied bellowing.

Julia snatched her wailing baby from the basket as Mab got an arm round her and ran her into the creek. "Keep on wading till it deepens and then crouch down. Pull your skirts over your head," he said and went back to Martha. She would have dashed into the flames, calling on her children, and he had to struggle with her, for she was a big woman and half mad. "Think of Mark," he said sternly. "Do you want to lose him, too ?" But he was thinking of Julia half seen through the smoke, on her knees

in the water, her drenched skirts over her yellow head. Taking up Mark, he plunged into the creek ; and Martha, her eyebrows scorched off, her face blackened, tottered after with little Maria. " Adam ! Kay ! " she repeated, in her anguish forgetting Jenny. And Mab could only think of Julia, wet and soft and strangely brave in his arms as he helped her forward over the stony bottom.

The fire was in the tops like a scarlet sky. The tall trees, welcoming it with whistles and shrill screamings, flung it on, and it leapt through the tinder-dryness too fast to notice the scrub below. Then lit branches came spiraling down ; a small tree crashed, blazing ; the long leaves of tree-ferns stood outlined in flames and then collapsed in a glow of clear heat ; jets of flame hissed out of tall trunks burning downward. Distance came suddenly where had been bush ; a quivering transparent distance of purest red.

Mab got them all round the elbow of the creek, which was here surprisingly deep. Something blocking it below, thank God, he thought, as they huddled down, keeping wet the coats and shawls over their heads. Martha had stopped crying on her children. She stared with eyes as blank as those of the bush animals now crowding about them. A kangaroo squatted at her elbow, its delicate paws lifted as though it prayed, unknowing that its joey was drowning in the pouch. A flock of galahs came shrieking by, falling in glowing bunches of burned feathers on the the water. White cockatoos with their sulphur crests up fought the flames with beak and claw and were borne away on the fiery torrent. A platypus paddled by, raised its strange head with duck bill and black bright eyes at the strangers and dived noiselessly under the bank. A little native bear asleep in a tree crotch, fell into the hot ash, crying like a child.

But now that mad dragon of a fire had galloped by, and although its tail of sparks blazed still and the breath of its mouth was hot like hell, the worst was over for the present. Mab, who until now had thought only of Julia, thought : If the fire turns at the paddocks below, Clent and Bredon may escape yet. But there'll be a big loss of sheep and cattle in the hills.

Then his eyes went back to Julia, meeting hers as though this

torment shared had somehow welded them into one. He stooped his head with its smoke-blackened skin and seared features and their lips met. To both of them it was the first real kiss they had ever given; for not until now had they been quite man and woman. Youth left them. Mab knew later, with that kiss.

Round the corner of smouldering chaos they found the dam which had deepened the creek and saved them. Burnt mountains of flesh and scorched hair that had been the hobbled bullocks that had fallen and drowned and burned as they lay. But the bullocky no one ever saw again.

The fire had turned at the paddocks and gone beaconing with wild witches' arms along the range. The paddocks were stubble; but Martha and Julia passed them in silence with their shoes burned off their feet by the hot ash. Fainting and megrims were the fashion when all went well, but no pioneer woman gave way in times of stress.

Settlers all along the river were already busy: ploughing wide headlands across their land to protect their homes; rounding up sheep and cattle, organizing their neighbours to fight the fire. But when Mab, riding like a demon, went round collecting a search party, all the best horses and bushmen turned out with that intense generosity of pity which belongs only to those who understand.

"If they had the sense . . . and the time . . . to get to the creek, they may be all right," said Mab, unwashed and haggard, with his clothes half gone to tinder on his tired body. "Of course all the undergrowth will be burning yet."

Last year, when hunting a man, he had found the tiny burned bones of a long-lost child among new-sprung grass in a hollow. Riding out now with the search party, he thought of little Jenny's bones, her delicate air so like Madam's, all the compact sweetness of her. . . . My little dear maid, he thought and found his lip tremble. . . . Yet I couldn't have left Julia, he thought fiercely. . . . Julia, brave and wan in the creek among the dead birds, with that red blossom of hell flowering above her . . . his heart contracted. Never, it seemed, could he leave Julia again.

It was Robert Snow who found the children at the next mid-day. His "Coo-ee," had brought a feeble answer; but they were

very proud and lively by the creek, where, it appeared, Adam had caught a little fish.

“And we cooked it in the ash, but it was not very nice,” cried Jenny as Robert Snow suddenly snatched her up and hugged her. Warmly she flung her arms round his neck and kissed back, and then was seized by all the apprehensions inevitable to her training. Did anybody ever kiss ticket-of-leavers? It seemed a shocking ungenteeled thing to do; but possibly verbal thanks were just as unpermissible, and how should a very hungry and tired and dirty little girl express herself? She threw herself on her own private standards as she was to do so often through her life and kissed him again. “I’ll ask Grandpapa to give you your freedom,” she said.

At Clent, Madam had gone to her own rooms and locked the door, although Celeste beat on it hopefully at every meal-hour. She sat by the window, watching the men under William ploughing great swaths in the grazing land to protect wool-sheds, barns and stables, and cutting away the patches of sheltering scrub which might carry the fire to the individual trees where the sheep found shade from the sun. All through the night she sat there; and although the fire did not come down but burned itself out in the wet gullies higher up the ranges, Jenny did not come either. And when she came it was Madam who looked by far the more exhausted of the two.

III

Julia had one wild interview with Mab, and then she left Bredon. There could be no half-measures between them now, but Mab did not follow her to town. He startled William by working early and late at Clent, sweating to exorcise the devil who seemed to grow with keeping, while Madam watched and thought: James Sorley would have destroyed me. Is it for his daughter to destroy my son?

Jenny was at this time going through a period of religious fervour conducted by Miss Bean; for her elders, being quite assured that the plastic mind is incapable of taking impressions until it ceases to become very plastic, took little interest in her,

and Miss Bean, unwholesome, sentimental, neither fish nor fowl in that great house, did her earnest best to make Jenny a prude. It was she led the prayers for "your poor Uncle Mab" every night; and Jenny followed rapturously, although she didn't understand what it was all about and could get little from Miss Bean but upturned eyes and groans. But it was Jenny's own idea to advance her new and glorious belief to Mab one noonday when he was fitting a new handle into a pitchfork.

"Uncle Mab, don't you think if you prayed more you'd be happier? Prayer is the heart's proper food, and you do often look so hungry."

Mab dropped his screwdriver and stared at her in the light from the dusty window as though he had not seen her for a long while. Indeed, at this time no one was seeing the real Jenny. She had shot up out of her round babyhood, although small and vivid still. But her innocent face was almost smug with her unnatural desire to better the world.

"Miss Bean told me to tell you this hymn, Uncle Mab. She says it helps her when she finds the world very evil."

In the shadowy workshop she looked a nymph, an elf. Her voice, though schooled to a nasal reverence, still had the quality of light. She intoned solemnly:

"Sleeping on the brink of sin,
Tophet gaped to take us in.
Mercy to our rescue flew,
Broke the snare and brought us through.

"Here as in a lion's den
Undevoured we still remain.
Pass secure the wat'ry flood
Leaning on the arm of God."

Jenny, always the mime, clasped her hands exactly as Miss Bean did. "How beautiful, dear Uncle Mab, to think we may remain undevoured——"

"You unspeakable little prig!" said Mab, finding his voice at last. "Get out of this!"

Then he went after her with long strides as she fled in a shock of tears, caught her by the high wall where the lilacs grew, and

found their bloom all mixed with her wet cheeks as he kissed her. "It's not you I'm angry with, dear maid. It's the teaching. Kiss me, darling."

Jenny kissed him freely. She could never be hard with those she loved. But she ran back to Miss Bean and they prayed together: the ardent glowing Jenny, expecting the concrete descent of fruition from those tall blue-and-white heavens, and the nursery-governess, pallid as a celery stick and weakly in love with Mab, who would not have recognized her if he had seen her detached from her surroundings.

With a desire to detach her from them as speedily as possible, Mab went that evening to Madam's room, where she sat writing at her *escritoire* with the Sèvres-china inlay. She smiled a little sadly, flicking a paper toward him with the feather of her pen. "All that . . . *c'est de la peau, seulement*. She has but now come to an age when that woman can harm her. And so . . . read, then."

Mab became assured in very small letters that Miss Martin's Establishment for Young Ladies in Hobart Town supplied in addition to Board and Tuition (fifty guineas) and numerous Extras at varied prices a coach in the backyard where the said Young Ladies might learn to ascend and descend gracefully *en crinoline*, and also a warming-pan warranted to heat beds every night.

"Undoubtedly the extras make an expense," explained Madam trying hard to be businesslike and succeeding about as well as Jenny herself. "It may not be necessary for her to have them all. I will teach her French and the harp in the holidays. And if William finds himself unable to afford *quelque chose*, I go to arrange it. I would strip this." She made a large gesture and in the candle-light she and her room seemed all rare dim jewels together: "I would strip myself so that *la petite* should advance. She must carry the torch, our little Jenny, since my sons find it too heavy."

Mab, not looking at her, muttered rebelliously, "You do expect so much from everyone, you know, *maman*."

"*Eh, bien*," said Madam, dauntlessly. "I shall continue to expect." She took up her pen. "And who knows but that my

expectations may at length bring something to pass ? But you, *mon cher* . . . at present you are no more than *un mouton qui reve*."

IV

If she had allowed it, life would have been *triste* for Madam just now. But assuredly the gods must be with her, and if one believes in them as little as might be, that was not their affair. Let them do their part as she would do hers, thought Madam, who was always ready for a bargain. If the gods don't bargain . . . my faith, but they don't understand the joys of life !

The Captain would not bargain with anyone. He fought Transportation with a luxury of words such as might have imprisoned him if they had got into print. He annexed his favourite *Punch's* particular patter of the 'forties and quoted it up and down the country until everyone sang it. Riding stockmen in red shirts and hats of kangaroo-skin, beggars crouched from the rain in some hollow tree, jovial sheep-owners driving to a township for the markets . . . they were all at it.

" Wheel about and turn about,
And do jes' so.
Ebery time I turn about
I jump Jim Crow."

" And that, gentlemen," the Captain would shout continually from platforms, " that, *per omnium diabolorum potentiam*, is the policy of England and her colonial minions on the subject of Transportation."

He called the amazing decisions and indecisions of Government on an amazingly difficult problem " the Jim Crow somersault," and he never found anything laughable in it. Meanwhile Earl Grey, meeting the heads of the Van Diemen's Land churches in London, approached this problem from the moral side and announced that Transportation must cease. Then the colony, after rebelliously suffering differential duties which struck a shrewd blow at home exports, and resisting the dog tax with open warfare, began to tuck in its shirt and offer thanksgivings at the very hour

when someone else approached Earl Grey from the social side and roused him to an ultimatum that Transportation must continue. In the middle of the impasse which arose, Denison and his councillors, after plumping freely for Transportation, discovered that the entire loss of emigration with its consequent paralysis of industries would harm the country more deeply than could be covered by English grants for convict establishment, and said so.

And after that, Councillors Sorley and others in their progress down Macquarie Street to the Legislative Chambers were likely to be accompanied by small dirty boys somersaulting to the tune of :

“ Wheel about and turn about.”

James Sorley traced the beginning of all this to the Captain, and did not forget it when the time came. But at present he was too busy over the next election of councillors (there being as yet no parliament) and was perhaps a little nervous when he carried the war to the Captain's own stronghold of Trienna. Conrad Beverley of Tingvalley drove his yellow four-in-hand at a gallop down the grassy Main Street, yellow streamers and rosettes flying everywhere and all Tingvalley's towers gone mad with yellow flags. But Councillor Sorley in a sober coach of rifle-green, with a green coachman handling the high-stepping bays as one, snatched the victory from the great Viking somehow, although the deciding handful of votes was spiritedly contested with showers of dead cats, rotten eggs, and vegetables, and the two pairs of stocks by the police station were filled for days after.

It was all open voting then, with the hustings very merry ; and Jenny, seeing from Tingvalley balconies her first free fight, almost fell through the railings in her joy. Down among the wagoners with their long whips, harvesters with new straw bands (they called them bo-yangs) below the knee, hairy shepherds hauling on their dogs, the Captain had climbed on an empty whisky-case to carry on his war to the last minute.

“ *Oh, la, la ! Mon vieux,*” murmured Madam, tenderly

mocking. The Captain's rosy face between white top-hat and gill-collar was turning purple. One plump hand was tacked beneath his cutaway coat at his plump waist and the other clenched to hammer his periods home.

"And again I ask of you," he shouted, "will you return to office the vacillating tool of a nincompoop ministry which is forever landing the settler in deeper morasses, until he has not a leg to stand on unless he gets it into the pocket of officialdom——"

Here he was struck in the waistcoat with an egg which, oratorically considered, might have been the message of a friend; and Mab and William got away through the crowd, still protesting and very lively. On the balcony Mrs. Beverley, all importance and indecision, distributed handkerchief-wavings, finger-kissings, and frowns, while the young ladies palpitated and wished that Mab would come and tell them how the day was going. But Mab, thought Madam with a small sigh, the Mab of to-day with his haunted eyes and his manner of going through life like one who follows a quest he can see no end to, this Mab was not to be halted by a Beverley. Another spell was on him. And as to the business he and Julia had with each other, Madam could only feel that if *le bon Dieu* knew of it he was not quite the gentleman she had always believed him to be.

Down in the street Mab and William got the Captain into the Gentleman's Arms, where he jovially drank confusion to his enemies. But all the truculency went out of him when election results were posted, and he turned with great solemnity to his sons. "Hell's let loose. Hell's let loose, and may the Lord have mercy on our souls. Boys, come home and have another drink."

"In fact, he persists in seeing the worst of it," complained William to Susan, who said, "Yes, dear," and continued putting tucks in a new frock for little Charlotte. She would not have considered herself a good mother if she had not tucked the feminine part of her family as far up and as far down as she could, and in the holidays she regarded Humphrey's short long trousers regretfully. A few tucks to be let down at need . . .

Henry Sorley, refusing to break a friendship begun in petticoats, rode over to Clent with a flag of truce, but the Captain

would not see him. "All tarred with the same brush," he said, and William went out anxiously to Henry. Henry tried to smooth it over.

"My father is doing as he thinks right, William. His party will continue representation to the Queen and the English Parliament. It will continue to advance the proviso that, under certain circumstances, the colony might do better with Cessation. Bishop Nixon—an exceedingly sound man, although I believe he has not yet been granted his mandate—will make representations——"

"We have had our fill of representations, Henry. We want results."

"We shall have them, I do not doubt. It is only necessary to hold on. Ah . . ." He retreated shyly under the many capes of his overcoat; got out: "I am well aware that many of the landowners . . . We are such old friends, Bill . . . A little temporary accommodation, perhaps . . ."

William had just sold to old Merrick the Hereford bull which he had hoped to keep for breeding, and the money had gone for the Sorley mortgage. He feared that Henry knew, and became agitated in the blue twilight. "Not at all . . . Everything in excellent condition. I take it very kind of you, Henry. But . . . not at all."

v

Mrs. Merrick's command, so folded and wafered and stamped in purple wax sealed with a thimble as to send Susan into a panic, had been received at Clent. Since Jenny was going to school next week, she must first say good-bye to her maternal grandmother, whom she was not likely to meet again this side Eternity. Nor t'other side, neither, unless Jenny became a better miss than ever she had been yet.

"*Effectivement!*" cried Madam, flipping her fingers. "It is well that the boat is broken or I would have taken Jenny myself, and then we might have heard something."

But the boat was broken, and so Mab took Jenny by the bridge ten miles off at Sassafra Ponds; driving in the tall gig with the

hood and buttoned apron, through Trienna, where the skittish young tandem nearly bolted at Jauncer the bellman in his long red coat, and Maria waved from Tingvalley balcony as they spun by on the Main Road.

Jenny was so silent that Mab kept looking at her. Such a slim, fresh, self-contained small thing was Jenny, with her pointed chin and big eyes tied into the great grey beaver bonnet, and her straight delicate little body in its broad green tippet rising above the shiny black of the apron. Her hands, in white cotton gloves three sizes too large, clutched and unclutched as her thoughts eddied on bright wings. Sometimes she sang scraps of songs, simple as daisies. Sometimes she laughed the low husky laughter which was later to trouble men. She was so very special, so very much Jenny, and for the first time Mab realized that with a kind of fear. Jenny was a darling, and life had such a monstrous horrid way of doing unkind things to darlings.

“Jenny!” he said. But when she looked up, wondering, he had nothing to add except, “I love you,” which was what other men would tell her one day and no sort of warning at all.

“And I love you,” said Jenny, always warmly responsive, and went back to her little songs.

Nature still held her own, the mysterious lady, in this bushland where fat iguanas with moveless eyes basked by the tracks and the green-and-gold beetles ladies sewed on their gauzy scarfs made love in the tall bronze bracken, myriads of them dazzling the eyes. There were rough descents heady with the sharp bush tang where bright mountain parrots sheered over in noisy flocks, and unsteady bridges of round gum poles where the ponies passed snorting above deep ragged gullies and streams dank with fern. And now they climbed out of the sudden chill through heavy timber of celery-top pine and thin-leaved peppermint to meet again the sunshine and the acrid odour of a late bush-burn on the opposite hill.

Bush-burns were too potent for Mab. They made him giddy with aching for Julia, now at Port Arthur with her husband. He thought with passion: It is all wrong . . . wrong. What are we going to do? What are we going to *do*?

“There’s a porcupine,” said Jenny, pointing. “We saw one that

night in the creek, Uncle Mab. It was squatted down with its little head moving, and it let me stroke it. I nearly stroked a blue wren, too, and I said that when robins and blue wrens died I thought they turned into red geraniums and blue salvias. Kay believed, but Adam didn't."

"Did you believe?" asked Mab, marvelling at this small Jenny, hungry, bedless, and in danger, holding her man-court like that.

"Well," said Jenny, musing, "it's so easy to believe what you want to believe, isn't it?"

"Too easy," said the man who was trying not to believe that love has the right to wreck homes when it sounds its clarion for two hearts.

On a long stretch of fallen timber black cockatoos were at work, shredding out the bark to a tawny tangle in search of the fat grubs. They cursed, disturbed at their feast, and rose with slow dark flappings like witches. Lovely Corners, when Mab drew up at it, might have been the home of witches, with its tall barren walls and its vegetable garden right up to the bleak black face of the door. To Jasper Merrick the graces of life were so many snares of the devil; and so, Mab thought, he must approve of Ellen welcoming them in with her nervous angularities like a great grasshopper loaded with chains.

He escaped Ellen until evening, when he went out to smoke a pipe in the stables. Joe had gone after the cows—old Merrick imposed indignities on his family through some obscure instinct of defeated pride in himself—and Mab was wondering why Lovely Corners kept such crocks when good horses were being bred all over the country, when Ellen came to the bin for poultry-corn. She dropped the crib instantly, crying: "Mab, I've been looking for you. You must help me. Some one has got to help me."

She looked a distraught creature in the warm ammonia-scented twilight. Her big arms waved grotesquely above the clumsy distension of her skirt. Her large face was thinner and its bright red colour gone, and between the pale rolled wedges of hair her pale eyes were frightened. "Mab, you must help me. I don't know what to do."

So here was another who didn't know, but surely not from the same cause. Hysteria was present in Ellen, and after a full

day at Lovely Corners Mab found that natural enough. In this house the worst of early Victorian methods and furnishings had impaled themselves upon the worst of colonial; and in the midst of its dreary routine, tightly protected by red flock wall-papers, red rep curtains, and green baize doors from any contact with life, sat that terrible old woman, Mrs. Merrick, using her daughter as her footstool.

"I'm sorry," said Mab, sympathetic but uneasy. "I . . . I don't understand . . . What do you want of me, Ellen?"

"There's a gentleman," said Ellen, swooping closer like a great pallid owl. "We desire to marry . . . but the circumstances . . . If Papa should ever discover . . ."

"By Jove," said Mab, enormously relieved. "Is that it? Why, my dear girl, marry him. Your father can't do anything. You're of age."

"Life is cruel." Intensest emotion could not make Ellen anything but absurd. "And the world says odious things. I could endure that . . . I'd rejoice to endure it. But possibly it would kill Mamma. She is so sensitive. I mean, if she ever found out. At present she is hearing Jenny her catechism, but she expects me to be always at her side. She says it is my duty."

It was the slogan of the period. Even Madam's independence of thought recognized the sacred immolation of the unmarried daughter. Mab found himself beginning to hedge. "Of course, if your mother——"

"She may never discover it," said Ellen. "I would continue to live at home."

A secret marriage, thought Mab. Something wrong here. He said, "You had better tell me all about it, Ellen."

"How can I tell you all?" Ellen sank in a swirl on the corn-bin. "We have belonged to each other for years."

"You have . . . Do I understand . . .?" Apparently he was meant to understand. "Good God!" said Mab, walking away a few paces and coming back. In the brown shadows that immobile figure had the strange dignity of some primitive sculpture. "You had better tell me all about it," he said, again.

"I promised to wed him," said Ellen in a hurry, "but now I fear. I thought you might help me to keep it secret, Mab. You

are so experienced in worldly matters. If ever it was known, my reputation would be destroyed."

It seemed that this was already done. It seemed that Ellen was straining at gnats after swallowing camels.

"What's it all about? Who is this fellow?" asked Mab, struggling to understand.

"You know him. He is very nice. Mab, I adore him and he is as genteel as yourself. His eyes . . ."

"Good Lord! *Who* is he?"

"He works at Clent. He painted Jenny. It is Robert Snow."

"Snow?" Mab stared. He could not at once remember the name. "*Snow*? You don't mean one of our convict servants?"

"He will be time-expired next year, and then he might get a little school with a house and a garden. Marrows and cucumbers——"

Mab took her by the arms and shook her. "Listen to me. Do you mean that you have been letting the convict Snow make free with you?"

"He is as much a gentleman as you are!" cried Ellen, weakly blazing.

"How long?"

"I . . . about t-two years."

"Two years?" Mab felt his brain reeling. "And now you want to marry him?"

"I l-love him."

Mab dropped her arms and turned away. This incredible thing was true, and might have gone on being true if Ellen in her incurable foolishness had not let it out. He walked up and down on the stone setts, trying to get his thoughts in focus. Like a son of America's old Southern families, he had been born to be served by a race set apart for the serving, and the fact that this race was white and could in time regain something of the ordinary status of white men did not matter to him. They were criminals or they would not be here. They stunk of jails, and they had been flogged. "Good God!" he cried. "The fellow has been flogged!"

"I shall never forgive William for that," said Ellen, out of the shadows.

Mab rubbed his hands over his face as though trying to rub

off some leprous clinging thing. The whole of him was revolted beyond understanding or pity. He thought: We must get him sent back to Port Arthur. . . . He said, realizing the feebleness of words, "You have disgraced yourself."

But this did not have the conventional meaning that Ellen attached to it. She began to weep noisily. "I know. But we couldn't help it. You can't when . . . when . . . and he was so unhappy. Like a dethroned king. . . . It was all my fault. I vow it was, Mab. You know how the prison system sucks independence of thoughts and words and even looks out of a man. I have made him a man again, with hopes and ideals and human interests. He has told me so."

"You make me sick," said Mab, and indeed he felt so. "You can't marry him, of course. Put that out of your mind. We must cushion him. It will have to be hushed up."

"No, no, no!" Ellen ran at him, pouring out staccato phrases probably learned from the fellow himself. "Mab, think of all he has suffered. That awful ship . . . Port Arthur . . . road-gangs . . . violent translation to station life, all so new, so difficult. His atrophied will struggling to readjust itself . . ." Mab had read something like that last in *The Trienna Clarion* before Denison suppressed it. "Oh, Mab, Mab! have brotherly love! Have understanding!"

"He's a convict. That's understanding enough for me. You must have been mad, Ellen." He was frankly at a loss, staring at her. "How you . . . how any lady could do such a thing . . . egad! I can't understand you."

"I love him," blubbered Ellen. "If you ever loved Julia——"

In this connection it was a profanity he could not bear. "Keep her name off your lips, Madam!" he said fiercely, and marched out with his pulses singing. Behind him Ellen wailed for a minute, and then remembered her duties and went to feed the fowls.

Across the misty yards scented with hay and cow breath Mab found Joe, who was turning the cows out of the bails. Joe was the man of the family. He would have to manage Ellen, since old Merrick would simply kill her . . . and perchance that would be the best thing, too.

He walked down the dewy yards with Joe, behind the slow, heavy cows with their swinging udders ; and perhaps because of the pain and shock in him he felt how very beautiful the world was to-night. Peaceful, dreaming, with a clear star in the green west, a dim ripple down on the river, birds calling in sweet detached notes across the open fields. He told Joe somehow, his heart still burning with that mention of Julia, and Joe leaned on the slip-rails and looked at him, his huge red hands and wrists hanging loose from his tight short sleeves. Joe had the unsure ways of a boy who has been browbeaten all his life and the strange eyes of the dreamer. Up in the stable loft were some of the little machines he had dreamed into life, but no one would ever know of them. He too was trying to understand. Ellen ? To his crushed manhood it seemed impossible that Ellen should have so far escaped as to have dared to live. He felt an obscure envy, an admiration, a quiver in his dulled limbs. " Ellen ? " he said stupidly.

" Gad ! I was never so shocked in my life," said Mab, beginning to recover a little. " You'll have to talk to her, Joe . . . see that she doesn't meet him again until I can arrange something. I don't quite know what can be done, yet."

He still did not know when they had gone into the house again. Joe had shown no more initiative than could be expected and Mab thought : Noll. I'll have to take it to Noll. I'll go down to town to-morrow night. . . . Then he thought that possibly he might see Julia, and felt his heart faint in him and almost forgot Ellen.

It might seem that the very atmosphere of Lovely Corners clamoured against Ellen, for there the quarters of the convict servants had iron gates, and along the passages ever and again were iron doors. A stealthy sense of watching, of guarding against a hidden evil was in the air there, as Mab had found it in other homes that were convict-worked. . . . Here is this unholy thing in our midst, those houses seemed to say. We bear it because we must, but we never forget.

Mab ate kangaroo-steamer and bread-and-cheese at six o'clock because the Merricks bragged about being such plain folk. The sullen girl changing the plates was Number Something, but he

happened to have heard her history. When her husband was transported she had stolen an egg in order to follow him. "And so she shall," said the judge, in a glow of feeling. "Let them begin again in a new land. This is the very apotheosis of colonization."

But she had never found her man in the new land, and the authorities, although sympathetic, could not help her. Probably he was dead, or his number had gone astray somewhere. The woman might come across him some day, they said.

To Mab this was a terrible evening. Old Merrick snored chokily in his high wing-chair. Joe sat in a corner, brooding, staring at Ellen as though he had never seen her before. Sometimes a flicker crossed his heavy face as though he saw some strange light never seen before, either. Ellen was very vivacious over the photograph albums which she had set out on the round table where a glass Cupid stood on a woollen crocheted mat, upholding a tight bunch of purplish dahlias. With frenzied nervousness she was trying to establish some secret contact with Mab, but he held aloof. This room always afflicted Madam's son with a very anguish of depression. For years he had known all the bright oleographs on the wall—to which had lately been added a silver-print of Bishop Nixon "because everybody had one"—just as he knew the green rep chairs, the raw bookshelves on the wall, the heavy puce "drape" on the mantelpiece with its glaring blue china vases.

He wondered how Jenny bore it, sitting docilely in the little worsted-work chair which had been her mother's, her alert delicate face bent over the *Good Words* Mrs. Merrick was showing her. Ellen giggled. "This is Mamma when she was young. Can you conceive of Mamma as young, Mabelle?"

"No levity, Miss!" snapped old Merrick, waking with a choke. "Those new Californian gold-fields are going to be useful to us, Mab. They'll take some of our produce."

"I wish they'd take me," said Joe, suddenly, his dull face lit with a moment's vision.

"You young men," said his father, turning heavily in his chair, "you're never satisfied. Ain't there enough for you to do here, eh?"

The light left Joe's face. Again he looked at Ellen with that slow wonder and fell to knotting string with those thick clever fingers that so ached to clutch at life and were afraid.

"This is a picture of the Prophet Elijah which always gave your dear mother much pleasure, Jenny," said Mrs. Merrick.

Ellen turned the pages of the album noisily, murmuring to Mab, "Come out in the passage presently." But Mab answered as low, "Not now. I'll be back in a few days."

CHAPTER SEVEN

I

INCLOSED for months with the great ladies of literature, the great dream of poets, the mellow memories secured to him by generations of gentlefolk in gentle English homes, Roger Keyes would suddenly emerge from his Russia-leather library, kiss his wife, and take Brevis travelling to see other great ladies.

"Here," he would say to Brevis when they came to Clent and found Madam amid sun and roses and canaries singing their hearts out in gilt pagodas, "here, my son, is a great lady," And Madam would let the boy kiss her little cool hand, talk with him graciously, and dismiss him, saying to Roger Keyes :

"Some day he may be Cæsar, but never, I fear, Antony."

"Let us hope there will not be Cleopatra," said Mr. Keyes, thinking hopefully of the little Genevieve whom he could never help regarding as a direct product of Madam—Mrs. William, poor lady, always seeming so very much out of the picture. But when he hinted at his interest in Jenny with her "charming little flexibilities, her daring," Madam would say musically : "Ah, *mon ami* ; man proposes, but *le bon Dieu* disposes." Yet she hoped to help *le bon Dieu* in the disposing of Jenny. The Keyes connection was well enough, but not to mate with her Jenny. None in the colony was fit to do that, although Madam expected *le bon Dieu* to send him.

Mab came in, bringing Jenny back from Lovely Corners, and Madam saw in a minute that he was agitated and a little bump-tious as a young man is when he assumes responsibilities new to him. Coming home through a dewy morning of bush scents and magpie carolling, Mab had been stimulated into a decision. He would take one of the young horses down for sale to the Hobart Town Yards and Robert Snow should ride him. Once Snow was in town, Oliver could be trusted to arrange matters. And possibly Mab might sell the young 'un. He badly needed the money.

To Madam, elegant and shining at her tambour frame in the sunny window, he was blunt and a little red-faced as he asked if she had any commissions for town. He was riding to town that night, he said, and Madam drew a long thread of lilac silk right through before she answered : " You will see Noll. I have a small packet for him."

More of those jewels from Madam's secret cabinet were being negotiated by Noll to equip Jenny for school, and that Madam was prepared for. But she was not prepared for Mab's journey to town.

He will see Julia. He knows that she had come up from Port Arthur because of Louisa's indisposition, she thought with a terrible sinking of the heart, and went on lightly talking to Roger Keyes of Mr. Disraeli, the third Napoleon, and those refreshing scandals which crop up endlessly when one has the wit to find them.

Dark-faced Brevis with his large remote brown eyes was essentially a recluse and prig at this age. He detested Clent in the holidays ; when Jenny and Humphrey together tumbled down straw-stacks with loud shoutings, and together rode bare-back on rough ponies, and together hung over fences to try who could hold longest to the curly horns of the merino rams shuffling by down the race to the dipping-pen. Brevis was being instructed in the Persian and Greek literatures, and his head was full of strange musics and soft colours and drooping women. Jenny with the huge green sunbonnet, on which Madam insisted, hanging down her back, was a trial to all his sensibilities when, her arms full of red apples, she climbed the straight ladder to the loft which always made Brevis giddy, and there ate the apples with Humphrey, among the pigeons, throwing the cores down to Brevis elaborately indifferent below.

Jenny, thought Brevis, tried to be a boy when she wasn't one. Even at that age he was very fastidious about the proper position of women in a world that by all the laws of nature belongs to men. Brevis, returning to the salon where his father and Madam were still talking, had a sense of exaltation and relief. He was quite sure that the wine of womanhood is a harsh vintage until matured.

II

In Hobart Town, James Sorley was gathering up all kinds of information through Oliver and applying it where he thought it would do him the most good. On the morning Mab rode in with Robert Snow on the tired young 'un behind him—they had pushed the pace—and met Oliver at the foot of Hunter Street, Oliver had been abroad quite early for him. James had sent him out to the convict hulk, *Neptune*, which had just come up the bright blue waters of the Derwent, and Oliver, very much disgusted, was hastening home to change his clothes.

The *Neptune*, he told Mab as they walked up together, had no right to be furling her tired sails out there. Apparently she had no right to be anywhere. Much as one sympathized with the dear old Motherland's problems, said Noll, one must rejoice that she was at last lending an ear to that volume of protest which had been coming for so long from Van Diemen's Land. Actually she had served out circulars around the Empire, begging any kindly disposed country to take her criminal overflow, and to South Africa she had sent the *Neptune* along with the circular. But South Africa had refused them both with no uncertain sound; and so here she was, storm-battered and rusty with nearly a year's travelling, come up past low wooded shores steeped in sunshine, to deposit her burden in a deeply resentful land. And here without doubt, said Noll, all other convict ships would follow her.

The colony, said Noll, was now receiving convicts at the rate of two shipments a month, and for himself he could see no end to it. Earl Grey, in the House of Lords, was asking why not send them. He had made a great speech, telling how millions had been expended in preparing the country for them, asserting that "the free inhabitants cannot expect that simply because they choose to call for Cessation the imperial policy will be altered at their demand!"

"In short, the country is in a damned muddle," said Noll, tapping his cane in his finicky way, "and this League of Remembrance which some parson—West, isn't it?—has started in Launceston will stir up more muddle. For it will spread. Beverley

spoke at the first meeting, I hear, saying that England must use her common sense and cease transporting for peccadilloes."

"How do we know they are peccadilloes?" said Mab, fiercely. "All these brutes are as bad as can be, I'll dare wager; and given time they prove it."

They considered Robert Snow riding behind with the horses no more than if he had been an animal, and he knew it, watching with his brooding eyes the two young dandies. They were merely the product of their times, he told himself, and rarely brutal. But they had not learned to look with the inner eye as Conrad Beverley and other great souls were doing. He dreamed of getting Beverley and this Parson West on his side, and there was a big chance for him now in the many little taverns up side streets where, Henny and others had said, one might find many sympathizers, and even a few with money. When Ellen got over her present hysterical fear and married him . . . then, thought the man, with the long ache in him throbbing into hope, something might . . . would be done.

At the street corner they stood aside while the draft off the *Neptune* passed. "Egad!" said Oliver, whipping out his scented handkerchief, "if you could have smelled 'em down in the hold!" Mab looked at them with an eye too hostile for pity. The man behind him had dried pity up for the time, and Mab was glad that Snow should hear these clanking chains and the barked-out commands of the guards while the draft, bleared, blinking, and barely human in the gay sunlight, were right-about-faced and marched off up Macquarie Street to the prison.

Refresh his memory a bit, since he's forgotten what he is, thought Mab, and was in haste to send Snow off to the stables while Oliver unlocked the door to his fastidiously furnished rooms and indicated decanters and long cigars.

"Must send this coat to be fumigated," said Oliver, pulling off yellow dogskin gloves. But with Mab's burst of confidence he forgot about it. "Ellen?" he echoed, with arched brows. "Ellen? Egad!"

There was much of Madam's wicked humour in Oliver, and he began to laugh. The more Mab raved through the room the more he laughed, lying spread in the saddleback chair with his elegant

legs outstretched. "Curse me," he said, wiping his eyes, "if the fair Ellen isn't deeper than I guessed. Oh, la, la! Ellen!"

"Can't you see that it's iniquitous?" cried Mab.

"Oh, assuredly, I see that. But it's deuced funny. And so you have brought the fellow to me? What d'you expect me to do with him?"

"Can't you have him sent to Port Arthur?"

"Well . . . I don't know. That's only for the trebly condemned now. It's full up. But," he leaned forward, pouring out two whiskies, "we must put our prospective relation away somewhere, eh?"

"It makes me sick," said Mab, who had never a large command of words. Oliver sipped reflectively. Man's organism is a complex thing, he thought. Always heights in it somewhere. He said:

"Snow has blood, y'know. Possibly as well born as we are, and certainly better born than old Sorley. A hundred years hence his progeny—though, perhaps unfortunately, *not* Ellen's—may be members of the Executive as Sorley is now. A damned select little parlour party that, Mab, all holding one another's hands and ruling the roost."

"You talk as though it didn't matter."

"Oh, it matters. Don't mistake me. It matters infernally under present conditions. In the future . . . We'll have Cessation and general pardons before long, Mab, and then it will be each for himself and the devil take the hindmost. And the hindmost are likely to be you and me, my boy. We have never learned to use our wits."

"What are you going to with Snow?"

"Oh, we'll send him to Port Arthur somehow. I'll ask Julia. She will want some frescoes painted on her walls immediately, I dare swear. And once he's there, Berry will keep him. Berry owes me something."

"Is Julia . . . in town?"

"Until to-morrow. The fellow can go down on the boat with her. You've timed it nicely, Mab. And now go away, there's a good lad, and let me make out my report for Sorley."

He wrote it in the jargon required by the councillor, who, in

common with the governor, was actively engaged in white-washing the whole affair :

The shipment by the *Neptune* appears in excellent shape, and will undoubtedly be of vast value to the colony. The Irish State prisoner, John Mitchell, is said to be anxious to receive his T. of L., when he will be at once removed to Bothwell, there to occupy his own cottage. Other prisoners will go to the very vital work of pushing roads into the outlying districts, thereby opening up not only agricultural land but also the large coal concessions which only await their opportunity.

He pushed away the paper and sat thinking. Ellen and her convict. Mab and Julia. That way went the world. Always a greediness, a lusting, a sense of denials, of incomprehension of the whole damned business. Julia and Berry were cat-and-dog already, and Berry, that dull soul, would never know why, but Noll knew. Poor mortals that we are, we must still have concourse with the good, still seek the quality of beauty, the forbidden raptures. . . . Though deuce knows if they satisfied the gods, thought Noll, and went out, the perfect secretary, to find James Sorley, who was beginning to believe himself a second Earl of Chatham, just like every other rising politician of the day.

III

In the water-side taverns Robert Snow found the whaling men, jovial numbers of the big lean, brown fellows from Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket, with the pipe in the mouth, the girl on the knee, and the pannikin of rum close at hand in the red lamplight. They talked love and whales with a salty tang on the tongue ; and Van Diemen's Land meant no more to them than a good harbour for trying-out and a good place to drink and kiss in. There was a time, they said regretfully, when all the harbour was full of whales and every gentleman had his private whale-boat. But those good days were gone, and now sailormen were a long time at sea. . . . " And give us a kiss, lass, for soon we have to leave you."

Snow borrowed a lantern and went along the dark front by

the sucking water, seeking a place that Henny had spoken of. The harbour was full of the red and green riding-lights, but the rough streets were in darkness. In Davey Street a naphtha-lamp flared in the butcher's shop, and Snow wondered for the twentieth time why all through the country butchers' shops were the only beacons. A crudity almost ugly in its implications. He found the tavern at last, a low wooden place crusted with rime and canting drunkenly. Such, it seemed, was where the likes of Robert Snow must meet his kind while young Mab Comyn went up the hill to the great houses in their glowing gardens. He would be at the Sorley mansion to-night, perhaps take Julia Berry in to dinner. Robert Snow stooped his dark head to enter the dark little room and thought: If ever my time comes I'll settle with Mab Comyn.

The tap-room had wooden benches and men spat in the sawdust on the floor. Time-expired men, as Henny had said, with their smug talk and their long hair. Decent fellows, enough: small carpenters, grocers, gardeners, watermen, with little before them but that little their own. In a year Snow could be one of them; marry a daughter, and live an obscure hand-to-mouth life for the rest of his days. "But no one can interfere with us. At least we're free," they said.

They chilled Snow's hot blood with their cramped content. In a little he was on his feet in the sawdust, talking while they leaned against the dingy wall in the dim light, sucking their pipes.

"Aye?" said a greybeard. "Come from Clent, do 'ee? A proper old fam'ly theer. I worked for Cap'n once. He choosed me roight off the boat. He did so. Aye; ye're none so bad off if ye come from Clent."

"I want to be better off. Surely we all do. Why are we pariahs in this land which we have made? Why are not the clubs, the big houses, the hotels open to those of us who are free men? We have as good a right there as anyone."

"The quality don't think so," said a young carpenter with keen eyes and long hands that he clasped and unclasped. He was caught, and Snow turned on him. He was a recruit.

"We could make them think it if we chose. We are the majority. Soon we'll be more so, with the military being with-

drawn all the time. This country should be ours. It was meant in the first place for us, and the settlers have only got rich through our labour."

"Aye, rich. There's the rock we split on, sir," said a thin old fellow, craning a long neck. "It takes a mort o' money to teach folk to see aught."

"We could get the money. A little to start with and the rest would come." Robert Snow saw his Elysium as he talked. Almost he made the others see it. A land that was their own, with no chained and hunted man in the whole length of it. A land where they would walk with the gentry and not behind. Where understanding would be between them all, and a large mercy.

"And those who won't bow to the new idea can get out," said Snow, thinking of Mab Comyn. Mab, he thought, would starve sooner than sit at meat with him. But Mab did not know about Ellen. There was the trump card which Snow would play when he chose. A new kind of gratitude mixed with his affection for Ellen.

When again he went out into the windy night, he felt excitedly that he had done a little, paved an inch of the way. It would be slow, but he was inured to patience. Probably he would be a freed man long before the crisis came. But it would come, since down a myriad underground ways men would soon be talking, thinking. He had put a new idea in their dull heads, and it would go on . . . go on . . . He knew how messages, information could go through the most closely watched chain-gang, despite the guards. "They can't chain our souls," he said.

In Davey Street two men stood together outside the office of Stock & Son, shippers and timber merchants. The younger carried a candle shaded with his hand, and in the flickering light Snow saw that the other was James Sorley—the great Councillor Sorley—the governor's right hand. Snow stopped on the edge of the dark when young George Stock cried out: "We're ruined, sir! Clean ruined."

"Kindly elucidate," said James Sorley, in his dry tones; and then Snow, now listening keenly, heard something which he would not have missed for worlds.

Stock & Son, it appeared, would not be the only folk ruined

in this great speculation of the Californian goldfields where men had been clamouring for food, food at any price so that it came soon. Most of this year's wheat had gone from the colony to San Francisco. Blackwood and swamp gum for shorings had followed, and now at the American end organization had utterly broken down. Wharves and streets, said young George, were piled with valuable Australian cargo delivered over to the rats, the rain, and thieves. There were no agents available to distribute or control.

"I assure you, sir, that it is quite impossible to get invoice returns or payments. Nothing can cope with such a tremendous influx of men. My brother Alec returned yesterday by the *Pardon*. His health is completely destroyed by the hardships. . . . I apologize for troubling you with personal matters . . ."

His voice died in the fitful wind. James Sorley stood, his thin rigid body like a post. He said at last: "Then you can get me no payments whatever? For neither timber nor grain?"

"Not you nor anyone, sir; and you'll find every shipper in the country say the same. What can we do? No organization, and rapid deterioration all the time."

"Very well. This, of course, is in confidence. We can keep our heads above water if no one knows we are hit. Good night."

James Sorley passed on with his slow, pompous step, and the young man went back with the guttering candle into the store. But Robert Snow, going up the street to the shanty where he was lodged, found his head whirling. Scarcely a settler in the land but would suffer more or less, and times were hard anyway. Some would be walking off their runs before long; and then the freed men would walk on. And once they had the land . . . I must make Ellen see reason now, he thought. When I get back, to-morrow.

To-morrow Mab Comyn sent for him early. He was in Oliver's room at the fashionable Albion, frowning from a heap of bouquets in paper frills to some boxes of fancy sweets. He said, not looking round: "Take this, and this. No; not that. Only roses, I want them carried at once to Mrs. Berry's cabin on the *Tribunna*."

"Any message, sir?"

“No. I’ll be down myself.”

Snow went out with the things. Who would pay for them, with all the Captain’s grain rotting on the wharf at San Francisco? This gay young buck would be looking a shade less debonair and genteel before long.

On the *Tribunna* he waited for Julia, who came with Mab just before the gangway was drawn. She was veiled and went straight down to her cabin while Mab turned to Snow. But he was hardly thinking of the man, for Julia had cried last night, saying that she would never see him again. “Or you must never see Berry again,” said Mab. But that had frightened her, and she sent him away, to find him at her door again the next morning. And now she was going, back to the man and her two round-eyed babies; and Mab told himself he was better dead, and was keen enough to feel that the world had never known a tragedy like it. He said to Snow, abruptly: “I have lent you to Mrs. Berry. You will go down to Port Arthur with her to do some painting.”

To the man who had already been there it was as though the word made some profound chemical change in him. He seemed to shrink, and sudden sweat stood on his face. He stammered: “Oh, no! Oh, please, sir! Oh, won’t the Captain——”

“I’ll arrange with the Captain. You hear? You are under Mrs. Berry’s orders.”

And then he was gone and the gangway up, and the *Tribunna* leaning to the light wind as she drew out into the river. But Robert Snow stood by the rail, staring. Everything had collapsed in him under the old fear. He saw nothing but the Dumb Cell at Port Arthur.

IV

Sudden setbacks and advances are natural sequence in the game of colonizing; and so that the sun still shines and the wind rolls the brown tussock over in silver and wheeling gulls and rooks follow the ploughing along the hillsides man rarely consents to defeat.

When the Californian debacle swept the country, settlers

bowed under it like trees, and, like trees, rose again. A few were ruined; a few put down their four-in-hands and reduced their cellars. The Captain sold two paddocks, and James Sorley let his town house for a year, going into lodgings when the country, in the person of the governor, required his presence. Everywhere was a gradual watering down of luxuries, a gradual getting to work of the leisured class. Only Susan, undeterred, continued her increase, so that Jenny, now consuming knowledge with some success among the country's "premier young ladies" found the nursery fuller almost every holiday. At Lovely Corners Ellen read Paley and *Robertson's Sermons* to her mother, mispronouncing a great many words, and waited for Robert Snow who never came. Once she drew on her courage sufficiently to speak to Mab, but he was finding life too hard at present to spare her kindness. "Since you can't take care of yourself, we must do it for you," he said. "Put the fellow out of your mind."

So Ellen went about the yard in the chill blue twilights, feeding the poultry, looking over the river, and Joe ceased to regard her with hope and envy. When it came to essentials it seemed that she couldn't fight any better than he could.

Jenny sent Mab valentines, all pink hearts and frilled edges, but Julia sent him letters. Once she wrote of Robert Snow who had "done something foolish, tried to escape, I fancy. But he had no pass, and so they put him into the gangs. So your mind may be relieved on Ellen's score, dear Mab; but as for me I am dying in this place, dying . . ."

She really was thinner, she thought, looking at the slender wrist lying on the paper. And then Berry came in and stared with his blank black eyes.

"Hang me if you're not always writing to someone," he said jealously.

"Would you deny me that also?"

Berry, black-whiskered, brushed and uniformed, had a puzzled look in these days, as though this marriage business which for one bright moment had lighted his dull soul was fizzling out like all the other affairs—and not so easily ended, by Jove. He put a heavy hand on his wife's slim shoulder, moved it across the white skin uxoriously. "Now, Julie! I've got to earn my

livin'. And with the old uncle alive and kickin' and money as tight as a drum I must go where I'm sent. You know that."

"I know," said Julia, her soft lip suddenly quivering like a child's, "that you never understand how I feel."

In his various experiments with love Berry had heard before that universal complaint of women, but from Julia it always drove him frantic, because he cared too much for her still. "Why don't you tell me, then? Damn it! You know I'll do all I can."

"Oh . . . tell!" murmured Julia, lifting her shoulders. His hand was hot and sticky on them. Its weight, his weight bore her down. She wanted to cry: "I'm too young for all this. Too young for child-bearing and housekeeping and living with one man all my days. I want to play. It was cruel of you to marry me at sixteen and stop my play."

Her heart was bursting with it, but she dared not say it. She was always a little afraid of this man before whose heavy voice those yellow clumps of convicts ran and stopped and laboured in silent terror. She had seen them in the stone-quarries with her husband standing above in the sun and the white tea-tree flowers. He had only to raise a hand, snap out a word, and the straining wretches harnessed to the little carts hauled until their sweat ran in rivers.

"Sulky, eh?" He gripped her suddenly, shook her, and then pressed his over-red lips to hers in a long kiss that tasted of smoke and whisky. "Eh, you little devil," he said with rough passion, "I'll teach you yet."

She heard the clank of his sword as he went out, and she laid her yellow head on Mab's letter and cried for a long while. "Oh Mamma!" she wept. "Oh Mab! Oh Mamma!"

Emotions were still all confused in her young soul. She wanted the dear home at Bredon and Louisa's kind plump breast. She wanted town, where she was still the toast, still so pretty in her gay silk muslins and her white-satin bonnets with lace veils to sparkle a blue eye through. And she wanted Mab, that strange god of the wilderness who could frighten her more than Berry did, although that fear was an exquisite thing, a sensation sending a shuddering joy through all her body. "Oh, dear Mab; how

I desire to see you again!" she wrote, blind with her tears.

She saw him sooner than she had dared hope; for in the spring a prison-fever ran through Port Arthur, reaping away, among others, Julia's younger pledge of an affection she never had felt for Berry. Dry-eyed she saw him in the tiny convict-made coffin and then she went back to Bredon with her other son. Julia in black set all the English macaronis of the regiments raving while she stayed in town to buy her mourning, and innocently she very much enjoyed the macaronis. But at Bredon she would see Mab. Mab could not compose an acrostic nor turn a verse for a lady's album, and in a ballroom he seemed always too large. But how that hot dark personality of his got inside a woman's guard! Trembling, smiling, and eager, Julia walked over the paddock path among the tall white daisies to see Mab again. He was coming down the Clent garden between the rosemary, borage, and lavender, and the good clean scent of the herbs was round them in the warm air as he stopped and took her hands. She had meant to say something light and friendly. He was all ready with sympathy for her loss. But the touch of their linked hands stampeded them. They gazed and gazed and could not speak at all.

V

If there had not been the long phalanx of black swan sweeping over to the green west. If their clarion crying had not come down like a challenge to the two walking by the old hut in the bush. If there had not been a wild apple tree blooming there, shedding its bridal petals on Julia's drooping head, all might have been different.

Yet how could it be different? Destiny assuredly had planned this from the beginning and only Life had made the mistake. Mab stopped, laying his hand on her arm. And she stopped, smiling faintly like a woman obedient to the call of her man. A magpie carolled, full of joy, on the mossy old boundary fence. Crickets chirped in the long grass. Mab flung an arm suddenly about Julia and carried her into the hut, shutting the door behind.

VI

Now the great gold discovery of Australia raised its head in a night, startling the world and promising staggering things. It promised new heavens and earths to the destitute in England, who set instantly about small sinnings so that the hulks should carry them by way of Van Diemen's Land to the new mountains of gold. In accordance with unassailable system the hulks took them, swamping the colony's prisons beyond hope of recovery. The free male population had moved almost in a body across the strait, and there were few left to control or employ the swarming convicts, so that down in Hobart Town the distracted councillors had to go hurriedly about the making of new laws.

"Unless we can remove them at once," said James Sorley, Member of the Legislature, "these fellows will destroy the country."

And so clerks and scriveners got to work, with a stroke of the pen turning all ranks into ticket-of-leavers, and handing out free passes on the little sloops and luggers; and hollow-faced men flung off the yellow jackets and pulled on the corduroy and went off to dig their salvation out of Bendigo and Ballarat.

When poorest England heard this she redoubled her efforts, sinning and surrendering in shoals until the Government cried: "This is no longer punishment. They have forced our hand."

Forced it was, although for some time they pretended to sit in council, considering this, considering that, considering the League and Solemn Engagement of the Australian Colonies which regularly sent them ultimatums and was influencing even the very governors themselves. The Captain played *Rule Britannia* on his accordion with the silver stops, after signing a document pledging him to employ no more convicts admitted after a certain date. But James Sorley tore his copy with lean dry hands, and would have had Oliver put it on the fire but that Oliver was over the strait with Mab, at the goldfields.

To Mab the cry of gold came like a terrible light, wakening him and Julia, drunk on dreams. These months they had moved in an unreal world; with people about them like unsure mists in the distance, and with neither to-morrow nor yesterday at

their gate. Sometimes Mab thought inertly, "I must go to Berry." But his young drugged limbs carried him to Julia instead. It was a golden season, bright with bright waters, and drowsy with the murmurings of many bees and wandering fragrances. Moonlit nights and a warm magic; and when they two went hand-in-hand down the bush-gullies at dusk they saw fauns and elves. For, protested Julia, brown shadows with prick-ears, too friendly for possums or rabbits, could not be but Pan's children, any more than those white tossing arms could be wild apple trees.

And then they kissed, and after each kiss they were not quite the same.

But the feet of those tramping myriads beat into the dream, and Mab's lusty young life roused suddenly and ached to follow.

"First I will see Berry and then I will go to the gold-fields," he said. Julia was terrified. Never, never. Mab could not leave her at Berry's mercy like that. Where should she go? What do?

"You must stay with me or you must say nothing until you return," said Julia, firm through fear. And in the end they left it so, and Mab rode south for Oliver, with the scent of sweet-briar in his nostrils and words clattering with the horse-hoofs through his head. *Thus have I had thee . . . ?* How did it go?

"Thus have I had thee as a dream does flatter.
In sleep a king, but waking no such matter."

Aha, but he was a king, and he had her, awake or asleep. And by and by there would be the gold and he'd settle with Berry.

He came riding with the dawn into Hobart Town and thrust handfuls of the *Sydney Morning Herald* on Oliver trying to sleep off the result of a bad night at roulette. "Read that! And that! And that!" cried Mab, standing over him glowing and splendid in a long cinnamon-coloured riding-coat and tilted hat. "Vision it, Noll. All that gold . . . children scratching the earth with a stick and picking up a bagful. A native digs in the clay with a penknife and pulls out a lump of sixty pounds. It's El Dorado, Noll. It's liberty." . . . It's Julia, he thought, but

could not say so to Noll sitting sulky with bedclothes to his chin. "At Launceston they're packing four hundred apiece into those cockleshell Melbourne boats. Everyone's going, Noll. I'm going. You're going . . ."

VII

Until he got to Bathurst among all these tents, all these bearded men damning the proprieties, gambling, stealing, loving, he did not, he felt, recover his sense of proportion. Love was ecstasy, heaven. But this was a man's game. Even those women with their bold eyes and flaunting shawls walking the streets of the canvas town knew it was a man's game. His body had never ached so much in all his life, and his hands were raw with the blasted pick. But he was getting gold. Gold for Julia.

Soon he found the gambler in him working up, working out like a nail in a shoe. It was a psychological necessity, a letting off of steam after these drugged months, but he did not know that. He only knew that everywhere he gambled with his luck and wealth flooded into his hands. He bought horses, houses, shares in everything; sold them and bought again. He was mad with the game. Monstrous joke, this, sitting cold at a table and making a fortune in a night. Better fun than grubbin' in the clay. Another drink an' he'd go over and clean up the boys on Lone Water, be damned if he didn't. There, who wanted shares in Rosalie? He'd sell at a hundred per cent profit? Done. As a dream . . . as a dream does flatter. In sleep a king . . . and waking too, by Heaven! And waking, too.

Oliver, with a few dribblets of gold, was back at Clent before they knew. In a tent on the high cold plateau of Ballarat he had pneumonia and was cupped within an inch of his life.

"A devil of a business," he could assure Julia. "A man really needs the physique of a bull—or of Mab. I vow that Mab is mad. Luck follows a madman ever." Julia trembled, asked why (since he was now rich) Mab did not return. Didn't she know that no gambler ever had enough! Never could return until he had lost all he'd made? There were endless stories about Mab

already, but Oliver protested he would not tell them to a lady. Mab (naturally, since he was a Comyn) was not vulgar with his wealth. He did not light pipes with five-pound notes, nor eat them between bread-slices as the *canaille* did. Oliver had seen them munching away. And Mab did not buy for scullery-maids costly Paris dresses, nor deck some gold-field wench in raw nuggets and then want to marry her, as Bob Beverley would have done but that Mab prevented him. Oliver was there at the time. "Have your fun, my dear fellow," he had told Bob. "All you can, for this won't last. But God forbid that you should marry it," Mab had said. "Anything you like, except that." Oh, 'pon honour, Mab was growing shrewd. All this racketing around with men . . .

At last Mab was sated ; sane again. He was rich, and he came back for Julia like a king returning to his kingdom. He felt just like that, interviewing his bankers in Launceston, leaving the coach at Trienna, and walking over the paddocks to Clent. The sharp clean wine of autumn was in the still air. Grass was crisp underfoot, and beyond the naked hawthorn fence he heard sheep nibbling the turnips, coughing their short grating coughs. Love of these well-established things of home came over him with a rush of passion and tenderness. He was tender still when he came into Madam's boudoir and stooped to kiss her.

With the appreciation of an epicure Madam felt the new atmosphere he brought. He filled the little place up with more than his size, his radiant good looks. It was the complete masculinity of him that so pleased her. She moved her little hands as though bathing them in its essence. Surely, surely he had now gone beyond pretty, uncertain Julia, who had returned to Berry when he became Sir Almeric and took a town house and yet, people said, still squabbled with him helplessly. How much did Mab know of this Julia ? "You have come to stay with us, *mon chér* ?" she asked wistfully.

"Later. I'm riding on to town to-night if Bill can lend me a horse."

So it was still Julia. Madam said : "But there are many horses. Have you not sent us much money ?"

“That was to pay off Sorley’s mortgage.” He frowned. That mortgage had always galled him. “Hasn’t it been done?”

“Oh, I think your father would not occupy himself with that. He has built a river-wall where the paddocks used to flood, Mab. You must see it.”

“I’ll give him a cheque for the mortgage.” Mab stood up. His brown hands with the hair on backs and wrists had never been still. Madam recognized the power of that other woman who was pulling him.

“You have been away a year, Mabelle. There are great changes.”

“Not in the things that really matter,” he said, and went out with his big laugh and his big swinging shoulders.

Along the Main Road were many little farms where had been bush-land, for under this new shower of gold the colony was burgeoning like a spring pasture. Women in checked aprons were feeding pigs, scattering grain to noisy poultry. Old men with smocks and shaven lips above the chin-whiskers raked manure out of the stone barns. He saw few young men, but they would come. They would come, when their gold-lust was slaked, for the buxom girls pressing against the post-and-rails to stare after him with hands shading their eyes in the bright sun. They would come even as he was come for Julia.

Hobart Town had grown. On the hill were a number of new “gentlemen’s residences,” and Mab rode up the stiff driveway of Berry’s new house with his own backbone stiffening. Julia should not be here. She belonged to him just as he belonged to her. Not once through this hot and stormy year had he forgotten that he belonged to Julia. . . . Ours is the real marriage. It began before we were born, he thought. She should not be here.

In Berry’s large chill drawing-room where the footman left him while he went to seek Julia, Mab found himself growing hot. All the signs of domesticity were about him. Photographs of Berry, of Julia, of the boy. A tangle of embroidery silks in a plush-lined work-basket. . . . I should never have gone away, he thought. But what else could I do? I had no money. . . . And then there was a small sound and he turned to find her

standing behind him. He put out his hands with a cry, but she shrank back. In her eyes, blue and shining as her gown, was an expression he did not know. Her golden hair was rolled back from the delicate blue-veined temples, giving her an older look. She had her knuckle pressed to her full red lips as though to stop its trembling.

“Why did you come like this, Mab? You should have sent me word.”

“I came as soon as I could,” he said blankly. “What’s the matter? Is Berry . . . ?”

She made a gesture with her hand under its hanging sleeve of lace. “Please sit down. You overwhelm me. You’ve grown so . . . large.”

He sat where she indicated, at a little distance from her. Bewildered, he kept thinking: I’ve startled her. What a goat I am. And how lovely she is! How lovely! . . . “I must seem rough to you,” he said humbly. “I’ve been so much with men, over there.”

“Yes. I know.”

He saw her trying to control herself and waited, gripping his hands together between his knees. A blank chill was creeping across his confidence, but he thought: Give her time. I must give her time.

His stillness, the overpowering uncouth masculinity of him invading the barriers she was trying to raise made him terrible to Julia. She had loved him. At Bredon she had exulted when he came on her like an avalanche and bore her away. He had filled her up with his own immensities of love, of assurance, and it was not until he had withdrawn them and gone over the strait that she discovered how little had been of her own making. That which she had done, that which Mab had made the most natural and holy of fulfilments now seemed to her unnatural, a horror from which she woke in the night crying with fear. . . . The scandal! The scandal! I must have been mad, she thought.

Then came the town life again, with its conventions and pleasures; with Berry’s accession and the thrill of ascribing her visiting-cards “Lady Berry.” She was young enough and, being James Sorley’s daughter, snob enough to relish going into

dinner before the elder ladies—who would draw their skirts aside from her if they knew.

“ Oh, Mab ! We must have been mad,” she said at last.

“ If love can make one mad I suppose we were. And now, now, my own beloved, we can be mad forever. I’ve come for you, Julia. I’ll see Berry and send him a challenge to-day.” He began to glow. He would not kill Berry, any more than he would let Berry kill him. He would just make the matter clear as between gentlemen, and then he would take her away, across the strait. And after the divorce . . . He felt a sudden sharp stab of remorse. “ I hadn’t thought . . . My darling, I’m afraid we’ll have some unpleasantness to go through. I didn’t think of that. But—— ”

“ Mab, Mab, you must understand ! We can’t go through it.”

“ What’s that ? ”

“ Dearest, listen. Of course I shall always love you, and I’m breaking my heart. But it’s ended. You must see that.”

“ How ‘ ended ’ ? ” He came over, stooping to lean a hand on her chair. “ How ‘ ended ’ ? What do you mean ? I look on you as my wife. I look on myself as your husband. All the time I’ve been away I’ve never forgot that. You wouldn’t let me write to you, and it wasn’t necessary. We belong to each other. How ended ? ”

She felt his personality swamping her again and began to sob in sheer terror lest he should take her in spite of her. And he did take her. He put his arms round her and lifted her up, and she cried : “ Oh, Mab, go away ! Oh, don’t break my heart ! ”

Unused to subtleties, he brushed them aside as he brushed the lace sleeve with which she tried to hide her face : “ I don’t understand. Won’t it break your heart if I go ? If you loved me it should. Or perhaps you don’t love me ? Is that what you mean ? Good God ! ” he cried, sharply. “ Can’t you *speak* ? ”

She wept on his shoulder. It was all so hard. Of course she loved him. But her duty. Her little boy. Her duty. And her father. Scandal would ruin them all. Mab must wait. She must wait. She was used to sacrifice. “ Mab, Mab, you must help me to be brave ! ” She was weeping for her lost springtime, her young

lover, her position, her title, a thousand things. Like a woman, she wanted them all. "Oh, Mab! Help me!" she cried, so very sorry for herself.

In the end he agreed to wait, hearing the words as though they did not come from his own mouth. He looked round dazedly on the pretty prim chintzes and water-colours of Julia's room. What was he to do now? Where go? He said, unconscious of heroics in his suffering: "I feel myself as much your husband as though we'd been married in church, Julia. Berry is only a . . . a something that should never have come into our lives. There will be no other woman for me while you live, because I count on us belonging to each other. And I'll come back again. I'll keep on coming back."

"Oh, yes, yes! Come back. Oh, poor Mab, why should we be so unhappy . . ."

She let him take one kiss which she returned so passionately that he could scarcely go. But he went, a defeated warrior with drooping plumes. Surely enough, life was hard for women, the female sex being so at the mercy of the world's tongue. He must remember that, be chivalrous. He felt his muscles twitching as though they longed to grip something, shake it, throttle it. . . . Think I'd best get across the strait again, he thought, walking fast down between the stiff rhododendrons.

VIII

Mab stayed one night at Clent, and Madam, with unaccustomed tears blurring her eyes, watched him go. Julia, that hussy with the snub nose and no antecedents, had been too much for her. To-day, with the colony in a state of prosperity and penury beyond credence, with servants flaunting it in embossed satins and gentlemen walking the roads in the rags which were all they had brought back from the gold-fields, a man with money and character could do anything, arrive anywhere. Essentially a woman of action, herself, she saw Mab's chance awaiting him—such a chance as did not arrive twice in this so *triste* universe. And he would not take it. He was riding down the avenue

between the naked trees with William. At the bend by the river he turned and waved his hat. Now he was gone.

The Captain came in, very rosy and happy. He kissed her forehead. "Damme, my love, I've made a good deal!" he cried, rubbing his hands. "Sold a draft of fat lambs right off the turnips for more than we made out of all our sheep last year. Cash in hand now, eh?"

"And yet there are beggars at your door," said Madam, meaning herself.

"Hundreds of 'em. Hundreds of 'em. We'll see to that. I told Bill to bring a new cheque-book from Trienna."

"And that assuredly will assuage many a broken heart," said Madam, getting out her embroidery frame.

Susan brought in the Beverley girls and a piece of gossip. "William says some rich Australian has brought Dykema and put Tom Jerrold in as manager. He saw Lucy in Trienna, just covered with watches and rings. Tom must have made a fortune at Ballarat."

"Doubtless Lucy will soon be paying calls in her own equipage," returned Madam. "But not, I think, upon me."

Dykema lay just below Clent and was constantly changing hands. The Beverley girls chorused: "Oh, who do you think has bought it? Will he come there to live?"

They had the eager pointed look of women who see their hopes passing. *Les pauvres*, thought Madam, and no wonder, with all the young men out of the country, making fortunes and losing them. "I hear that your brother has returned full of gold and whiskers," she said aloud.

"Oh, yes!" cried Letitia Beverley. "He is so rich that we vow he must take us to England at once."

"England!" cried Susan, dropping her work in horror. "That dreadful country where all the convicts come from! You must be mad."

Madam looked at her with attention. It was so seldom Susan said anything worth hearing.

"I don't want to go there," Jane Beverley said. "How is Jenny, Madam Comyn? Maria wrote that she had had the toothache."

"Lady Berry kindly had her for a night when she went to

the dentist last week, and desires to have her again. She says," added Madam, unable to repress her pride, "that *la petite* will make a *succès fou*."

"I don't think Jenny ought to stay with anyone so gay as Julia," protested Susan, unpicking tucks at a great rate. "A young lady's reputation is monstrous soon blown up."

"Be easy, my Susan. Because you never had cause to fear for your own, you must not grudge *la petite* her diversions. Julia has the *entrée* everywhere, and James the Good to back her."

Susan never got over her dread of Madam's tongue. She murmured: "I fear this frock will be too short for Fanny," and Letitia sighed: "Oh, dear! I wish Lady Berry would invite me."

She won't invite Jenny again if I know her, thought Madam, grimly. Yet would I let *la petite* go, every time. It would be good for my Lady Berry to play the second fiddle.

"Dear Mamma is so distressed about Ellen," said Susan, immersed in her own troubles. "She is not nearly so considerate as she might be, considering dear Mamma's sensibility. And she goes out walking in the evening. So immodest in a girl."

"I was a woman at half her age," said Madam. "And a mother, too."

"Oh, I could not possibly think of Ellen as a mother!" cried Susan, confused. Really, Madam managed to make every topic immodest.

IX

The battle for Cessation continued, with James Sorley in town trying to agree with everyone, and the Captain agreeing with no one and writing daily letters to the papers, in the library which long association had taught him was a better place to sleep in. On a May morning of 1853, Madam came in through the glass door open to the spring warmth, bringing to him the last *Hobart Town Gazette*.

"Perhaps a letter of yours will be in it, *mon vieux*," she said, not very hopefully. So few papers dared print the Captain's letters now.

He flirted over the pages; spread them out. Then he sprang

up with a great oath and a crumple of paper; snatched her about the waist. "It's come! It's come!" he shouted. "Glory to God! It's come!" He held the sheets out before her with a shaking hand. "Read, Jenny . . . See . . . 'Her Gracious Majesty's Government . . . irrevocably decided . . . cessation of transportation . . . Fourteenth December, 'fifty-three.' *Cessation!* By . . .'" Here he became so unprintable that Madam was glad to be there. The robustness had gone out of life of late.

"God save the Queen!" she cried, rolling her lace handkerchief in a ball and tossing it up.

"God save her and damn Jim Sorley!" amended the Captain, hurrying off for his accordion. And a few moments later the maids gaping from the windows saw Madam and the Captain marching arm-in-arm round the great carriage-sweep, with a dozen glad dogs at their heels and the Captain making noises on the accordion which someone presently guessed to be the National Anthem.

Part Two

CIVILIZING

CHAPTER EIGHT

I

*T*HE life of another, it seems, is most like to a band of musick marching past us on the high road. At first faint, uncertain, inarticulate this distant music; merely such light sweet separate notes as might come from a child at Play. Then, with harsh Sweeping crescendo the band is upon us, and for a little at its high tide we discern a something of its Composition. It may be that we note only the drum-major, proud of his whirling Gavel, strongly leading his troupe. Or the leopard-skin, the motions fantastic and Wild of he who strains his limbs as he thunders the big Drum. Or one marching with rapt face, calm and inwardly listening to the haunting shrilling tenderness from his fife. Or one who has fallen silent for the time, to wipe an exhausted face, to yawn, or to Leer aside. It may be that we see but the one and yet are they all there; all in the one body, all the one Marvel that is man, marching by to the drum-beat, the Fife-crying of his own Heart.

Now that great Hammering struggling volume of sound which for the moment has been human Life at its zenith is past. Gradually, inevitably it is retreating into a purple dimness, over the wet dropped autumn leaves, under the stooping trees. . . .

Now it is gone; vanished. And because gone for us we think that it is silenced. By what Right? Are we, pausing for an instant in our own march, the only Listeners on that high road through eternity? Did that band make Musick only for our careless ear? Is it not even now Whistling with some gay blackbird in other flowery meadows; swinging, sweetened and mellowed by use and time, past other listeners on the sunny highway, retreating undismayed and Deathless towards other stars . . . ?

In one of the attics at old Clent another Jenny lately found this paper; yellowed and rat-eaten along with the crumpled

French cap ribbons, the dancing-sandals with frayed cross-ties, the little white-satin bodices folded in blue tissue papers of near eighty years ago.

Heaped on the Captain's old hair trunk containing them was a brittle pile of half-cured tobacco leaves such as William had grown and used in the 'seventies to combat scab in sheep. Those, falling to dust when moved, and a broken fencing-foil of Mab's . . . and memories.

Who wrote the paper we do not know. Jenny, perhaps. Or Sigurd Beverley, born a poet and bred a farmer. Or Humphrey, who never got what he wanted ; or his younger brother Richard, who got too much. Perhaps the night wind knows, blowing through the old grey trees the Captain planted, now grown tall to tap the attic window-panes. Perhaps they know, those young fragrant ghosts with hooped and lace-plumed petticoats, with gauzy scarfs on immature white shoulders and nosegays in soft ringless hands as they scurry unafraid and drawn together by hushed laughter and whisperings over the rotting attic floor o' nights, along the dim corridor where Humphrey, Jenny, and the whole tottering tribe that followed them learned to walk, and down the shallow stairs that now creak woefully where no foot treads. But they have no time to tell, the young ghosts, pausing with drooped ringleted heads and dewy demure mouths at the bottom step : for there in the square hall, under the blossomed boughs of Christmas gum and the tall white Christmas lilies their eager and pomatumed beaux are waiting. And they must curtsy, and the gallants, hand to heart, must bow. For this is the Romantic Age, with Victoria unwidowed on her throne, and what was a man to swear by then except a maid's bright eyes ? And what was a maid to think of then except a man ?

II

It seems that about this time there began in the colony a great urge of liveliness and youth, an impatience of old methods and tradition, among the new generation born and bred there and looking on this new world as their own special oyster. " Our grandfathers, our fathers, Englishmen all. What say they ? Let

them say," cried the young men of the later golden 'fifties, glancing round with confident eyes. "Wait till we take our coats off and turn our sleeves up. We'll show them what we're going to do with *our* country."

Undoubtedly many of them made a shocking mess of the exhibition, having too much of the pioneer temperament and too few anchors. The first and fiercest struggle of occupation was over, the blackest cloud of penal settlement lifted. The elders, it seemed to the young men, as it always does, were rather stupid, unlawfully taking their ease, unlawfully muddling the issues which youth could manage much better. Discussions begun in the school dormitories of Hobart Town bubbled up later into private clubs designed by their authors to improve the country. And as nobody much had any professions or any especial work to do, the clubs flourished.

There were the Young Bucks, very nice about their waistcoats and their oaths; the Thrusters, out to improve the breed of riding-horses, which (it now appeared) their fathers had shockingly neglected; the Æsthetes, a small body and very precious; and the League of Chivalry founded at Trienna by that delicate-minded young knight Sigurd Beverley, who never would learn any better. The Sorley boys, having much more money than anything else, belonged to everything, although Adam broke most of the rules within a month and the head of the president of the Æsthetes shortly after. Adam, with all the instincts of his grandfather except determination, was a handful for any young country and was slightly more popular in the whaling grog-shops of the Hobart Town water-front than in a lady's drawing-room. But Sigurd still had hopes of him. Sigurd who, while the town rang bells and flew flags and ate buns in honour of Liberty and the end of Transportation, was up on Mount Wellington with his face in the wet fern and mosses, quaking and sobbing with the strong glory of his visions.

Just now he was trying to tighten up the strings of his League, and Adam, aware of having loosened most of them, protested. "'Pon my soul, I can't see why one should want to be good. Good men never have time for anything else. Damned dull, I call it."

“But what a crass notion!” cried Sigurd. Some half-dozen of them (including black-browed, steady Humphrey Comyn and Brevis Keyes from Tane Hall) were tramping through a red, cold winter sunset after shooting duck over the Bredon marshes, and Sigurd paused on a little brownstone bridge to shift his burden of duck and toss back his hair. Sigurd, who wore fair hair and flowing tie rather longer and looser than other youths, had at times a fleet, sweet look of the young Shelley, which would have deeply distressed him had he known. Adam considered Sigurd a prig, and perhaps he was. At any rate he spelled Ideals with a capital I, and even wrote of them in young ladies’ albums. “You have no imagination, Adam,” he said now. “You’re thinking of monks who deny themselves the natural laws and attempt to fight God and nature and——”

“Women,” said Brevis Keyes, his thin high-bred face youthfully cynical under the round hunting-cap.

“Ain’t they both God and nature?” cried Sigurd, kindling. “And ain’t we pledged to see that we never dissociate the three?”

“Good Lord!” said Adam, round-eyed. “Does any sane man ever try to associate ’em?”

The others laughed, beating their chilled hands and relighting the blunt little pipes which had lately taken the place of the old churchwardens.

“There you go!” Sigurd cried hotly. “Grinning through horse-collars at the verities! I say there’s nothing we can’t do, we of a new land, a new tradition. No other country ever had such a chance . . . never stunted by poverty or ignorance . . . our fathers and grandfathers English gentlemen . . .”

“And our mothers, Sigs. Don’t forget them.”

“Oh, jeer away! I tell you there’s nothing we couldn’t compass if——”

“Adam has already compassed a new way of slipping a billet-doux,” said Brevis. “That should surely count for something.”

Laughter comes easily to jovial youth. They went on through the frosty stillness, arguing, swinging their strings of duck and teal. By stiff clumps of wattle and tea-tree their well-bred dogs ranged and came again. Sigurd was at it still, terribly earnest:

“Yes, your father, my father . . . they say, ‘We’ll do this and that because it was always done so in England.’ But *we* must say: ‘Exactly. And therefore you had to leave England. She couldn’t support you. We will do this and that because it was never done so in England, and because we think it the better way.’ We can surely rise to heights——”

“That’s it,” said practical Humphrey. “There’s lots we could do differently. This land can’t be farmed like English land, you know. We’ll never grow clover hay on Clent, but we try it every year. I’d like a greater freedom of outlook and experiment.”

“I’m with you there!” cried Adam. “I’m all for greater freedom. Why, one mayn’t dance twice with a gal but you have her mamma after you—unless she’s the kind who ain’t got mammas, and I’ll grant you they’re the most amusin’.”

“Those old traditions are indecent,” declared Sigurd. He dragged out a note-book. Sigurd’s pockets brimmed with note-books. “Here’s a lovely extract from the *English Ladies’ Book of Etiquette* that I found Maria reading the other day. Listen to this: ‘Ask the father, before the movings of ambition have calcined his heart and directed his eyes only to the graces it displays, ask him if he could commit the innocence of his daughter to the pollution of the waltz. Ask the mother——’”

Shouts of laughter drowned him. Brevis said, grinning, “Don’t be ribald, Sigs.” Sigurd glared. He nurtured himself on Swedenborg, Malory as interpreted by Mr. Tennyson, and *Aucassin and Nicolette*.

“The infernal immorality of that suggestion! What notions it’s likely to give Maria! We’ve got to get rid of all that. In this new land we must make all things lovely and of good repute.”

“Convict settlement, for instance,” said Brevis.

“That’s done with. It’s for us to wipe out the stain. No nation ever had such a chance as we have. Wealth, peace, education, a perfect climate, youth of body and soul. If we don’t go far——”

“You’ve gone far enough.” Brevis flung an arm round Sigurd, gaping with the cold. “Come home, you old madman. Good night, you fellows. Be good, but never as good as Sigs an’ you love life.”

Brevis was staying at Tingvalley and the ways parted here. Humphrey tramped a little farther with the Sorley boys until the dark line of the path to Bredon turned off through the frosty grass.

“Comin’ in?” asked Adam, hospitably. “My Aunt Julia’s here again, and at her most entrancin’. I’d like to see the pretty miss who’ll oust my Lady Berry from her place as belle of the country.”

Humphrey refused. He disliked Julia. Her bold blue eyes had a greed, to his mind, as though they searched him for what he had no desire to give. He whistled up his dogs and went on, abandoning himself in staid ecstasy to the wooing of this wild earth scent of fallen leaves and frozen grass and ploughland. Far on his right the ranges rose dark on a daffodil sky, and all the world was hushed into quiet clean-cut as a cameo. In the home paddock each tree stood like a burnt-out torch, each block of wool-sheds, grain-sheds, cart-sheds had its blunt individuality, each line of post-and-rail fence lay white and stoutly complete. Still Clent was Humphrey’s chiefest Lady, although Maria Beverley was now running a close second.

Queer thing, this need to love something in particular, he thought. Old Sigs, now, with his love of humankind; Oliver with his passion for comfort at any price; Councillor Sorley, mad on power; those far-eyed, loose-tongued whalers and sailors and sealers who drank and gambled and loved in Hobart Town and yet must leave their lesser loves at call of their greater lover, the sea. Even the merchants, the grain, wool, and timber merchants, touched with the high emprise of commerce, taking chances for love of the hazard. An uncanny jade, Love, flicking at men here and there, thought Humphrey, uncynical and a little wondering. Then he winced as he passed the knot of tree honeysuckle and scrub wattle where the old Clent hut was falling to pieces. Long ago the Sorleys had cleaned up their side, but the Captain had a sentiment, an untidy mind. Damned shame to waste good land like this, considered Humphrey; stopped short at hearing voices; peered through the broken window and went on in a great hurry.

Incredible that Lady Berry, wrapped in furs, should be crying

in a broken chair, that Mab Comyn, speaking rather loud^d should be stooped over her. Incredible as what he said. But there it was ; and Humphrey, burning slowly into anger as numberless slight circumstances fell into line within his mind, knew that there it had been for several years.

The sun had set and silence was absolute in a frosty world. The clatter of hoofs on the highroad over a mile off passed through it like thunder. A duck quacking in the marshes seemed to splinter it like glass. Seeing the lights of Clent on its hill, the dogs barked suddenly, and Humphrey had a queer shocked impulse to silence them. It seemed that they proclaimed aloud the shame of Clent. For shame it would be if Mab did . . . if Lady Berry did . . .

Shame it was already, anyway ; and youthfully determined that there must be no more of it, Humphrey became certain that he must speak to Mab, bludgeon the truth into him that, no matter who sighed or sorrowed, the fair name of Clent must not suffer. It would be a simple thing. Mab would see it when another man put it to him straight. Humphrey in the humourless wisdom of eighteen years marched home to make Mab see it.

III

On the rare occasions when there was no company at Clent the evenings were frankly dull. Madam ceased to play the harp when her voice ceased to please her critical ear. She played bezique with the Captain, or fashioned flower bunches on her embroidery frame while he netted curtains in thick white cotton for the whole of Clent. So far Madam had saved the austere elegance of her salon, but she knew that she would hang all the walls with that atrocious netting sooner than *rendre triste* her good man. . . . The brutality of age ! It softens one, she thought.

Susan stitched unendingly on petticoats and frills. In her sewing-room was a long shelf which she hoped to fill with empty reels before she died. What *le bon Dieu* had been about, to fashion such as Susan, was more than Madam would ever be able to guess. And the swarm of children she and William

produced between them. Looking with dislike on fat, pale Susan, Madam felt she could have borne it better had William alone been responsible. William sat at the small buhl table, reading the *Mercury* and making notes regarding sales. Humphrey wandered in and out, and Mab had a book and an easy-chair by the big bright fireplace. Mab had nearly gone to the Crimea, to the New Zealand wars, to the gold-fields again. Madam, whose hopes had lessened sadly with the years, had prayed him almost on her knees to go to the Crimea. "I would buy you a commission," she said. "And the army is a proper enough career for a du Nesle Comyn. To return as a general would also give you an *entrée* into the Government."

Once she thought she had him persuaded, eager, the hunger gone out of his eyes before a new light. But it had all come to nothing, and very well she knew why and would have gladly slain Julia Berry had it been possible. . . . *Dieu!* she thought. And all this because I was virtuous. To have encouraged *un peu plus* the good James and there had been no Julia. . . . Profoundly considering the results of virtue, she looked again at Mab. He had ceased to read, but he did not feel her look. He stared into the glowing caverns of the fire. Seeing Julia, *sans doute*.

Everywhere Mab's troubled heart saw Julia. Julia with fair tragic face and too yielding body wrapped as he had just now wrapped her in hood and cloak of darkest fur. Julia in town, slaying a troop of curled young bucks with the bright hard shining of her eyes. Julia, that soft innocent child-thing of that long-ago Christmas Day. Julia, who once had sent him a rhyme :

Since all that thou can'st ever do for me
Is to do nothing, let me never see
How all-endured that nothing is to thee,

and, woman-like, had ever since expected him to let her see it.

Berry was Sir Almeric Berry now. Or "A.B." Or "All Brandy." He answered amiably to any name his endless associates gave him, and (being always hard up) had the constant excitement of being refused money by Julia and returning to the lenders with a puzzled look in his bemused black eyes. "My Lady

says I spend too much," he told them in his thick loitering voice. "So I do. She's quite right. Mons'rous fine woman, Lady Berry. Tell y'what," with sudden energy, "money's root of all evil. Comes between man and wife, y'know. Bad thing, that. I wonder . . ."

He seemed to be always wondering in the interludes of his "little amusements," which were the perennial scandal of the town. The latest, having recently consoled a hard-shell whaling-captain, had offended even the military's generous canons of gallantry. "So I've left him again," said Julia, still lovely in her twenties. "But if you left me, Mab, I should die."

Old Jerrold brought wine and plum-cake. Susan went to the feather bed she so closely resembled. The others drifted out. Mab sat alone over the fire; seeing ghosts, broken forms that once stood upright, incomprehensible pitiful forms that led him nowhere, promised nothing. Then he looked up and saw Humphrey stock against the tall white mantel.

Hours of preparation had convinced Humphrey of the difficulty of his mission, but they had not deterred him. He opened at once: "Jenny comes home for good next month, you know."

"Lucky you! I wish I had a sister."

Mab was feeling that one has to begin very young if one hopes to understand women. He lay back smiling up at the boy, with quizzical tired eyes. Experience, poise, a man's dark knowledge—Humphrey read them all and, badly frightened, he turned his head and blurted out, "I shouldn't care for her to see what I saw in the old hut to-night."

The utter silence following that frightened him more. He had a new and desolate sense that right is not always might, that this errant uncle was somehow stronger than righteous anger, mysteriously proof. Some sternly held youthful beliefs tumbled into ruin, bewildered him. He breathed hard.

"No gentleman ever sees what he is not meant to see," Mab said evenly, "or hears what he is not meant to hear. Haven't you learned that yet! Good night."

"Good night, sir," said Humphrey, and went out with his head down. In the corridor he stood a minute, brushing his hand over his face. But he could not clear his vision. Life, it seemed,

was not the direct, uncomplex, practical thing he had been used to think it. Life was . . . well what the devil *was* it?

IV

It was William who brought Jenny home that September of 1856, when she was just about seventeen.

"I had business near by and your trunks can come by coach," said this tightly frock-coated and white-trousered William who had no mind that Jenny should get above herself. And Jenny said a shy, "Yes, Papa," and kissed him on the edge of the sandy *barbe-de-bouc* which now gave a queer fringed dignity to the parrot nose and small mouth, and tucked herself into the hooded gig which William drove tandem at such a spanking pace, and waited docilely for developments.

Like most men, William was nervous with his young daughter and defended himself by hectoring. "I trust you have made good use of your time, my dear, for the golden days of youth will never return. Ah . . . what is the Latin for *work*? Take heed before you answer. . . . Your mother expects that you will now give her valuable assistance with the children, especially as little Fanny appears barred by constitutional timidity from advancing as far with her arithmetic as her governess hoped. Your mother expects you to aid her there. Ah . . . your mother expects . . ."

Poor Susan fully understood what both William and Madam expected her to expect of Jenny and, as usual, submitted herself as the battlefield upon which these two sets of expectations met. Meekly agreeing with William that it was now Jenny's duty to stay at home and help her mother, she was yet surprised into enthusiasm for Madam's determination that Jenny should make a good marriage next year.

"She shall begin a bottom drawer at once," cried Susan, "and I will tuck her some petticoats. A young lady must have petticoats even if unmarried," she added with hasty loyalty to William.

Madam was grimly amused. "Even a woman so immolated on the conjugal altar as Susan is impassioned to fling her daughter

into the flames. And very well for you men that it is so," she told Mab, who said harshly :

"You'll surely let the child choose for herself, anyway."

"That, at times, costs dear," said Madam.

It had cost Julia dearer to have another choose for her. Mab was silenced ; but when Jenny ran into the warm dim hall with the chill spring air behind her he barely waited for greetings to end before pulling her to stand before her portrait. "Let's see if the same stuff is in you still," he said with a queer roughness.

He held a candlestick close ; but either the flicker or a shadow that fell from the tall roof made to his searching eyes the living Jenny appear the younger, the more innocently defenceless. That brave baby on the wall had heard the angels as she played. This Jenny heard only the call of life ahead, and her eagerness to fly to it was dashed with fear. For this home-coming carried a terror with it. Madam had made no bones about it. "Listen, child ; the three-minute sands of an egg-glass do not run faster than the sands of a girl's time. To be beautiful and to marry well and soon, soon. That is the duty of a young lady of position. Well I know it !"

So Madam, worldly-wise and contemptuous of smaller matters, and hitherto Jenny had agreed as one agrees lightly about the certainty of death and old age, and had babbled sentiment with the girls at school, and listened to clever Lydia Quorn expounding the deliciousness of *Don Juan* (after lights were out in the bedroom) and found it quite as stupid and unintelligible as Lydia secretly did. A little of this Mab guessed, looking from the pretty agitated thing to Madam, gracious and eagle-eyed in her flowing silks and laces. Jenny, he suddenly realized, was destined to pay for his demerits. Somehow, somewhere, Madam would have her triumph. Indeed, she was experiencing a foretaste of it now.

Susan, seeing only the somewhat strained little pointed face with its dark eyes, the very slender body shrinking slightly in its ankle-length crinoline and tight-fitting jupe, was crying disapprovingly : "Gracious ! How small you are, Jenny ! Charlotte still lacks a month of eleven, but she could make two of you."

“Three,” said Madam, with relish. “Jenny’s waist in full skin is fourteen inches !”

To Jenny’s lively imagination the words seemed suddenly to set her before them all “in full skin.” Half wildly she stared from the genial Captain to pompous William and this big dark silent uncle, realizing them now not as childhood familiars but as members of that sex of which an assiduous training had taught her to be so very much aware. Then through the hall door walked Adam Sorley with bold eyes of approval, and Jenny, evading him in sudden panic, fled up the stair, her crinoline bobbing like the white scut of a rabbit. Madam laughed faintly, wrinkling her eyes. Mab frowned.

“Well, Adam, my boy,” the Captain said, “your father’s merino rams beat mine badly at the Melbourne sales. What do you get out of it ?”

“A new hunter, I hope,” said Adam, very debonair. “You’re looking well, sir.”

In his great beatitude at settlement of the convict question the Captain was certain that he could never again be anything but well. He had broken out a flag on the staff first raised at Clent in honour of the Queen’s accession and kept it flying for a week. He had shamefacedly begged from Susan one of the *Cessation of Transportation* 1853 medals issued to children, saying “Little Lottie’d only lose hers, eh? A girl don’t want such things,” and now most proudly wore the misshapen leaden disc among the gold seals and keys upon his fob. Wherever in the district bells had rung and people cheered, there rode the Captain on his grey cob, jovial as the sun; and when the old name of the colony was jettisoned at last, it was the Captain who declared in an astonishing burst of oratory that Van Diemen’s Land—discredited Cinderella for so long—had donned the glass slipper of Liberty and become Tasmania crowned and queen.

Denison, enraged at what he considered to be a forcing of England’s hand by the colonists, had refused to allow government servants to participate in the rejoicings. But when, just after his departure, England very suddenly and splendidly established the Australasian Constitution Act which abrogated

to each young colony political powers more liberal than her own, the Captain almost wished Denison back.

“When I realize how the governor’s wings will be clipped *pro rata* under this new regime I could enjoy seeing the fellow here to learn his place. The councillors’ll have more power though, damn ’em.”

Still nursing that old feud, thought William, although James came rarely to Bredon now, having built himself a fine house in Upper Davey Street, which was quite the most fashionable part of Hobart Town. There he gave wonderful dinners and believed himself to be a symbolic figure, a founder of the country.

In the golden ’fifties every man of standing was rich and many amazingly so, but the Captain seemed to go through it all, somehow. William suggested that there was now a good bit to be made in tavern and brewery shares, and the Captain went so purple that William feared for a fit.

“Huckstering, sir! Before I’d descend to! peddling drinks I’d beg my bread along the road. Damme, sir I’m afraid you’re a thought plebeian yet, for all my teaching.”

So there was nothing for William to do but bully Humphrey. And perhaps, like many other men, he found in that his chief reward for parenthood. “No, you shall not have that draft of merinos on Latterdale, Humphrey,” he said. “Don’t be so ready to think that you know everything.”

Already Humphrey had learned that he was never supposed to think that he knew anything unless a situation arose too sudden and severe to be adequately met by William, such as when the Bredon rams broke the fence and got in among the Clent stud ewes. Then William said helplessly to Humphrey, “Whatever can we do now?” And because Humphrey had no solution, William was ready with his acid: “There you are! When I ask your advice you are quite incapable of giving it, and yet you are always wanting me to let you run Latterdale. A pretty pickle we’d be in if I did.”

When Governor Denison played his famous Crown Lands game whereby many thousands of acres fell into the hands of settlers at easy rates just before the laws were revised, William

had bought hill country across the river and set Humphrey there with a couple of convict woodsmen to live in a slab hut and put up miles of snake fencing.

There were only possum and platypus there, and at night the sound of waterfalls rushing down through the heavy timber high in the ranges. But Humphrey loved it, and would have liked to have Jenny there, warming her toes over the aromatic camp-fires and coming out at dawn to a sweet surprise of gay little flowers in the dewy grasses and stray wallabies hopping all around the hut. But this could not be. Jenny had to behave like a lady now, paying calls with Madam in tight kid gloves and the barouche, and entertaining that prime dandy Adam Sorley, who turned up at Clent with new verses and new waistcoats and new pimples every day. Humphrey, reading :

She likes a verse, but, cruel whim,
She still appears a-verse to him,

thought Adam smart until he discovered it in *Punch*. "So the mighty Adam cribs," he told Brevis. "When Jen has a sheaf of the stuff I'll make Adam own up before her. What a lark, eh?"

Brevis shrugged, muttering something about immaturity. Humphrey felt abashed. "Of course we can't all be clever like you," he said humbly.

Madam was not sure that Brevis was clever. Roger Keyes was going to make a judge of him, so he said. But Madam could not see what young gentlemen of position should need with professions. None of her sons had them. Nor the Sorley boys, although Martha declared that Adam would do something great. "Bah!" said Madam to Mab. "Adam with his little songs and his little verses and his little sketches of Jenny with enormous eyes and ridiculous waists! But he will do for *la petite* to try her prentice hand on."

Jenny always felt a little naughty with Adam. He was so serious and one always forgot him until he was hot at one's elbow. And so hot! And how Jenny disliked odours. Adam lifted the big loving-cup (Sorleys to Comyns) from the calf-bound volume of Josephus which always stood on the hall-table. He was dreadfully serious, imperious.

“ Look ! Leave me a message where we can meet, in a given page of this. A leaf of ivy if it's by the dove-cot. Or geranium if it's the parapet beyond the sundial——”

“ Or cabbage if it's the kitchen-garden.” La, la ! this great calf Adam, trying to be dignified like his grandfather, telling her it was no laughing matter ! She came near him, slow step by step. Adam, breathing thickly, saw her demure as grey silk and little frilled apron and white collar could make her. Saw her chestnut hair rebellious, her lips and cheeks roses, her eyes . . . through their long lashes her eyes. He threw his hands up. “ You . . . oh, you wicked little nun ! ” he cried.

Poor Adam. So he might paint her, Jenny said, for he needed all possible practice. And when she desired no more of it she would leave a thorn in the book. “ Which page shall we choose, Adam ? I like these long s's, don't you ? ”

Adam, going in daily fear of the thorn, found many leaves ; rose, carnation, oak, and sycamore, staining the yellowed pages of old Josephus. Then Charlotte discovered the game (as she discovered most things if you gave her time) and added a varied handful which set Adam distractedly roaming the place until he found Jenny by the river, shook her in fury, and then kissed her more furiously still. And that did for him for good and all ; for Jenny ran home in a perfect anguish of shame and wrath. A thousand times Susan had told her that no man who respects a young lady would be so libertine as to kiss her ; and although the girls at school had said otherwise, this was Jenny's first grown-up kiss and it startled her. She got out her diary and solemnly took a new quill pen. This was an Occasion. She wrote :

A.S. has behaved as no gentlemen should. Never shall I forgive him as long as I live. I shall practise those Italian duets with Maria until even she stops making mistakes, and I shall help Fanny with her sums, and Mamma with the linen-closet. A.S. is not my Fancy and never was. I still consider Uncle Mab the Greatest of men except Lord Byron, and sometimes he lets me exercise his horses.

V

Into the confusion of shearing and Christmas preparations at Clent, Oliver brought Lieutenant Valentine Paige who he intended should prove Jenny's "Fancy." Or the fancy of those controlling her, which was much more important. Oliver, now managing Berry's racing stud at New Town, often regretted that he had not been born a gallant of the French Court at a time when parasites were at their zenith. He knew himself designed, like the native cherry on the hills, to feed on the roots of others, and what better way to do it than by providing himself with a number of rich relatives? To marry a rich wife was one way. But to marry Jenny to young Paige who greatly admired him and had lately bought a fine property on the Hobart Town side of the Bagdad Valley, was a better one. He had already mentally chosen a couple of sunny rooms for himself in Paige's house when Jenny should be mistress.

And then, later, there would be Charlotte.

Oliver, planning Charlotte all the way from town, found himself moved to indignation at sight of the big, plain, heavy girl. It was indecent that an exquisite such as he should have a niece like Charlotte. Possibly he might find some brewer or tobacco-and-spirit merchant who liked them fat. Fanny, at eight, was fair and delicious, and in time there would be the twins. Oliver foresaw endless consolations for his much dreaded old age and was pleased with Mr. Paige's comments on Jenny, who really did combine the fresh sweetness of the English rose with the delicacy of the French fleur-de-lis. Nothing takes like sweetness nowadays, thought Oliver, who preferred 'em with a flavour, himself.

"And Paige is really struck with her, by God," he protested to Madam, who caught him next morning with his hands full of sun-warmed apricots on the lawn. Jenny, Maria, and Lydia Quorn from Hobart Town played shuttlecock down the green slopes, and Mr. Paige leaned on the sundial in an attitude more suggestive of inviting admiration than conveying it. Madam had no objection to that. She liked a man who knew his worth; and this Paige was worth a great deal, even without his exterior,

which, by reason of a little moustache and beard, contrived to look quite foreign and excessively elegant. And his flowered waistcoats undoubtedly came from Paris, even if he did not. Madam's brown eyes questioned Oliver. There was much understanding between the two.

"Oh, a prig, ma'am; I grant you that," admitted Oliver. "But upright on his legs. The best catch in town."

"Jenny will not need to catch her husband. She will be caught," returned Madam crisply. But she floated off with her wide shimmering skirts to watch white shuttlecocks fly against blue sky. Bim-bim went the battledore of tall flaxen Maria in her tartan silks. "Ow!" screeched Lydia Quorn, dark and sharp-nosed in white muslin. Jenny said nothing. Like blown blossom of pink may she paused and darted. . . . The dainty *bouquetière*, thought Madam, fondly. *Dieu* send a good husband to pick her, I wonder much if this is he.

Mr. Paige was certainly attracted. With quizzing-glass he followed Jenny's movements.

"'Pon honour, ma'am, a fairy, I declare. Upon what cobweb did she descend to gladden our eyes?" His drawl was as exclusive as the rest of him. Even to Madam's jealous eyes he seemed a very proper fellow. "I have just seen the 'The Mountain Sylph' on the stage in Hobarton. I prefer her off it, by Jove," said Mr. Paige.

"My granddaughter is very young," assented Madam with the airy indifference of the creator. But she was well pleased. Jenny, it appeared, was going to do what was expected of her.

CHAPTER NINE

I

UP in her room, Jenny dressed for dinner with hands that shook a little nervously. Life was so exciting now, with Lydia and Maria giggling and looking sly at her, and Mr. Paige turning the music while she sang "Maid of Athens" or "When We Two." No young lady sang other than the songs of Lord Byron—the fascinating wretch—just now, and Jenny wondered if Lord Byron could have been at all like Mr. Paige. Certainly this siege by Mr. Paige was a very different matter from Adam's, and there were elements connected with it that she did not dare think about. Madam was taking more than usual interest in Jenny's clothes. Susan had begun to talk at large about bottom drawers. Jenny felt herself the focus of something deliciously romantic and vague as she ran about the ugly room made up of Susan's discards.

But until these last few nights she had slept well in the great bed with its raking half-tester of faded moreen with clumsy red woollen tassels and the counterpane knitted in bunchy circles of coarse cotton. Cheerfully every morning she had splashed her face with cold water from the cracked crockery on the unpainted wash-stand, and brushed her hair with a plain wooden brush at the dressing-table of two boxes nailed above each other. When Susan made the table a petticoat of spotted net over pink glazed calico Jenny had been dizzy with pride for a whole day, and the pink crochet pincushion Maria had given her "to match" stood on it still. There was nothing else but a red-velvet box with a lid of little shells and a small scarred looking-glass which lost its head and fell over backward every time she looked in it, an occurrence which might have warned her of what she was later to expect from its betters.

An impossible room which gave Madam *la grande misère*, but Jenny felt it perfection because it was her own at a time when

privacy was for only the very few. She sang French catches as she brushed her chestnut curls out and knotted them up with a scarlet ribbon.

“ En passant par la Lorraine
Avec mes sabots,
Recontrai trois Capitaines,
Avec mes sabots,”

she sang. And then Aunt Ellen came in quickly, closing the door in a mysterious way, and turned to take her by the shoulders. Her hands were cold on Jenny's warm skin, and she whispered hoarsely :

“ I see it coming. Don't deny it, Jenny. Don't deny it.”

“ Deny what, Aunt Ellen ? ” asked Jenny, much startled.

“ Do not remain UNPLUCKED,” said Aunt Ellen, making capitals of it. “ Even if there are lions in the way. Jenny, I implore you, defy the lions. Take warning by me and do not remain UNPLUCKED.”

“ N-no, Aunt Ellen,” faltered Jenny. Aunt Ellen had lost her red cheeks and her big shoulders. She was gaunt and yellow. All Jenny's lively vision could not see herself like Aunt Ellen.

“ It is leap-year,” said Ellen, “ but only for one week more. Remember, Jenny, that it is better to leap than to remain unplucked. But be sure that you leap far enough. Half-way is of no use.”

She slipped away ; tiptoe and finger to lip like some uneasy ghost. Jenny lit the tallow candle, not yet being allowed the thick yellow sperm ones made in Hobart Town, and peered into the crazy glass. What she saw did not content her. There seemed so little of her but eyes. . . . No one could really admire me, she thought in sudden terror. I suppose I really shall be like Aunt Ellen some day and never be married or have any darling babies.

But because Susan had thoroughly taught her that all the natural instincts are shameful, Jenny could no longer face the glass. With cheeks burning, she dashed out the candle and went skimming like a white ghost along to the nursery where her baby brother was wakened by soft lips wandering over his bare limbs, a soft voice cooing love-words. The baby cooed back, and old

Nurse, like a withered apple sprouting cap frills, came scolding

“Did 'ee rouse 'ee, my lovey? . . . A main naughty girl you are, then, Miss Jenny, as ought to know better.”

Jenny went soberly downstairs, avoiding Mr. Paige on the veranda, and slipping out to join Mab, who was smoking a pipe on the balustrade above the river. Mab put an arm round her, but he did not speak. He did not know how to reach Jenny now. Julia and the dark shadow of passion stood between while his dear maid in her young brightness was being drawn away to this tailor's dummy brought home by Oliver, who never had any conscience.

Perhaps Mab was unfair to Mr. Paige, who, if he knew himself to be over-virtuous, over-rigid in his desires, at least hoped that marriage would better that. He was anxiously conscious of lacking a Temperament which, he again hoped, marriage might create. All about him he saw men damning themselves and the dear women for love—such as lived sober as the heads of families he did not trouble to see—and he would have liked to court some denied fair, but had not the courage. He longed to cut a figure and would have liked it to be dashing; but finding nothing in himself that answered to that demand, he had decided to be intellectual, which, if more troublesome, was certainly less dangerous. Yet it was a real grief to him that he preferred rat-hunts to hunting his own horses, and always had to get his stimulation from outside.

This young colony, keen and quarrelsome, with pioneer stock, stimulated him. So did the red-shirted blaspheming bullockies, and the stockmen roping steers for the branding, with that deep-chested big Mab Comyn swinging on the rope and being dragged through the dust like some triumphal chariot. As for little Miss Jenny, she stimulated Mr. Paige so effectively that Maria and Lydia had him in their diaries nearly every night.

Maria, very pensive with her hair down, thought of Humphrey, but wrote principally of Mr. Paige, with a great many italics:

Never did I see *any one* so truly elegant as V.P. His rings and waistcoats are a heavenly dream and in the Pasterole on Xmas night he and Mr. Oliver *excelled* themselves, although O.C. is better in

the pigeonwing. It is clear that V.P. is *devoted* to Jenny and he squeezed her hand in Sir Roger with a look that spoke *Volumes. Volumes!!!!* Humph v. forward and k. me under mistletoe which I know I shd. not have allowed.

Sharp-nosed Lydia Quorn had another angle :

I long to play a trick on V.P. To quiz and hurt him and discover if the idle [after several re-writings it remained thus] has possible feet of clay. I want to make him SUFFER. Oh, me! Wretch that I am when I know that if he looked at me twice I'd fall at his feet. Yes, if they were *tin*. Is there any subjeck on which he cannot discourse with brilliance? I do not know it. He makes every other man seem an ignorant *worm*, and if I can find Uripydees in the Tingvally Library I will read him all night long and win from Jenny at the Post. *N.B.* If Jenny has uripidees I shall make her lend it to me.

Then below, very agitated :

His buckskin breeches! Oh, my heart

It was really an excellent Christmas, even although Mr. Merrick, in addition to his brown trousers, had pinned back the tails of his blue surtout to serve as a dress-coat, thereby sending Oliver into the male equivalent for hysterics ; and Mr. Paige's conversation (much stimulated by first-class port and sherry) became so very erudite and dull that even Madam was hypnotized into thinking him clever ; and the Captain, gallantly handing Mrs. Merrick through a quadrille, had the misfortune to lose his footing among her trailing shawls and jerk them all from her. She shrieked as though she had not a stout black-satin gown and four flannel petticoats below. She stood shrieking while the Captain heaped her with apologies and shawls and her daughters ran to enswathe her. But she would not continue the quadrille.

"Something always happens to me in this horrible place," she cried. "Bush-rangers or warming-pans, and worse. But thank Heaven I try to continue modest, in spite of captains."

The Captain, too upset to answer, walked away to Oliver. "Nothing could be more painful to me than a scene like this, my dear boy. Any suggestion of lack of gallantry toward a lady——"

“Where’s the lady?” asked Oliver, dryly. He was suffering from a surfeit of William, whom he had tentatively approached that afternoon with respect to Mr. Paige and Jenny. “I shall allow no engagement for at least a year,” announced William, his hands beneath his coat-tails, and Oliver retorted, “Well, don’t refuse him before he asks, will you?” and went off whistling “Nix My Dolly,” a popular low song which might have upset William considerably if he had recognized it.

If Madam at this period did not actively encourage Mr. Paige, her salon did; and Oliver skilfully made the most of its beautiful austerity of Louis Quinze chairs standing far apart on a hardwood floor, its tall mirrors dimly gilt, and Watteaus on pale walls, the Isabey miniatures of Madam’s father (an imperious wigged aristocrat with orders on his scarlet coat) and mother, the silken curtain blowing wide to a hot night which now held no fear of bush-rangers.

An exquisite atmosphere, through which slipped Jenny like a nymph that smelled of lavender and fresh water and other pure bright things, with an elegantly embroidered Mr. Paige in chaste pursuit.

III

Christmas at Clent was a great stimulation to Mr. Paige. There were no prayers in the morning, because presently there would be church. But there was an extraordinary amount of noise and laughter, of sunshine and gay summer dresses and sweet airs; of Madam and the Captain distributing presents in the hall to a neat curtsying line of servants; of children everywhere with shining faces and loaded arms. And to Jenny there seemed an extraordinary amount of Mr. Paige, sentimental in the epigrams of Meleager and Agathias, and unaccountably arch over telling her how Dr. Johnson “beat the world with pedagogic rods.” And then there was something about the Duchess of Bedford, who, it appeared, having accomplished her world’s work by the invention of afternoon tea, had lately gone to her reward.

“I observe that in the colony you still adhere to the earlier

wine and cakes," drawled Mr. Paige, archer than ever. "Strange. Strange. A great loss to the histrionic world, the duchess. Possibly as much so as the lamented Count d'Orsay, who invented my neck-cloth. A mystic, I grant you. A pure mystic."

Bewildered and yet flattered, Jenny escaped to the joviality of the kitchen, where the Bodges twins, Christmas Eve and Goldish-Bronze—freckled and wide-mouthed and wonderful in garments made from Madam's old boudoir curtains and trimmed from Susan's piece-bag—rushed about, helping cook. A Homeric place, the kitchen, where a flagged floor was already wearing into the ridges of age, a smoked ceiling with hams and herb bunches hanging like bats already taking on dark mystery. There was a great colonial oven with blazing fires above and below, a long dresser full of crockery and earthenware and copper, two longer tables scrubbed shining white with sand. Cook, whose son, Tom Jerrold, now ran his own race-horses in Melbourne, was a slow mountain of a woman in wide frilled cap and unthinkable spread of apron. She had the hand of a fairy with pasties and jellied brawns and chicken pies all golden with round of egg, and Jenny peeped at the covered mounds of tarts greedily.

"Cookie, I am so hungry. It's nearly an hour since breakfast."

"There's a-many young ladies," said Cook, profoundly, "as 'as lost the love of a young genelman by comin' the 'ungry hover 'im. They're main sentimental, is young genelman, an' passions to think of young ladies as hangels without stummicks. Don't you heat no dinner in the 'ouse to-night, Miss Genevieve, dear. Jest you slip hout to old Cookie when as you wants feedin'. It's wiser."

"But . . . but . . ." began Jenny, burning up with her blushes. And then some one knocked at the outer door, flinging a crooked shadow.

"Beggars," said Cook, wrestling with the boning of a turkey. "Feed 'em, Golly."

Beggars were plentiful as frogs in a bog, but none left Clent empty-handed. Jenny, glad to efface herself, cut great lumps of yellow cheese, helped Goldish-Bronze draw two loaves from the brick oven beside the chimney, filled a cider bottle with milk for the shaggy half-naked children. The crooked woman begged a

“nugget,” which was old convict slang for tobacco long before convicts went to the Australian gold-fields and applied it there to the lumps of gold. Another woman came through the courtyard later, but she did not beg. She stood in the door with blue eyes grown dim with seeking and asked, “Has any one seed my man?”

Jenny knew her for the young woman who had once been at Lovely Corners and had chosen a convict's life in order to follow her husband. She cried pitifully, “Oh, haven't you found him yet?” And the woman went on in a monotonous patter:

“Has any one seed my man? Sam Hall, that's him. Five fut three and spits a lot when he's got a quid. Full-rigged ship on right arm, two ankers an' ‘Mary’ on chest. Mermaid on right leg. S'posed to have come out on the *Thunderer* twelve year ago. Any one seed my man?”

Cook came to the door, big and crimson. “Now, you be hoff. I knows all about you, an' no good neither. You never stays nowhere, young 'ooman. You're a jade, that's what. Be hoff, now.”

“I wants my——”

“Well, we ain't got 'im. Go hask at the perlice.” She slammed the door. “Since she's time-expired she's a reg'lar noosance. . . . More wood, Chrissy.”

Jenny stood still. The woman had worn men's boots padded with straw which stuck through the uppers. Her clothing was principally a coachman's long caped coat and a dirty neckerchief called a “susy.” Her battered bonnet had often been slept in. The very dregs of womanhood and tragedy she was. Jenny thought of her going on forever: on bare dusty roads under the blinding sun; down steep hill tracks with gaunt bush ghostly each side; begging a drink of billy-tea at some splitter's lonely shanty; putting her piteous question where men gathered round the hitching-post outside some bush hotel. Because she could not find her man, old Mary could never stop going on. Because Aunt Ellen could not find a man, she might not leave that grim dark house at Lovely Corners. How terrible it was, Jenny thought, that a man should have to mean so much to a woman! It seemed that Mamma was right when she said girls were very foolish if they had the chance and didn't take one. Her mind flew to Mr. Paige and hurried away, alarmed. She ran down the back passage to

the pantries, where Susan and Charlotte, very important in big aprons, were getting out the custard glasses. Jenny, in blue frills with a white muslin collar, always felt very frivolous when she saw Charlotte.

“Oh, Mamma,” she cried, “we really must help poor Mary. Couldn’t we get the governor to have a description of her husband posted at all the police offices or something?”

“Ridiculous,” said Susan. New ideas were abominable to her. You never knew where they would get you to. “Ridiculous! Jenny, don’t go jumping about like that. You’ll have the tray over.”

“But Mamma, it’s so terrible. Oh, people shouldn’t be allowed to be so unhappy!”

“How you do grumble!” said Charlotte. “Always something.”

“Yes.” Susan remembered that Jenny was always fussing about something. Celeste with a cold or Golly with toothache or somebody’s sick baby. “Yes, Jenny, dear Lottie is quite right. I can’t see what *you’ve* got to grumble about. I’m sure you have everything you want.”

“But Mamma! That’s just it. I have, and so I can’t bear to think——”

“It’s not your duty to think.” Susan knew herself on safe ground here, only having to repeat William. “Let your betters think, and do as you’re told. That’s all God asks of you, Jenny.”

This was *vieux jeu*. William had first advanced this theory to an eight-year-old Jenny, who had found her heart hotly postulating that God must be a fool. True, she had been instantly seized with the conviction that she had sinned the Unforgivable Sin of which Grandma Merrick talked so much, and had run straight up to the attic where she considered three desperate methods of suicide among the tarantulas. But it had all come to nothing, as so many of her plans did, although for months she had walked beneath that shadow. Now, even more dreadful because more personal, she found herself shelving that suspicion, for one regarding her parents. . . . No, no, Jenny, she thought, you must not think that of Mamma.

“Grumbling! After that beadwork necklace I made you, too,”

said Charlotte, virtuously. Jenny walked off. She wished she could think Lottie a fool, but she wasn't. She was exactly like a large pale glassy gooseberry, with prickles.

III

Every one, Jenny had read, carries with him a certain moral atmosphere, but had there ever been any one more moral than Mr. Paige? She felt not, somehow, driving to the Trienna New Year's Races with Grandma and Mamma and her first grown-up parasol with an ivory handle and pink silk fringes. It seemed to her that Grandpa oughtn't to take him there in the gig where he would see (Jenny felt) sights that would distress him. For herself there was a rough roistering exhilaration about it all that made her want to swagger about, chewing straws with the smocked farmers, tilt her hat, and cry, "Make yer bets, genmen," like Warrego Jack, smack her leg with a riding-whip (standing straddled to discuss a horse's points) like Uncle Mab, like Adam and Brevis and all the other lucky ones who knew what being a man meant. Mr. Paige, she suspected, had other views.

Oh, a joy, a good rich joy this, like hot roast beef and Yorkshire pudding! Even through the carriage window she saw the red bullock-drays come lurching up, come creaking with solid wheels as they had creaked out of the bush hills before the magpies began whistling or mist was gone from the gullies. And the frowsy eager women in them, the shirted men with wide straw hats, the brown, untidy children. And here, if she leaned forward, were bushmen in furry hats of kangaroo-skin; harvesters, their trousers tied with string at the knees; the young Fremps perspiring in heavy broadcloth; old beggars in tatters, a faded scarlet coat with the regiment buttons gone. And women: how happy they looked, the women wandering about instead of sitting prim by Grandma in a carriage!

A very representative meeting, men thought, with plenty of four-in-hands, tandems, singles, and riding-horses. Plenty of the fine upstanding country racers in the long sheds under the gum trees. Plenty of food and drink: chicken and sherry for the quality; slabs of bread and pale cheese for the labourers, and

black bottles filled at the three Trienna taverns. There was no gate yet, no restrictions, Oliver explained to Mr. Paige. The grand stand was a hill-slope cleared of timber. On that course marked only with little red flags some of the keenest horsemen in the world would presently ride their well-bred hunters and racers over those big fences, for the love of it, winning from one another the handsome prizes they had put up. And because most women rode like Amazons, Oliver explained to a Mr. Paige keeping well away from the horses' heels, the fair were less inclined to scream when a man went down than to blame him for poor horsemanship.

That big black hunter of Adam Sorley's, said Oliver, was bred by Cox of Melbourne, and Kay had a mare out of Beltane by Lamplighter, one of the colony's greatest sires. The Sorleys could pay what they chose for their horse-flesh, said Oliver, dryly, helping Mab to strip Vanity. The old satin-skinned beauty with her wise lean head and her fired hocks was being asked to do far too much in these days. But Mab said he must make money somehow and there was never any to spare at Clent. Mab, Oliver guessed, would never beg earrings from Madam, any more than he would resign his mad dream of Julia Berry. "I resign," Oliver thought he could hear him saying, stepping out with his fierce eyes, his young mouth like Tannhäuser from the Courts of Love. But he wouldn't. They were tenacious, the Comyns. More fools they.

Kay and Adam were noisy in the saddling paddock among the other young bucks. Already in the hot sun they had been drinking. Oliver moved Mr. Paige softly among the gentry with puggarees to their white top-hats, with field-glasses and loose pale trousers; among the little cockatoo-farmers who, probably, were once indentured to the big settlers; among the sons of these—the colonial-born, with their leaner, harder look, more brown than red, more long-limbed than stocky. The bare hill blossomed now with glinting silks and nodding plumes and the blowing fringes of gay parasols, and just as Henry Sorley rode down to start the first race on his old white cob Mr. Paige suggested that they should go up and see the ladies.

"Oh, certainly, if you like," said Oliver, inwardly cursing.

Julia called Mab up, to wish him luck. She was wearing his colours, and he frowned a little. "I wish you'd be more careful," he said, and then she was angry, as she so often was now. Never any tears now.

"I give what I can, but it seems I can't please you," she said, walking off with a shrug.

What she could? Was a crimson parasol with a black tassel all she could give after these wasted years? Mab wondered, flying the first low hurdle and steadying away for the brook. Beside him Bob Beverley, two years his junior and already the jovial father of a family, was bringing up brown Werribee, and ahead was Brevis Keyes, slim and elastic as a faun. The man of substance and the youngster. And himself, Mab Comyn, in between; still nothing; still getting nowhere.

Over, by Jove, and a near shave, too. Adam was pounding up behind. . . . Over again, with a stagger from good old Vanity and Brevis dropping back against his knee. A stone wall now . . . a brush-and-rail with the sun right in the eyes and a regular rattle of striking hoofs. Lord, but Adam was hitting up the pace! At the ditch he and Kay took charge and some one went down. These boys . . . racing already. Foam from a reefing bit flew back in his face, and Vanity was fencing like the dainty veteran she was, and good old Bob somersaulted into the water-jump.

Mab saluted with his whip and he swept over. If only one could ride forever! Ride away from troubles and hopes! Here came Brevis like a slung stone, by George! Brevis had it! Brevis! Vanity was done, and Mab wouldn't gruel the old darling. Just another chance chucked into limbo after so many others. But the boys were flogging up the straight: these slick and clever children of the dragon's blood springing up everywhere. But Brevis had it! Brevis . . .

Faces with open mouths reeled past. And the tall box where Conrad Beverley in a white panama with a puggaree stood shining like the sun in judgment, and the little red flags. But Brevis had it, and Vanity was lame and Julia up on the hill in Madam's coach. *You ask me if I am going to the masquerade. I am at it,* said some one once. Mab felt just like that, walking off to rub Vanity down and rug her.

IV

“There’s a kind of vulgar lust in us all,” said Bevis, strolling with Humphrey and Sigurd, “which can be satisfied only by this sort of thing.”

He snuffed up the good homely smells of dried grass and heated horses, of stale spirits and meat sandwiches and bullocks and sweating men crowding about the punters who shouted their wares from gigs and tip-drays. He stopped to listen to the plump goodwives in stuff shortgowns and huge bonnets who in loud voices were discussing intimate matters; and had a word for Chrissy and Golly on the arms of Alsode Fremp, who was feeding them with liquorice.

“In this way one can study humanity without having to suffer its limitations,” he said. But Humphrey, rubbing up his hot face with hotter hands, wouldn’t agree to that.

“You *can’t* study humanity unless you suffer with it. What do you really know about all that lot, for instance?”

They halted under a gum tree creamy-white with blossoms, to look back at the wagon where Henny and her blowsy female companions were camped with a handful of government men whose masters had allowed them by special favour to come to a public meeting. The two military police, like Shem and Ham in scarlet tunics, white trousers, and flat straw hats, walked by the wagon several times with sharp glances; but the men lay lazy in the sun, chewing nuggets of the best Virginia begged from the gentry, and the women sat up decently against the wagon wheels, drinking very politely in their turn from black bottles.

“You could study Henny all day and you’d know nothing of her,” said Humphrey. He looked a little awed. “My Heaven! With convicts I always think what a whole ghastly world they know that we couldn’t even dream of in nightmares.”

To Henny the world was no nightmare now. She had come through it. She had been pretty at a time when even plain women were much sought after in the colony, and by the time that power had left her she had gained others. In this underground world she stood for infinitely more than the police could find out, whatever they guessed, and there were caves back in the

hills behind her hut that were full of unsuspected treasure yet. Collins had a heap of booty there when he made a mistake in sticking up Sylvester and ran his neck into the noose which finished most of them. She could have done a lot for that harnsome young painter who wanted to rouse the country. He could a'done it at that time, with her behind him. For the fiftieth time she asked: "Don't any one know what happened that theer Snow?"

But none knew nor cared. He had made no splash as Rocky Wheelan had, before they turned him off. And bush-ranging was not worth it now, they told Henny, with conditions improving all the time. Better run straight and get your ticket, be a free man.

"No guts left in the lot on yer," said Henny. "Rocky were the larst wi' guts. He did it proper. Ah, an' swung proper fur it, too."

A little man in a red nightcap gained some attention through having ridden for a while with Rocky, that Nero who slew old and young for the joy of it, and had been hanged at Hobart Town the year before. "Seen 'em hang seven blarsted blokes on the ole gallers, pokin' above the Pen," declared Barcelona Mike. "A tight fit fur seven, but I've heard as it were main comftubble fur six."

They laughed. Herein lay their native jests. A groom in corduroys and highlows turned his straw, saying: "They 'ung Rocky a bit forrarder back to the jail, but Hi seen 'im kickin' agin the sky. Hi were there."

"D'ye mind the auld gallows on New Town Hill?" asked a gentle Scotch shepherd. "It wadna be used in oor time, but when we were camped near by the wee chainies wud clank the nicht lang, and niver a stir o' wind."

A burly Northcountryman told a yarn in the unprintable prison slang. He reached a thick arm and drew his wife near, a scrap of a creature in a drab gown and big black stuff bonnet. "Aw reet, Betsy lass. . . . I been dustin' o' her jacket for she," he explained to the company. "But I got 'ee some black 'ile from the chimist for't. Eh, domned but I did."

Betsy wriggled her beaten back against him and grinned. And the young groom, moved thereby to his own amour, sought

Molly Hempson's hand and held it. There was a pause with the hot peace welling about them.

"Better'n the hulks, lass," murmured the Northcountryman.

"Yon's a pratty maid," said one, jerking a thumb as Jenny went by with Mab and Humphrey. Henny grunted. Then grinned. "Her name ain't Julia, though," she said. Had that wild Muster Mab ever shown Lady Berry the name Snow pricked on his breast, she wondered wickedly as she rose up her gaunt height and straightened her crazy bonnet. "Mebbe I'll go round and tell a fortune or two." She twitched her features into a cozening smile. "Cross me hand wiv silver, pretty genelman, an' I'll tell ye . . ."

The men laughed. Molly said as she ambled off: "The old mare'll do the blarstedest things to fill her nose-bag. . . . Dave, I'll guv yer one on the nob if yer do that again."

V

Madam, lunching with dignity behind glass doors in the coach, made room for Jenny when Mab brought her.

"God, what sights!" she cried. "Never before have I seen so many silk purses made of sows' ears. Dairy- and scullery-maids gold-encrusted as the high priests of Solomon's Temple, and ploughmen more jewelled than the Queen of Sheba. Alas, for poor humanity! The less there is below, the more, apparently, we put on the surface."

"But it's magnificent to have brought all that from the gold-fields," said Oliver. "I have nothing to wear on the surface except my skin."

"Obviously," agreed Madam, briefly. More than the emerald earrings had gone to Oliver, and now she was calling a halt. "Remember that already I have given you a *dot* like a daughter, my son," she had told him. "With it you must marry good-luck . . . or even laborious days."

Oliver had been so gracious, so charming that she had to turn him out in a hurry or she would have forgiven him and begged him to rape where he would. With an asset like that, what need

had he of her? And now he would marry this jejune Paige to Jenny and select the best rooms in their mansion for himself. She doffed her *chapeau* in admiration to Oliver, but she took off her coat at the same time. Paige did not passion her, but he had not the low vices of so many men, and assuredly he was dignified and would give the child a position. But not until Jenny had made her curtsy to the governor did Madam intend to make her choice.

Julia came, languid and coldly handsome. She had had luncheon, thank you, but the Sorley coach was so full of Henry's children; one never remembered how many nor knew what they were all for. And was Madam really taking Jenny down for the ball in that shocking old Government House? Although certainly the ballroom was improved.

Mr. Paige leaned with bared head through Jenny's window. "Fair charmer, I may have the first valse?" he murmured.

"I . . . I can't say."

"You . . . surely you will not break hearts by refusing to gladden us with round dances?"

"I . . . I don't know."

She could have bitten herself for her sudden shyness. Apparently he liked it.

"Aw . . . you're behavin' like the sex. 'Pon honour, I prefer a woman to behave like her sex," vowed Mr. Paige. And Jenny, who had never been called a woman before, was so intoxicated that she sat up straight, flung back her veil to cast a careless glance at Lydia Quorn walking by with the Beverleys, and promised Mr. Paige the first dance, "if Grandma allows . . ."

"Again the sun shines," said Mr. Paige, who really was more than usually conscious of life and colour when with Jenny. That vitality which is the very genius of living shone in her small body to stir his sluggish blood. He had a sudden insane longing to frolic, woo her with pigeonwings and whistles as maids were wooed on Hampstead Heath, quip and pun as airily as Oliver was doing. But he could only transfix her with his quizzing-glass and tell her that Plato's proper name was Aristocles. "Plato means *Broadly*. I suppose he was fat," simpered Mr. Paige, archly. And although Jenny listened in all politeness, he felt

dismally that his persiflage lacked dash. Assuredly he must marry Jenny and cultivate Oliver. And then . . . He saw himself lifted upon their wings, witching the world.

"Here's a fortune-teller," said Oliver. "Come, my good woman. Are fortunes hot or cold to-day?"

"Hot for you, young sir," said Henny, ogling. "Cold for the yaller-haired genelman wherever he goes."

"Aw, no! I protest!" cried Mr. Paige. But Julia (always superstitious) was holding out a delicate palm and Henny began her patter. What she knew of the Berry household along underground ways would have staggered Julia.

"Friends. Everywhere you has friends, m'Lady." Then Oliver cried: "In both places? Is she like the dying duchess who didn't care a fig where she went, for she had so many friends in both places?"

"Noll, you are too bad," said Julia, and Henny gabbled: "I see blood. I see a harnsome young genelman wi' breast bared and the little needles a-workin'. They're writin' 'Julia' on his heart."

Oliver had never cause to quarrel with his wits. Mab! That was just what Mab would do, the lunatic. And at Henny's of all places. Madam was looking keen, Julia scared. He burlesqued it boldly. "Good Heavens! How did the old hag guess! But, forgive me, it was never intended for your name, Lady Berry. The fellow started to write me 'Jubilate' and misspelled it."

Julia's smile was too wan to be appreciative. "I think I'm cold and the woman stupid. I shall walk on the hill."

"Many are cold, but few frozen," agreed Oliver, gaily. He helped her out and stepped after Henny. "Watch your tongue, woman," he said sternly. "Even the time-expired may find their way to the House of Correction."

He went down to the saddling paddock, considering. Was this escapade of late date and leading sharply up to something more? There were not wanting people who hinted at something more. Undoubtedly Julia knew of the tattooing. Had probably seen it. Oliver, with a tolerant knowledge of human frailty, was assured that Julia had seen it. And now, what to do? Any scandal in the family would scare off that prig Paige quicker than

anything. Feeling himself on the dangerous edge of things, he sought Mr. Paige, who inquired languidly: "Aw, shall we go and make our bets? I vow I would love to make a bet."

An extraordinarily unsullied Paige, this, for Jenny to write her virgin experiences upon. She ought to be grateful to Oliver.

VI

Jenny, not inquiring of herself how she felt, was yet conscious that life was stranger and more exciting than ever she had dreamed. She believed that she walked on air, and yet she was conscious of pitfalls. She heard her voice speak, but was not sure what it said. She felt neglected when Mr. Paige went away, and wished him away when he came. She felt . . . after the manner of a young female whose friends are trying to persuade her that she is in love, this seventeen-year-old Jenny straight from the rigid rule of the schoolroom of the 'fifties did not in the least know how she felt.

It was the Romantic Age; an age drenched in simple sentiment, and scattered with nosegays, little silk aprons, sentimental verses, blushes, and perfumed memories. An age when young ladies sang to vamping accompaniments, "Hast sorrow thy young days shaded?" and men were not ashamed to brush away a tear. The Captain invariably did when Jenny sang that, and Oliver's mellow tenor following with "She is far from the land where her young hero sleeps," was certain to breach flood-gates in other directions.

A courteous, simple age, too soon to be succeeded by the antimacassars and antiseptic gentility of the 'seventies, and no more artificial than every age in its turn. For what would poor humanity do if it dared fling off its motley, be that motley fans and drooping curls or cocktails and cigarettes?

CHAPTER TEN

I

BEFORE leaving Clent, Mr. Paige approached William in quite the proper manner, but Madam had been ahead of him. William, perforce, had to convey to the suitor his willingness to open the matter "at a later date, when my daughter shall have recovered from the excitement under which she will undoubtedly labour on the occasion of her presentation to society," and leave it there. It was all but a pledge on Jenny's account, as he meant it to be, circumstances having forced him to the conclusion that a man who has his quiverful of parents in addition to children may be happy but can scarcely be prosperous, while a docile married daughter well able to take younger sisters under her wing was most decidedly not to be sneezed at—although William couched the thought in finer language.

So down in Hobart Town, Lieutenant Valentine Paige awaited Jenny's coming with what after careful inquiry into himself he gladly perceived to be excitement. He had managed to transfer himself temporarily to the Government House staff instead of going off to the Maori wars. "I hear that D'Aubeny and Potter have married Maori wives, natives, down in New Zealand," he told Oliver in disgust.

"Maori wives are not irrevocable," said Oliver, "and I presume that they offer practice. It is inconceivable to me that a man would be expected to qualify for the greatest game of skill in the world without practice."

"But . . . aw . . . for the ladies . . . aw . . ." objected Mr. Paige.

"It is they have raised marriage to the status of a game of skill. They're all right," said Oliver, who was anxious to get Mr. Paige out of the army and into his house before foreign service twitched him away to the West or South Australias.

“That’s why it’s wise for a man to marry them young. By the way, my mother is bringing my niece down next week. They will stay with the Sorleys in Upper Davey Street.”

“I had thought she would stay with Lady Berry,” said Mr. Paige, much disappointed. Madam’s dragonage would be so much more intensive than Julia’s, and Oliver, who felt the same, judged that the time had come to speak plainly.

“I have some influence with my mother, if you would care for me to use it on your behalf.”

Mr. Paige looked up from *The Illustrated London News*, which had a woodcut of the Ninety-ninth Regiment leaving Hobart Town per transport *Windsor* in the January of 1856. They were bound for the Crimea, and he was very glad not to be with them.

“If you are able to assist me,” he said solemnly. “I protest that I shall owe you more than I can ever repay.”

Don’t you worry about that, my buck. You’ll repay, all right, thought Oliver, and felt a revival of his cheerful assurance, which had somewhat faded of late. Indeed, the cheerful assurance of a country that had overreached itself in extravagance was fading, Oliver considered critically. The New North-East Coalmines which had promised so buoyantly had closed down for lack of roads, and he had been among the shareholders to be hard hit. Timber (William had hoped much from the Latterdale timber that Humphrey cut with such reluctance) was almost unsaleable since the Australian colonies had opened up and were drawing intending settlers across the strait. Victoria, which Tasmania had mothered, was the greatest sinner and going ahead like the devil.

Gold still flowed through the colony; but it was slippery, and in the Captain’s hands it shot toward infinity like a pinched apple pip. Latterdale, what with clearing, fencing, stocking, was costing too much, and Clent wool never brought top prices. (And indeed, with all the experiments tried by the Captain it was a marvel, said his friends, that he didn’t produce goats or even those long-necked Spanish animals . . . llamas, were they?) The Midlands had great breeders, but the Comyns would never be among them. Henry Sorley was a great breeder, and Julia was one who reaped a harvest thereby. Julia, Oliver felt gratefully, was a good friend.

II

Mab took Jenny and Madam to town because the Captain refused to enter the house of Councillor Sorley until Councillor Sorley had entered his. "*Mais que les hommes sont enfants!*" cried Madam in despair. For it seemed that James was saying just the same to his Louisa. But the Captain assured Madam that James must have got the notion from him in the first place. "I must have said it first, my love. Nor has Sorley any reason for his pig-headedness," said the Captain, very dignified.

So Jenny (said Susan, almost impressive and stuck all over with pins) was to have her chance and it was to be hoped she was properly careful. And if she were careful with these fine clothes and didn't go rushing about in her usual way, so unbecoming in a young lady, they would do for the bottom drawer later on.

Undoubtedly they were fine clothes. Madam believed more in art than in that Destiny which is the refuge of the inefficient. She sent to Launceston, Melbourne, everywhere for *mousseline de laines* (Jenny loved their soft sprigging of pinks and greens), Victoria silks, jaconets, silk gauzes, and satins *superbe* in all the strong unsubtle colours of the time. Jenny's richly tinted youth could bear anything, thought Madam, who proceeded to make her bear it, being minded to present Jenny as a challenge, while Mrs. Beverley, artistic without being artful, decided to garb an also budding Maria always and only in white.

The Main Road spread itself good-naturedly for a small Jenny going to conquest by means of the mail-coach. Passed away were the pony-post riders who had dared black and bush-ranger in the 'twenties. Passed the tandem mail-cart driven by Cox of Launceston during the 'thirties. And passed the famous Cobb & Co. with whose high green wheels America conquered Australia and bid fair to conquer Tasmania until Page's Royal Mail Coaches were doing the hundred and twenty miles for five shillings, with a good breakfast thrown in. No American could stomach so unlucrative a business for long. Cobb retired, and the horns of Page and his red-coated successors blew triumphant to the bush hills and long valleys every night and day.

Jenny drove by settlers' timbered huts with their lichened roofs, and pigs grunting about the bare feet of their bearded owners ; by great houses gleaming out of their rough gum-tree parks, and humble taverns overtopped by splendid stables where ostlers came running in bright waistcoats to change the smoking teams. Wrapped in the heavy dark garments without which no lady could travel abroad, she walked for a while on the trampled grass with Mab, who was worried because she was not so bubbling-bright in these last days. Perhaps it was the huge trunks of clothes which had gone on in a chaise with the Beverley trunks, and perhaps it was the shadow of that society which, adventurous although she was, must loom rather high and strange. But he feared much that it was the thought of Paige, that prig to whom his dear maid was evidently to be given as a Christian to the lions.

Paige, Mab felt, hadn't even the manhood to dispose of her in one snap. He would mumble her stupidly, wearing her gay youth down. And all this because, by Madam's relentless code, Jenny must be sacrificed since he himself had failed. For the first time he wished that he were now a big man in the colony ; something of a shape to deny them all, snatch up Jenny, and put her where she should be. "What have I not endured in this bitter land that my blood may rule here ?" Madam had cried. And, since he had so disappointed her, she was backing little Jenny now.

And little Jenny, ill mated, might grow to be like Julia, hard against the world and himself, yet taking all she wanted from both. . . . But at least there's no one else with Jenny, yet, please God, thought Mab, taking no pleasure from the crisp sweet air and the rolling distance gold with wattle and gorse. And then he was ashamed for having judged even momentarily poor unhappy, bewildered Julia who needed him so much. Didn't she always tell him how she needed him !

A posse of military police trotted by, their long white-trouser legs in the short English stirrup that Mab found so impossible, and their glossy horses a sheer joy to the eye. Fine horses, too, in the gigs, four-in-hands, and other vehicles crowding the road, for the gentlefolk were proud of their blood stock ;

and if many the farmers rode had been illegally bred by the bush-rangers, they were none the worse for that. Some of the best mares in the colony had been stolen and taken to the hills.

On the coach-top Mab talked a little with a stout old gaitered fellow who wore his long upper lip clean-shaven and a grey fringe under the chin. He had come out "with a free passage" as the business was called now, and was at last time-expired with a rich little farm of his own.

"An' I can putt my name to my own cheque noo," he said, with simple pride. "I made oot to work wi' a stick i' the muck at the back door till I could do it good as the next man. An' them lads o' mine, they'll get eddication. No thart aboot that. Aye . . ."

Mab thought that there was much of Madam's spirit in the old chap. He had broken the thing which had tried to break him. He had held on just as Madam was holding on. But Mab had never found that easy to do.

There were others who had not found it easy. These old men and women with pipes and swags and with "convict" written all over them had not found it easy. They sat in the sun by the roadside, and doddered on from town to township, never getting anywhere, never knowing where they wanted to get. Like Mab, this, he thought, driving by Oatlands Gaol where many navy-and-yellow figures worked, harnessed to the little carts of dressed stone.

The coach flung at a gallop over the bridge and Celeste groaned. She was one of those great soft Frenchwomen whom Madam likened to human Percherons, and no longer young.

"*Mon Dieu!* I am in purgatory!" cried Celeste.

"Confess your sins, then," retorted Madam, upright in her uneasy corner. "But not aloud."

Jenny looked wistfully. How wonderful Grandmamma was! Never tired, never complaining, never uncertain or pitiful. Consistently always the great lady. Jenny, conscious of many confusions within, hoped she was not going to disappoint Grandmamma. But how was a girl to know who was liable to be snatched at suddenly by a poignant sense of approaching and hidden futures which left her trembling? Or visited slowly and

intensely in the night by the shadow of dim mysteries, passions, and denials from that unquenchable past built up by the weak hands of women with unfathomable grave faces? Or, in the midst of life and laughter, feel the spinning world pause a moment to listen to some uninterpreted cry and then creak on again, leaving her like one who has listened in a strange land to an alien tongue?

Because she had never confessed all this to anyone, there was none to tell Jenny that in the 'fifties such notions were bad form. But undoubtedly Mr. Paige would tell her if a honeymoon intimacy ever moved her to confide in him.

The coach clattered down Bagdad Valley, soon to blossom richly with orchards from end to end. Beyond pale paddocks of grazing sheep and ripening grain a large brownstone house—Georgian in design like most of the early houses—stood on the hillside with its feet in green lawns. "Twickenham Park. Now Mr. Paige's residence," said Madam, with *empressement*. "I stayed there just after the Austins built it."

Jenny was angry at her blushes. She did not want to think of Mr. Paige. But with the Bridgewater estuary bringing scarlet sunset and the first salt tang of the sea; with the advancing of that high-shouldered blackness which was Mount Wellington; with the beckoning lights of the village of New Town reeling up, reeling past, it was impossible to forget him. Undoubtedly she would soon have to see a great deal of Mr. Paige; and sleeping that night in a room of chintz and elegance, with a fat frilled nosegay of pink roses under the bed because Mr. Paige had sent it to her, she was suddenly seized with terrors and would have flung the hateful thing from the window but that she feared Madam's questioning in the morning. And yet by morning (so inexplicable is a maid) she was smoothing out its ruffled petals and showing it with much satisfaction to Maria, who had run down with a servant in attendance to see her darling Jenny.

"Oh, my sweetest, how he must admire you!" cried generous Maria. "And the ball is on the eve of St. Valentine. Do you suppose that any of our partners will send us valentines next day?"

"I hope they all will," said Jenny, who was realizing that there is sometimes safety in numbers.

III

Madam, feeling that the years subdued her very little, expanded gaily even in this so ridiculous town of wooden buildings with straddling verandas and unpaved sidewalks and dim fish-oil lamps on gum poles at the street corners. Government House with its low mean windows, the rickety bridge across the Rivulet, St. David's spire like a three-tiered wedding-cake—to one whose very tissues still ached for Paris, for Brussels and Madrid, they were all better than country. And the town was still splendid with military and naval uniforms, although these were sadly depleted since the Cessation and would soon disappear entirely, so Louisa Sorley said.

"There are but a very few of the Twelfth and some other mixed drafts here at present," said kind Louisa. "And two British men-of-war and one French one. I have arranged some dinners for Jenny as you asked me, dear."

Very many regiments of foot had passed through Australasia since 1804. And young ensigns and captains had carried some of the brightest buds of the old colonial families away with them. So it was Mrs. Beverley had lost all her daughters excepting Maria, whom she was now presenting under protest. *Une situation presque comique*, Madam thought.

"I could not let any man have her. She is my sole consolation," said Mrs. Beverley, weakly proud of Maria, who looked in her plain white gown as much like a schoolgirl as her generous young limbs would permit.

Ah, bah! thought Madam. How she will bore her partners! And she went off with great content to watch Celeste unpack Jenny's gowns.

Jenny loved her gowns of organdie and gauze and tulle, with their rose-pinks and their lemons and burning golds. But she was nearly sick with nervousness when, on the night of the ball, Celeste hooked her into the biggest Bluebell crinoline in the colony, and then slipped over her head the shining skirt. There

were twenty-two yards of ivory silk gauze in the skirt, and Heaven only knew how many festooned yards of Madam's frail and frosty *point de Venise*. In the big mirror and the light of a dozen candles in tall sticks on the floor she looked like a frightened puffball; but when the bodice was on and laced she was much more frightened still. "There's nothing of it!" she cried, agonized by so much gleaming nakedness.

"Put on the wreath," said Madam, floating about delightedly in lavender satin. This, she thought, returning to the French slang of other days, is going to knock the young bucks end-ways.

Jenny made a step to the door, the gauze streamers floating out from her white rosebud wreath; her hands filled with a Chinese fan of worked ivory and—here showed Madam's daring—a huge bouquet of crimson roses. But she could not pass that naked shameless thing in the mirror. "Give me a scarf, Celeste," she said faintly.

Madam snatched the scarf from her and picked up a hair-brush. "Goose! Would you like a stuff shawl of your Grand-mamma Merrick's?" She applied the brush bristles sharply to Jenny's cheeks. "Stand still! That will rouge you until wine and excitement do it. Now, *chérie*, come."

IV

Madam, Oliver considered, was the shrewdest diplomat at Sorley's table to-night. Unlike Mrs. Beverley, she had brought no bread-and-butter miss to town, although the little Jenny was modest and blushing, as men liked 'em; as Paige was liking this one. The rogue never took his eyes off her from his place on the far side of the table, and De Joyeuse (it was clever of Madam to send Jenny in with the commander of the French battleship in the bay) was making her sparkle more quickly than an Englishman would have done. "You have intelligence," Madam was fond of saying, as though intelligence were inevitable as a handkerchief. "*Bien*. Use it." Gad! she used her own!

Out of the hurly-burly of uniforms, shoulders, diamond-

studded shirt-fronts, and enormous white ties Jenny's scared eyes at first saw only Adam languishing at her with his tie out to his ears. Great owl, she thought, and recovered sufficiently to make a face at him. But Grandma saw! Past all the welter of flowers, epergnes, lights, and the big silver elephant candelabrum presented to Major Sorley in India, Grandma saw, she who saw everything. Jenny turned hurriedly to chatter in French to De Joyeuse, who burst out into thanksgivings:

"By all the graces! So it is a fleur-de-lis and not an English rose. And I with no English of sufficient eloquence for the occasion was *triste comme un chien sans la queue*. May I, then, have one of those so perfect bud roses from your bouquet, mademoiselle, to remind me of the felicity of my mistake?"

"They are merely heads on wire; puppets, monsieur. Will they then serve to remind you of me?"

Jenny had got her first public applause. De Joyeuse flung back his head with a great laugh that made every one turn. Madam saw Jenny crimson to that smooth candid forehead with its thin arched brows; but she was ready for De Joyeuse again, *la petite cocotte adorée*, Madam thought fondly. . . . A nymph, this Jenny, but one who has played late with Puck in the woods and caught through green twilights the flash of a satyr dancing, and rather hopes to see him soon again. *Mon Dieu*, thought Madam, suddenly concerned, will she perhaps be wasted on this Paige after all?

"I cannot conceive," said James Sorley, sonorously, at his table-end, "that this new company calling itself the Peninsular and Oriental can ever vie favourably with the clipper-ships. Most certainly not with those which Tasmania herself has built. There is nothing in the China tea trade much better, although the Australian Steamship Navigation Company, whose boats, I regret to say, are called boomerangs by the light-minded because they unfortunately have had so often to return to port . . ."

There was James at it again, like an elderly cuttlefish, thought Madam, protecting himself in a thick black soup of the dullest information.

"It is perhaps not realized by many that Hobart Town as a refitting station for whalers, from as far afield as the Japanese

and American grounds, has no equal. Nor has its harder timber for shipbuilding any equal. What Aloysius Carmichael wrote the last last *Mercury* of——”

“*Fi donc!*” cried Madam, who did not mean to have this delicious *vol-au-vent* thus spoiled. “Not that shocking man with his so shocking old hat and coat?”

“Don’t abuse them, ma’am,” said Noll, peering at her round that detestable elephant and more than ever the good-looking *vaurien*. “Carmichael’s hat, like its owner, was good once. As for his coat, old it may be, but it covers a multitude of sins.”

“By Jove, sir,” said a stout colonel. “That wit of yours must be dangerous to your enemies.”

“It is more dangerous to my friends, perhaps,” said Noll, lightly. “I know so much more about them, you see.” He went on talking, and Julia, opposite Mab, suddenly saw by Mab’s face that Noll was being dangerous still. She strained her ears. He was talking about tattooing: “Sailors tell me that the Fijians consider it a necessary preliminary to love-making; but I fear we have not that excuse, as it is, I believe, forbidden by the Bible. Yet some of us . . . a few of us . . . do other things which the Bible forbids.”

So Noll knew; and how long would it be before others knew, depended entirely upon his humour. Involuntarily Julia shut her eyes, seeing in the light on the lids first Mab’s set face, and behind it a score of grinning faces, and behind all cloudy clustering wild things, shapeless things peering here and there with shifting eyes. She roused herself with an effort when Mrs. Sorley made the signal; but she was scared still when, half through the evening, she walked on Mab’s arm out of the ball-room at Government House and into an anteroom where he found her a seat behind a bower of tree-ferns, saying: “It is only once in a thousand times that Noll loses his sense of decency. I’ll swear we hear no more from him.”

“So . . . you’ve told him.”

“You know I have not. I’m tired of being accused of all kinds of absurd things, Julia.”

She pushed her hair back nervously. Ever since she saw Jenny’s luminous youth she had been conscious that she was not looking

her best, and Mab's eyes were confirming it. Perhaps her white cashmere wrap embroidered with gold and cherry-colour was too hard, and even her maid had hinted that the elaborate head-dress of gauze and lace and big cherry bows was set too far back on her fair puffed hair. She thought of Jenny's wreath of roses and a wild tide of jealousy and despair rushed up and out.

"It's your fault. It's all your fault if I do look time-worn and shop-soiled. You did it. Why didn't you let me alone? I was so young, and you . . . Oh, men are brutes . . . animals!"

He did not move his eyes from her. She railed on hysterically:

"You know how hard it is for me. You know what life with Berry means . . . and all the public position to keep up. And you never letting me go. It is you, not Berry, who's destroying me. You! You!" She flung the words at him like stones. "And now when I look old and tired you compare me with Jenny. I used to be like Jenny before you . . ."

She went on and on, unable to stop. And he stood looking as though in a minute he'd smile; looking in the fullness of his manhood a hundred times more splendid than he had been as a boy. Age had ripened him, but already she . . . Suddenly she began to sob. "Mab, Mab! I'm not thirty yet. I am very young to be so unhappy."

"Why should you be unhappy? I have told you I will call him out when you choose."

"And do you imagine that would end it?" She believed that he did. Men always thought that you could settle any matter by violence. It would not be ended so easily as that. The laws of the universe, always falling more heavily upon women, would see to that. "Mab, I'm too frightened." No, men were not like women. He put being frightened—and what is worse?—aside as trifling.

"The question is, Julia, what do you want me to do?"

As though it were as simple as that! How did she know what she wanted him to do?

In the dim light behind the tree-ferns Mab stood quite still. Julia was always making scenes. Some women—and unluckily Julia was one—luxuriated in scenes. They loved to drag out to the light instincts, delicacies which he felt should be veiled,

cherished. He was never very clever with words, but he knew dimly that there were some things to be silently and sacredly held within the mysterious ego of the soul. And Julia was always trying to turn them into melodrama. Quite suddenly he was sick of it. Sick of it. Sick of her.

She lifted her blue eyes that still were lovely; put out her gloved hands to him, saying piteously, "How I wish I could forget you . . . let you go."

"But you can't. I understand." It startled him to know how intensely he understood, how intensely he could say, "Nor can I let you go."

"It isn't as though I were not a good wife to him now," said Julia, recovering. "There's surely no harm in our seeing each other sometimes."

His smile was bitter. No harm for her who would have her cake and eat it. But what about him? Beyond the screen people were streaming past: ribbons, laces, and ringlets of laughing girls streaming past. The loud rollicking of music through opened doors. Mab gave Julia his arm, and they went out into the stream.

Jenny was comparing programmes with Maria when Mab came presently asking for a dance. Jenny, lively as a cricket, glowing as the dawn, laughed at him. "Not one left, Uncle Mab. We *both* haven't, and Grandmamma won't let me dance more than once with anyone, either."

"But I was granted the supreme favour of 'The Blue Danube'," remarked Mr. Paige from behind Madam. He had propped the wall there ever since, with crush-hat elegant on his hip, as though requesting the world to understand that after consorting with angels one did not descend to the common herd. There he remained, drinking Jenny like wine as she floated by and becoming so much stimulated that he actually called a toast at the buffet later while the ladies were cloaking: "Gentlemen! I give you . . . aw . . . the brightest eyes here to-night."

"They're toasting Jenny," said Oliver, arriving to give Madam his arm; and Jenny, with wide eyes, stricken into terror by the power of her own womanhood, heard them cheering. Then she

turned and dived into the carriage, and Madam followed to find her sobbing.

“There, there,” said Madam, patting her and thinking of Julia as she had seen her a moment before, standing in the doorway listening to the cheers. “*La reine est morte. Vive la reine.* Such things will go to arrive, *ma petite.*”

V

Brevis and Adam appeared early next morning with their valentines and found Jenny half abashed in the middle of bouquets, verses, gifts of all kinds, according to the fashion of the day. Madam was very much pleased. She had expected it. She had expected this sudden bright thing, full of the passion of living, to be a new sensation. And Jenny was ; and yet, Madam hoped, sufficiently Madam Comyn’s granddaughter to command respectful handling.

“A nice wench,” said Oliver, teasing her. “And twenty pink cupids with silver darts to tell her so. . . . Can you do as well as this one, Brevis ?” He read aloud :

“*Acrostic in admiration of Miss J—— C——*

“Just one hair could bind my heart in chains,
 Enchanting creature, so it was thine own.
 Not roseate dawn excels the rose which stains
 Naiad-like thy maiden cheek. Long Beauty’s throne
 Yawned desolate, waiting for thee alone !”

With all of them looking at her Jenny felt desperately shy and tried to hide it.

“*Ma foi !*” she cried. “Where would the gentleman be with Genevieve Elizabeth if his grammar and feet go astray over Jenny ? ‘Miles Comybeare, Lieutenant Second Battery.’ Was he the one with no chin, Maria, or the one who trod on all our toes ?”

“So that’s the tone you’re taking with your slaves ?” said Brevis, laying his bouquet among the heap on the table.

“I never asked them to send me things,” retorted Jenny, feeling herself going red.

“Ask?” He came near with keen eyes half shut. “Didn’t all you were and wore ask us last night? I think so.”

Jenny’s face burned. She was not at all sure that she liked Brevis. “If anyone thought so, *c’est tant pis pour lui*. Oh, Adam!” Adam’s bouquet was in a holder of silver arabesque. Reluctantly Jenny took it out and gave the holder back. “It’s lovely, but Grandma says I mustn’t. There have been several things . . . I’m very grateful and apologetic, Adam.”

Jenny being these things was delicious. Adam protested hotly, “Between old friends . . .” But Jenny took fright again: “*Voilà pour l’histoire ancienne!* . . . What are you laughing at, Uncle Noll?”

“Egad, he’s a solemn noodle!” said Oliver. He read with mock heroics some verses which Adam privately considered very fine. “Who d’you think sent them, Jenny?”

“Mr. Paige,” said Jenny, prompt and wicked.

Oliver opened his eyes. So little Miss was setting up to quiz Paige? This would never do. “Ah, yes. Where is Mr. Paige’s acrostic?” he said.

“Did you think an acrostic would be learned enough for him? He sent a sonnet, no less, so full of dark erudition that I can’t make head or tail of it.”

“Humph!” said Oliver. And Madam, a little sharp, although amused, told her, “You let your tongue run away with you, *petit oiseau*.”

“Yes, Grandmamma.” Jenny felt suddenly meek. She gathered the bouquets, and stood with both arms spilling colour and fragrance and rosy cupids dangling at the ends of narrow bright ribbons. Above them her face glowed. “You see, this kind of thing don’t happen to me every day,” she appealed, abashed and laughing. Then she was gone like a sprite up the stair, with the faithful Maria after her.

“Youth triumphant,” said Madam, with a sigh. And Oliver said, “Come down to the club, boys.” Mahomet advises that the labourer be given his wage before his perspiration be dry, and Oliver very strongly felt the justice of that. For some months now Mr. Paige had exuded some elegant substitute for perspiration, and that the wage might be given to one of these dapper

and hessianed young bucks who were but yesterday in the cradle was unthinkable.

Oliver wished he knew the extent of Jenny's feelings. But Jenny herself did not know. Up in the chintz room smelling of roses Maria was accusing her : " Jenny, you sly wretch, I believe you don't care for Mr. Paige at all."

Excited Jenny began a flippant reply, felt her whole body protest in a sudden crimson flush, laughed uncertainly, and ran to the window.

" Do you ?" asked Maria, following and putting both arms round her.

" I don't know," whispered Jenny, honest and humble. She turned and hid her face in Maria's ample breast. " Darling, how can one tell ?"

They hugged each other, innocently in love with Love, whatever his name or form.

VI

Now that Jenny was the toast in clubs and smoking-rooms, now that it was *Down Julia, Up Jenny*, Madam could, she felt, afford to wait awhile before any decisions were made. Jenny, of course, would not be required to make them, which was as well ; for in all this swirl and glow and excitement of bouquets, compliments, and lovers pumped and pomatumed to the nines there could be no room in her young head for anything else. Mr. Paige must take his chance with the rest, decided Madam during jolly evenings at Secheron or the other big houses, when young gentlemen were sometimes persuaded into " doing a little conjuring," and Maria and some other equally protesting young lady were at last shepherded up to the piano for a duet.

Neither Brevis nor Mr. Paige ever " did anything " at these parties ; but while Brevis, to Madam's annoyance, managed by not doing anything to make himself the most distinguished person in the room, Mr. Paige was merely effaced. Undoubtedly Brevis had qualities. But not much else, and Madam thought it a good thing that Roger Keyes was sending him off to study law

in England, although "the professions" were a vulgar ending for any young man.

"You'll be married and settled long before I come back, Jenny," said Brevis, looking down with her on the blue harbour and the tall barque-rigged *Nourmahal* where he had secured the last of the five cabins just as the captain had decided to fill it with wool.

"I suppose so," said Jenny, sighing. "But I wish I were going too."

"Do you?" asked Brevis, flushing with surprise. Jenny's hands attracted him, and her sweet, husky, singing voice; but he had never made love to her.

"Yes. You'll be seeing places instead of people. I'm getting rather tired of people, Brevis."

No wonder, thought Brevis. Anyone would be tired of that Paige fellow. But Madam means him to have her, although she doesn't quite know it yet.

A few weeks later Madam discovered that she did know. There are many points, when she counted them up, in favour of Mr. Paige. A wealthy man with his investments in England and not to be upset by the colony's vagaries did not often wish to settle out here. This man did. He had no vices, which, though dull in a lover, was quite estimable in a husband. He had learning at a time when the colony's young men were, most of them, half educated, and Jenny liked him. Madam added this as an afterthought, but she added it. Never should it be said that she forced Jenny as Julia had been forced. Moreover, Paige would resign from the army at marriage, and so Jenny would do as Madam had planned and make herself, and possibly him, famous in the colony.

The door opened and she turned, very comfortable in her Trafalgar chair by Louisa's big fire.

"And here she comes, *ma mignonne!*" she cried. "*Très charmante en tenue d'amazone.* Tell me, *petit oiseau*, where have you been?"

Jenny had a sprig of wattle in the breast of her royal-blue riding-habit and a rose tucked under the sweeping feather of her hat. She sat glowing on a stool at Madam's feet and told how

that droll Quaker, Gamaliel Thompson, gave the wattle and Mr. Degrasse the rose.

“For we came home past the Cascades, Grandma, and went into the brewery. Mr. Degrasse gave us an *impromptu régal* of cakes and wine, with ale for the gentlemen, and picked such a bouquet of roses. But I left that at the female House of Correction.”

“Did Julia take you there? She should have known better.”

“The females seem very content. And they have a musical box to dance to, and lots of babies to play with. What gown shall I wear to-night, do you think?”

“*Bien*,” said Madam, as though she had not already decided, “you wore orange to the military ball in Webbs’s Rooms last Friday, and white-and-silver to the Fergusons’——”

“Scarlet. The white-and-silver was at the rout in Del Sarte’s Academy. Perhaps . . .” Jenny laughed; felt suddenly shy. “Mr. Thompson picked me a monstrous bouquet of violets . . . but De Joyeuse has composed a nocturne in pink and crimson roses—he calls it a nocturne—and perhaps as the dance is on his ship . . .”

“H’m,” said Madam. This Quaker man was very proper for a merchant, with fine brick warehouses down by the wharves and excellent trade in hides, wool, and tallow. But Jenny could not marry tallow any more than she could marry De Joyeuse, who, with a Frenchman’s adaptability, had probably several wives already. She said briskly: “You shall wear the pale-pink faille with mother-of-pearl ornaments. Mr. Paige has sent you small mauve iris in a holder of mother-of-pearl, and this you may accept, for your papa and I also wish you to accept the giver.”

Madam talked on for a few decisive minutes while Jenny sat nervously clutching her hands together. So it had come at last. Often through these gay and whirling weeks she had stopped for a breath to wonder where it was all leading her. Now she knew. It had been leading her to that bourne from which no decent woman could ever return, and it was Mr. Paige who was to go with her.

“Think well, *petite*,” said Madam, feeling that she did her duty. “Once you marry you will never get rid of him.”

“I . . . I suppose I must marry?” Jenny was almost suffocated with the beating alarm of her heart.

“*Mon Dieu!* A thousand times yes! You must marry and you must be disillusioned with some man, unless you wish to *coiffer* Saint Catherine, which is unthinkable. Courage, *chérie*. Man is as the good God made him; and since He did not choose to make better, it ill becomes us women to complain. Nor is there need to love before marriage. Indeed, men prefer it that way. The stimulation of the chase. So,” said Madam, having got rid of her duty and solemnly kissing Jenny on the forehead, “deck yourself for your husband, my dear. To-night he will ask you for your hand.”

VII

With Celeste's help Jenny dressed for the dance, feeling somehow as though her hands and feet did not belong to her. She actually stumbled once, going with Oliver along the magic bridge of boats on the dark water and up the gangway to the blaze of light on the *Hirondelle*. There were tree-ferns and wattle branches hiding the gun-carriages; streamers of pink-and-crimson ribbons looped into canopies, and maids down in the cabin with pins. De Joyeuse had insisted on plenty of pins, knowing how the ladies would see themselves everywhere in the three hundred little mirrors set along the tarpaulin walls. De Joyeuse would barter the mirrors for copra later on in the islands, but they made a gorgeous pageant of the decks now, reflecting to infinity the uniforms and bright dresses. They caught Jenny at every angle, showing her up—oh, cruel of them!—as rather pale and lost-looking and very slender. Men, seeing so many Jennys, felt that they were all too pale.

The band had fifes and drums, cymbals and clarinets. It played sweet and unfamiliar French music, and even the wattle scent seemed unfamiliar to Jenny to-night . . . I am dying with the sweetness and the music, she thought, dancing and promenading with one partner after another. . . . There were nooks with two chairs each, discreet up on the boat-deck; but Jenny knew she must occupy one with Mr. Paige only, while for Lydia

and Maria there would be no nooks at all. . . . I am dying with the sweetness, she thought, not knowing that she was already beginning to die of Mr. Paige. For she had been so thoroughly trained that she must not know anything, except what her elders had already masticated for her after the fashion of the pelican with its young.

If only I were a man and could go off as Raleigh and the other adventurers went, she thought. . . . This little shore town with its red and green gleams on Battery Point was adventure's very own spirit. Riding-lights from rusty whalers in the bay, from the swift and slender wool-clippers were all adventure, and so were those dim taverns scattered along the beach. There were sailors in those taverns : far-eyed rollicking men, voyaging to distant lands. There would be whalers, and what had they not seen and done ? There would be soldiers, bearded, hot, inscrutable, with wild memories behind them of India and the Crimea.

And here she was with fan and bouquet, smiling at compliments ; while all the time at the foot of Hunter Street was a glow, a yellow jovial glow from the Steam Packet Inn. Every one knew that the sailors still smuggled barrels of rum ashore up the creek behind the inn.

"It would be very nice," said Jenny wistfully to her partner, "to be a smuggler."

"My dance, I think," said Mr. Paige behind her. He solemnly offered a black sleeve and a white-gloved hand. Jenny as solemnly placed her hand on the sleeve and was led away to the boat-deck. There was not any use, it seemed, in wishing to be a smuggler.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

I

IMMEDIATELY upon his engagement Mr. Paige became so full of archness, so tenderly considerate of Jenny's youth and Madam's age that Madam could not bear it and returned to Clent, leaving Jenny for a while with Julia because Mr. Paige protested that he could not part with her so soon and could not at once leave his regiment.

Jenny would rather have gone home with Madam instead of riding, driving, dancing and walking with none but Mr. Paige; reading Milton and Cowper illuminated by the explanations of Mr. Paige, and trying to remember that life is real, life is earnest, and marriage not only its goal but its dedication. Yet, having dutifully accepted him, she found him quite nice so long as one kept him off, innocently forgetful that the time would come when she must dutifully cease to keep him off. Town society, being chiefly military, was full of punctilio, shining Napoleon and Wellington boots and wonderful waistcoats; but Mr. Paige was most shining and punctilious of all when Jenny and Lydia met him by the Guard House in Macquarie Street where the town crier in cocked hat and tail coat to his heels was crying lost valuables. With an arch smile, Mr. Paige swept off his curly beaver.

"We won't have that fellow cry the valuable you have lost, my Sweetness," he said. Lydia thought he looked so exceedingly handsome and foreign with his quizzing-glass and imperial that, having lately felt that she could never feel the same to Jenny again, she sighed into her bonnet. "I have found it. Your heart, you know."

"Where did you find it?" inquired Jenny, who really did wonder.

"Ah," said Mr. Paige, gaily, "I won't tell." He glanced at Lydia (who had pointedly turned to speak to the aide coming out of Government House where the latticed front was golden

with the little Banksia rose) and then stepped close, seizing his opportunity. He was an adept at seizing things, Jenny found: hands and gloves and opportunities. "Enchantress! My Pretty Virginites!" he murmured, becoming poetic. "Last night you said something which has desolated me. Let me assure you that I have never loved before, although with a man who has . . . aw . . . such knowledge of the world it is but natural that you might suspect . . ."

"I?" Jenny, who had never suspected anything, turned crimson.

"Aw . . . Well, from Voltaire downward, every man has leanings."

"Leanings?" said bewildered Jenny.

"Did I say I had leaned? . . . that was purely rhetoric. No." The most raffish of characters prepared to lay suspicion could not have put a bolder face on it. "I must request you to believe that you are . . . aw . . . my sole love. I . . . need you." Vaguely conscious that he had said this to other young ladies who had afterward abandoned their responsibilities, he looked hard at Jenny. Certainly she was handsome. And stimulating. And came of good stock. His voice quickened. "The resignation of my commission has already been forwarded to England. I doubt if I could . . . could have abandoned my career for a lesser reason than yourself, Jenny. Surely I have gained the right to expect——"

"Shall we stroll on, Jenny darling?" asked Lydia, and Jenny went eagerly. She would have strolled, even run, anywhere to stave off that early marriage which Mr. Paige was so constantly having the right to expect. At the town pump brown barrels on little carts received the shining flow and a man in a yellow shirt stood on the well kerb. Jenny never guessed that Lydia would have gladly seen her down the well, or at least under the pump.

On Wellington Bridge passing workmen paused to eject their quids into the Rivulet which, already providing the whole system of drainage for the city, had no right to expect . . . or was it object? Jenny, feeling Mr. Paige pervading the whole universe, grew confused.

"There's your Uncle Mab, Jenny," said Lydia. "How well

he rides ! And ' All Brandy ' with him, looking like sour milk. They say the medicos have him on a strict diet of syrup of squills, the naughty wretch."

Lydia loved to sound a little fast, dress a little fast. Mab, riding by, noticed that her tartan skirts assaulted more legs than Jenny's flowered muslin. Her jacket had bigger buttons and her jaunty hat bigger bows. Mr. Paige uncovered with a satisfied flourish, and Mab had never more keenly desired to ride the fellow down. Berry scowled. Enforced sobriety was making him dangerous in a way drink had never done, and twice Mab had raged at him for sawing his young mare's mouth. In Macquarie Street were a knot of sailors examining a double-saw-edge cutlass. Light from it and from their round flat glazed hats and coloured china pipes frightened the mare ; and Mab followed as Berry went at a hand-gallop past New Market Place with its flaring cupolas ; past the Royal Engineer Offices and up the ride among the English trees in the Domain.

" Come on, can't you ? " shouted Berry. " Ain't we here to see if this mare can gallop ? Or . . . why are you here, anyway ? "

II

That evening Berry found out. Some busybody who had been with Mab at Ballarat and seen the name tattooed among the thick black hairs on his chest talked to Berry, and he burst into the room where Julia and Jenny were cloaking to go with Oliver to the Assembly and there made a scene. Julia sat whitely silent, and Oliver tried to soothe him, so sorry for the blundering, piteous fellow with his black stupid eyes that he quite forgot Jenny in the corner. A servant announced Mab, and Oliver shrugged, giving it up.

" Now we shall hear some peevish cries," he said, and sat on the table, looking at Mab over the rim of his crush-hat.

" An effective entrance, Mab," said Julia, speaking at last. But Mab's eyes, taking it all in, took in Jenny also. He caught her by the shoulders and ran her out into the hall.

" Go upstairs at once," he ordered, and went back, shutting the door. Jenny snatched at the knob, but she had not the courage to

turn it. She stood, cold and sick, hearing the loud voices, trying to make her brain understand what her ears had just heard. Behind the shut door some one fell heavily. Julia ran out, almost upsetting Jenny, and scudded up the stair, her gay fringed shawl flying behind her like wings. Inside the room Oliver was helping Berry off the floor. "*Toutes mes congratulations, Mabelle,*" he was saying over his shoulder. "The first Comyn to arrange an open scandal for us."

"Kick him out," blubbered Berry, mopping a bleeding nose.

Mab walked out into the hall; looked for his hat; couldn't find it. To Jenny there had never been anything so strange as Mab, with that awful face of tragedy, hunting for his hat. She brought it, trembling, but he did not seem to see it.

"Julia? Where is she?" he asked.

"Up in her room. I heard the door lock. She . . . she's quite safe, Uncle Mab, dear."

"Jenny!" he said with sudden realization. "You shouldn't be here."

Again he stood with that stunned bewildered look which frightened Jenny, and then Oliver came out, frightening Jenny still more. This was no debonair and smiling Uncle Noll, but some one with cold face and eyes, asking sharply, "Have you a ticket for the Assembly to-night, Mab?"

He asked twice before Mab said, like some suffering thing goaded into speech, "What the devil has that to do with it?"

"Your sense of drama is exquisite, my dear fellow," said Oliver, "but not, I regret to say, your sense of fitness. You're taking Jenny and Lady Berry to the Assembly in a few minutes and I will follow with A.B. as soon as I've cleaned him up. Gad! You are, then! D'you think the servants haven't got wind of this already? D'you think the whole colony won't be talking if we give 'em rope? Collect your wits!"

"I . . . see." Mab pushed his hair back from his strained face, and Jenny thought how huge and dark he looked beside the dapper Noll. "I see. Cushion it."

"If we can. Come, Jenny." Oliver led her up the stairs. "You must help Lady Berry to-night. Help us all, perhaps. Understand?"

“ Yes. I’ll try, Uncle Noll.”

“ Good girl.” He knocked on Julia’s door. “ Please open, Lady Berry. There’s no time to lose.”

Within a very few minutes the carriage was bowling swiftly between the privet borders and the drenched chrysanthemums, bowling swiftly down the hill, with the shipping-lights and a few oil-lamps along the water-front making smeary gleams upon the dark. Mab had gone on the box-seat beside the coachman, and Julia sat silent beside Jenny, who was at last beginning to take it in. Even Madam insisted that a young person should never allow herself to take in anything that was “ unsuitable.” But how, Jenny often wondered, did the young person know it was unsuitable until she had taken it in? This was one of the many questions which could not be asked. Jenny, confronted now with a round dozen of them, found her mother-wit supplying her with answers. Uncle Mab was only too truly like Lord Byron, and only too truly did she love him the better for it.

Doors let them in with a crash on a dazzle of bright lights, bright colours, bright sounds, feet going by with a swish on a polished floor, *umpha-umpha-umpha* of brass trumpets, banks of flowers releasing a warm fragrance, some one swaying a huge crinoline, waving a hand at Jenny as she floated. Julia, suddenly very animated, waltzed off with Colonel Dethbridge. Mab put an arm round Jenny and swung her down the floor.

A man, Jenny felt—having by now had so much experience of gentlemen—has none of the nuances of a woman. Uncle Mab’s face was a scandal already, like a bronze image with haunted eyes. She cried: “ Oh, how your tooth must be aching! Come down and have some coffee, and I’ll tell every one you are demented with the toothache.”

Oliver had never been more angry. Mab would ruin them all yet; for Paige, who was the most fastidious of men, might even repudiate Jenny; would loathe being mixed up in scandal of any kind. Duels, although not quite extinct, were now rare enough to cause every pistol-shot to ring throughout Australia, and Julia, always indiscreet, had already set tongues wagging. . . . Oh, tongues! thought Oliver.

Unless Berry, the half-savage, half-pitiful fellow who had been

his friend so long, could be otherwise arranged for? Oliver, never having done anything decent for the Comyn name, began to feel a sort of lust for protecting it, undoing in one shot all that smudged it, justifying to himself the taking of those bibelots from Madam. (Each bit of loot still gave him a reluctant queasiness. One could go to it with a better heart if one *did* something.) A shot? Oliver, master of strategy, soon had his mind made up, and jovial gentlemen in the card-room saw with amaze Noll Comyn and All Brandy gradually rising from discussion about All Brandy's new mare to insults. All Brandy it undoubtedly was who flung the dregs of his glass in Noll's face, but it was Noll who was on his feet, demanding satisfaction. Shocked in their gentlemenly instincts, they still were, they recognized, pleasantly excited in the wolfish strain that lies within us all. They had not had the bones of a duel to pick since dear Lord knew when, and both these chaps were excellent shots. Yet honestly they tried for peace. "He's been ill, Noll, and you provoked him, by Jove. He'll apologize. You'll apologize, won't you, A.B.?"

"Apologize to hell!" said Berry. How ridiculously his soft halting voice combined with that straddling bloated fury. "I'll meet him at once. . . . O'Shane, you'll be my second? G-got 'nother appointment later on." Julia, he felt, Julia who had already cost him many pangs, could wait. This slur on the most valuable horse in his stable could not. "Where can we go?" he demanded, glaring around.

III

Oliver, with the seconds consulting, making plans, impressing a surgeon, felt monstrous pleased with himself as they all rode through the night by the sounding beaches to Brown's River. In case of necessity, it had been unanimously decided (half the card-room had come along as audience), the survivor could escape by some cargo-boat or whaler. They would see to that, they promised heartily. I'll see to it, promised Colonel Dethbridge, who had offered himself as Noll's second, riding with black cloak billowing in the sea wind, riding like the emissary of Death.

Oliver played with the thought, sang in that sweet tenor which had moved men to tears (he'd seen them) :

“ But he who drinks just what he likes
And getteth half-seas over,
Will live until he dies, perhaps,
And then lie down in clover.”

And then lie down . . . Here was the dark bush rising on the right, the dark sea moaning on the left. A.B. was the better shot and he'd do his damndest, while Oliver must not shoot to kill. No, he thought, feeling affectionate, sentimental even, toward poor old A.B. whom nobody loved, he couldn't shoot to kill. And here, where the beach spread out, pale under the stars, where hills broke the wind and a river ran to lose itself (like a soul) in eternity, the seconds were pacing out the distance. One stood forth as though naked before men's critical eyes and knew oneself a god. Sucked up to a height where gods conspired, one realized man's capability for magnificent sacrifice, for a daring of the eternities which gods even might not compass. Egad! for all one's pandering and pilfering, one discovered oneself at heart to be a gentleman. A woman's name, an ancient name . . . they'd have cause for gratitude and never know it. This, one felt as the pistol came cold into one's palm, is what it means to be a gentleman. . . . How white A.B.'s shirt showed against the dark sea. One couldn't miss him. But one must. . . .

This, thought Mab, awaiting Berry's challenge in the old Derwent Inn on Murray Street, was what it meant to shilly-shally, let a woman make a fool of you, show susceptibilities instead of certainties. If he'd called out Berry long ago . . . had it over and done . . . under the churchyard sod, one of 'em. How he and Julia had sung that! How that ribald fellow up at Bathurst had sung it! Oh, that we two were Maying . . . thoughts of lilac, loveliness, long green hills beneath the sunset, Julia's summery frills enveloping her in little rosy clouds. Oh, to have died then when all the world was May, thought Mab, sorrowing for glad youth withered down into this.

But he might die now, would die now; and here came the forerunner of promise up the stair, stumbling a bit; as though

weighted by his errand, opening the door, by Heaven, as though this were not the private apartment of a gentleman. Noll? "Noll," he said, surprised. Noll up at this seven of a winter's morning. Noll, a little jaded and muddy, but extremely jaunty. Mab stammered, "Noll, Berry hasn't sent . . ."

"Couldn't. He's in bed, with two surgeons extracting a ball from his shoulder and another bawl from his mouth. You understand, Mab," said Noll, tossing gloves and hat on the bed. "Dirty linen must be washed at home, so I've been seeing to ours. We fought about a horse. You could not have. People would have——"

"You've fought him! You——"

"Look here: if you don't consider you've done harm enough, go out and hang yourself, but kindly let this matter alone. Julia is with A.B. now, and if you have the sense of a louse you'll leave her there. Any one can make A.B. believe black's white, and she's busy at it. Where's the brandy? I'm cold."

"Leave her?" Mab felt his blood suddenly boiling. "Now? You've only made things a thousand times worse with your damned interference. It's too late——"

"It's never too late to end. Where's that brandy!"

"Curse you! You'd quip and pun at the Judgment Seat. . . . Let me by."

Mab ran out, with Noll calling after him, "God bless you, for I can't think of any one else who will." But he could not think of Noll. He went fast through the empty streets and up to the Berry mansion in Montpelier Crescent; and although Julia kept him waiting for an hour of agony, she came at last, her gold hair plainly banded, her eyes tired.

"My poor, poor darling!" he cried with his arms out.

"Why are you here?" asked Julia, standing inside the door. "Have you not already done me enough harm with your wicked selfishness?"

"Julia! I . . . why . . . I couldn't . . ."

"You will please go away," said Julia, holding her hands tight together. "And never never try to see me again. I suppose I must pay for the sins of us both. The woman always pays."

So, in a few minutes, she went up again, back to her husband; virtuous, head held high, never seeing Jenny running frightened

down the stair. Mab stood in the hall, blind as Samson shorn of his strength. Jenny ran to him, cried, "Darling!" took his hand. "Yes," said Mab, mechanically. He made a few steps. "Like Helen of Troy, there are many women not so fair as they are painted. Noll said that." Jenny was more frightened. She put soft lips to his brown hand. Then he started, muttered something, slapped his tall hat on the back of his head, and walked out, swaggering. She saw him go down the drive, still swaggering and defiant. Out through the gate, bankrupt of hope and love and honour . . . still swaggering, still defiant.

Panic seized her. Years spent—as young ladies should spend them—in fettering natural impulses were suddenly jettisoned. Almost physically she felt the relief of flying, mentally screaming challenge, in the face of everything; snatching hat and cloak and racing away after Mab, scattering shocks among those early afield as she ran on unchaperoned ways. Two labourers frowsy in fustian and dirty neckerchiefs stared after her. A pea-jacketed sailor, grinning from a black fringe of whisker, tried to stop her in the Salamanca Road. Del Sarte's Academy, where she had danced last night, presented a drab face across Macquarie Street, and she ran over dead flowers and cigar butts which a mumbling old woman scratched together. Here she was at the inn, demanding Mab as haughtily as though she'd come in a carriage with a posse of footmen.

"I am Miss Comyn. Show me up at once." Of course every one knew Miss Comyn, said the astonished waiter in green-baize apron. But Jenny was already beating on Mab's door, crying: "Let me in! Let me in!"

Mab opened the door. He looked dreadful, and suddenly she felt dreadful. As though she had insisted on seeing him in his bath or something. She said weakly, "I felt you wanted me."

"I never wanted you less. What is it? Why are you here?"

"You did. I *felt* you wanting me." Tears began to blind her. She blinked, saw the horse-pistol on the bed, pounced, and the bullet went up through the open window, grazing her forearm on the way. Now she could comfortably whimper a little while

Mab staunched and bound her, never looking up. At last she dared, wondering if he would understand : " It . . . it will heal, Uncle Mab."

" It may," he said, under his breath. " Where's your maid, Jenny ? "

" I came alone."

" Through the streets ! " He flushed, fastened her cloak with a strange softness, and walked back with her to Julia's gate. Then he said abruptly : " You're no coward, dear maid. Don't let them marry you to Paige unless you really wish it. Remember it's you marrying him, not them. These old folk . . . they think themselves so damned wise."

IV

Very satisfied, Oliver took Jenny home. Mab had gone to Melbourne, where it was to be hoped that he would stay. All Brandy would be the better for his bloodletting, and Mr. Paige pressed for an immediate wedding. " It might be as well," said Madam, rather alarmed by what Oliver had to tell. But here Susan cried out at Oliver that no trousseau was ready and she had ordered six dozen (or was it six hundred ?) reels of white cotton, and she and Lottie had whipped Valenciennes on fifty yards of batiste for frills.

" Forty-eight and a quarter, Mamma," said Charlotte. (Dear Lord, thought Oliver, whom would he ever find to marry Charlotte ?)

" Indeed, my love," cried Susan, " I never intended to exaggerate, only I'm so harried with this and that, and jam-making and new bed-gowns for Baby . . . "

" Dear Mamma," said Jenny, kissing her, " I don't mind about a trousseau."

Susan burst into tears. That was the most ungracious thing a notoriously unsympathetic daughter could say to a loving mother. " After the yards and yards of calico and red flannel I've bought!" she wept, nursing the baby violently.

Charlotte, hanging round with the fingering curiosity Jenny

had noticed of late, asked suddenly, "Do you love Mr. Paige more than Uncle Mab, Jenny?"

"Certainly," said Susan, promptly. "More even than Papa."

But here the essential Jenny rebelled. Mab's wandering feet going down the avenue away from Julia; Mr. Paige, elegant and arid, saluting her cheek with moist lips. No, no! she cried. Mamma might *know* she didn't. She . . . she had not known him long enough.

"There, Lottie dear," said Susan. "I told you you could not comprehend. A young lady don't love a young gentleman until she is married to him. It would be indelicate."

Jenny found consolation in this. It was easy, almost too easy, to believe that Mamma had not loved Papa before she married him. Marriage, she supposed, must be like death, making people quite different all in a minute. As for illicit love—which no one imagined her to know about—that was the love men died for as Uncle Mab had nearly died.

A splendid bird with broken wing, that love. Jenny was glad it was in the world, although there could be none for her. Mr. Paige, she felt, would see to that. In the 'fifties the opinion of one's elders was law, and Jenny did not rebel. Sitting on the fence of the old kangaroo grazing-ground, Jenny tried to evoke that wonderful moment in which she had first felt herself *Me*, but it did not return . . .

Reluctantly Jenny wrote letters weekly, beginning "Dear Mr. Paige," and ending "Yours V. sincerely, G. E. Comyn." And if Mr. Paige began "Adored Rosebud" or "Enchantress of my Soul," it didn't matter, although Charlotte said, "How silly it must make you feel!" Charlotte could not be a fool if she tried, though she often presented sense foolishly. Jenny, feeling that Maria would have cried, "Oh, darling, how he must *adore* you," and Lydia shrugged her thin shoulders and looked catty, felt somehow grateful to Charlotte, although of course she must not say so.

But now came an invitation from Mrs. Carr-Becket, whose husband was relieving the commandant at Port Arthur, and Jenny was to go, said Madam. Jenny was too excited to sleep despite—she knew very well it should be because of—the fact

that Mr. Paige was quartered there. Mr. Paige, it appeared by letter, was desolate without his inamorata, and quoted Greek (which William didn't understand) and scraps from the *Euphues* (which he hoped he didn't) to prove it. And he desired to confer about the wedding.

"He . . . ah . . . probably wishes to speak of a dowry," said William, torn between the natural instincts of a gentleman and a father and the increasing emptiness of Clent coffers. "You will be . . . be very tactful, Noll? I shall be unable to settle anything on Jenny, I fear."

So long as you don't settle yourself or Susan on her, I don't imagine he'll mind, thought Oliver, promising to say the right thing and whistling complacently as he walked the deck of the clumsy little paddle-steamer a few days later. Quaker quiet in the dark voluminous garments proper for travelling ladies, Jenny sat on a bench, and Oliver found himself regarding her almost with affection. A really charming and docile little creature, for all her high spirits, who would allow him to furnish those two rooms in the tower at Twickenham Park exactly as he liked, with Paige's money, naturally. He smiled down at her, and (Jenny thought) Oliver with his dark-blue lazy eyes and fair unlined skin was still a very pretty fellow when he smiled.

"Feeling all right, Jenny?" he asked. Jenny came out of Paradise to answer politely, drifted back into it again.

Better even than smuggling, life must be on that four-masted barque drawing deep with wool and hides; setting sail by sail as she stood farther out on the blue silk of the bay; now catching the soft and magic airs compact of bush scent, brine, and wattle-bloom sweetness, and coming past like a sheering gull dazzling with silver wings. A deserted whaler rocked to her ripple, showing scarred rusty sides. What ports she had hailed, the squat old whaler; far and far from this glowing gipsy of a town lying along the feet of shaggy satyr hills that shouldered together, high and higher, until they were all one dark monster of a mountain veiled with a bloom like that of grapes. Jenny dreamed of the barque, the whaler, bringing their offerings to this riotous secret gipsy of which the big world knew so little. There they lay: necklaces and brooches of buildings with shining windows, stray

coloured garden-beads, flung along the lower slopes where gum-tips were pink like roses ; flung along the golden beaches. Across the harbour at Bellerive were the gipsy's neglected sisters, pale floating-haired she-oaks to whom men gave no gifts. Almost harder than having nothing it must be to see others have so much. Jenny, thinking of Mr. Paige, tried not to feel that this rule might work both ways.

The barque, leaning to the wind like a young girl running, fled away past Bruni Island, past the long green bluffs and ebony hollows toward the outward road where men went adventuring. Her sails gleamed, tossing a gay farewell. She was gone.

Here was the Huon River, where incoming ships shot their ballast : red rubble and stones from England, China, France. Strange unwilling colonists, the rubble and stones ; lying forever in alien waters to be stared at by alien trees, swamp gums, black-woods, peppermints old and grim as Viking warriors, guarding the way to the Big Timber where a few mills were at work, nibbling into the vastness like little mice. Beyond them a dark mysterious silence led into uncharted ranges. Only the bush-rangers knew them, or the convicts escaped from Macquarie. And usually the bush kept their secret . . . and them.

Bruni turned wine-colour with sunset ; trees on distant hills flared gold, sank into shadow ; beaches of tawny orange paled into drab and vanished. Night came with a keen wind fretting the water and Jenny went below, hoping to dream of Columbus instead of Mr. Paige.

v

Something of the ghoul which is in us all stirred Oliver on arriving at Port Arthur in the morning. Peace on earth. Goodwill toward men. He wondered what it would be like here at Christmas. Mr. Paige on a black jetty was apologizing because the convict railway was not running now. They must row round to Opossum Bay, which was Port Arthur proper. Sunshine on sparkling water, green shining trees against blue sky did not present the right atmosphere, but Mr. Paige showed excitement. Jenny looked a little peaked this morning. Oliver hoped that

it was from sickness, wondering suddenly if it had been wise to bring such a sensitive child to this settlement of punishment and pain.

Mr. Paige, it appeared, had no such sickly doubts. He pressed Jenny's hand as he set her down on the red cushions of the boat. "More my Pretty Virginities than ever," he whispered. "Did you put on that pink bonnet for my sake?" He raised his voice. "Give way," he shouted, and as the four convicts bent to the oars: "And so you have come all this way for my sake also? Little love-bird who had to flutter to her mate."

Facing life and Mr. Paige for the first time unshielded by the women of one's own blood, one felt very much at a loss, perched up somehow on the arid alien edge of things to be shot at by a Mr. Paige with lavish compliments. Mr. Paige seemed suddenly to have become lavish in all directions. Undoubtedly Port Arthur or her advent had astonishingly stimulated Mr. Paige. One had never noticed before how big and white his teeth were, either!

Against the dazzling light the convicts rowed fast and sullenly, their shaven heads dropped under the black leather caps like bells. Their leather jackets were yellow and so were the trousers striped broadly with navy blue. One had a chain round his ankles, linked in the middle to a belt about his waist. It clanked with every pull and Jenny felt that Mr. Paige was somehow horrible, to force tragedy like this upon her. But Mr. Paige apparently did not think himself at all horrible. He sat very close, with smiles that smacked newly of freedom. He would have taken her hand before them all, but she snatched it hotly away. A very strange Mr. Paige this. *Pas gentil* at all.

There was a lovely island, floating bright green in the sun. Dead Island, said Mr. Paige, but Uncle Noll said Eden. And then Mr. Paige cried, "Exactly—now that Eve has come to her Adam," and preened himself on the apt delicacy of the jest, and handed her over to Mrs. Carr-Becket, for they had now come up past trees to a yellow beach with gardens and houses on the rise beyond and great tawny blocks of buildings near at hand.

Mrs. Carr-Becket (asking questions all the way) took her up the stone steps and past the O.C.'s pretty cottage and into the

very fine grounds of the commandant's house. Tall gates arched over with worked iron in which lantern-lamps were set clanged behind, shutting out—was it wicked to hope so?—Mr. Paige.

“Everywhere, my love,” sighed Mrs. Carr-Becket, “am I haunted by these shocking yellow garments and broad arrows. House servants, gardeners . . .” They went up a double flight of stone steps from which one could see the blue bay between gum trees and into a hall overwhelmed by huge cupboards with military cloaks hanging. “The creatures depress me to the earth,” said Mrs. Carr-Becket. “Intended by nature for a gay and elegant existence, I feel the cruelty of my fate. Constitutionally I am so much more sensitive than others. It is my misfortune.”

Jenny remembered what Grandma had considered Mrs. Carr-Becket's misfortune. “To look like Lady Macbeth and talk like Mrs. Gummidge—*ma foi!* How unfortunate for her,” Grandma said.

Mrs. Carr-Becket was being very chatty.

“I'm giving you a small dance to-night, my dear Miss Comyn, and to-morrow there will be quite a ball at the Lunatic Asylum. Such a perfect floor, and the harmless ones looking on. You'll love it. Fortunately, few people are so sensitive as I am. Sensitiveness has made life peculiarly difficult for me. This way, my love.”

Jenny followed up flights of stairs and along passages where dim mural paintings showed ghostly figures, ghostly scenes. In a small fusty room Mrs. Carr-Becket sailed across to pull the blind up.

“This is a horrible life . . . but you'll enjoy it. Captain Paige talks of you continually. He will be up presently, but you must be patient. He has to attend a flogging first, I believe. Rest a little, pretty rover,” said Mrs. Carr-Becket, with melancholy roguishness, and went out, shutting the door mysteriously.

Jenny flung off the voluminous purple cloak, the tight purple kid gloves, and the pink bonnet which Susan had insisted she must land in. She ran to the window and flung the sash up. Something seemed stifling her.

Beyond the window squatted many heavy blocks of brown free-stone buildings: barracks, guard-rooms, offices of the

commandant evidently, from the splendour of their open galleries, porticoes, and towers. A sentry walked on each of those thick-set battlemented towers, and Jenny began to quiver, to feel tears in her throat.

VI

Mr. Paige, who found the stimulus of Port Arthur exactly suited to him, apologized to Noll because the place was only twenty-seven years old. But there were seven hundred graves on Dead Island, and an enormous occupancy of the asylum—a charming building, and he hoped Oliver liked the clock-tower—and all this should surely count for something, protested Mr. Paige. O'Hara Booth, he explained, feeling very much at one with that intrepid gentleman, O'Hara Booth, commandant for eleven years in the early days, was the outstanding personality of the settlement. He had discovered the plan of setting each man at the job he could do best. Architects to design and raise the buildings; tinsmiths, farriers, workers in the night school, boat-builders, cooks . . . “He found chaos and left a civilization. Or, if you prefer to put it so, he was the first to come through the horses, and a gigantic task that must have been with seven thousand men at a time.”

Oliver did not care how Mr. Paige put it. Port Arthur with its blue bay circled by little tapering hills and shining bush; with its low pretty houses sunk in almost tropical gardens, its stately avenues of English trees, its pleasant songs of birds and swathes of sunlight, was really charming. Even to the most brutalized man going with chained and straddling feet to his work in the quarries or on the cultivated slopes it must be nearer heaven than the fetid English hulks.

“Aha! not always.” Mr. Paige looked sly; took him with zest up a steep yellow road beside grey sagging timber buildings which had housed the prisoners before a great stone block of stores on the beach had become the penitentiary; introduced him past high walls and warders with keys to unlock heavy doors, and so into the Model Prison.

“Shocking horrors have occurred here,” said Mr. Paige,

evidently much stimulated in the musty shadows. "Men have died in the Dumb Cell. The asylum is principally supplied from it. Aw . . . observe the clever arrangement here for solitary confinement." The corridors went off from the centre like spokes of a wheel. There were little wedge-shaped high-walled yards bristling with iron spikes wherein each prisoner (masked) took exercise. There was a chapel into which each prisoner (masked) was separately conducted, to be locked in a kind of cupboard: "So that during the service he could see but the parson and his . . . aw . . . God," said Mr. Paige, impressively.

Oliver wondered what that God looked like to the prisoned men and refused to inspect the Dumb Cell (which was also a Blind Cell) although it was empty. "It usually is empty," regretted Mr. Paige. "The fellows here now are all old lags who've had their lesson. Most of them appear to see the error of their ways."

Judging by those furtive smug restrained faces everywhere, Oliver guessed that what these old lags saw was the way to trick their jailers. Mr. Paige was certainly tricked, and so enthusiastic about the system that he had almost lost his languor. "Brisked up," old Nurse was used to say. Mr. Paige was very much brisked up, and Oliver did not like him the better. It would be well to retrieve Mr. Paige as soon as might be.

"Of course you won't remain here after your marriage," he said.

"Most certainly I shall. I find a stimulus, a realization of the value of perfect discipline on men's bodies and . . . aw . . . on a body of men, if you will allow the quip," said Mr. Paige, archly. The dank prison smell was now shut in behind them by clanging doors and they stood in the low bush by the reservoir. "There goes a gang of fifty to the quarry, with only five warders. We are deuced short-handed now, you know, and the warders could be overpowered in a minute. But the men don't dare. We have them cowed. All the camps are run so now. Timber-getters, coal-miners, road-makers, invalid-dépôts throughout the peninsula. But are there any attempts at escape of violence? No. We have the rascals cowed. That," said Mr. Paige, with conviction, "is the way to handle men. Cow them."

“ I should have said you dogged them. What of the string of dogs between Eaglehawk Neck and the mainland ? ”

“ They are merely a detail. I am speaking of principles.” Mr. Paige looked at his watch. “ I find I am about due at a . . . aw . . . a flogging. You would wish to see it ? ”

Oliver thought he might as well. “ Part of the show,” he said. But what he really wished to observe were Mr. Paige’s reactions during the business. Seeing that he meant to make the fellow support him for the rest of his life, it was well to know the worst of him, thought Oliver (who knew that he could have gone to the guillotine even more delightfully than his ancestress and was feeling his aristocratic gorge rising just now). He did not care for skimming his emotions off other people, which seemed to be this fellow’s only method of procuring them, and he had always avoided floggings, even while knowing that the ordinary magisterial affairs were not a circumstance to these.

“ An excellent situation for a garden-party,” he said when they stood on the green lawn by a brattling stream and watched the triangles being set up against a yellow wall lined with flowers. Mr. Paige explained that all Port Arthur seemed laid out for garden-parties and the officers’ ladies did their best about it. They were giving Jenny a garden-party to-morrow. “ And on that slope the hospital sick and the tractable lunatics are lined up to watch the flogging. A splendid deterrent,” he said, and for the moment Oliver thought he was going to rub his hands.

The hospital sick sat stolidly on the slope, but Oliver had no doubt that they were wagering on the result—nuggets of square-fig, pinches of tea, any valuables the poor wretches might have. They will get their fun somehow, he thought, as the principal actor, just marched down from the dark Model Prison, blinked owlishly in the strong light. Oliver felt his skin crawl as the fellow was stripped and spread-eagled and the flagellator cleared the knotted cat-o’-nine-tail thongs with his horny fingers.

“ Back here for the third time. He’ll die here,” said Paige. He gave Noll the record. Bush-ranging, stealing, incendiarism, escape from military pursuit on a blood racer stolen from Beverley of Tingvalley, attempted burglary of Connorville. Surprised, Oliver re-heard these tales of his youth. So this was the famous Little

Bunt, forgotten for so long : this small old, old bent man with grey hairs on his fibrous sunken chest, a grey crafty light in his sunken eyes.

Mr. Paige gave the signal and Oliver found the result sufficiently unpleasant. Little Bunt apparently knew what would please Mr. Paige, what was expected of him by his backers. He was at first very silent, and then very noisy . . .

“ And now we will go and see my little Jenny,” cried Paige, gaily, as Little Bunt, bleeding and moaning, was carried back to the prison.

“ Good God ! ” said Oliver. “ Don’t you want to wash first ? ”

Mr. Paige examined his military person closely, expressed surprise. “ No blood has splashed me,” he said.

VII

By little acts women express the religion of their souls, Jenny thought, trying to understand why the doctor’s wife wore rings outside her gloves, why one officer’s young wife let the convicts working about the house nurse the baby, why Mrs. Carr-Becket pervaded the profuse hospitality of the settlement like the taste of onions. With Jenny she attended dinners, dances, picnics, drives by the sea with great flights of mutton-birds darkening the air and the guard-dogs howling back on the Eaglehawk Neck. With Jenny she received bouquets from the officers, vegetables sent in from the Government Farm, compliments ; it rejoiced Jenny to see how neatly Mrs. Carr-Becket fielded the compliments. She tried to receive Mr. Paige when he came after Jenny among the arches of multiflora roses at the Comptroller-general’s residence ; but Fate and Mr. Paige were too strong for her there.

Jenny felt this place grow more terrible daily. It stood up against her like some dark door to which she could not find the key. She went to church, rustling among other rich silks and wide crinolines into the tall plush-covered pews. But God wasn’t there. Only Mr. Paige, smiling at her elbow, telling her how this very beautiful edifice had been designed and built by some convict architect whose name was already forgotten. “ These people are no longer individuals,” he said, standing with her to watch the

mass of yellow-clad men surge up beside the penitentiary against the shining sea, step briskly off in squads, and come marching up the shady avenue of English trees to mark time by the wall until the quality had passed into the church.

One, two. One, two. They came and stopped. Jenny, looking with a sort of shame on the hard, secretive faces, had a sudden shock of memory. There was a face she knew. A dark, gaunt, terribly alive face with a familiar sardonic twist to the mouth. His eyes met hers, dropped. They told nothing, but it was a face she knew. A face . . . a voice . . . her mind searched . . . "Head not quite so high, please, little lady . . ." Now she remembered. Now she knew. The ticket-of-leaver who had painted her many years before had said that. Robert Snow! And here was Robert Snow who had disappeared when she was a child, and here he had probably been ever since.

"Come, my charmer," said Mr. Paige, his hand under her arm. "We must go in."

Snow watched them pass. He had been looking out for Jenny and she had not changed so much. Still a clean spirit brimming with generosity and fun, although shadowed now by that slimy toad. How did she come to take him, he wondered, tramping in with the rest to stand, a stout mass of subdued yellows guarded by warders. He watched Jenny sharing with Paige her prayer-book as she was shortly to share so many things, and the numb bitterness which had frozen him so long stirred for a moment into pity. Then the first hymn was given out, and the men about him began to sing with an immense volume of sound. That was the way information passed between them, some singing it low while those next the warders followed the hymn. Around him they sang:

*"Hark! Did you hear Bunt cry? Wake, brethren, wake.
He shouted too soon, say I. Wake, brethren, wake.
Jake lost three quids that night . . .
We are the children of light,
Because Bunt got in a fright. Wake, brethren, wake."*

Jenny, the bright thing, and Mab Comyn. Snow had forgotten much, but he never forgot his hope that he might live long

enough to be revenged on Mab Comyn. That was his peak of Darien, standing before him night and day, although as yet he could not see horizon. Above the regulation blue-and-white neckerchief his strong hollow-checked face grew more rigid with thought, with desire. If he could get in touch with Jenny. Slip her a note. Her youth was radiant yet with pity and tenderness. She might get him freed, although his two attempts at escape would go hard against him.

“Pass it along, mate,” said the man at his elbow, and he sang :

“*Call to each waiting band, Wake, brethren, wake.
That’s the pretty girl Cap has . . . command. Wake,
brethren, wake.
Ain’t she a beauty ? . . . wait,
He’ll marry her soon . . . Master’s gate,
Lord ! I wouldn’t like her fate. Wake, brethren, wake.*”

Jenny was impatient to speak to Oliver of Robert Snow, but she felt instinctively that it was better to keep the matter from Mr. Paige.

“You’ll do something, won’t you, Uncle Noll ? He was such a nice civil fellow and he looks so different from the rest.”

Oliver was much annoyed. Of course the Ellen affair was cushioned and ended, but the fellow would have been better dead.

“I can’t interfere, Jenny,” he said. “*Pas si bête*. You may be sure they have him here for a good reason.”

“Then I shall ask Uncle Mab,” said Jenny, ready to cry.

“Oh, certainly. Ask him by all means,” agreed Oliver, smiling. Between these two Comyns, Snow would be safe enough till the end of his days. Jenny wrote a hot letter to Mab that very night. “If you could see him among all these dreadful faces, dear,” she wrote, “you, too, would think of a martyr given to the wild beasts.”

Snow could not get word through to Jenny. She did not see him again, although from his labours on the swampy foreshore where land was being reclaimed for pasture he sometimes saw her with Paige and Noll Comyn going about the cook-houses

and laundries, the vegetable gardens and workshops belonging to the prison. Paige, as every old lag knew, luxuriated in the place, was continually urging improvements, thought himself a second O'Hara Booth, and had got himself well hated with his chilly eyes, his hectoring ways. Jenny was growing alarmed at her own rebellion at Mr. Paige's hectoring ways. . . . Some day, she thought, I shan't be able to bear him another minute, and what's going to happen then?

She was in the workshops that morning, hearing Mr. Paige bullying an overseer at the end of the building while she turned over the various things that the convicts made. Here was a little desk delicately inlaid with twenty-two kinds of native wood. "It's lovely," she told the very ancient man who had made it, and suddenly he thrust it into her hands.

"Kape it, miss. It's pra-aper gude for a pra-aper wench. I ha' scombled ower it seven years. No crinkum-crankum work in it. Kape it."

"Oh, no! I couldn't . . ."

"I rightly want ye tu." He came close, his old eyelids and wrinkled chin quivering. For the moment he was entirely human. He whispered in his harsh croak: "My darter wur a pra-aper wench tu. I dunno what happened her. I misdoubt she's dead this twinty year, but I been ma-akin' out I wur workin' this for her weddin'. Will ye ta-ak it, miss, please?"

"Yes. I will." Jenny put her hands on his old scarred ones over the box. "I will keep it forever and value it——"

"Here! Stand back, fellow!" Mr. Paige tapped the man smartly with his cane; took Jenny by the elbow and drew her out into the sun. "Really, my angel," he said firmly. "You must *not*."

"But he gave me this dear little desk," said Jenny, afraid she was going to cry.

"Gave! My love, they make these things for sale. I shall get a warder to value it and send round some tea and tobacco if you desire to keep it. Your payment," he said, assured that he was behaving very handsomely, because Jenny really should have known better, "was so infinitely lavish as to be entirely beyond his comprehension."

Feeling that far too many things were beyond Mr. Paige's comprehension, Jenny made a valiant attempt to explain. "You don't understand. If you had seen his eyes——"

"Seen his eyes! I really must beg of you, my love, not to sentimentalize over these creatures. See my eyes if you must look into those of some man."

He said it. Incredibly he said it, seeming to think it a graceful jest, a skilful re-creation of the bond between them. It was just then that Jenny knew that what she had feared had come. She simply could not bear Mr. Paige another minute. Picking up her crinoline, she ran from him like a hare, down the red dusty road to Oliver leaning over the low stone wall to watch the men at work on the foreshore. Plenty of 'em, he thought, he who never yet had had plenty of anything. But soon, at Twickenham Park——

"Uncle Noll," said Jenny at his elbow, Jenny with eyes like blazing suns and the manner of Madam herself, "please take me back to the house. I am not going to marry Mr. Paige."

She spoke as though she had walked off in the midst of the ceremony, and before Oliver gathered his wits Mr. Paige arrived, outraged and breathless and trying to hide both under a dire facetiousness. In fact, Oliver realized, Mr. Paige thinking himself at his very best and being at his very worst.

"A . . . a slight lover's quarrel," he panted at Oliver. "Such things will occur, although I haven't a notion . . ." He seemed quite bewildered. "Kindly leave her to me, Comyn." He wagged his head at Jenny. "Saucy puss," he said forgivingly.

Jenny was still looking at Oliver; still——devil take her!——with Madam's commanding air. She said very quietly: "Uncle Noll, please explain to Mr. Paige that I cannot marry him. I . . . I should never have said I would. I . . . I always felt . . ." Here she nearly became the frightened girl, but recovered with an effort that Noll could appreciate. "I have changed my mind. I am sorry," she said, courteously turning to Mr. Paige.

"'Pon my soul!" said Paige, roughly. His grey eyes had a sudden cold spark. The points of his little moustache seemed to lift into lances. "Will you kindly leave her to me, Comyn?"

"Afraid I can't do that," said Oliver, much alarmed and

mentally cursing them both. "Apparently the lady don't wish it. You had better come back to the house, Jenny." He looked at the man with a blandness which he was far from feeling. "She's temperamental, like all the Comyns, my dear chap. Give her time and it will come right."

"It never will," said Jenny, positively. "I've tried. Now I know."

"Come, come, we can't have a scene out here. Come, Jenny," said Noll, conscious that, to do her justice, the naughty little baggage was behaving with more dignity than this fool cutting at the hedge-rows with his cane, trampling the dust with his polished boots, protesting that Oliver had no right to interfere. Oliver tucked Jenny's arm into his at that, explaining that he stood in place of Jenny's father. "A sort of comic relief," he explained, walking Jenny off. "Give us time, sir. Give us time. Don't rush your fences. Life in this place is enough to upset older brains than hers."

He took her through the commandant's gay garden into the arbour above the sea and sat her down. She was all of a shake, the monkey, and his own voice was not too steady as he asked, "Now, my dear, what's all this about?"

"If I have to marry him," said Jenny, shuddering, "I'll kill myself."

"Good God!" said Oliver, thoroughly startled. "What has he done?"

Jenny stared, unable to explain how she had somehow suddenly seen a ghostly door swing wide, suddenly heard ghostly warnings that rang away down the grey centuries behind. Those ghosts of dead women reminding her of her womanhood; summoning her with vague crying—how could one understand?—with the slow insistent tread of passionless feet that had grown so tired, being set on the wrong road. But Uncle Noll was waiting.

"It's just . . . I can't do it. I feel it in my soul."

"Come, come," said Oliver, who never had any patience with souls. How could one go about it? he thought, too angry to be other than choice in his methods. "All this, I suppose, is quite natural in young ladies before marriage, especially in an environ-

ment such as this ; I understand, my dear, and I shall make Paige understand."

"The only thing to make him understand [Gad ! how lovely it was, that mournful voice !] is that I . . . I loathe him."

"Come, come." Oliver sat beside her, patted her hand. *These Comyns*, he felt, exasperated because he was so much one of them that he could not let this small pitiful thing of his own blood be bullied by any Mr. Paige rampant between the hedge-rows. Yet although he had lifted Mab out of the pernicious mess he had got himself into, he was damned if he was going to lift Jenny. For Jenny, Paige had sent in his resignation, made excellent settlements (the settlements had warmed Oliver's heart ; he would always be able to borrow a fiver from Jenny), received congratulations and a few precipitate presents. It would be a shockin' breach of confidence to let the fellow down. No Comyn could do it. Besides, women must not be permitted to upset a gentleman's life against his will. That was allowing them too much rope altogether. Paige and Port Arthur combined might be—he quite admitted it—too strong a flavour, too earthy on the palate. But Jenny mustn't wreck her chances ; nor Oliver's.

Evidently she had nothing tangible against Mr. Paige except the mood of the moment. Paige looked the popular notion of a nice man, even to the touch of priggishness which all young ladies liked. Didn't they worship curates ? But Jenny sat desolate with her peaked chin on her hands and wished that Uncle Mab were there. . . . Thank Heaven he isn't, Oliver thought. He's done harm enough. But he had to put a kind hand on that quivering shoulder, give comfort. "You poor little bit of nothing, don't get in such a taking. No one is going to hurt or bully you, Jenny. You must trust me there. But, my dear child, you cannot repudiate . . ." No. Better leave that. Better get her home and let Madam and Bill handle it. And they were due to go to-morrow, anyway, thank the Lord. Home was the proper place for hysterical young women, he told Mr. Paige who (Jenny having gone indoors) now approached brandishing—there was no other word for it—his trouble. "It is the atmosphere which has upset her. I'll take her home, and if you come up in a week or two——"

“But I must speak to her now. Now!” cried Mr. Paige, dusty to the eyebrows with much tramping about the roads. “I am convinced that I could persuade her——”

“My dear man,” drawled Oliver, feeling at the moment much the same, “you’d only persuade her into the harbour.”

Paige clutched his sleek hair with both hands. With his grey eyes starting and his hair on end, his usually immaculate person seemed as though it had just weathered an earthquake.

“I am distracted!” he cried. “I adore her. Why should this blow fall upon me?”

“I’ll do what I can,” promised Oliver, but he had not very much confidence. He knew Comyns.

VIII

Jenny had wit, and Oliver hoped she would know what to do when he got her home. For himself he hadn’t a notion, and the silence of this small dauntless thing through the long tiring journey was unnerving. Not that he expected her to tell him anything of her feelings. He believed that Jenny never did tell them—except possibly to Mab, who was the worst mentor any living being could have.

“Here we are,” he said, helping her out of the carriage which William had sent to meet the coach at Trienna. “And I hope . . .” She flashed a bright inquiring glance at him, and he ended lamely, “I hope you’re not very cold.” Incredibly the little Jenny had actually floored him. Egad! There would be wigs on the green between her and Madam.

He followed her into the bright hall with its lit candles and smiling welcomes. But Jenny was not taking her kisses and pettings until she had got her news off her chest. She loosed the huge heavy cloak and stepped out of it like a blithe young soldier going into battle.

“Grandma . . . Papa,” she said in that sweet caressing voice of hers. “I’ve come back. And I am not going to marry Mr. Paige.”

“Port Arthur is hardly a sedative to us Comyns,” said Oliver, jestingly, knowing that he looked older and more anxious.

Heaven knew that the Comyn coffers were in no condition to reject such a gold nugget as Paige, who was no worse than falls to the lot of most women.

“Oh, dear!” This was Susan’s toot. “But your trousseau, Jenny!”

Now Bill had waked to it. He pushed Oliver aside, staring out of his pale whiskers. “What is this, miss? Of course you will marry him. I gave my word.”

“I have given him back mine.”

She stood like a small Dresden-china doll, looking at Madam, who leaned on her gold-headed stick and said nothing. Madam was meeting this in her own secret way before she swooped, and it was old Bill who rose to the occasion like a true patriarch. He said much more than was necessary, while the others stood waiting. Every one knew that the real battle was between Jenny and Madam. Every one, that is, except Bill, who ended majestically: “You will go to your room and remain there on bread and water until I have decided what to do with you.” Madam moved, and Bill amended hurriedly, “Until we have decided, I mean.”

Madam furled the turkey-feather fan that hung from her waist, stepped forward, and lightly struck Jenny across the shoulders. “Ingrate!” she said, and turned her back and walked off to the salon. Oliver expected to hear the harp, but apparently this was beyond harps.

The Captain, much troubled, took Jenny up in a big hug. “Never mind, sweetheart. . . . She don’t mean it,” he said.

“Dear Grandpa,” said Jenny. She patted his rosy cheeks, kissed him, and went up the stair, not looking back. Oliver wondered if those behind shared his uncomfortable feeling that the little baggage, going to her punishment, had somehow got the best of them all—and knew it. But no one spoke except Susan, who was lamenting that Jenny’s trousseau would be too small for Charlotte.

CHAPTER TWELVE

I

ON the high burning flats of Bendigo, Mab read with distress and shame what Jenny had to say about Robert Snow. The man belonged to the forgotten past when Mab had none of that pity for others which so often troubled him now. Since then he had been into the mud and out. He had made fortunes and lost them, and now he had little left but his strong body and a steadying sense at the bottom of his mind that, after all, the fight's the main thing.

Outside his hut he sat on an upturned powder-cask, generally used as a water-bucket, and smoked a pipe through, staring at the rickety tin buildings and wooden huts reeling grey in the heat. Men moved about them : scores of men and a few women, all living, hoping, suffering humans like himself. By the time the pipe was done, his thoughts, never very quick, had arranged themselves. He stood up.

"Nothing else for it," he said half aloud. "The poor devil was no worse than me. Not so bad. I must get him out of that."

He took the next boat from Melbourne, which landed him four days later at Hobarton. Every one now called it Hobarton, but Mab could not learn the trick of it any more than he ever learned the trick of subtlety. But even he saw his opportunity when he called on a distracted Mr. Paige and heard what Jenny had done.

"It is inexplicable," said Mr. Paige. "I went up to see her, but . . ."

Mab gathered that he had returned more distracted than when he went. He had a kind of unbuttoned look very pleasing to Mab, who loathed the fellow, and he was so oilily abject, like a dog hopefully sniffing round legs.

"Perhaps you might get her to explain, Comyn. She is fond of you."

It did not need an Oliver to grasp this opportunity. Mab, although feeling somewhat dishonourable toward Jenny, at once offered Snow as a lever. "She was troubled about the fellow being there. I'm afraid there was some mistake. If you could have him released . . ."

"It shall be done." . . . Lord! thought Mab, the man really cares. He has changed all in a minute. . . . "I will leave for the peninsula to-morrow," said Mr. Paige, beginning to gather up razors and neckties.

Mab went to dine with the Sorleys and there heard more about Jenny, under the new petroleum table lamps which, Louisa complained, were worse than the marsh gas with which Hobarton was now beginning to light itself and which generally left dinner-tables in the dark somewhere between the fish and the savoury.

"My dear, we must lead," said James, balder and a little bent, but exuding wealth and importance. "As a Member of this First Parliament of Responsible Government . . ." he continued with plenty of capitals. But Mab had no wish to hear anything of the first parliament, which busied itself with quarrellings, with putting on duties and taking them off, and was just on the edge of finally extinguishing itself with a vote of "no confidence." He asked about Jenny.

"Oh, poor Jenny! William told Henry that she was still incarcerated," said Louisa. "I suppose she should be, for of course children should obey their parents." Thinking of Julia, she sighed. These immutable laws had a queer way of confounding their sponsors. . . . If only she had married Mab. I vow he is handsomer than ever, she thought. But never once had her innocent soul suspected Mab.

"To have sense," Madam had once told Oliver, "one must know the cabaret versions of the songs of the world. Louisa knows none that are not sung in drawing-rooms, nor does she know that there are other versions. James must be cleverer than I thought him."

"I am grieved that you will not see Julia, Mab," said Louisa. "She has gone to Sydney with Sir Almeric. He still has some weakness."

Even her generous mind could not quite forgive Noll for trying to make her child a widow. Yet in that case Mab could have married Julia. But she would have lost her title. Possibly Providence knew best after all.

To his almost shocked surprise Mab found that he could hear Julia's name without wincing; and this so heartened him that he rode north through a rosy dawn silvered with dew on the cobwebs, whistling with the magpies, throwing pennies to the tow-headed beggar-children who came swarming out of haystacks and other places of the night. All things healed if you gave 'em time, he thought. But, excepting for Jenny, he was assuredly done with women.

II

After some weeks in her room Jenny was rather surprised to find her tremendous sense of relief still upholding her. That individual *Me* which she had first found in the kangaroo-clearing, and which Mr. Paige had almost obliterated, had returned with such glorious shouts of freedom that she often held high revels with it up there in the dark. Interviews with William or Susan only made it freer, and she was ashamed to remember afterward that it had made the long nose at Mr. Paige. Now that she was no longer afraid of him . . . *Dieu!* but he was funny! Yet she never went to Madam except reluctantly, for it is hard to fight those one loves even though at times one must love oneself better.

"For what, then, have I educated and considered you?" demanded Madam, stately in her high chair, and Jenny, a little white and shaky, answered:

"I cannot marry Mr. Paige. He is *canaille*."

"Gracious Heaven!" cried Madam, gripping her delicate hands until the rings and pointed nails hurt her. "Do you perhaps imagine that you know more of gentlemen than I?"

"Mr. Paige isn't a gentleman," persisted Jenny.

Because Madam knew that now, she was the more angry. Speech with *le gros* Paige left a sour taste *au bouche*. But he was a *bon parti*, and she had chosen him. She cried: "Are you not my granddaughter? Do you not owe me obedience?"

Jenny never could cry when tears might have been useful. She said helplessly : ‘ I am very sorry. I cannot marry that man.’

“ *Eh bien.*” Madam reached for her embroidery frame. “ I wash my hands of you. For many years I have depleted myself that you might have advantages. Wasted effort ! You may go.”

They were burning gorse and bracken on the low hills when Mab rode up to Clent and stopped to speak of Jenny to William, who stood watching him in the red glare with the columns of harsh-scented smoke eddying round him. He left William shocked and pulling at his sandy whiskers and went on to attack Madam, which was a harder job because they loved each other. But he did not mince words. “ Marry Jenny as Julia was married,” he said, “ and you’ll get a worse tragedy. Jenny was your blood and she’ll go to the devil. And I’ll help her.”

“ I marvel that you have the face to speak of Julia to me who knows what happened there,” retorted Madam, very erect.

“ Because you know, I am telling you that it will happen again. How would you like to be browbeaten yourself, *maman* ? Gad ! no one likes it, except such things as Susan, and they haven’t the wit to know what they like.”

“ Jenny must marry.”

“ Multiply and replenish the earth, eh ? Not with Paige.”

“ You have grown coarse, Mabelle. You do not pleasure me.”

“ I am not here to pleasure you. My heavens !” he cried, switching about Madam’s dignified furniture with his riding-whip. “ Can’t you see, you who have so much imagination ? Can’t you see how much farther she’ll go, given her head, than if you couple her up with that dolt who’ll never lift his nose from the manger except to nuzzle her ? ”

“ A young girl cannot go far alone,” said Madam, considering this.

“ She’ll have both of us behind her.”

“ And what can you do ? ”

“ I’ll show you, if you can persuade Bill to let Jenny out of that room. She won’t be improved by losing all her colour and spirit.”

“ If I can persuade Guillaume ? Is he, then, *grand seigneur* ? If I pardon Jenny, I think we shall hear no more of Guillaume.”

“*Touché*,” thought Mab content. He stooped to kiss her cheek, soft with the softness of age. “Egad, *maman*! Where would the Comyns stand now if you had been a man!”

At sixty Madam, who had begun life at fourteen, was no longer very young. She leaned her head against Mab’s arm. “Life is too harsh. And you are harsh. But one lives down everything, including death. Our *petite* must marry, Mabelle.”

“Not unless she wants to.”

“*Mon Dieu*, my son! Do we ever get what we want?” She looked up at him sadly. So much she had wanted for this big splendid child of hers, driven here and there by his passions. The cunning of love moved her. She drew his face down to hers. “Let us work for our little Jenny, Mab . . . together.”

So, as a bone to placate dignity, it was settled that Jenny should go for a time to Lovely Corners, as a continued punishment. Susan, still upset about the trousseau and the fact that Jenny had four younger sisters and might have more (for you never could tell), reluctantly became William’s mouthpiece again, requesting that the said punishment should not extend to bread and water nor solitary confinement. “Then where do the punishment come in?” demanded Mrs. Merrick, peering out of her black shawls. Susan looked round the fusty crowded room where her girlhood had so suffered, where Ellen’s womanhood was so suffering, and said nothing. William had not told her the answer to that.

III

Mr. Paige, very haughty in his own eyes and very peevish in the eyes of others, returned to Hobart Town and Oliver’s consolations. He had now no heart for Port Arthur, which offered quite the wrong kind of stimulus, and had obtained a temporary post on the government staff.

“He don’t look like a man about to marry,” simpered Lydia Quorn to Oliver. “Has that naughty Jenny turned him down? What a creature of whims she is! And la! How he admires you, Mr. Oliver!”

Detecting a certain quality in her tone, Oliver began to

reconsider. Wooden-pated blockheads like Paige could be easily caught in the rebound. *Down Jenny, up Lydia. Le roi est mort . . .* It seemed possible. Very possible. Lydia's mother (interested in all good works except the advancement of her daughter) was worse than useless to a young female. Lydia, one believed, would be grateful if Oliver helped her to Mr. Paige on his silver platter, and after marriage not quite so grateful. But by then Oliver would be consolidated. Quite another pair of shoes, this. But he believed he could make them fit.

"My dear artful creature," he said lightly, "is there anything I can tell you that you do not already know?"

And they laughed together. Lydia was of those who would sooner be called artful than good, and Oliver had no objection to helping her cook her goose. And the sooner the better, lest Mr. Paige take fright at the country's condition and flee over the seas again.

Yet the country (which half the population believed to be ruined and the other half hoped was prosperous) was in some way getting things done at a great rate. Launceston completed a scheme which gave her almost the best water-supply in the world, with a million gallons and more always on tap. Hobart Town, with many throes and ministries, turned herself into a city under full civic rights, banished the old jail, with its sombre memories, from the town centre to Campbell Street and began to tidy up. Once the Empire drab, Tasmania was fast becoming quite the lady, with her fine schools, public offices, bridges, roads and what not. She had slips where some of the fastest vessels afloat were being built; wattle bark such as the rest of the world could not produce, and wool of which even England spoke with a surprised respect. Her natural beauties were far above and beyond all these; but in the 'fifties Nature was put in her place and kept there, like unruly daughters.

"Time we had Jenny back. I miss her, my love," the Captain said daily, until James Sorley, waiting for re-election, returned to Bredon and delivered himself at a public meeting on the subject of increased taxation. Then the Captain, always ready for battle with his old friend, sprang at him like valiant Jack at the Giant. James knew himself in these days as a giant, and

wore a faintly superior acid manner which enraged the Captain surprisingly.

"James is getting what Cook calls up-nosey," the Captain told Madam, as he sat one evening netting curtains. "By the way, tell her that there will be an old couple at the back door presently. They can sleep in one of the sheds. And now we'll have some of *Mr. Pickwick*. Mab . . ."

But Mab had had an urgent letter from Mr. Paige and gone by stage to Hobart Town where he met a just-released Robert Snow and was much the more embarrassed of the two. Snow, a freed man with no assets except two half-crowns in his pocket and the Lord knew what liabilities in his soul, stood with his lean sardonic smile in the little hotel room. He did not speak. His dark eyes were narrowed. His thin nose seemed too long in his hollow cheeks. Mab said in a hurry: "Glad to see you. My niece, you know. She saw . . . must have been a mistake somewhere. Never expected . . ."

"Quite. So I have you to thank for my release, too?"

Mab didn't like the "too." A queer bleak look the poor devil had, though. No wonder. "I can get you work if you want it."

"That's inevitable, isn't it?"

"Er . . . I suppose so. Mr. Keyes of Tane Hall wants a shepherd. I'll recommend you."

"As a shepherd?"

In the clothes he had just bought himself Snow looked dreadfully like a gentleman in spite of his broken hands. He had never been soft. Always . . . uncomfortable. Now he was something more. Ten years at Port Arthur were bound to make him something more, since they had not smashed him. Impulsively Mab blurted out: "Were you ever in the Dumb Cell?"

"Twice. And you?"

"I? Oh . . . I looked into it once."

"Ah! An amateur."

He was devastating, but Mab had to go farther, although no one who saw poor old Ellen at thirty-eight . . . "You understand that I am helping you only on condition that there . . . there is no . . . no more . . ."

"No more promiscuity. I understand."

"Gad!" thought Mab, going away after making an appointment for Snow to meet Roger Keyes that evening at the Albion. "He's inhuman. I half wish . . ." But, after all, it had been inevitable, just as Snow said.

"But the fellow *is* inhuman," he insisted to Jenny the next time he went over to Lovely Corners. And Humphrey, who had come down from Latterdale where he studied history in his log hut after a twelve-hour day at logging and stumping, remarked that all men had had an inhuman streak ever since Hannibal crossed the Alps and Cæsar went to Britain.

"You can't stand loneliness without you have a bit of the animal, or death without you have a bit of the god," said Humphrey. "Trouble with too many of us colonists is that we haven't had to stand either. An aristocracy of blood and bluster; too many of us."

Again Mab felt at a loss. These youngsters! "Too many new ideas," he said.

"Not enough of those," retorted Humphrey, rocking his stocky body as he and Jenny sat on the grass under the apple trees. Always got back to the earth when they could, those two. "Why, Uncle Mab, you must realize how these stiff-necked old colonial notions are blocking everything. Take pasture, now. Because people started on the rich alluvial land along the rivers, they will apply the same processes to hill country. Take Latterdale. I'd never set a share in those sweet tough native grasses on the slopes, but Father will plough them and sow with English seed. Then the first heavy rains and where are you? Nothing left but the bones of the hills."

"The English were always conservative, Humphrey. That's what has put us where we are."

"But where are we, us young uns?" said Humphrey, thinking of Maria whom he meant to marry when his father gave up buying him clothes and his mother stopped weighing out his weekly rations with those of the other men. "Oh, Lord! I would like to earn some money!" he said.

Jenny shook the apple petals out of her ringlets and swept them together in the pale muslin of her lap. If only this fragile pink-and-white was money for Humphrey, who would never

drink of the wine that makes men mad on holy dreams but who did so want to make roads and prosperous farms.

"But I couldn't marry Mr. Paige," she said, pursuing her thought.

"That scab! You never did better work than when you made him cut his lucky, Jen. He's not the cheese."

"He has got the man Snow's freedom for you, though, Jenny," said Mab. "What are you going to say to him for that?"

"Tell him that I never appreciated the meaning of the word until now." Jenny looked at Mab, widening her eyes. "I feel more wicked and more happy than I've ever felt, Uncle Mab. I know I shouldn't——"

"Possibly you'll feel wickeder and happier yet," said Humphrey, getting up. "'Specially if you go on burning the tracts Aunt Ellen gives you."

"I burned *Snatched from the Pit* and *Little Adolphus*, but I kept *Buttons for the Breeches of Salvation* for you."

She fled away laughing among the blossoming apple trees, with Humphrey making clumsy grabs at her as he followed, and Mab went soberly to look for Ellen. *La petite* was so very much less subdued than he had expected to find her; and although she was delicious this way, he much feared that it was dangerous. Very dangerous, every one knew, for a girl to think for herself, and Jenny, apparently, was so thinking. He heard her distant laugh among the trees; chequered light and shade mysteriously hid her, but still her vividness remained. . . . Something that could not come to heel in Jenny . . . elves, fauns, all the wild, gay, mischievous things. Disturbed in his mind, Mab had a sense of relief as he stepped into the high-windowed back room where Ellen was always cleaning the black clothes of her parents, who were dirty feeders. Ellen must be told about Snow, but there was no fear of further outbreaks here. The chains of custom were set too deep in her flesh.

It was difficult to tell things to Ellen, because she never helped interpretation. Just stood with her bony faded face, her hare eyes, her pale half-open mouth, and waited.

"It's about Snow. He is out again after ten years in Port Arthur," said Mab bluntly.

Something flickered up in the hare eyes, flushed the faded cheeks. The essential Ellen whom Mab in the name of all the proprieties had helped to kill. But before he could feel pity or compunction it was gone and Ellen crying confusedly about the disgrace . . . the disgrace. Undoubtedly she had regained her sense of proportion!

"I had thought him dead. Oh, if he were dead!" She waved her arms uncouthly, upsetting a bowl of soapy water across Mr. Merrick's waistcoat. "Mab, what shall I do? He will come for me. Oh, I could not bear it! Tell him he mustn't come."

She prepared for hysterics. Mab, remembered that cold face, said: "He won't come. He understands."

"But he adores me. Is he handsome still? I always thought . . . a martyr's face. Is he like a martyr still, Mab?"

"A martyr? I don't know." Mab thought of the thin acid smile, the stillness that was round the fellow like a shroud—or a protection. "No, I shouldn't say so." A martyr loved his kind, didn't he? "I thought it best to tell you, Ellen, in case you heard it elsewhere. But you can put him out of your mind, for you'll never see him again."

"And no one will ever know?" Ellen began to weep, smearing her face with the soapy, dirty water. "Ten years at Port Arthur! Mab, I should die of shame if people ever found out."

Mab went out abruptly, leaving her among the fusty smells of damp broadcloth and bombazine. So that was what it all amounted to. Julia used to talk of dying of shame if people knew. People! Meant more to women than anything else, did they? He tried to understand. People's tongues could kill a woman more effectually than a bullet, and—poor devils—they knew it. How would that bright daring spirit of Jenny's fare if ever it brought itself within the range of people? He felt a moment's sickness at the thought.

IV

Each morning Jenny helped Ellen make Grandpa and Grandma Merrick's bed, feeling very thankful that Ellen was so strong. Between them they turned the heavy palliasse and lifted upon it the lamb's-wool mattress before untying the strings so that

they could plunge in their hands and tease away knots formed during the night. Between them they hoisted the horsehair mattress atop and the feather bed—with some struggling—atop of that. When coverings were added and the puce moreen curtains spread out on the pillows the erection was almost as tall as Jenny, and Ellen said anxiously :

“ It is such an effort for Mamma to get into it. I always fear that she might strain herself.” But when Jenny suggested a stool such as other ladies used, Ellen shook her head. “ Mamma considers stools popish. She is such a strict Unitarian. Of course, Papa . . . ” She stopped, feeling it indelicate even to wonder how Papa got into bed, he being so very stout and nightshirts so very short. “ Well, it is as the Lord wills,” she said.

Jenny found her more than usually awkward and nervous the morning after Mab left. She all but dropped the plaster statuette of Diana (swathed about the middle with drab poplin) on returning it to its bracket after dusting ; she mixed *Daniel's Animated Nature* with the twelve volumes of *The Parents' Assistant* on which the Merricks had brought up their family, and she seemed to be always listening. Once she cried, “ Is that the Clent boat on the river ? ” and climbed on a chair to look out on the bright day. Her face was queer when she got down. Gaunter, and yet relieved. She giggled weakly.

“ I haven't been at the cherry-brandy, I assure you,” she said.

Jenny, climbing to the hay-loft later after apples, found Joe there among his “ models ” and so embarrassed, with the pathetic shyness of an inventor of great dreams, that he could scarcely show them to Jenny.

They were nothin' . . . well, that thing . . . he believed that some day folk would reap by machinery and he worked it out. He bruk the blades out of a penknife ; if Jenny pulled it along they went round. Trembling before ignorant Jenny, Joseph dragged the clumsy contrivance through shavings that spun away as the blades whirred. It cut standing stuff, said Joseph. Once he'd tried it by moonlight on the lawn. . . . But how much more interesting than any machinery he was, with the strange fire in his eyes, the strange tenderness in his great hands.

“ Oh, Uncle Joe,” she cried, excited, delighted, “ I never knew

you were so clever ! You must show it to some one who'll make a big one. You must ! ”

“ Yus an' git laughed at forever,” said Uncle Joe. He stood like an overgrown child abashed among his toys. His prominent teeth showed in a mirthless grin (poor Uncle Joe, even plainer than Aunt Ellen); his eyes in their freckled sunk sockets had exchanged their fire for fright. “ If ever you tell, Gen'vieve, I . . . I dunno know what I'll do.”

Joseph, Oliver had declared, never did know, any more than Ellen, any more than Susan. *The Parents' Assistant*, Oliver said, explained that.

“ If you'd let Uncle Mab see——” Jenny advanced timidly.

“ Him ! ” squeaked Joseph. “ Him ! ” He felt quite faint to think of dashing, flashing Mab Comyn poking his models about with a hunting-crop, offering to bet which would rouse the most laughter among experts. “ I don't want no one to see 'em. Nor to hear of 'em. You go on down, Gen'vieve, an' don't catch your crin'lin on the spikes.”

Jenny went soberly, wondering why he was ashamed, why one could never ask him or any one else questions about the things that really mattered ; nor could you possibly be answered if you did. Marriage, like death, was the only stamp which franked you into knowledge . . . and not so very far in then. Most things were acts of Providence, Papa said : or acts of the devil, said Grandma Merrick, who evidently had an intimate acquaintance with the devil. It was rather pushing and bourgeois, Jenny had gathered, to face facts unless one simply had to, and one gained direction for daily life by opening the Bible with shut eyes and dabbing the finger on a verse. Aunt Ellen and Mamma always did it and had taught Charlotte and Jenny, until Jenny felt it must be blasphemous to laugh so much over the advice one got (such as taking seven husbands and . . . well, other things).

Why, she wondered, was it pious to read in the Bible what one certainly would never be permitted to read elsewhere ? To the pure all things are pure, said the Rev. Mr. Fennel, who prepared her for confirmation in white alpaca and a book-muslin cap that covered her hair. Then why mustn't one talk of them ? It was all as puzzling as the wonder what Mamma got, for instance, out of :

“They did work wily, and went and made as if they had been ambassadors,” which was dangerous teaching for Mamma. Or of Job scraping himself with potsherds.

Jenny—drawing breath after all this merry and confused tossing on the foam of adulation, the light of lovers’ eyes—began, as she patted up golden butter within the fragrant dairy or sat quiet in the flock-papered dark rooms while Mrs. Merrick slept, to sort out her sensations with increasing skill. Something surely must be wrong in a world where men went into the glorious bush merely to burn and destroy; where Uncle Joe was ashamed of creation and so many proud of destruction; where obedience to parents was more important than obedience to your conscience, which, you were told, came from God; where men (made in God’s image) wore balls and chains day and night. “We cannot run the risk of rebellion,” said Mrs. Carr-Becket about that.

So many people, it appeared, guarded against that risk by converting themselves into leg-chains which never came off. The Merrick grannies never came off. Ellen and Joseph wore them as constantly as Maria was wearing Mrs. Beverley, as Jenny would have had to wear Mr. Paige. Here, from sheer light-heartedness at release, she had to go out and jump from haystacks, her crinoline making a buoyant balloon on the ambient air so full of cock-crowing and other spiky and lively sounds; or ride the boughs of the black wattle, being a centaur (annotated by Mr. Paige, centaurs became as dull as donkeys, but Jenny had retrieved the splendid creatures), springing through the woods of Caledon with hoofs that struck the leafy earth but now and again. And then (after all, she had been well brought up) one remembered one’s sins and one’s age—past eighteen—and ran in to sit with *The Book of Martyrs* open on her knees.

Then thoughts went round again. Chains, it seemed, were the only modest wear for women. They must have visible appendages. Convicts might get rid of theirs and set semaphores on Mount Lupus and Mount Stewart flashing and troops with long ball-loaded Brown Besses marching out among the bloodhounds: they might stay free and become bush-rangers with friends all over the country. But a woman socially escaping her trammels would not

have the same luck. She would have no friends in any country. Strange and terrible, this, but it explained the case of Mab and Julia as nothing else could do. Julia would have had to choose her man against the world, and she dared not. Would any woman dare? Wandering through the dim garden under the lilacs, hearing the sleepy sounds of birds in the bushes, the soft distant rush of the river, Jenny thought: Would I?

A faint wind came with the tang of the bush hills. It seemed to blow across her soul; dark yet poignant. She stood still, her face raised like a pale flower in the green twilight among the trees, as though waiting for an answer. A white moth brushed her cheek, the wind passed on, leaving her heart beating. But it had held no message. She went in, disconsolate. . . . Perhaps, she thought, I shall never love well enough to know.

In the next week Mr. Paige plighted his troth—he called it that to Oliver, who was very delicately understanding—to Lydia Quorn, and after that not even William could miss the humour of continuing to “incarcerate Jenny.” She wrote to Mab, who had gone with his horses to the Launceston Races:

Grandma is taking me on a round of visits. *Dio mio!* her handling of the gentlemen is the liberalest of educations. And there are cricket and archery matches, kangaroo-hunting and again bouquets, balls, and beaux. I have never had so many proposals in a week before, but Grandma says: “This cannot go on, Jenny. At twenty a girl is on the shelf among last year’s bonnets.” And the gentlemen tell me my eyes are continually asking something, and that is the truest word they say. How should they know, poor innocents, that I am asking them all to have the kindness to capture the heart of Jenny Comyn and so tumble me into the matrimonial morass with them. Alack! I’m afraid that not even one of ’em will!

V

Madam, tired and more than a little bitter, brought Jenny home at last to a Clent acrid with smoke from the raging bush fires back in the ranges. All along the river men were out day and night, fighting the fires, and sometimes Charlotte and Jenny rode out to them with great billies of cold tea or oatmeal water fastened to the saddles. Charlotte now went daily to a Young Ladies’

Seminary in Trienna, where she wrestled unemotionally with a little singing, drawing, deportment and literature, all merely as means to an end. Jenny knew that the end was to be Mark Sorley, a timid, delicate boy who would be easily handled, and—unlike Charlotte and Susan—she did not feel it indelicate to say so. Susan was outraged, but Charlotte said tolerantly that some of them would have to marry. Jenny felt that Charlotte was very tolerant toward life. When the youngest Fremp child was burned playing out on the hills, she did not blame it on the Deity as Susan did when she told Mrs. Fremp that it was God's will, nor did she cry against the instability of everything, like Jenny.

“If we cannot look after ourselves and our belongings, we must expect to suffer,” said Charlotte, looking after herself as competently as anything.

They rode home through Trienna for the letters and there found Sigurd Beverley smoking in the sun on the edge of the great stone drinking-trough. Sigurd was being very Bohemian just now, with no collar and no hat. He had decided that only in this manner could a Bohemian express his soul, and had offended James Sorley five minutes before by saying that if ministers would give up wearing stocks the blood of humanity might flow more freely to their brains. It was the gathering of the ticket-of-leavers for their biannual report at Trienna Police Station which had moved Sigurd to that, and he sat with his face like the young Shelley and cried passionately to Jenny: “Scapegoats! Scapegoats of human incompetency. Look at 'em.”

While her mare snorted into the water and then touched it with dainty lips Jenny looked under her wide hat at the crowd coming up through the dust and the heat. Brisk, well-clad store-keepers with wives in gay shawls and bonnets; labourers pitching down their scythes outside the door; small settlers riding straight with blackened faces and red-rimmed eyes from the fire-fighting; a school-teacher or two, and—sidling by with leering greedy eyes on the quality—those old and filthy ruffians who were never off the roads except when in jail. A handful or so there were of the feeble drained-out men and women born to be a charge on any country and making Jenny's heart ache with their bleared eyes and sweating weary faces. Charlotte said:

“And after this year England isn't going to allow us even the six thousand pounds for all the jails and poorhouses and hospitals!”

Charlotte always knew facts and knew them quite exactly. She never had to end up with “and things,” as Jenny so often did. Sigurd shifted his warming quarters on the stone and began to say that the twenty-five thousand pounds which England had paid until Cessation had been little enough for all the penal settlements and the military, and as for Parliament imagining that they could fill the treasury by more taxation . . .

Here Jenny ceased to listen. A woman limped up the stony street between the grassy edges. Her choice of stones seemed symbolical of her wild battered self, her mournful cry. She stopped by Jenny and repeated it: “Has any one seed my man? Sam Hall they calls him. Spits a lot——”

“Oh, poor Mary!” cried Jenny. “Oh, Sigurd, have you any money?”

Sigurd pulled out his purse as men all over the country pulled them out for old Mary. No roof could shelter her now, no kindness hold her. The spirit of unresting search, she passed up and down, crying for the man she had come across the world to find; a grey phantom homeless as the wind. An old hag with matted locks sticking through her faded head-shawl pressed up, whining: “Friend o' mine, her be. Comed out i' the same boat nigh thirty year back. . . . Penny, dear genelman. . . . Jest a penny, sweet pretty young lady.”

“Oh, let's get away from these creatures!” cried Charlotte, and set off home at a spanking trot. But the woman looked ill, and Jenny cried again, “Oh, Sigurd?”

Sigurd shook his head. As a man and a ratepayer he knew better. “You're never done with 'em,” he said. So Jenny cantered off after Charlotte, wishing, like Humphrey, that she had some money.

Even sixpence a week would be something, she thought.

She could never get used to these derelicts any more than Madam could get used to what Mr. Disraeli called “a plebeian aristocracy blended with a patrician oligarchy,” although this was settling down with a healthy growth in the colony since the gold-

rush. The Captain, rather at a loss for subjects since Cessation, began writing to the papers about it. Here was this shocking question of rural municipalities ; he cried : " Damme, sir, d'you realize what that means ? Any rude fellow with a few rods of land can get a score of like beggars to elect him for the municipal councils ; and there is an end to the rights and privileges of the gentlemen of the district."

" It's evolution," said Henry Sorley, who was a little tired of the rights and privileges of the gentlemen of the district. They had so many, and all conflicting ; which was possibly quite natural, seeing that the personal and individual element which had founded the colony was still very much alive in it, but rather troublesome to a practical citizen who was more concerned over gettings things done than over the procedure of doing them.

The Captain ignored evolution. Either you were a gentleman or you were not, and so, damme, where was the sense of talking, he said ; clapped his panama on his white shock of hair, and went off in his gig to find some one else to talk to about it. But a little later had come the Indian Mutiny Fund, and in writing of that and collecting subscriptions he forgot the privileges of the gentlemen. When battle was in sight, said Madam, regretfully, the Captain was not a man but a regiment.

In his library, full of *Bell's Lives* and all the English sporting papers, he wrote diligently in praise of the first submarine cable to Australia. But before his letter lauding the impetus to industry and the link with Old England was published the cable broke and continued to break until the colony understood that it had paid forty thousand pounds for a worthless article. Then, as a natural corollary, he sent in broadsides blaming the Government.

It was Mab who put him on to a new theme. Mab, who had been prospecting on the east coast, where at Fingal alluvial gold was already paying, rode in to Clent with a month's beard and a spirit at rest. The great silence and bitter testing of the bush, its deluges of rain, its blazing sun on naked tops, and its warm quiet nights full of strange scents and the calls of little animals had at last washed away that sense of bewilderment and distrust of humans which Julia had left him. He sat with feet stretched

comfortably, watching Jenny and Madam playing backgammon, and exulted in the civilized scent of the pinks in the garden border, the civilized sight of pretty women. The Captain snuffed enthusiastically.

“Soon our gold-fields will be rivalling Australia, beating ’em,” he said.

Mab shook his head. “How can we get the stuff out, with no roads?”

“Roads? Roads? We’ll soon have roads, damme. I’ll write to the papers.”

He did. But Mab was right. The highlands of this wild country, with its roaring torrents and monstrous vegetation, refused to harbour roads. Prospectors were starved out on the high bleak plateau of the Great Lake; lost heart in the southwest whereof they told tales of walking thirty feet up on the horizontal scrub like monkeys. And when they fell through—as they often did—it took all day to climb from the fetid depths again. So gold-mining could not help the country, and the Captain went back to his library and wrote, “We must rely upon the agriculturists, who are, as they always will be, the backbone of any country . . .”

Humphrey read the letter aloud to Mab, up on Latterdale.

“The dear old sport. Hopeful as ever,” said Humphrey.

Mab lay smoking by the camp-fire, but now he turned on the gum leaves and looked at stocky Humphrey through the dusk. Humphrey’s voice was less contemptuous than pitying. . . . These young fellows, thought Mab. Not half the hope in them that I had. And I have less than my father. Does civilization do this always to its children? he wondered, remembering dimly the blazing enthusiasms of the old colonial days.

“Agriculturists!” said Humphrey. “What can we do, with the New Zealand gold-fields taking our best labour, and America and Australia wanting no more of our cereals? Why, land values have so fallen that town properties are merely white elephants taxed by a greedy Government. What in hell can we agriculturists do?”

“Make new freedoms out of old abuses,” said Mab, dryly, quoting from the Captain. “Drag experiment out of the muck of tradition and conquer the world with it. Gad! can’t that old chap

beat the drum ! I wish I had half his convictions. . . . Got your clear title to Latterdale yet, Humphrey ? ”

“ We never will, any more than we could prove on a lot of Clent. They were damned casual in the old days. None of my generation could prove he'd been born, for there were no birth-certificates until ten years ago. These old conveyancing laws are the deuce and all. I've heard Brevis jawing about 'em——”

“ Ah ! Ever hear from Brevis ? ”

“ Rarely. He was ill for a year in Italy . . . or said so. But tell that to the marines. Our Brevis was seeing life as he always said he would.” Humphrey pushed a tame possum off his legs (everywhere animals came to Humphrey) and added : “ I wish I could have Jen up here for a while. She's being smothered down in Clent, and I'm scared she'll marry just any one because she's so dead tired of always being expected to.”

“ She'll not do that,” said Mab. All Jenny's secret delicacy had been shocked by Paige as his had been shocked by Julia. It would be long before either would trust love again. Mab doubted if he ever would until age deadened his fires and stiffened his thews ; but he had made himself, on the way, heavens and hells to liven his chimney-corner. Jenny could not. The allowance for a woman was one hell only, which seemed meagre until one remembered that she usually had to stay in it all her life. “ Poor dear maid,” he muttered, staring down the hill where the dead ringed gum trees spread ghostly arms against the midnight sky.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

I

“**T**OO dange-rous now . . . bush-rangin’.”

“Not when it is done for pleasure.”

Henny pushed back her great bonnet to peer through the twilight at the man sitting by the table. “Yer voice has changed sence yer uster come here tattooin’ the boys, Robert Snow.”

“Probably. I have changed.”

“Well. Gimme a good safe job as shepherd ’n I’d stick to it.”

“Probably.”

She moved uneasily, rubbing her sinewy hands up her wrinkled face. . . . Somethin’ about the feller, she thought. Settin’ there with his little smile. “Well. What yer want to go bush-rangin’ fur ? ”

“I have told you. Pleasure.”

“’Tain’t so pop’lar as it was. The tavern-keepers likely won’t help a outlaw now. Too smug. Yer’ll have every man’s hand agin yer.”

“As it should be. My hand is against every man.”

From him it somehow did not sound ridiculous. It sounded almost like a fair deal.

“Want to git a bit o’ yer own back ? ” she suggested.

“Your notion of pleasure too ? Yes.”

“Well. If yer git caught, whar do I come in ? ”

“You don’t come in, any more than you ever did.”

“Collins wouldn’t of larsted so long wi’out me behind him. Or Rocky Wheelan. Or Wingy.”

“All men have cause for gratitude to some woman.” Snow laid a purse on the table. “There will be three of us. And horses. You can show me the caves ? ”

“To-night ? ”

“That is why I am here.”

“His voice is dif’runt,” muttered Henny, uneasily. But she rose and took a lantern from a dirty shelf. Her witch face showed

in the gleam from the sputtering yellow lucifer ; and then she swung the lantern up suddenly before him. " You're goin' killin', Robert Snow ! "

" Do you really think so ? "

The dark thin face with its small smile did not change. The narrowed eyes met hers steadily. She wavered ; shot a glance at the purse on the table ; gave a slight shiver. " Well, there's some likes a high death, apparently. Come. "

He followed her into the night. Aromatic scents of the bush, its complete darkness rose about him in an instant. A broken ripple ran on the polished leaves as the lantern swung and the track climbed steadily. Burnt trees advanced in black masses among the grey rocks ; retired ; left only the rocks in a steep dried water-course. Snow followed Henny up it with cat steps under tall thick tree-ferns that met overhead and gleamed here and there with the pin-prick eyes of opossums. They left the stones and his feet rustled on fallen gum leaves with their acrid smell. Henny swept aside an armful of hanging creepers against the hillside. " 'Ware snakes," she said mechanically, and vanished. Within, a stream ran down a narrow gut. They followed it up for perhaps ten minutes, stepped aside, and Henny swung the lantern round as Snow smelt sudden dryness and old horse dung.

" Here they kep' the horses," said Henny. " They lived beyond, A heap o' caves beyond." Her face showed sudden greed. " Collins left a heap o' stuff buried off there somewheres. I ain't never found it."

" Inconsiderate of Collins," said Snow. He glanced round, lifting his thin shoulders, drawing a long, contented breath. Here, below the earth where men trod, away from men's eyes, he felt himself once more a man. Outside he was an " old lag " ; a man from the triple-sentence prison of Port Arthur. Give a dog a bad name . . . that was what it meant. Ostracism among the virtuous ticket-of-leavers, the still more virtuous freed men. An old lag. No getting over that. No use talking.

Get a bit of his own back ? Ah, and so he would, on the world as well as on Mab Comyn who had destroyed him at his pleasure and put him back in an alien world at his pleasure. Yes, he would get a bit of his own back there.

Accustomed to darkness—he had spent much time here and there in the Model Prison—he moved round the walls, feeling the rough mangers, the rusty piles of hay. His feet came among corn-husks. Rats, that, and 'possums. Here was the smell and feel of leather : saddles with the stuffing eaten out of them, gnawed bridles. Collins had gone off in a hurry, as bush-rangers always did go . . . as Snow would, in the end. As he would go, with every man's hand against him and every woman's. Yes, even that of the girl whose baby face he had painted. It had something of the baby look still : clear forehead, soft contours, the flush of youth. But her eyes and mouth were a woman's.

From the inner caves Henny returned, grumbling in her prison slang. The lantern-light struck a pointed gleam from a silver teaspoon in her hand. "Collins et well. Crested silver, eh? I can't find no more."

Now the moon was up, turning the drooping fern fronds, the smooth white tree boles into splendour. The warm night drew the flavour of the bush, of some crushed plant poignantly sweet. There were delicate stirrings in the air ; a peaceful sense of those great forests, untrod, untroubled, lying at rest along the hills. Near by, a magpie sent out one full-throated call, tucked his head under his wing with a sleepy chuckle. Moths like frail spirits bewitched out of nothingness by the night showed a delicate wing and were gone again. Snow stood, savouring the wonder, shaken by the beauty into an artist's passion. This only was life ; this unearthly mystery pouring from the heavens ; this utter calm whereby man attained communion with the unreachable gods.

Henny turned her witch face under the grotesque bonnet ; beckoned with a horny finger.

With a faint sigh, Snow tramped on, his thin twisted lips smiling.

II

At the beginning of the 'sixties James Sorley came all the way from Hobart Town to call on the Captain for the first time in many years.

"I hear with . . . ah . . . horror that you contemplate

inaugurating a rifle club in this district," he began, before they were well into the library.

And the Captain—quite ready for old James with his pinched-in waist and stiff cravat—replied promptly: "Then you've heard wrong. It is inaugurated."

James went quite grey. He refused the offered chair and began at great length to assert that as Representative of the District (one always heard plenty of capitals when old James was about, thought the Captain) he had continually set his face against the degradation of military——

"Now, look here, James." The Captain decided to be tactful as long as he could. "You may as well stop this poppycock. If England can have volunteers, so can her colonies. And will, sir. And *will*."

"As Representative I warn you that I can exert powers . . . I . . . I warn you . . ." He ended vaguely, wishing the Captain wouldn't stare like a terrier about to bite: "I warn you of the very grave consequences which may overtake yourself and your dupes."

"I've already warned 'em that we're shootin' on the new Butts in Trienna Sandhills this afternoon. Now I warn you. If there are grave consequences attendant on any one's hangin' about the targets, I'm not responsible."

"Then," James grasped tighter the hat and stick which he had not laid down, "then I am to take it, Captain Comyn, that you defy me?"

"Take it how you like, James," said the Captain, enjoying himself hugely. "Take it how you like. Can I offer you a tot of Hollands with it?"

But when James stalked out like the crack of doom the Captain felt a discomfutable prick of alarm before he fortified himself with the tot James had rejected. For perhaps the first time he wished that mortgage had got itself paid off. But mortgages never did, somehow. Old James couldn't expect it, especially now that the Captain had made himself responsible for the general upkeep of the club. But each man provided his own uniform and the entrance fee was only half a crown. If that was not doing the thing cheaply, he would like to know what was.

Hypnotized into content by the consciousness of economy somewhere, he drove out with Madam to the Sandhills, very splendid in a frock-coat of olive-green, drab leggings, and a tall shako with cocks' feathers. Already there were two companies of artillery in the country, and soon there would be four of infantry. "Let Napoleon the Third bring his Frenchies when he likes," the Captain said to Madam. "We are ready for them."

Madam looked at the company drawn up against the yellow sand and the grey scrub wattle in the sun. If rifles had come in with the Crimea, whiskers had too, but she never liked them—particularly under shakos.

"*Eh, mon vieux!*" she cried. "Uniform is apparently as irresistible to a man as jewels are to a woman."

Very rosy and happy, the Captain kissed her hand, making the one epigram of his life: "With this difference, my love. With this difference. We wear uniform in order to prevent damage. The fair sex wear jewels in order to increase it."

"That's as may be," said Madam, rather tartly, remembering James Sorley's face as he left Clent. "There are occasions when the mere putting on of a uniform may provoke damage."

Had that been intuition? she wondered two days later, finding the Captain tossing into a great heap on the floor the papers from three large tin boxes in the library. He looked up, hot and dusty with snuff, and smiled when she asked him what he wanted.

"Nothing, my love. A mere nothing. If I can find the titles . . . I did have them."

"What do you want with titles?" asked Madam, a cold chill at her heart.

Still tossing papers, still on his fat little knees, her goodman answered her: "Nothing. Oh, merely an ultimatum, my love. Very civil, like one nation to another, but . . . but, damme, Jenny darling . . . *not* like one gentleman to another. If he was annoyed about something—and I certainly did gather as much the other day—he should have called me out and not ordered some pettifogging attorney to call in the mortgage. James never was a gentleman. We shall have to sell, Jenny . . . if I can find the titles."

Madam sat down. Her hands came together in her lap.

“Guillaume, we have the spirit of the pioneer, and there we end. We could conquer, but we could not serve. And only those who do both can remain in the land.”

“My dear girl,” he said. “My darling girl.” He put his arms round her, kissing her forehead. “It will all come right, Jenny—though, damme, I don’t just see how, at the moment. But whatever happens, my love, I can only feel that we both have done our best.”

He looked at her simply, trustfully, like a not too intelligent dog, and she took his face gently between her hands and kissed it thoughtfully. Guillaume, bless his dear soul, had certainly done his best with James; but Madam Comyn, the once-beloved of James, had not yet entered the lists.

Councillor James Sorley thought it best not to tell his family of the ultimatum. Uncomfortably he felt that, despite what he knew to be their very deep and natural respect for him, they might conceivably question it. In fact, the country might presently question it; for Comyn never could keep his mouth shut, and if he were as hard up as Henry declared and had to sell Clent . . . James withdrew his mind somewhat hastily from that thought; wished his family had not all gone out to dinner and left him to feel dull alone, and began industriously to recollect that he was a Member of the Upper House, complimented on his administrative qualities by the elusive Downing Street, and with a possible title in view. In any case Comyn was getting no more than his deserts. A noisy little chap whom he had never really liked, and if Madam . . . but, thank God, she hadn’t. Thank God for a decorous and influential career with Louisa always faithful, so very faithful, beside him, instead of that mad and bad sweet dream——

“Madam Comyn,” announced the maid-servant, and slammed the door. James made a swift movement of flight, controlled it, said and did things as though the sky were not falling. Madam, looking through her ringlets, was completely at her ease. James’s convulsive movement had put her there and, *nom d’un nom*, where was she not going to put him! With both hands out she advanced, shimmering silks and sandalwood scent quivering in the warm air.

“At last,” she said, “at last I have come to you, my friend.”

The councillor grasped the back of Louisa’s red-plush chair as though it were his faithful Louisa herself. He shot a glance round on her familiar things : flowers under glass shades, photographs on fretwork brackets, and ormolu clocks exposing their insides, and found his eyes drawn back to Madam, who stood smiling with downcast eyes.

“Ah, *la douce ivresse* of the years !” she said musically.

“Eh ? Hum. Yes,” said James. “Won’t you . . . er . . . sit down ?”

“You have not changed as others have changed. As Comyn has changed to me. When again he refused me my desire, I thought, ‘There is still one who does not change to me.’ And so . . . I have come.”

“What did Comyn refuse you ?” James found himself catching at the side issue with almost vulgar alacrity. With equally vulgar certainty he knew that he was suddenly sweating.

“*De quoi, alors ?*” Madam sank into a chair, spread her fingers. “If I demand a new bonnet, a new barouche, it is equal. It is that I demand and he says, ‘I cannot afford it.’ Like that he says it. Figure you if a man ever so spoke before to the wife who under great provocation has been faithful to him all these years.”

“Perhaps he really cannot ?” James felt a little heady at being called a provocation, but that did not compensate for his terror.

“He used not to talk like this. I do not like it. I am annoyed. All the time he has no money. Then why not get it ? I say. But he will not. James, he has changed. But I know that you have not. And so . . . I have come as so often you have implored me to.”

“Do I understand . . . am I to understand . . .” Feeling desperately that he did not understand anything, he cried, “You can’t love me now !”

“Oh, as for love, would you have me confess it ? *Ciel*, James, it is for you to teach me as you have so many times offered to do.”

“Hem. Not of late years,” said the councillor, deprecatingly. “Not of late years. At present I . . . ah . . .” He coughed. Ridiculously a long-forgotten injunction of his old nurse rattled into his brain : “Be a little gentleman, Master James. Be a little

gentleman." The councillor of thirty years' experience quailed under it. "Er," he said. "Ah. Er . . ."

"Comyn no longer loves me!" cried Madam, suddenly abandoning herself to grief in Louisa's red-plush chair. "I am sick of being good and having no money. I never was built for that. I have a gay soul. So I think I will fling my bonnet to the wind-mill and make one good man happy. And so . . . I am here."

The councillor wiped his forehead and his voice was unduly loud. "I am not a good man."

"So much the better. I never really liked them good," said Madam, reflectively.

"Madam Comyn, I . . . ah . . . beg you to listen. I am deeply . . ."

"Why not *Jenny*?" murmured Madam, her little hand groping. James took it. A man could do no less. It sent a thrill through him which warned him that he must be strong. For both their sakes he must be strong. He said so, and when Madam cried, "*Why?*" he said it again.

"I must consider you. Your standing in the country. I must realize for us both that we cannot now overset our lives with . . . ah . . . impunity. We owe so much to others."

"You too? Ah, these so horrible debts!"

"I . . . ah . . . did not speak of pecuniary obligations. I trust that I am able to discharge those without difficulty. But the country . . . our descendants . . . my old friend, who, I assure you, loves you devotedly. How," he cried, his fingers twitching above those soft glossy ringlets, "could he help it!" Terrified again at himself, he backed off. "You are undoubtedly under a serious misapprehension if you do not know that at present the whole country and, I may say, the . . ." He was finding his feet now, but Madam promptly jerked him off them. All the enjoyment of this interview was to be hers.

"If Comyn has no money, then it is clearly the will of God that I embarrass him no longer. And if I leave him, to whom should I turn but to one who has waited his reward these many years? Why should one man keep what he no longer values when another so desires it?"

"Good God!" said James. With trembling fingers he

rebuttoned his coat, as though the gesture shut her out ; suddenly stooped over her where she sat with the firelight round her desirable little body like a nimbus. " My dear," he said with a real earnestness that abashed her, " there was a time when I would have given my soul for what you are now saying. But I . . . ah . . . have learned the world since then. I now know that it is my duty to protect you against yourself . . . myself. I . . . ah . . . yes," Madam heard him swallow the pill with an audible gulp, " I will see Captain Comyn and I make no doubt but that something can be arranged. No doubt at all. I am convinced that what you consider want of love is actually no more than want of cash."

" He has told me so. But how to believe . . . any man."

" You can believe him. I swear it. And you can believe me when I . . . ah . . . assure you that I shall never forget the . . . ah . . . inestimable honour which you have done me. May I hope," here he began to regain confidence and his hand went naturally into his coat-front, " that, once more reconciled to your husband and flowering in the position you have for so long adorned, you may in an idle moment cast a thought toward him who resigned the most glorious vision of his life in order that your name might remain untarnished ? "

" What a man ! " said Madam, softly, into her handkerchief. " What sensibility ! How can I but submit . . . and admire ? " She thought swiftly that, this settled, it was a good time to put in a word for Charlotte, whose marriage might set *la petite* upon her mettle. She murmured : " It is rumoured that your Mark is amorous of our Charlotte, and had that come to pass it would not be right for me ever to think of you again. But since it will not come to pass . . . "

" Who says it won't ? " cried the councillor, sharply, as though struck by a new idea. But Madam did not press the matter. She had the gift, so rare in women, of knowing when she had said enough. After one pressure of the hand, one backward look, she went off in her waiting carriage, and the councillor returned slowly to pour and drink the peg of which he felt so badly in need. And then, although informed that dinner had long been waiting, he stood before the pier-glass for an appreciable time.

With dear Louisa he often felt fully seventy. That siren just

departed had made him feel forty-five. *Heigh-ho, hey nonny nonny!* Well, there went the mortgage, for he would have to pay for this interview through the nose. But when did a man ever kick at paying for favours? He might even have had a kiss if . . . But no. That would have been dangerous, and besides . . . a gentleman . . . *Youth is gay, and a maiden is bonny.*

Still humming and switching his coat-tails like a young cock bird with new feathers, James Sorley stepped jauntily in to his dinner.

III

Charlotte accepted without excitement her engagement to Mark Sorley, and with resignation her journey to town for presentation at the Governor's Ball. But Susan had such a long list of materials to buy for the trousseau that Madam suggested getting them for the layette at the same time.

"Now and then," said Susan to William, "I cannot but feel that your mother's remarks are not quite delicate. Especially as they are not to be married for a year, and there never may be any, either."

"There are sure to be," said William, gloomily. He felt how many things there were to be gloomy about now, what with taxes increasing, and scab in the sheep, and Humphrey having opinions, and the Captain taking up again with old James Sorley, which, in view of the mortgage, was a good thing, but one never knew what it might lead to.

"I've misjudged him all these years, Bill, my boy," said the Captain, but William knew better. Everything else the Captain did misjudge. But not that.

Jenny was not staying at the Sorley house in Upper Davey Street, but at Government House, where the governor—who had been Governor of St. Helena first and so understood that there were other places in the world besides England—was very appreciative of youth and beauty. And Jenny still had both, although Susan, bursting with pride over Charlotte, persisted in speaking of "poor Jenny" as if she were already quite out of the picture. Then Brevis Keyes, returned from England without warning, as people did in those days, came to pay his respects

to the governor's lady and found Jenny in the hall, waiting to go with the others to the regatta.

It was a curious meeting, although Jenny did not realize that until later. At the time it seemed inevitable that she should have sat there dumb, knowing with exultant fear what he was doing to her as he talked in this new manner, faintly bored, faintly Byronic, sardonic; she heard the girls squabbling over Brevis's manner afterward, disagreeing but all very much excited.

"The town tells me I have been away five years," said Brevis. "Sight of you tells me it can't be more than five months. Which am I to believe?"

"I don't know," said Jenny, stupidly. She was looking at this Brevis, who, in an age of whiskers and peg-top trousers emphatically checked, used his dignity of travel and "the professions" to be so different. The outward difference was marked enough: black clothes emphasizing his slim height, a velvet collar giving to his dark, thin shaven face an air; wavy locks clipped closer than the present shaggy fashion which made men look like eager Skye-terriers. (There was even a Skye-terrier coat on the market, and Adam Sorley had worn one yesterday, walking with Jenny in the park.)

Looking at Brevis, Jenny thought of a black greyhound, very wise, lithe, and assured, taking its silent way through the prickly gorse and sand stretches of life toward some secret goal. . . . But it nips up rabbits as it goes, she thought. A shiver ran suddenly through her. . . . Am I one of those rabbits? she wondered. . . . Mind what you are about, Jenny Comyn.

The governor came, very splendid and a little pompous in full regimentals, and Jenny watched the meeting between the men. She tried to see Brevis through the governor's tired, quizzical eyes. A personable young man; he would have to feel that. Slightly affected, and with no special prospects. Rather too fine-drawn for colonial life. . . . But it would not do. Too helpless even to be indignant, she felt the spell this easy young man had flung about her, and went with him, fluttered as a dairymaid, down through the gardens, past the naked foundations of the new Town Hall and into the governor's barge moored below the wheeling sea-birds.

It was a dazzling day, with something wild in it. In the rush of broken clouds up in the high blue ; the whip of impatient flags against the masts ; the shouts of men in the booths, the side-shows, the betting-rings lining the shore, the mad laughter of gulls swooping down on the bright awnings.

"A proper day for the regatta," said every one. But Jenny knew better. This glorious, imperious day flinging white foam from the bows of the racing boats, stinging the lips with its salt savour, was not here because of the regatta. It had come because Jenny Comyn, sitting enthroned on the governor's barge with every one very eager to salute her, had for the first time looked upon a young man and found him good.

She did not look very often. The knowledge was yet too much pleasure and pain for that, like the scent of sweetbrier, which more than any other unlocks the heart to old mysteries, old rites in moonlit woods when Pan was young. Gliding over blue water on the governor's barge, Jenny dreamed that she smelled sweetbrier, heard little birds sing in the groves, saw dancing forms with white arms.

Brevis leaning over the rail with Mab, saw only the crews of the racing boats. To one just back from the effete Old World they were particularly interesting, he said, especially as they would help him to make his living. "Always trouble of some kind among seamen," he said. "Too many knives. Too many wives."

"Gad ! Surely you won't handle that kind of thing ?" asked Mab, amazed. This looked such an extremely genteel Brevis. "I wouldn't touch their dirty rows with a pair of tongs."

"More psychology there. They don't stifle their emotions. Look at those fellows, by Jove. All human !"

He watched the straining boats, his lower lip drawn in on his teeth. His dark eyes burned with a queer light. Dissecting 'em, Mab thought ; and was so startled by this unexpected acuteness in himself that he walked across the deck to Jenny, rattling a pocketful of those merchants' tokens which still considerably helped out the shortage of English coin in the colony.

"I'll wager you all of Gamaliel's tokens you can find in this lot that his five-oar won't win the Ladies' Purse," he said. He

balanced one on his finger. It was stamped G. T. above a sheep and a barrel of tallow. Not unlike, this last, Gamaliel himself, broad as a house in his Quaker holiday clothes. But Jenny was not interested, and Mab went back to hear what Brevis had to say about the crews.

Those strong, sinewy young colonials like Gamaliel and Adam Sorley wasted their strength, said Brevis, and so did those ruddy blue-eyed sailormen out of Devon and Dorset. Too impatient. All Saxons are, said Brevis. The Maoris and South Sea Islanders were better: solid brown chunks of greasy flesh whose eyes could pick up the jet of a whale miles off in a dazzling sea, and who knew to the last inch what they could do. But best of all were the thin-lipped gaunt American whalers who lifted the boat with each stroke as gods might lift the world they stood on. Fine fellows, Brevis thought them, whose lives must not too closely be inquired into along the Japanese Banks, the ports of Scandinavia, the murmuring simmering ports of half the world. Brevis talked as though he knew these men who were wise with the eternal wisdom of the sea, brutal with the courage of their craft, sentimental with the long homesickness that comes in the uncharted places of the seas, under silver nights of stars where no land looms.

“They’re great lovers,” said Brevis, smiling his faint ironical smile. “Great lovers . . . for the time.”

Jenny could bear it no longer. She did what she never had thought she could do. She came seeking a man, protesting—she would have said anything to have those quiet, considering eyes of Brevis’s attentive on her—that the Americans were winning everything and it was unfair. These Americans, having beaten English and Australian whaling off its own ground, had no right to beat them in play also.

“They are the best men,” said Brevis. His interest was still in the crews, his eyes going back to them. “Americans are the finest harpooners in the world and have the greatest number of ships on the various fisheries. We are not competing with that, though I think it a pity. Once when I was on a Yankee whaler off Spitzbergen——”

“You?” Suddenly Jenny felt so angry, so envious of all this

life he had lived without her that she had to pretend to be very superior. "How droll! Do tell us all about yourself, Brevis, now."

Looking down, Brevis remember that this actually was little Jenny Comyn, whom he had quite forgotten all these years.

Under her wide white-chip hat with its pink wreath of roses, under the absurd little pink parasol, this girl actually was the toast of all the clubs. Tell her? he thought. Good Lord! how much can . . . should a man tell a girl with that innocent mouth?

"There are many things I'd like to tell you," he said, slowly. "And some that I wouldn't tell you to save my life." And then, because her colour came so wonderfully, clear damask under the clear olive skin, he told her a few of them. And told her more, a little flattered by her interest, that night at the Governor's Ball.

A pretty thing, but not so quick of tongue as they said, he thought, steering her among crinolines. (Heavens! The size of crinolines now, making women above the waists look like dolls.)

"Let us go out," he said; and they walked in the sloping garden languorous with magnolia fragrance and jasmine while he compared her in the moonlight to the flowers. But she would not flirt, as other young ladies did on such occasions, and so he ceased for a little while to be bored and really talked.

Delivering her over at last to an obsequious Mr. Paige, he found himself glad that she had not married that fool; and indeed in these days Mr. Paige was not at his best. Lydia stimulated him quite in the wrong way as a wife, and he attempted the "art of disrespectful attentions" and, being snubbed by very young ladies who were likely to think him drunk, retired on Ovid and Objectivity and Aristotle until Jenny felt quite kindly toward poor Lydia, who, very grandly attired, tried to patronize her.

Jenny began the next week by feeling kindly toward all the world, and then forgot that there was a world outside this strange new throbbing pain given by Destiny into her arms. Yet she hugged it; meeting Brevis everywhere since the season was at the full, and lying awake of nights trying to laugh herself sane again. But her sense of humour was gone. She only could think of Brevis. Brevis with his faintly smiling air of *Is this then what men call life?* Brevis with his suddenly roused panther-like

following of some strange story, revealing unexpected fierceness, dark hints of savagery. Brevis the genial comrade, the mysterious presence standing on the threshold of her life. Brevis the everything but lover as other men were with their loves.

Refusing Gamaliel Thompson for the fourth time, she almost cried to him, Oh, why aren't you Brevis! And then in pity for his honest sorrow, she gave him both her hands and a little bit of her soul. "Oh, please, please don't ask me again! I'm unhappy, too. And I can't even ask and find out as you can."

Gamaliel laid his broad face on her hands and she found them wet with his tears. "Pray God thee may find thy happiness, my dear," he said.

That afternoon Jenny rode with Brevis through the fields to New Town. They rode with the sea-wind in their faces, seeing beyond Queen's Yard the black bones of the wharves stretched out on the turquoise sea. A turquoise sky curved above the low hills of she-oak, fretted by delicate clouds. Beyond Hunter's Island lay the whaling ships, rusty red like tired eyes that had watched too long. In the buttercup fields an English lark was singing. Jenny let her horse out to a gallop. A hot wind seemed to come on her out of the wild past or the wilder future. She did not know which, but she felt the urge of it, restless, compelling, frightening. Something she must have to curb the impulses rising in her, and so she drew rein at St. David's graveyard.

"I want to go in," she said, and ran over the tufted dusty grass holding her long green habit high above her little green boots.

Brevis followed slowly. He liked the frank and simple legends on these old mossy stones; these records of hearty whaling men and of the little colonists who died in their dozens when the century was very young. He read aloud to Jenny, his ironic mouth twitching, of the man of eighty "cut off like a flower" and the mother who died "full of years" at the ripe age of twenty-one. He thought the friend of "Poor Cornelius" ungenerous for recording that he died of "poisoned potations," and applauded the spirit of the two small Kearly boys who, departing with no more than nine days of life to the pair of them, had made the best of it by demanding in very crooked letters on a rain-worn stone:

Come, Lord, make ready our bride. "What an amount of puling emotion we waste on the dead, Jenny!"

"Oh, no! Their people must grieve, even though I suppose they know that they go to heaven."

"I don't suppose anything of the kind, but I hope they've done with hell."

Startled, Jenny looked at Brevis frowning down on the Kearly boys. She had an aching sense of the distance he was from her, this immaculate and smooth-faced young man with his secret life so shut up in him. Not hot and rough and passionate like Mab, was Brevis, but in some bitter-cold way the same rebel against life.

"But," she said, speaking her thought out, "don't they really go together—life and law?"

He looked at her quickly, his eyes suddenly warm. Across the Kearly boys he reached for her hand and held it. "You have extraordinary intuition sometimes, Jenny. Did you know it? I shall often come to Clent when I set up practice in Launceston," he said.

IV

Word came to town next morning that bush-rangers had been seen in the Midlands again. At this late day many would not believe, but the incoming coach brought details. Cattle had been driven and barns fired in several places. An empty house had been rifled of all its valuables, and a man coming home late down the Snakebanks road had seen riders pass with packhorses and heard speech that was unmistakably a gentleman's. Roger Keyes, who had come to town to meet Brevis, thought this "might be that Port Arthur fellow you got me to take on as shepherd, Mab. He disappeared a fortnight ago, and I can't trace him."

Brevis agreed. "Just what one would expect from a man with a grievance," he said, but Mab protested.

"Why, he'd be there now if I hadn't had him released!" he cried.

"Then look out he don't reserve a special bullet for you," said Brevis, dryly.

What, he wondered, seeing Jenny and her family off by the stage with its four handsome horses and the red-coated coachman blowing his long horn, what personal interest had made careless Mab Comyn busy himself with an old P.A. lag? Some queer story there if one could get at it. He watched Mab riding alongside on an awkward young 'un as the coach disappeared in dust. But walking back to his lodgings he found himself thinking of Jenny.

Jenny was sitting very straight in her corner of the stage, looking out (she had secretly drawn her veil aside) on a world which had gained immeasurably in significance since she came to town. Rollicking calls of minahs through the clear crisp weather, tall wattle trees spraying their gold against blue sky, bright water running down between the lace of tree-ferns, sheep in tussock paddocks tawny with sun, violet loom of the distant ranges seen beyond the dark green of the nearer hills—all these vital pagan glorious things were recreated because Jenny the pagan had discovered the miracle of life.

Love. That is the miracle, thought Jenny, as proud as though a hundred men had not already told her so. That little blue wren on the weathered log fence was not hopping more gaily than her heart. "I shall often come to Clent. I shall often come to Clent." Brevis had said it.

Susan, who always felt sick in the stage, mourned that the bush-rangers would certainly come for their jewels when it got dark.

"Give the case to me," said Charlotte, and sat on it. "They will not get it from me," she said, looking almost matronly in her sherry-coloured silk with a magenta bonnet.

"Oh, dear! I do hate town," lamented Susan.

"I have told Mark I am not going to another ball before I'm married," said Charlotte. "It was nice of you to give me your spare partners, Jenny. Most of them were odious."

"Oh, Lottie darling! One was the governor's aide!"

"A vapid noodle, Mamma. I don't wonder Jenny wouldn't marry any of them. I wouldn't, myself."

"Dearest, you don't need to. Your hand is already bestowed," said Susan, piously. Then, in sudden alarm: "Mab! Mab!"

She gesticulated a tightly gloved fat hand from the window. Mab rode near. Behind him poddy calves, very young and inquiring, stared through a barnyard fence with yellow hayricks beyond. Susan cried: "Mab, is the cart just behind? Is it safe? All Lottie's trousseau——"

"Ten paces behind," said Mab, who had not seen it for an hour. He trotted on past prosperous farmyard buildings, hissing geese round a pond, a field where men in smocks cut grain with sickles that dazzled in the sun. He put the young 'un to an awkward gallop on the grassy side of the road, popped him over a low rail into deep pasture where a young Hereford bull raised an annoyed head, and took him out over blossoming gorse at the paddock-end. Needed schooling, the colt did, but how good it was to feel the unaccustomed young mouth answer to his light touch on the rein, the unaccustomed young limbs gather for the leap. Yes, life was good, even sweet now that he could meet Julia without pain. No, not without pain. There was always the sense of something dead in him when he saw Julia now. . . . I may love again, he thought. . . . But I'll not be able to trust. She's put an end to that for me.

Arrived at Clent, Madam went to her bed and sent for Jenny, whose parting with Brevis, decorous although it was, had told her too much. Men said that Brevis would go far. *Bien*; let him do it. For her part, her mind, full of gay-coloured pasts and regimental pageantry, revolted against the dullness of "the professions," and she had not carried off that unregretted and successful coup with old James in order to see Jenny marry an unfledged lawyer. If it came to more fights with *la petite* . . . Madam, defiantly conscious of her years, of the innate cruelty of life, girded her loins. Jenny should lead the colony yet; and be damned to her for a minx.

Jenny brought Madam a sweet negus of port and a biscuit, and made a soft radiance in the moonlit room where the light came through old-fashioned fan windows above the ordinary shuttered ones. Madam, who could calculate anything but money, knew well the insistence of inanimate things; the restlessness Jenny's ugly bedroom had unconsciously produced; the ravishment which the girl always felt in this dim sweet place, redolent

of pot-pourri and old silks and laces taken out of sandalwood. To-night Jenny would have liked to sit here thinking, and conscious of the faint celestial aroma from crystal bottles and silver pots and enamelled bright little patch-boxes; the faint celestial light from dim-gilt mirrors and the glasses on faded water-colours. A remote enchanted room where one might (very cautiously) take Love out of one's shielding bosom and hold it between the hands; turning it this and that way until it glowed to peacock brilliancy, and shone white as silver, and took the eternal fire of all the suns. Jenny, thinking this, smiled uncertainly at Grandmama whose eyes in the light from the one tall silver candlestick were so bright for all her age.

"Now," said Madam, who knew that atmosphere will break down barriers where words won't, "we will chat, my pigeon."

They talked. And said nothing. No barriers broke, wherefore Madam with the lucidity of her sex deduced that there were barriers. And she gave an angry admiration to this girl whom she had trained to so much more than the harp and petit point.

Peste! Madam must, then, use her wits with this child even as with Oliver. A little flattery; a little suggestion of secrecy, and there you were. When Jenny proffered ripe lips at last, Madam held her close, searching, almost tender.

"Tell me . . . you are happy?"

"And why not?" asked Jenny, laughing-sweet. "I've nearly everything."

"Nearly?"

"There's still something to look forward to, you see," cried Jenny. And kissed her again and ran out of the room, leaving Madam, a stately high-nosed little figure in cap and bed-gown, to settle back among the pillows in a grim silence.

Avoiding the salon where Charlotte would be gathered with the elders (already Charlotte behaved like an elder), Jenny flung a scarf about her shining shoulders and ran out into the night. For sheer joy in life she sang with little provocative steps and side-lookings:

"En passant par la Lorraine
Avec mes sabots,

Recontrai trois Capitaines,
Avec mes sabots.

Le premier prends . . .”

Oh, la la ! Who could make sounds on a still night like this, with the garden fragrant with bosses and banks and pools of pale bloom, the air heavy with Paradise ? Jenny went up into the bush which still touched against the back of the stable-yard, and here she watched a bandicoot grubbing with slender pink paws and nose in the heaped leaves of centuries and thought back over all she knew of Brevis. It was not much. Oh, foolishness which had not known that the god would come in his shape ! Brevis had good hands on a horse and took his wine well. And he and Sigurd had founded the League of Chivalry, although Sigurd believed that Brevis had forgotten it all long ago. “A cold fellow,” Sigurd said. “Cold and chaste as ice.”

Jenny, puzzled among her own ardencies, wondered if that were true. His last hand-clasp had not been cold. Nor his eyes. And as for chastity . . . Well, chastity appeared to mean never thinking the thought that every one thought sometimes ; never doing the things that a certain proportion of earth’s children insisted on doing. Oh, an unlovable lady, Chastity, knowing nothing of warm straining lips, the warm clasp of flesh to flesh !

Because Jenny did not know either, but knew in the bones of her that she was soon to know, she huddled down on her knees by the spring, seeing her pale face in the moonlit water. Her bare arms shimmered and she stooped her head and kissed them, softly, reverently kissed her young fragrant flesh like the pagan she was. Some day soon Brevis would kiss them. She closed her eyes and shuddered with the thrill running through her.

The air grew cooler. A hare loped out on the grass and stared with its soft prominent eyes, twitching its long ears. A night-bird called back in the bush. Jenny sprang up suddenly and fled back to the house, her hands squeezing her burning cheeks.

How gloriously, terribly easy it was to think unchastely !

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

I

UP on Latterdale, bullock teams—eighteen bullocks to a big stick on this country—were hauling out timber for the new mill Bob Beverley had opened at Trienna, and Humphrey, whose heart ached as royal blackwood and stringy-bark gave their lovely lives up, rode slowly out of the dark gully rich with its scents of bleeding sap and torn leafy earth and straining animals, toward another sacrilege. The stretch of black wattle along the hill was to be barked for Gamaliel Thompson's tannery in Launceston; and to Humphrey, measuring, assessing, figuring out the amount to be contracted for, this killing of the native bush was like the murder of children.

“Civilization! Lord, why can't we work with Nature instead of against her?” he said aloud, thrusting his battered felt hat back from his hot face and bared throat. He looked down the hill where tall wattle groves and close scrub wattle that had once been scarfs of gold now stood already barked and naked in the clear twilight. Fire was at work there, sending up thin tongues ruddy against the coming night, smouldering in the dying hearts, spiralling away in soft grey feathers to the quiet sky. “Destruction, I call it,” said Humphrey bitterly, thinking of the last argument he had had with William, which like all the others, had ended in defeat. William was going to plough that murdered hill and lay it down in rye. Humphrey would merely have thinned the groves and let ewes lamb there in the warm shadows.

“There's no disease on this virgin country, and lambs dropped here would stand the climate perfectly,” he had said. “Only such a little of the run is above the winter line.”

“Do you dare imagine that you know better than your father?” William had retorted, pulling his sandy whiskers. “I won't allow any but dry sheep on Latterdale.”

So he sent up merino hoggets with foot-rot, and old rams with scab to infect the clean soil. Gloomily Humphrey watched the

dark shapes moving on their knees down the slope. . . . If only I had money to buy the place and marry Maria ! he thought. But that was one of the dreams which would never come true, it seemed. He finished his figures and next day took them in to Launceston to set them before Gamaliel, whose big loose body was to be seen all day at the desk, where, every one said, he was making money hand over fist. Mab worked for him now, when he worked anywhere. Mab, said Gamaliel, was going for him to New Zealand to see about hides. "There is no scab in New Zealand," he said.

"There needn't be so much in Tasmania if people had sense," returned Humphrey, with a sigh, and went off to spend the night with Brevis, who, now in the office of Shone, Mathews & Shone, was already feeling his way.

"I shall set up for myself soon," said Brevis, and Humphrey believed him. Brevis gave people the feeling that nothing, except himself, would ever deny him anything. He moved about in a velvet smoking-jacket which somehow seemed just as appropriate as his rooms did. They were not rooms like Mab's, all whips and spurs and hunting pictures and pretty girls tacked up anyhow. Nor like Humphrey's, with the wattle-and-daub walls painstakingly papered with London *Graphics* and a little daguerreotype of Maria over the bed. Nor like Noll Comyn's, with no pictures at all, but wonderful china and heaps of cushions.

Brevis's rooms were like himself, restrained, yet curiously emphatic. There was a small gilt icon on the mantel ; a Dutch sabot for cigar butts ; a youth's head in discoloured marble lying on a black cushion ; a few grave landscapes ; a lively bronze faun in the corner where the firelight caught it, and a large Mona Lisa. Humphrey had not seen her before. He called her wicked, with Brevis smoking at his elbow.

"No two men ever see her the same, any more than they do other women. Talking of women, are you going to let Mrs. Beverley devour Maria entirely, Humphs ?"

"God ! I don't want to !" Humphrey talked about this to every one, and never got any satisfaction. "But what can I do ? Since Beverley died Maria has felt that she must stay and comfort her mother."

"He's been dead some years, hasn't he?"

"Nearly three. But Mrs. Beverley——"

"I know. I've heard it. People say her devotion to his memory is so beautiful. So like our dear Queen," mimicked Brevis. "That's what keeps the old lady going. That's what keeps her shut up with the old chap's picture and Maria and herself all wound up together in the same black crêpe. Force of suggestion. The finest and most damnable power on earth. She's a sociable woman naturally, and fond of bright colours."

Humphrey was staggered. He had been brought up to an almost Chinese veneration for his elders.

"B-but what can I do?" he repeated helplessly.

"Marry Maria out of hand and take her to Latterdale. That would bring your father to heel and make him treat you like a human being. And it would do Mrs. Beverley the greatest possible service. You'd have her in colours for the christening of your first child."

Humphrey's legs weakened. A faintness of desire, of longing came over him. He sat on a stool with his head in his hands, and from the sofa where he lay full length Brevis watched him curiously. Psychological reactions! Lord! how men gave themselves away! Poor old Humphs, the too decent fool!

"If we don't make life for ourselves, the gods won't do it for us, Humphs."

"B-but I . . . but Maria wouldn't."

"I think," said Brevis deliberately, "a man can persuade a woman to anything if he gives his mind to it. That's what we're for."

"You might. I couldn't. I . . . I've tried."

"Well, think it over. Think it over. I hate waste, and you two were born to give solidity to the somewhat erratic colonial tradition. Keep step, carry the torch, all that sort of thing."

Humphrey saw his bright eyes, his lazy smile in the flickering firelight, and turned suddenly shy. So very wise, Brevis sounded. Bland, passionless, experienced. He wondered if Brevis had ever loved a woman, ever persuaded her. He said hastily: "I hear that Snow's Gang tied up old Tolmie, down the Tamar, last night. Wonder if we'll ever catch him."

Brevis's smile deepened at the clumsy transition. He watched the light dancing on the prick-ears, the sharp grin of the faun. "Snow—if it is Snow, which apparently no one is certain about—is something rather special in the way of bush-rangers, I think."

"Is he? How do you mean?"

"Well, he has a policy, as I figure it. The definite mocking of man. He don't hamstring horses or leave cattle and sheep slaughtered all over the place, as many of the others did. And he don't kill men . . . yet. He just catches 'em where he can, trusses 'em up in undignified attitudes, and sets 'em where they can see their belongings burn. A destructive devil with a fine sense of humour. I wonder how many good old buildings have gone up in smoke since he got tired of being a shepherd at Tane Hall."

"We lost Clent wool-shed about a month ago, you know. And they tied old James Sorley up to watch Bredon coach-house burn. Gad! I'll never forget finding him squatted against the piggery with his nose to his knees! I never heard old James curse before," said Humphrey, beginning to chuckle. "His feelings were really hurt, and he was almost afraid to go back to town. Our most eminent councillor! He has offered a huge reward, but the police don't seem able to do anything."

"They're not dealing with an ordinary man and they think they are. That's the trouble. And usually the gangs grew too unwieldy and one of them would peach for the reward. This man has the sense to keep to his original three. And the person sheltering him—probably only one—apparently can't be bought."

"They came to Lovely Corners one night," said Humphrey. "Joe heard the dogs bark and went out with a lantern. And Aunt Ellen ran after him and flung it over the fence. Then she had hysterics in the barnyard and the fellows made off."

"Miss Merrick threw the lantern away?" Brevis sat up, staring through his pipe smoke. "Why did she do that?"

"Oh, no one knows why she does anything." Humphrey was not interested in Ellen. He talked of the difficulty of getting the new wool-shed finished before shearing, but Brevis did not listen. His mind, always avid for ideas, was hard at work. Mab Comyn was so interested in Snow that he got him out of Port Arthur. Ellen Merrick was so interested that she had made a public

spectacle of herself in order to give him warning. If Brevis could discover their reasons he would know, probably, what Snow was aiming at ; for that the fellow would stop at burning outbuildings and making men laughing-stocks Brevis did not believe. The vanity of man does not work that way. Having attracted the attention of the whole colony and even Australia, Snow would undoubtedly proceed to heroics, demoniacs of some kind.

Brevis stood up, yawning, stretching until Humphrey thought of a graceful black cat. " Bed, Humphs. I'm bathing at dawn in the Cataract Basin with Mab and Gamaliel. You coming ? "

II

The straggled town of Launceston, almost as old but not so large as Hobart Town, was sunk in river fog when the four young men climbed through rough scrub and tall timber up the Cataract Hill. In the east the sky was flushing in delicate pinks and saffrons and a chill dawn wind blew down to the marshes below, sending the mist driving like thick giant figures, shredding it thin until little streets and houses blinked out in warm reds and faded blues. Deep down on Brevis's right the wild gorge of the cataract thundered with its dark waters, and he stopped more than once to listen while the others tramped on. It had a tremendous attraction for him, that sinister voice trumpeting defiance out of the shadows.

The sun was up when they came over the hill ; warm on the grey rocks smooth with age, warm in the clear, calm water of the basins. Tea-tree was in flower here, long wreaths of starry-white blossom above them while they stripped. Parrots, robins, and song-sparrows were at their morning orisons ; all the clean, sharp scents of the bush loosened in the growing warmth of the air. A virgin place, given over to the wild rocks and ancient timber and the passing of small bright birds.

Like school-boys they bathed, shouting, splashing the silver spray, then spread naked on the warm rocks to dry. Brevis, chin on hands, considered how much a man's naked body could tell of him. Gamaliel's curves were large and kindly as his tallow butts, very soft. Stocky Humphrey had the deep chest, broad shoulders

and hips of a man meant for domesticity and agriculture. But Mab Comyn's lean flanks and long muscular legs belonged to the rover, the rider born. Mab was dark as mahogany, with curious livid scars here and there. Brevis beside him felt too bright-white and slender in the waist, but was fortified by the strong hairs of his body, thicker even than Mab's upon the chest. Strange terrible things, these bodies of hot and aspiring dust; so soon destroyed, so beautiful, so potent with unconscious life to be.

Humphrey plaited grass, whistling plaintively "Annie Laurie"; but Gamaliel, on his broad back with wide-awake over his eyes, was talking to Mab of tallow. "Now the Maori wars are over, those big New Zealand sheep-stations will go ahead. Hides . . . and I'm confident we could build up a good market in tallow."

Tallow. . . . Good Lord! thought Brevis, watching a blue wren weave its turquoise skein of flight through the tea-tree. . . . Some day I shall be Crown Prosecutor for Australasia, if I live. And they are content with tallow!

"Are you coming to Clent for Charlotte's wedding, you fellows?" asked Humphrey, suddenly, and Mab sat up and began to laugh.

"Poor little Mark is trying so hard to do the right thing. He wrote Lottie a poem beginning: 'Hail to thee, blithe maiden. Bird thou never wert.' I don't think he got any farther."

"He didn't," said Brevis, who heard often from Jenny in these days. "Charlotte thought it very true, but rather obvious. She and Mark will get on splendidly."

He rose and began to dress, feeling suddenly very hot. He could not think of Jenny without a clamour of the blood; a kind of fierce humbleness. There was so much he ought to tell her and never would. Nor had he meant to tie himself before he was well established, considering all self-imposed chains suicide for a climbing man. But each trip to Clent left him less able to resist the attack of Jenny's bright spirit. He knew that he had won unasking what so many men had prayed for, and he knew that he would not have been human if that knowledge had not mixed a faint ichor of disdain with his pleasure and pride.

Mab, plunging into his clothes, was shouting in his rich tenor:

“ I would I were in Manchester,
A-sitting on the grass,
And by my side a bottle of wine,
And on my lap a lass.”

If all accounts were true, Mab Comyn didn't have to go to Manchester for them. As for Brevis, he didn't want them at all. He knew that what he really wanted, what he meant to have, was the position of Crown Prosecutor for all Australasia.

III

At Charlotte's wedding Susan cried as much as even she thought necessary, and Charlotte wore a bonnet with white lace strings instead of a veil. Her crinoline was enormous and, with bows, ruchings, and bunches of orange-blossom, almost extinguished Mark, who was a gentle edition of wizened Henry and watched her with a dog-like devotion. There were many speeches and toasts, with the Captain and Oliver and Brevis to propose and reply, and even Humphrey found one in the last *Graphic* and brought it out with pride.

“ May courtship be ever in fashion and kissing the pink of the mode,” he cried, splashing champagne on a blushing Maria gone into white muslin for the occasion. Ellen giggled, hiding her gaunt face in gaunt fingers.

“ Oh, la ! Ain't you ashamed, Humphrey ! ” she shrilled, and then made confidences to Brevis in a corner. “ I might have been standing there, you know, just like Lottie. Only I'd have a veil. I think it quite shocking she don't have a veil. There was a gentleman, but I would not have him. Naughty of me, wasn't it ? Oh, la ! We women are naughty. But don't tell.”

She put her finger to her lip, peeping with sly glances. Brevis looked at her steadily. He knew, although apparently these careless people did not, that her life or some more definite tragedy had touched old Ellen's brain. The clue was here if he could find it. He said, secure behind the noise and laughter, “ Perhaps the gentleman will come back.”

“ Hush ! ” Ellen bent closer. “ He did, just lately. But I could not have him now, of course. Mab said . . . But don't tell.” She moved off with mincing steps ; came back to whisper : “ I

really was married to him, you know. But Mab said . . . Don't tell."

Now she was gone, and Brevis, suppressing a whistle, went to pay his respects to the bride, who, to Madam's content, looked older than Jenny, radiant Jenny who was sparkling everywhere.

"Why didn't your father come?" asked Charlotte. "Is it true that he has grown afraid of our sex, Brevis? Tell him to come and see us at Bredon Cottage. It is really a huge house on the estate, but we call it a cottage. Like the dear Queen's York Cottage, you know. And the furniture is all new, is it not, Uncle Noll?"

"Oh, quite new and, let us hope, unique," said Oliver, inspecting Brevis with dislike. If it were to be Jenny and Brevis—and he feared so—there would be few pickings for him. Brevis was no fool; and, Oliver was cynically aware, any one who tried to keep a male Comyn afloat must have more money than sense. Paige certainly clung to him still; but Lydia made scenes and the aristocrat in Oliver could not abide scenes. He moved here and there, courteous, witty, carefully preserved, and watching his boisterous father with a new bitterness. Money pouring out like water to-day, and there was nothing the Captain liked better. What heritage had he given his sons but a similar desire to spend? If he, Oliver, had had a profession such as Brevis, he might have gone as far as Brevis seemed likely to go.

Profoundly pitying himself, he watched his mother while old James got off one of his prosy speeches. Madam, in lavender silks and laces yellowed by time, listened with her head cocked wickedly like a bird, hearing herself called the flower of womanhood and the Captain a long-respected friend, before James went on to give a résumé of his own services to the country. People were repressing yawns by the time the Captain rose to return thanks, and Madam had her eyes shut. A dull dog, James, she was thinking, although—God be thanked—she once had tied a tin can to his tail. And this wedding was the result, even if—

"For the love of God, *maman*," said Mab in her ear, "can you stop him?"

Madam's mind returned sharply to the long sunflooded room with its loaded tables, its groups of well-dressed startled people. She saw William with cockatoo crest up and pale eyes glaring;

Charlotte angrily red inside her white bonnet ; Louisa ready to cry ; Brevis with his fine cynical smile ; Sigurd, Joe Merrick . . . and before them all her *bonhomme*, thick white hair on end, blue eyes popping under the bristling brows, red fist thumping the table until the glasses danced.

“ And again I say it before the face of any man that the carriage-tax is an iniquitous proceeding which I utterly refuse to countenance. It shall never be collected in my district, and only an utterly contemptible and inefficient parliament would dare to offer . . . ”

Madam sat aghast. It was Jenny who ran to put an arm about his neck. “ Dear, we’re not a public meeting. And this is Lottie’s day,” she said.

“ Mean fellows ! ” shouted the Captain at the end of his breath. Then he kissed Jenny and looked round with smiling courtesy. “ Ladies, pray forgive me. I fear I was slightly excited for the moment. Lottie dear, I apologize. But when I think of the infernal——”

“ Sigurd,” said Madam, “ please fill the Captain’s glass. He is going to toast the Queen.”

A military man could say nothing about the Queen but “ God bless her.” So that was safe, and Jenny had saved their bacon when Madam failed. Jenny, looking like a bubbling champagne glass in her wide-spread champagne-colour brocade : Jenny with her bronze hair swept sternly back from the delicate temples to show to the full the piquancy of her pointed face with its arched brows and ripe scarlet lips. Jenny with her wit, her burning life, her laughter. If that dark chilly Brevis should take her, Madam would bear it ill. She hated Brevis leaning on a chair listening to Sigurd being eloquent over the poems of Mr. Shelley.

“ But he could inspire a clod,” cried Sigurd. “ Pure, clear, sparkling like cut glass. Keats has only a soft rich sensuousness.”

“ In fact,” said Brevis, “ if you dropped Shelley he’d break, but if you dropped Keats he would squash. Isn’t that what you wanted to say, Sigs ? ”

He moved away after Jenny. Madam saw her laugh back at him as she fled off on some errand. Ah, youth ! Youth “ the rose-light, the one light that never shall plague us again.”

Charlotte came down, very self-possessed in mulberry satin with a blue bonnet veiled in white lace and orange-blossoms, and her three younger sisters—slim fair Fanny promised to be a beauty, while the twins were stoutly bucolic—flung rose-leaves over her, with little piping cries and shy laughter at finding themselves so prominent. When she was gone and the tears and toasts were done, old Jerrold, going in to clear the broken meats, found young Master Richard sick-drunk under the table and called Oliver and Mab. Richard, tall and lusty at fifteen, resented being carried to his room, where Mab would have thrashed him, but Oliver said: "He has your looks, Mab, and possibly more, but apparently he has my stomach. Leave him to me."

IV

Mab walked through the house full of wedding aftermath and hurrying maids and Susan with inflamed nose and cap awry hurrying them still more. Queer that folk should rejoice because two more humans were caught and forced into the mould which implacable Nature runs for us all. He looked out on the long gay curves of the garden beds where the English trees, planted by the Captain forty years since, were grown tall and broad and full of rustling leaves. So did the English race, planted in a new soil, develop faster than in England. Some said they did not weather so well. Too much sap.

Always there had been too much sap in Mab. There was still. And it seemed there was too much in young Richard. History beginning over again in the blind, persistent, senseless way she had. Where were they all going, these Comyns who had lived through the birth-throes of a nation and the birth-throes of their own souls?

In the salon, Madam, who rarely sang now, was singing low to her harp:

"Jours de tendresse comme un beau songe on fui;
Jours de tristesse, de chagrins et d'ennui . . ."

Mab heard William portentous behind him and fled as though he had been the beautiful thought of Madam's song. From the parapet he looked down into the paddocks below. There went

two more whom Nature was catching to run into her damned mould: Brevis, elegant and intent, and Mab's dear maid, her skirts dipping over the English grass, and shoals of little blue butterflies and gauzy beetles rising about her like incense. They were on the trodden way that led to Bredon, that passed by the old Comyn hut. Mab made a hasty movement as though to follow, to forbid the plighting of Jenny's love in that haunted place.

Then Susan called from the veranda, and he walked slowly back through the sun and the heavy scents. Susan was tearful again, although one would marvel that she could have any moisture left.

"Mab, I must send off the lists of guests and presents to the papers," cried Susan, fussing into the library where the big walnut table was covered with white slips. "And I can't find Jenny, who really ought to know better, and if you would kindly check them for me . . ."

Mab complied. A hair bracelet with turquoise clasps had got among the guests in company with a cornelian necklace and Mr. Dickens's works. But as Ellen and Joseph Merrick were in with the gifts, there were no gaps, although even as gifts they were rather rough on Charlotte.

"Poor Ellen," said Susan, crossing her out of the gifts. "It was so very generous of dear Mamma to let her come for a whole hour. Oh, dear! I wonder where my darling Lottie is at the moment, and I told her to make sure that the sheets were aired at St. Mary's. It's sure to be damp, being so near the sea."

V

The old Comyn hut had always been dear to Jenny. Next to the bush clearing beyond the ram-paddock . . . how that little girl Jenny had loved to play, to read, to dream here where the 'possums had torn the paper from the walls and birds nested in the rafters! It was hoary with the memories of her race; ancient history as history went in a colony not sixty years old and already preparing its fourth generation. Brevis and Jenny (brave flowers in a soil which to them had never been alien) looked round the rotting place with a due reverence.

“Some of these logs in the walls must be two feet thick,” said Brevis. “I’m glad they haven’t been taken for gate-posts, but I should have thought your father——”

“It’s Grandpapa won’t have anything touched. *Voilà le beau sentiment!*” Jenny cried. “See, Brevis. He and Grandmamma used to sleep up in that loft. There was a ladder; I can well remember the ladder. Can you imagine stately Grandmamma climbing ladders?”

Jenny’s wide flop hat had fallen back on her shoulders. Her face with its drawn and netted hair had an elfish, ethereal fantasy in the gold light falling through the broken pane. Brevis took her suddenly in his arms. “You witch! Jenny, you know . . . you know how I love you. . . .”

VI

“The wedding-ring shall have a posy,” said Brevis later, when the gold light had gone and the big pink, hairy tarantulas were busy in the rafters and Jenny did not heed them at all. “What shall it be?”

Jenny, in her pale brocade on a heap of dusty sacks once used for chaff, said softly: “‘*First love and last love.*’ We’ll defy the Fates, Brevis. And the ring in two pieces with the posy between, like Grandmamma’s.”

Brevis felt his face burn. He hesitated, took her hand. Whatever came, he had resolved to be honest with Jenny, in so far as he could. “Last love is the only one that really matters, isn’t it?”

“Is it? *Sais pas.* I suppose there can be more than one love for some people. Not for me.” Her voice sank away reflectively in the shadows. “Not for me, my dear.”

The music of her voice! he thought. The fineness, sweetness of her! While women can speak and look like Jenny, what is ambition! Along the path of his desire his passion rushed out to her. Again he held her close, kissing her ready lips, her hair, her forehead. “You witch,” he said almost fiercely. “You perfect thing.”

But even across those kisses trouble cast its shadow. In the back of his hot brain something moved, reminding him that he had

not meant to do this. He had not meant . . . He kissed her throbbing throat, drunken with its softness.

Dusk brought the fragrance of the forest through the broken window and back in the tall trees the little owls called softly. Jenny pulled herself away, trembling and laughing brokenly. Reticent with others, she could proudly give up her reticence to him.

"Before you there was no one, and since you came there has been no one . . . except you. There! You see I am quite shameless, my lover. Look . . . it is as though I were a child with its armful of toys, bringing them all to you. I give you all my toys, Brevis. Every one."

"That's wrong of you." He looked at her queerly. She had no right to surrender in this way, making him feel how complete was his power. Man-like, he had to try that power further. "I can't give you all my toys, Jenny."

"What does that mean, please, Brevis?"

He saw her face white as apple blossom in the faint light. There was a frightened fibre in her tone. . . . I could be cruel to her, he thought exultantly, and she'd give me everything just the same.

"Some of my toys are broken. Other women have broken them. You didn't think me a saint, Jenny?"

"I never thought about it," she answered slowly. "You are you. I know that a man is not like a woman. Please tell me just what you mean, Brevis."

"So long as you know that!" He turned his head. If she looked at him like this he couldn't go on, for now he knew how much he was going to hurt her. "Men are amorous beasts . . . and there was one woman . . . I married her . . . and she left me. When I heard she was dead I was glad."

Jenny sat perfectly still. He saw her hands, white as her apple-bloom face, perfectly still. Out in the bush a small bird was twittering fretfully. A puny sound beside Jenny's great silence. Suddenly he was afraid. He could not lose her now.

"I never loved her as I love you, dearest of women." He would have put his arm round her, but she drew back.

"Please . . . I'm trying to understand. One does not marry

without a very great love. I understand that. I learned with Mr. Paige."

"There are different kinds of love." His alarm grew. Why had he been fool enough to say anything? How could he explain to a girl who talked like that the wide distinction between the different kinds of love? Frasquita had satisfied his hot youth and in the end disgusted him, as was inevitable. His real mistake had been the marriage which he thought so noble. Frasquita would have done without it, didn't want it. "Can't you understand, dear, that it was just a brief fascination? She had the Italian sensuousness . . ."

He stopped, for she was quivering at the word. Good Lord! These idiotic restrictions which wrap a girl in cotton-wool! Yet she couldn't be so innocent, either, with all the men she'd had after her. "Are you jealous, Jenny?"

"Is that it?" He saw her big eyes in the gloom. "No, I think not, Brevis. Not jealous. It's . . . I can't say it."

"Yes, you can. *Say it!*"

"It's . . . I thought we'd set out together . . . the greatest adventure in the world. And for you . . . it's spoiled already."

He had to bend his head to catch the last words, her head drooped so. Good Heavens! These ideals! Madam was to blame for this, and Susan, and old goody-goody Gamaliel; the whole crew who had conspired to keep her eyes shut, her mind shut.

"Not spoiled. No. Once a man has experienced . . ." She winced away again. Then she was jealous, after all. "There are different kinds of love, I tell you. I never gave her the respect . . ." He hesitated. He would never give any woman much of that. They were all too easy. Jenny had been too easy. He could have made her understand, perhaps, that wild desire for Frasquita looking impudent over her shoulder with hands on her broad hips. And he could make her understand, perhaps, how the very essence of her own lovely self had intoxicated him like a perfume, was tearing at his heart now.

"Jenny!" This was the way; holding her so close she couldn't struggle, laying his cheek to hers. "That's over. My salad days. She forgot me before she died, and I forgot her. I was a boy. Now I'm a man. Don't these . . ." Had any other man ever kissed

Jenny's lips? He didn't believe it. "Don't these tell you that, dear heart?"

"Then you never kissed her . . . like this?"

Damn it! She *was* jealous. He let her go. "Yes, I did. Of course I did. I kissed her the best I knew how. Now . . . are you done with me just because I've been honest with you?"

But here she was, smiling wistfully, asking wistfully, "But we couldn't ever be less than honest with each other, could we?"

Couldn't they? He didn't know about that. He knew that it was a pity he'd ever been honest at all. Instead of feeling the Grand Mogul he had expected to, he felt a brute, a despicable cur. Then—oh, these sudden impulses would be the death of him yet!—he was down on his knees in the dirt, hiding his face in her gown. "Jenny . . . for God's sake . . . I'm not worthy, hound than I am."

Her arms came cradling round his head. Her voice was rich and strong again. "It's I am not worthy. I was so selfish I'd forgotten how you must have grieved. I'll try to make it up to you, my dear."

Grieved? In those past passages of arms he had enjoyed himself fully as much as Frasquita, even when there had been crockery thrown. Some escape he had always had to have from the quiet, decorous, superior Brevis whom every one knew. Frasquita had been good fun. Jenny, he suspected, wouldn't be quite such good fun. Love upset a woman's sense of humour. He would never be able to tell Jenny about the crockery . . . or other things. He stood up, drawing her with him. The unearthly glimmer of her lifted face, the slenderness of her, even the silken slide of her dress under his hands . . . all were an intoxication. He began to tremble now, holding her closely. She whispered:

"Brevis, I'm thinking that I would rather we didn't tell any one yet. You see, I mightn't be all you think me, just as she was not. It would be better to wait until . . . you know."

"I do know. You're ingenious with torture, love, like all your sex." But he was relieved. He did not want to tell. Much better not to tell until he saw his way more clear. Besides, why should they tell when in secret he could kiss her . . . and kiss her?

She was murmuring so low he could scarcely hear, "'Life, oh life, I kept on saying, and the very sound was sweet.'" "

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

I

JULIA was back after four years in England, where she had left the prospective baronet at school. Discarding her other responsibility, her husband, in Hobart Town, she came to stay at Bredon; and Madam and Susan, going to call on Charlotte at Bredon Cottage, found her there, a little bewildered among Charlotte's brilliant bell-ropes, mantel-drapes, and knitted, netted, crocheted, and tatted antimacassars.

"Since gentlemen now wear their hair so long and use macassar oil so extensively, antimacassars are a necessity," said Charlotte, on whom gentlemen never came to call if they could help it.

Julia, much worn and very elegant in green satin with a black-lace mantle—Julia, obviously disillusioned with the world and weary of her husband—had become so outspoken that Madam found her almost racy. She told tales of English life, inquired when Charlotte expected her baby, and hoped she would not have thirteen as Susan had done. "Even your eight still living must be a great problem in these days, Mrs. Comyn, although I hear Fanny is so pretty that she may do very well. But marriage is a lottery, with very few prizes."

"It is what you make it," said Charlotte, placidly stitching lace on a baby's cap.

"My dear! I wonder how long you will think that! Berry has grown to such enormous size that the doctors say his life hangs by a thread. That is why I insisted on his taking this command (they made him colonel of the Second Division of the ——th) and bringing me home. If I am to be a widow I prefer it to happen among my own people."

"Julia! You mustn't even think of such a tragedy," cried Susan; but Julia looked at her with such an amused reflective air that Madam thought, She is planning to take Mab again, and sighed. . . . This world did seem to have an extraordinarily facile capacity for going wrong.

“ You need your tea, Grandmamma,” said Charlotte, pouring from a great urn on a brightly lacquered tray. She wore violet velvet over a crinoline and four starched petticoats, and there were flowers as well as velvet bows in her cap. Susan’s pale eyes worshipped her. . . . She is thinking, “ Lord, now let thy servant depart in peace, for never shall I see anything more wonderful on this earth,” thought Madam, sipping her tea and preparing to do battle with Julia.

“ You will be delighted to hear that Mab is now in partnership with Gamaliel Thompson, Julia, and is shortly going to New Zealand to buy . . . commodities.” Even now she could not bring herself to mention hides and tallow. There could be nothing heroic for Mab in this connection, although he insisted that there would be money in it ; and that was a rare enough commodity for a Comyn, in any case. “ He may be away a long time,” said Madam, defiantly.

“ Really ? Poor Mab ! Mr. Thompson deals in hides, don’t he ? ” Julia lifted her thin shoulders. Her eyes met Madam’s. Madam’s said, You’ll never get hold of him again, woman. And Julia’s said, How do you know that ? And the plague of it was that Madam didn’t know. The Comyns, she felt, were so tenacious. She was. Jenny was.

Julia, quite understanding that this was another of Madam’s sore spots, began asking about Jenny. Not married yet ? Dear me !

“ Oh, Julia,” cried Susan, flinging back the red bonnet strings that had fallen into her tea, “ we are so disappointed in Jenny ! ”

“ Speak for yourself,” said Madam, rudely. “ She keeps Clent alive.”

“ She is in love with Brevis Keyes,” said Charlotte, in her downright way. “ And Brevis is in love with himself. Jenny is very foolish. . . . Can I give you another cup, Julia ? ”

“ If you please. So that is what Jenny is about. You dear Comyns are all so romantic.” Julia’s eyes went sly and considering. “ I must see this wonderful Brevis. Perhaps I can help him. Berry has influence.”

For *la petite’s* sake Madam had to take up the cudgels for Brevis, much as she hated him.

“ I am sure that if Sir Almeric requires it Brevis will be pleased

to have you brief him. Mab says he has quite a name for adjusting difficult monetary affairs."

There was one for Julia, seeing that his creditors had virtually obliged Berry to flee the country four years before. She flushed. And then Charlotte was hiding her work away and trying to look unconscious, and Susan flurriedly whispering to Julia: "Don't mention Charlotte before Jenny. An unmarried girl, you know . . ."

Julia still had her mouth open with amazed laughter when Jenny ran in, looking in her lilac muslin as fresh and sweet as the flower. She kissed Julia warmly; for though she had once felt so bitter about her, how could one feel aught but pity for those who had missed happiness?

"Dear Julia, how well you look! And what a lovely frock! Did you bring it from England? I want to know about England."

In these days Jenny wanted to know about everything that could bring her education more nearly level with Brevis's. She sat on a low stool, eating cakes, chattering, enveloping them all in her radiance and her love for mankind. . . . Dear Julia, she thought. I might have grown like her if I had married Mr. Paige. . . . Dear Lottie, who had had to shoot her bird sitting; and poor little Mark was only a sparrow, too, not a soaring eagle like Brevis. Dear Mamma and Grandmamma, whose youth and hot love-time were forever gone. . . . Look at me, she thought, shining round on these much-to-be-pitied dear women. I have Brevis, so what can I do but love and be tender with you all!

Julia was interested. The whole atmosphere of the room had changed with Jenny's coming. Even those terrible antimacassars became a jest instead of a pain. So this was what love could do? She felt bitterly that she had never really seen love before, never guessed that it could actually make a light about it, like a star. Now, certainly, she must see Brevis.

"You sweet thing," she said, caressing Jenny. "You make me young again. I was feeling quite elderly among the matrons."

Jenny and Brevis must assuredly have an understanding, no matter what people said. And, they also said, Brevis would go very far.

II

Brevis had long since determined to go very far. And as Jenny's wisdom kept him clear of trammels—she never inquired if he was sure yet of his love—he was coming to find enormous pleasure in hers, which seemed to grow stronger, more buoyantly trustful with each one of those long letters, crossed and recrossed in their fine Italian hand after the barbarous fashion of the hour.

And he was finding enormous pleasure in his popularity. Men crossed the Launceston streets to pass with him the time of day. Ladies everywhere bowed out of their carriages. His mantelshelf was important with neat rows of invitation cards. He turned them over in one of his few idle moments, smoking his after-dinner pipe. Every one who mattered was there, and especially, he noted, the mothers of unwedded daughters. Never do to acknowledge himself bound while there was so much climbing to do—for Jenny's sake as well as his own.

He dropped into his leather chair, thinking of Jenny. For two months he had not seen her, and the desire for her was growing fast. He wanted her acutely; wanted her soft lips, her slim little body with its delicate bones like a bird's; wanted her hot undaunted pagan love, her gay flashing spirit. He moved restlessly, thinking of her. That which he had felt for Frasquita had been no more than the rough lust of adolescence. This, he felt, was completely different. He had a chivalrous tenderness for Jenny, a shame that he was not doing quite the right thing. But how alter it? He had known the terrible hampering of shackles once. He had known what possession of Frasquita had done to his ambition. It must not happen again. Self-control, aloofness, the skilful building up of the reputation for cool-blooded fastidiousness which, he found, attracted these hearty colonials more than anything . . . that was what he must concentrate on now.

By and by, with a place won for her and himself, he could rest a moment on his oars; take his love, his Jenny, and receive Susan's slobbering kisses, Madam's bitter congratulations; they'd never get on, he and Madam. Meanwhile, he would run down to Clent to-morrow and see Jenny.

He got out a sheaf of papers and settled to his desk. But

concentration would not come. His longing for Jenny had evoked her, a bright enchantment coming between him and this sordid squabble of dock-side lumpers which the firm had turned over to him. He read the evidence twice without realizing a word. . . . Jenny, the lovely loving thing, not so much surrendering as offering in her gallant courage. How utterly she trusted him, and how he loved her! How he forgot ambition, everything, when their lips met! And that was a danger.

He thrust the dock-siders away, turning to Thompson & Comyn's New Zealand correspondence. That could not wait, for Mab would be in directly to see about it. Some confusion about payments which must be straightened out before Mab left. Digging his fingers into the mass of his dark hair, he read: "As we have before pointed out regarding the present conditions existing in the Island of New Zealand . . ."

He had been right, he knew, to begin his career in Launceston. It was as different from the dogmatic military South as from the bucolic Midlands, this commercial North butting hard-headed against its difficulties, getting things done to the clang of hammers, the stink of hides and beer, the scream of the river steamers. When he left Tasmania, a few years before, it had been still rather nervously experimental, with small settlements along the coasts and outlying rivers, tentative agriculture on the higher lands, and a wild abandonment to quarrelling between governments and the gentry who (having been, as it were, there before any government) might be damned but would never be ruled. Still there had been a forgotten remnant of natives at Oyster Bay, many gay officers in military posts, many fine ship-building yards where some of the world's finest clippers took shape from some of the world's hardest timber. Now all these things were rapidly changing except the quarrels, which he hoped would provide legal bread-and-butter and presently champagne. Before very long, thought Brevis, raising his head as Mab came in, he would be setting up for himself with young Frank Shone as partner.

Mab, flinging off cloak and hat, had come to talk business. But over a preliminary pipe and glass before the fire Brevis saw so much of Jenny in his buoyant vitality that he had to speak of her. And from that, before he knew it, he had told so much that even

Mab guessed most of the rest. Mab was glad. Brevis, perched on a chair arm and swinging a leg in his anxiety, was enormously relieved that Mab was glad, for if there was one person who could influence Jenny it was Mab Comyn.

"That fellow Paige, you know . . . I could have wrung his neck," said Mab. "Jenny knew her own mind there. She always has, God bless her. She'll go far. You'll go far between you," he said, feeling that he hadn't the slightest notion what happened to folk who went far. But undoubtedly it must be the right thing to do.

"I'll be Crown Prosecutor of Australasia some day. And that is not talking through my hat. It's just what I mean to do."

"Then you'll do it," said Mab, with a sigh. "I never do what I mean to do. But if you're not all the good in the world to my Jenny, Brevis, I'll break your neck. What . . . what does my mother think of it?"

"She doesn't know. We think it much better for no one to know until my position is more assured. I shouldn't have told you, but . . ." He smiled, and Brevis had a singularly sweet smile. "I was thinking of her and it came out. You must keep our secret."

"Oh!" Mab was dampened. He had seen himself taking Jenny by the arm and marching her off to crow over Charlotte. "But . . . Oh, well; I suppose you know best between you." He thought humbly how seldom he knew best, while this young man whose clear-headed advice people were beginning to swear by . . . "Gamaliel wants to know what you advise about those Poverty Bay people, Brevis. He would rather not send cash."

"If you hope to gain financial standing and put your business through in a hurry, I'm afraid you'll have to. Even if he banked in Melbourne, which he refuses to do, there is no argument like gold among the individual farmers with whom you'll be dealing. Later, when you have established a connection . . ."

They settled that Mab ought to take as much gold as the firm could conveniently spare. "You can bank the surplus there until you need it," said Brevis. "But pay on the nail when you can. Get yourself known as Golden Comyn or something. Focus attention. Advertisement goes a long way in opening up new

fields, and New Zealand is still a practically undiscovered country. You'll have to keep your eyes open, of course. And look out for Snow's Gang before you leave the country."

"I have never believed that it was Snow. There's no proof," said Mab, with sudden stiffness.

"Well, one must call him something," said Brevis, lightly. He got up and shook a little incense into the burner before the gilt icon. It was his way to do extravagant things or austere things to rouse the interest of his many callers. Already he had proved for himself that advertisement goes a long way, but he was very sardonic with himself the while. He could trick outsiders. Some day he might have to trick Jenny. But never, he knew, would he be able to trick himself. Just now, lighting the incense, watching the grey smoke spiral delicately through the dark warmth of the room, he was trying to trick Mab Comyn, who, without any doubt at all, held some secret in connection with Snow. But Mab, who had smelt too many Chinese burning joss-sticks on the Australian gold-fields, was suddenly irritated at Brevis and went off in a hurry.

I shall go to Ellen Merrick, thought Brevis, when Mab was gone. Jenny writes that her delusions are increasing and no one takes any notice of her. They grew out of something, those delusions. And although nothing has been heard of Snow for months, I've a notion he won't let Mab Comyn leave the country unharmed. I may be on the wrong track altogether, but we'll see. He went to Lovely Corners before seeing Jenny. Snarling curs snapped at him in the mud round the dingy high-windowed place, and Joe was duller than ever. Some years back Joe had seen the first mechanical harvester at work in Bob Beverley's paddocks, and had gone home silent and stared at his own crude models in the stable loft.

"Mine'd not shake the grain about so. Mine's better," he mumbled. But he knew that no one else would ever see it or say it. *The Parents' Assistant* had done its work too well. Something had gone out of Joe with the years and the sight of that triumphant harvester. He let the dust lie on his models now.

It was never easy to detach Ellen from her mother's shawls and hot bricks for the feet; but Brevis found her in the kitchen-

garden at last, her skirts and wild hair blowing in the spring wind as she gathered sage and borage for Mrs. Merrick's herb tea. Ellen, grey sister of the dark night, was Tragedy in crinoline and a plaid shawl and most terribly ready to talk. No one talked to her, she complained, and yet she knew so many interesting things. Several gentlemen walked in cloaks on the opposite hill when the wind blew, and Mamma was really a cat, for Ellen had seen her claws sometimes when putting her to bed. "But don't tell, Brevis. Dear Mamma is so sensitive."

Some one whistled at her window every night. But when she climbed on a chair to look there were only the ring-tail 'possums swinging by their tails from the weeping-gum tree and beating their pink little paws on the pane. "And they are not paws, Brevis, but hands like my own little boy's. Did you know I had a baby? Mamma and Susan won't let me say it, but I should know, shouldn't I? Such a love of a boy, but I've lost him somehow. I seem to lose everything."

Her hare eyes were piteous in the clear spring day. Her pallid skin was sunken below the high cheek-bones. She had been such a sturdy, rosy girl once, but Brevis was too young and impatient to give her pity. He wanted to know of Snow, who, it seemed probable, was at the bottom of this. But Ellen screamed at his name; then giggled. "Oh, naughty! I swore to Mab his name should never pass my lips."

"It hasn't. I said it. Do you want me to tell Snow you lost him?"

"Hush!" She looked this way and that through the blowing shrubs, then leaned close. "I've told him," she whispered.

"But that was long ago."

"No, no. I told him again when Mamma had her last attack of bronchitis."

This was last week, as Brevis had already heard from Mrs. Merrick. "Ah, yes. He came to see Mab, didn't he?"

"Don't be sly! He came to see me, of course." She struck at him with the grey sticks of sage, giggling. "Why should he want Mab? He knows Mab is going to New Zealand next week."

I wonder how much he has learned from you, thought Brevis. So Snow was not far off? Probably preparing for another of his

campaigns wherein respectable citizens were forced to sit with a stick under their knees and hands tied over them, to watch their houses burn. It was a legend that there were caves in those rough scrub hills behind Henny's, although they had never been found. If Snow were there, then Henny was backing him . . . had been all the time. Yet neither bribes nor bullying had ever got anything out of her, which suggested that Snow—a good-looking devil as Brevis remembered him—made love to Henny, as he undoubtedly did to Ellen. No woman at any age is proof against that. He asked if Snow was not a great friend of Mab's. But now Ellen began to be troubled about her herbs and would not talk.

“I wish you would remember how much I have to do,” she said busily.

So Brevis left her, thinking that there was probably enough here to explain Mab's sending Snow to Port Arthur. But why let the fellow out again? All the Comyns were quixotic, yet even Mab might guess that Snow would make him pay for those wasted years. . . . And pretty soon if I'm not mistaken, Brevis thought, turning toward Clent.

III

In books, in poems Jenny read that women had loved before as she loved now. And yet it was hard to believe while love mounted like a lark in her and sang tempestuously against the skies. She was a lark, a song, the very sky, a diver flashing through clear water to bring up armfuls of pearls. She was any gay metaphor that flew into her head when she pulled her curtains on these spring mornings and leaned out with her breast on the warm stone to greet the sparkle of sun on the river and the galahs walking on the dewy lawn under the little white moss-roses shy in their rough calixes. Across the paddocks where sheep were beginning to feed, across the blue hill-distance she would stretch her arms in their long thick cotton nightgown sleeves to Brevis, calling him softly: “*Brevis! Brevis!*” His name was such music that she felt she could stop saying it.

What did the other woman matter . . . that poor woman who

was dead? She had not kept his love. It was all Jenny's now. He had said it. To the end of time it would be hers. "When we are old," she had said, "when we are old and all this hot burning over, we will still be together, Brevis."

It seemed a solemn thing then, this love, making her feel—not knowing why—the preciousness, the apartness of her womanhood, all womanhood. Secret citadels, all women, she thought, whereof the key is placed by God in one pair of hands alone, as hers in Brevis's hands. This citadel which was Jenny Comyn, with all its pettiness and foolishness, all its salty undercurrent of fears and hates and longings which are the inescapable heritage of all women—how humbly, how rejoicingly would she render it up to Brevis when the time came.

But even now, thought Jenny, happily pulling on white cotton stockings, twisting up the bronze ripples of her hair, I give him enough to shock Charlotte out of her senses. . . . She went weak all over with shivers of love. . . . I haven't enough guile, she thought, momentarily frightened. . . . I let him know that he means everything, everything. He might despise me if he were not Brevis. . . . Then she felt proudly: There is no need of guile between us two. I wouldn't dishonour him by even a shade of pretence. I wouldn't dishonour myself by it, either.

IV

Two days later Brevis walked in just as morning prayers began and knelt down by Jenny in the yellow sunlight by the window. His hand sought and found hers; and she heard not a word while the Captain gabbled through a chapter and a sulphur-crested cockatoo tamed by Humphrey repeated "Amen" and "Damme" on the veranda until William could bear it no longer. He went out, to be met with such a screeching shower of "Dammes" that every one laughed except Susan, and the Captain shut his book in a hurry and told Brevis that he wanted to ask him a question. But, like all the Captain's questions, it was really an assertion.

"This imbecile notion of the Inspector of Police in Hobarton, Brevis. What d'you think of it, eh? Suggestion that municipalities should introduce local policing, indeed! Damme, I never

heard such nonsense. I've stopped it in Trienna District, I'm glad to say."

"I fear you'll be sorry, sir. The country is getting rather past State policing now; and all these small-holders coming in on the back blocks are hand-to-mouth, you know, and not likely to buy sheep and calves while they can steal them off the big runs which muster only at shearing- and branding-time. How many sheep do you think you lose in a year?"

"Well . . . well . . . damme, Humphrey says that on Latterdale . . . But I stick to the old ways, lad. They have been good enough for the colony these sixty years. They'll last my time, I hope. Brevis, did you see that the salmon and trout ova brought out by the *Norfolk* have acclimatized? Greatest triumph the colony has ever had. Beaten Melbourne and Sydney off the field, eh? The years and years we've been trying acclimatization! And now it's achieved. Not that our own blackfish isn't the best eating in the world, but we've wiped the eye of the other colonies handsomely."

Madam watched them a little sadly as they stood by the open window in the sunlight that showed the snuff on the Captain's tweed waistcoat, the neat slim lines of Brevis's riding-suit. There they stood, her white-haired sanguine young man who would never be old, and this cool rapier-like Brevis with his young disdainful mouth and smouldering reflective eyes. He was old from the beginning, this Brevis whom Jenny loved. If Madam had ever had any doubt of that love, she relinquished it now, seeing Jenny's eyes like radiant moons and the lines of her soft face quivering.

Jenny glanced round; saw Madam's look, and ran off, blushing. . . . Eh, my Jenny, thought Madam, reaching for the ebony cane she always used now, why won't you tell me? . . . She went up slowly to her room. Perhaps Brevis had not given Jenny anything to tell? Very possibly. Brevis was intent on a career as other men were intent on other toys. They must have their toys, their dreams, the dear men! But a woman's dreams are of her children's children; her toys are her own strange flesh and blood. Watching from the window Jenny and Brevis going presently down through the long grass of the lower orchard,

Madam knew potently that the bluff, kindly mate with whom she had lain so many years had never roused in her the passion she had for that wild son she had borne—but Mab always would be a sorrow—or for Jenny dipping like a dandelion puff under the orchard bloom with close-knit Brevis behind her.

In the corner where the myrtles were thick with glossy green and frail white flowers, Brevis stopped and without a word took Jenny in his arms. He held her so long and so hard with his lips on hers that when he released her at last she was as white as he. Dizzily she felt that they could never be free from the passion of that kiss. It was a sacrament more complete than any marriage could be. They looked at each other, their eyes full of that sweet lust. And then they kissed again.

For some time they did not speak in more than broken incoherencies. Then they walked on, with grass pollen, with tiny pink-veined moths, with dusty gold rising about them. Earth's incense burned before her children, Jenny vaguely felt. Pan's music made palpable in showers of early gold. Jenny's spaniel came galloping back to her, looking up with adoring eyes. Then Brevis said unsteadily, "I've been living for this."

Jenny laughed because she must, or she would weep with joy. "You never think of me in town, until I make you."

"How make me?"

"I sit at my window in the night, and I think '*Brevis, Brevis*' all across the sleepy paddocks and the hills and in through your door to the room where you sit over your papers. (I wish I could just once be in that room, Brevis.) And there you are with your dark head; and you feel me come, don't you, Brevis?"

"Perhaps I do. God knows I wish you could be there all the time. But listen, my sweet; it's rapture to know that I am working for you," intoxicated by her nearness, he really believed that he was working only for her, "but I must not ask for my reward yet. I have so far to go."

"I am content to wait. No, I'm not. I am very rebellious. Yet I will wait. But, dear heart, can't we tell Grandmamma? She deserves it of me."

"Now, Jenny, you know what would happen then. She'd either put it in all the papers or she would forbid me the house, and I

fear the last. But when I can come for you with a name and a position——”

“ Oh, *boom, boom!* ” cried Jenny. She marched a few steps, swinging her skirts, making gestures as though she beat a big drum. “ Here comes the Conqueror, the Conqueror, ” she sang. “ Make your curtsy, Madam. Captain Comyn, make your bow. Here comes——”

Brevis strode after her, taking her small mischievous face between his hands. “ You wicked adorable witch ! What am I to do with you ! ”

But presently he was talking theories at her as he always did. Jenny had few theories herself—only hot beliefs—but Brevis was fond of constructing theories and applying them to the individual and watching them work. If they wouldn't work he discarded them, for he had determined that he would never be weak, never overridden by his own conceit. They sat on the high roots of the weeping willows that the Captain had planted by the river long years before, and watched the fish rise in silver bubbles and the great bright dragon-flies shoot over, and there in the warm spring sunlight full of murmuring life they talked. And if Brevis thought once of wild, life-denied, grey Ellen he would not let her shadow fall upon Jenny's sun.

Jenny, talking very fast, persisted in seeing life so clean, so splendid that no sane man could have possibly borne it. In spite of glowing eyes and parted scarlet lips Brevis told her so. “ Think of the dullness if people stopped cheating each other. And I'd have no more work, dear love. Let us be thankful that men are still as they claim God made 'em. ”

“ Don't be cynical with me, sir. Keep your poses for outsiders. Yes ; I know it for a pose. ” Beside the singing river, under great lime trees full of flower, they walked in an enchanted land. “ I thought, ” said Jenny, awed, “ that adventure meant going to new countries. But it means *this*. ” She looked at him, her lips trembling and pouted as if she were going to cry. “ I can't ever say what I want to, Brevis, but . . . we are going to make something real out of life, aren't we ? You and I together. And in the joy we will forget the pain——”

“ What have you to do with pain, you bright-white thing ! ”

Again he took his kisses from those warm pouting lips, and in her glad surrender Jenny cried, "Heaven can't mean more, oh, Brevis, Brevis!"

But Brevis looked with strange hot eyes. "Earth will be more yet," he said.

And they walked back together under the blossoming cherry trees, with Brevis thinking of old Grecian lovers on the Carian hills and Jenny thinking of nothing whatever but Brevis.

V

A few nights later, sitting in his room, with Mab astride a heavy oak chair before him, Brevis was being very annoyed.

"I think you are taking a quite unnecessary risk, Mr. Comyn. You are asking my advice about carriage of bullion to New Zealand, but I never advised you to drive through the country with a thousand pounds in gold under the seat of the gig. Why not go by Launceston?"

"Because that damned little New Zealand hooker leaves Melbourne the day before the Launceston boat is due. I must leave from Hobarton, Brevis, if I want to catch it; which I frankly don't, very much. A fortnight or more in a leaky little schooner the size of your hat don't appeal much to me."

"Nor does your journey to Hobarton appeal to me. Suppose Snow is about."

"Now . . . damn it," said Mab, getting up, "one would think . . . Look here, Brevis. I have private reasons for knowing that if it is Snow he won't touch me. Anyway, nothing has been seen of the gang for months. And, anyway, I'm going. Gamaliel thinks it all right, and so do I. Who's to know about the money? I haven't gone round the streets talking of it."

Brevis looked at him, frowning. You could never convince a Comyn; not even Jenny. And this dark, vital, ruddy giant in his great grey coat with many capes certainly looked able to protect himself. Brevis hesitated. He knew that he himself was not particularly brave, but the questing, querying hound in him could not pass what he believed would be a hot scent. Ten to one Mab had told them at Clent that he was taking gold with him.

Ten to one Ellen had passed the word on to Snow. Why did the fellow visit her if not for information?

"D'you mind if I come with you?" he said. "Not as protector, I don't mean. But I really must go down."

"Glad to have you, of course. Five sharp to-morrow morning. I'll do it in the day, with relays."

Dawn was grey and chill as the tandem trotted through the sleeping town; pink as the rose the Sandhills; and a great gold glory flooding from blue Ben Lomond away to the southern hills when they bowled smoothly through scattered bush where tall heath stood in a million white and crimson spears. The strange cleansing fragrance of the bush stayed with them for many miles of hills, hollows, and levels; dark, damp, and chilly sometimes, but usually all quivering with sunlight and the flying and crying of bright parrots. Then young green of wheat behind grey post-and-rails, log huts by shining creeks, hayricks, feeding sheep in yellow paddocks of native grass, a shock-headed boy bringing in red cows for the milking.

Mab never missed a drink while the ostlers changed the horses at the baiting stables, but he handled each new team with perfect skill; swinging along the Main Road that was swarming still with beggars, with farmers driving flocks of sheep, with carts of hay and wool; swinging across bridges, clattering through small townships in the twilight. But he stopped for far too many nobblers, thought Brevis, and when night came, sudden, clear, and blue, and very musical with the throaty calling of birds, he said urgently: "You don't want to stop at old Harrigan's, do you, Mr. Comyn? We'll be very late as it is."

It was a legend in the colony that Mab Comyn never passed a pub; and he was hauling on the reins now when suddenly the leader snorted and reared as a masked man stood at its head in the red light from the tavern door. There was a man each side the gig, just as quickly and silently, and with a sinking at the pit of his stomach Brevis heard the warning click of a revolver. Lord! Why had he ever come? What a fool he was! What a fool! Someone spoke in croaking tones: "Now then, Mr. Comyn, hand over that gold; and keep your horses still if you don't want a bullet through your head."

The voice was as disguised as the men, but it was a gentleman's. Brevis strained eyes and ears . . . the horses plunged . . . he saw Mab's face, black brows over flaming eyes, big nose jutting angrily. Mab said: "Can't you see I'm trying to steady 'em? Don't fool about with them, damn you!" Brevis saw his big hairy hands working the reins, punishing the horses' mouths. He'd have them bolting in a moment. . . . Oh, God! why don't they shoot and get it over! Jenny . . . she'll never . . .

Thoughts whirled round in his brain for what seemed like an eternity; but it could only have been a matter of moments before three shots rattled out and the team bolted, with Mab on his high seat rocking and yelling like a madman. Then the leader went down, riddled with bullets, and Mab pitched off his seat into the road as the bush-rangers came galloping, and the wheeler of the gig kicked the dashboard to splinters, and Brevis found himself on the ground also, being battered over the head.

He returned to life in a blaze of light on the tavern floor. Old Harrigan, moving stiffly, was loosing three frightened maids and a couple of ostlers from the chairs to which they had been tied, and Mrs. Harrigan, plump in black silk, strapped Mab's arm to his side as he sat on a bench with his black hair wet over his forehead. She was coaxing him: "Now, do'ee be sensible, my dear, an' kape quiet. If you go losin' more blood, it wull be the end o' ye——"

But Mab twitched away with a muttered word and came to Brevis, now sitting up holding his head.

"Can you sit a horse?" demanded Mab. "I'm going on now. They got the gold, Brevis."

He looked the most dangerous thing Brevis had ever seen. A black destroying vengeance; a wild discredited god. He cried to Harrigan: "Is that horse saddled yet? See to it, then. Are you coming, Brevis?"

"Why didn't Snow kill you?"

"He thought he had. I got his mask off. His bullet went through my hair. Gad! and I set him free!"

He ran out, and Brevis, dragging himself to the door, heard his great voice shouting at the ostlers. Mrs. Harrigan came up, her kind face puckered.

“ He’m likely bleed to death on the road, I’m fearin’. He coom in here on hands and knees wi’ his arm swingin’ an’ a girt runnin’ o’ blood from his head. We was all trussed oop. He’s had two-three brandies——”

A clatter of hoofs passed on the cobbles, roared off into the night. Mab was gone, breakneck and one-armed, to rouse up Hobarton and the police. Brevis said feebly : “ He’s ruined, you know. All that gold . . .” And then he slipped down feebly in the door and did not follow Mab.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

I

CROUCHED over the great red fire of gum logs crackling half-way up the chimney, Henny was being very sulky with her guests. Robert Snow would have her in trouble yet over this business of Mr. Comyn, and so she had told him last night. "I said I wouldn't have you harm Comyn," she had told him. "Any more o't and I peaches on yer. So now yer knows." But Robert Snow had looked at her with his still eyes and his small crooked smile, and clinked a few gold pieces in his hand, and . . . well, an old woman has to live, and there was no money in the lot who came to the road-house now. Besides, it was her pride that she had never yet peached on a client.

A poor lot who patronized her now. Terrible, she thought them, unguessing that they thought her terrible, too. No more they came to Henny's, the lusty young stockmen and shearers and bullockies. They were all grown too proud. All over the colonies now many whom the system had set free were slowly making good, working out the taint, building up their triumphs out of their tragedies. Henny's patrons were the old lags in these days. Bleared grey-headed derelicts which the country had finally cast out. For years they and their kind had hampered her; but now, authors of her being although they were, she had her foot on them at last. They were the homeless ones, the irredeemables; tramping the Main Road, men and women together; lying together at night in such foul-smelling hovels as Henny's.

Huddled in the warmth, they mumbled their smutty stories in the half-forgotten slang of the prisons, or dozed about the fire in the harsh smoke of square-fig tobacco and the stale odour of dirty bodies and the sharp reek of overproof spirits. Henny regarded them sourly. No gentlemen come to buy a dog of a well-set-up stockman now. Only red nightcaps on grizzled hair; only old Stony's toothless mouth dropping; only Betty Harker's

battered and mincing face decked about with ragged feathers and scraps of torn ribbon.

The glory of her road-house was departed, she forlornly felt ; and then heard at her door the step that was not the dragging step of discouraged age, heard a voice that was a gentleman's voice although it was not Snow's. Never did she want to see that Snow again, him that shot at Comyn who never did harm to no man. But when Brevis came lightly in, kicking damp fern mould from his riding-boots, nodding to one another, stretching his hands to the fire as he smiled his dark fine smile at Henny, she felt a sudden sickening of her whole body. Everyone knew young Mr. Keyes who did things with the law and was so clever he could have her into Port Arthur yet if he liked. And everyone knew that he had been hurt when Snow's Gang got the Comyn gold.

But as the one-time favourite of long-dead gallant gentlemen Henny met this gentleman bravely, croaking welcome under her moth-eaten bonnet.

"A stranger yer've been to one as allers wished yer well, Mr. Brevis, dear. Take a sip o' suthin' warm, honey. Ah, t'ain't much old Henny's got to offer yer now. All the gels is gone, huntin' suthin' better than these ole lags. But I got a drop o' fine sperrit yet."

"That's good. Drinks all round, Henny." Brevis pulled up a stool and put his boot-soles to the fire. "So old Braxey's gone, Henny?"

"Ah. Unwoun' his sins, he did, till thar warn't none left. 'That's done at larst,' he said, an' went out like a cannle. The saints come fur him, I reckon. He were a good man."

"Just so. Do you know if he had any relatives, Henny? There's money waiting for them. Left by someone he once worked for."

The fish snapped exactly as Brevis had expected. Henny's rapacious eyes gleamed. "Well, my love, I wun't deceive yer. Ole Braxey he were my brother."

"Really? Now, that is going to save me much trouble. You won't object to coming down to Trienna court-house next Thursday, will you? A few formalities to be gone through before paying it over, you know."

She objected with terrified violence, and this he had also

expected. He pushed the logs with his toe, pretending to consider. "I might manage to arrange it, if . . . but they can't harm you, you know. They have already asked you about Snow's Gang, haven't they?"

"Hundreds of 'em. And I don't know nothin'. I swear I don't know nothin'," she repeated, thrusting the cranky bonnet back on her grizzled locks and staring at him.

"They were fools if they expected you to sell him . . . or anyone. Never sold a pal in your life, did you, Henny?"

"Never did, s'elp me Gord. Ah, I'd be a rich woman now if I had!"

"But surely they shared with you, didn't they?"

His innocence disarmed her. Besides, this was a life-grievance.

"Mighty poor pickin's I ever had from ary one of 'em, and so I tell yer, Mr. Keyes, sir. An' all that stuff Collins had hid in the caves back there an' went off to be hung never tellin' me, an' though I've looked an' looked . . ." Caution returned suddenly, although Brevis was merely poking idly at the fire with a stick.

"I never been in no caves," she muttered. "I was jest talkin'."

"Well, that was too bad of them. But if you won't come to the court-house I don't know what I can do to make you more comfortable." He flashed a sudden smile at her. "I'd like to get you that money of Braxey's, too. Since he's gone, it is certainly yours as I see it."

She twisted her withered hands together; lifted one to pluck nervously at her withered throat.

"I could do w'it. I could do wi't fine. I'm near clemmed, times. But I ain't never sold a pal yet. Dun't ask me to do it, Mr. Keyes, sir, fur I'm almighty damned if I ever will."

Her bleared old eyes had another look now. Loyalty. Honour among thieves. Pride. . . . What a hound I am, thought Brevis, proceeding to tangle her dazed brain in sophistries.

"Don't we all know that? There was Mr. Sorley's reward, and a dozen behind that; and you'd sooner starve than touch them. A great record, Henny. I doubt if there's another in the country one could say it of."

After so many years of being cursed by those she served, Henny was not proof against this. She glanced round hastily, but all her

ancient patrons were drowsed into slumber over the drink and the fire. Then in a fervent patter larded with prison slang she let Brevis into the secrets of an amazing life, brutal, terrible, and yet strangely streaked with light, for through it all ran her Thief's Litany : *But I ain't never sold a pal yet.* No, quite clearly she never had, although they had battered on her, bullied her, neglected her, these lawless ruffians who had been content to leave their lives in her hand. No, not even now, although she cursed Snow for shooting Mab Comyn, although it had come nearly to a choice between betraying him and going "on the road." "I dun't wan' to die on the road, Mr. Brevis. Not unner a haystack, I dun't. But the stockin's main empty these days."

A gallant old sinner, Henny ; but Brevis was here with his mother-wit and his youthful cruelty to make her false to her creed at the last. He led up to it by skilful sympathies, careless questions. Then : "Well, I try to get Braxey's money for you, Henny. But it will take time and expense. I'd like you just to tell me where those caves are so that we might discover Collins's cache. You know he stole valuable jewels and things from most of the big houses."

"I been up an' looked dozens o' nights, Mr. Brevis, but I never carn't find nothin'."

"Good Lord ! They must be quite close," thought Brevis. "Well, suppose we go up and have a look to-night, Henny."

"No, no. Not to-night. To-morrer . . . or maybe next night."

"Snow's there," thought Brevis. "Why not to-night, Henny ? It only takes about half an hour, you know."

"Na, na. Near an hour wi' these ole legs. The stones in the watercourse is main bad, though the hosses go up a'reet. An' there's that bog at the top where the spring makes 'i the ferns, an' then down t'rough the water inside . . ." She stopped, her face suddenly gone wild. "I've told yer ! Dom yer bloody eyes ; I've told yer !"

"Well," he said easily, "and what if you have ? Collins don't want his cache any more, and if you and I find anything I'll see that you get something out of it. I'll be back on Friday night if you can take me then. Will that be all right ?"

He saw her consider, her old jaws munching together, her

rheumy eyes restless. . . . She's wondering if she can get Snow away in time, the old bitch, he thought. . . . Then suddenly she laid her dirty crooked hand upon his knee.

"Mr. Keyes, sir, what I jes' tole yer . . . It ain't sellin' nobody, are it, seein' as I dun't take the reward?"

Her muddled old brain! Not clearly knowing what it was saying, but clinging still to one shred of honour! Brevis reassured her; but his face was burning and he could not look at her eyes. He had tricked her as he had tricked so many people, but he could not trick himself. This was one of the victories of which he would never be proud. He promised to be back on Friday night, and rode away through the dark twisting bush tracks to Trienna. He knew the place now. They would all know it. They had all seen the stream that ran back from the bog into the hill. But it was a desperate man who first thought of riding down that dark watery gut. Bushmen might have done it, but it would be to their interest to keep quiet in case they some day needed the shelter themselves. Police and military had neither the soul nor the skill of bushmen.

By George, it's not a place to storm, he thought, putting his horse to a gallop along the Main Road. They could pick us off one by one. But because Henny would certainly go dragging her faithful old weary body up there at once, Brevis must have the place surrounded if possible within the hour. . . . I wonder what Snow will do to Henny. Probably shoot her, he thought, and pulled up before the red blank face of Trienna Barracks.

II

Now it was past midday, and they had been galloping more or less since sun-up; for a stern chase is a long one and Snow's Gang knew every short cut through the timber, every wild way round the crumbling mountainside. Mab Comyn, his arm in a sling, led the scattering bunch of about fifty riders as he had led ever since a tracker scouting round the mouth of the caves in the uncertain moonlight reported that the bush-rangers had certainly gone.

More time was lost in finding the trail. But the country was awake everywhere: boys running; men galloping with informa-

tion like exultant fox-hunters near the kill. "Snow's Gang!" they shouted to one another. "Snow's Gang!" To small freckled boys Snow was nearly tradition. He had come in with their babyhood. To station-owners he was a memory of peculiar indignity. One by one he had caught most of them in their time. To all these riding men—Beverleys, Sorleys, Comyns, the sons of the blacksmith F Kemp, men from the tanneries, little run-holders—Snow the bush-ranger meant something, but to Mab he meant most of all.

Never in all his tempestuous life, Mab felt, had he burned so for revenge. The fellow would have rotted in Port Arthur if Mab hadn't helped him out. To be sure, he had put him there in the first place, but Snow deserved something. He must know he had deserved something, and with proper behaviour he would soon have been out again.

By God! he thought, easing Vanity's gallant daughter up a long stony hill behind Latterdale, it's enough to make a man never show mercy to anyone.

From the hilltop his eyes, so well used to distance, saw through the shimmer of heat a dark speck on the hill beyond. Another; a third; and all moving. Standing in the saddle, he shouted back to those behind: "There they are! There they are! On the Breakneck Ridge!"

He shook the reins and went pelting down the shingle slope. And after him, sliding, jumping, scattering the small stones like hail followed the hunt. Only picked men left in it now, after these twenty miles of roads and gullies and hills, picking up the trail and losing it, scouting into scrub and drawing it blind. But they would be fewer yet by the time this tearing gallop came to its end in a straight fight to the death. "For he'll never be taken alive," said Bob Beverley, his big yellow beard blowing over his shoulders, his stallion snorting, sliding down the steep way on its broad haunches. He looked round on this splendid avalanche of prime horse-flesh, man-flesh with a twinge of unease. . . . Some will probably go to Kingdom Come before we're through with this, he thought, steadying at the bottom among the golden bracken, racing away after Mab.

Under the hoofs the bracken crackled like fire. Tall red heaths bent their belled heads and were trampled out in the mud of a

creek. At a stout deadwood fence they raised a boomah kangaroo and for a mile or so the great frightened beast ran with them, taking fifteen-foot leaps from off his mighty tail. Full speed they were racing now ; dodging under low branches in the open bush, rattling down hills under cutty-grass clumps and wombat-holes and leaping stones ; flying the post-and-rails of boundary fences with a clatter ; scrambling over huge long-dead logs that trapped a careless hoof in its rotten core. The thunder of the hoofs was music to these born riders ; the flinty fire struck between iron and stone ; the smell of the sweating horses, the white foam flung from the bits—all was good to them.

The passion of the hunt had taken the horses. Strong upstanding brutes of the hardy colonial breed, like cats they fought their way up steep faces of water-worn roots and jutting stones, and still had a gallop left down the last rough stony gully. Now the bush-rangers were close ahead, striving to reach the shelter of honeysuckle and tea-tree thickets beyond. The young constable, his broad snub-nosed face running with blood from a bramble scratch, was shouting to them to surrender. " Surrender ! In the Queen's name." They answered with a volley that went wide, and then they were into the thicket, leaving their foundered horses outside.

Brevis, again with that sinking at the pit of his stomach, pulled on the reins. Nasty work it was going to be in there. He saw Mab Comyn thunder past, crouched low, his hat lost, his dark ruddy face intent, and shuddered as though some terrible force had gone by. Mab crashed in among the honeysuckles with their dried brush fingers, their squat monkeyish shapes, and the bullets snickered all round him and the air was full of red flashes. He heard the troopers firing just behind, heard little Mark Sorley cry out. And then he was hand to hand with one bearded ruffian who dragged him out of the saddle so they both rolled to the ground. As he fell he saw Snow backed up against the blue-gum bole, and sight of that fierce, desperate figure set him shouting : " Don't kill him ! For God's sake don't kill him ! "

Brevis, frankly afraid and sick, waited for them to come out. After the crashing of scrub, the hoarse shouting of men, the barking of the revolvers, there was a short horrible silence. Then they

came ; the troopers hauling two handcuffed exhausted men and Mab with Bob Beverley carrying the third. Mab's face was dead-white as Brevis ran up, but the low shafts of the setting sun turned the man they carried blood-red. Or perhaps it was really blood. . . . Mark Sorley came whimpering and limping. "Wrenched my knee on a branch," he said. "How the deuce I'll ride home . . . Yes ; it's Snow. He's near gone, if not quite," he said.

They laid Snow down by a little creek that lilted grey and clear over the stones. It was all shadows here, and the cool scent of water rising above the stench of blood and heated men. Mab put his folded coat under the still head and brought water in somebody's hat. His face was wild. "God ! He can't go like this !" he cried. "Make him speak, somebody !" Brevis, dabbing water on Snow's forehead, thought : Not he. His big coup hasn't come off. He wasn't born to kill Mab, but he still can torment him, and he will.

Henry Sorley, pinched and grey with fatigue, hovered before Snow's opening eyes. Henry asked in his gentle, anxious way, "Is there anything we can do for you, my friend ?"

"Yes," said Snow, without emphasis. "Go to hell."

Mab brought his face close. "Snow, where did you hide that gold ? You can't take it with you. Be decent, man."

"I might have been decent . . . long ago." Snow paused between the words. He sighed feebly, then opened his eyes full on Mab and his faint crooked smile came back. "What is it you want of me, Mr. Comyn ?"

"Where's that gold you stole from me ?"

"Where are all those years you stole from me at Port Arthur ? Answer that !"

"It was your own doing. If you'd behaved——"

"If I hadn't been human like other men, you mean," His voice was suddenly stronger, and the rest stood back a little. Quite clearly and very surprisingly this was a personal affair between the two. Brevis thought : Gentleman ranker. Oxford or Cambridge ? He'll never forgive Mab.

A company of minahs chattered on a near-by tree. A magpie began his evening call. Scent of the water and of some pungent

shrub in the bush strengthened. The sunset stood above the bare hill like fire. Snow moved his head a little. The change was already on his face, making it gaunter and in some strange hard way beautiful. His voice was sharp :

“What did you expect me to do? Cringe and whine to you and your sort? Run with the women of the road? Be the animal your system tried to make of me? You’re a damned proud man, Mab Comyn, and I’d have killed you if I could. But luck . . . was against me . . . always was.”

“Give him brandy,” said Bob Beverley, offering a flask. But Snow shut his teeth against it.

“No. I’ve had enough of you all. I’m going. If there’s a God, He will understand . . . better than you did.”

“The gold! The gold! For God’s sake, man, where is it?”

Snow’s eyes opened again. His crooked smile flickered. “Would you like to know, Mab Comyn?” His voice faded on the last word; sighed. His eyes closed.

III

Since Jenny would not marry and have babies—which of course was the first duty of woman—Susan put her to teaching those already arrived, and toiled up to the school-room each day to see how she did. On the day of the man-hunt she found brightness from a big log fire, the twins’ yellow heads, a red tablecloth, russet-golden gleams in Jenny’s hair as she sat before the glow with Harry in her lap and an adoring sister each side. Susan was outraged. Most certainly the only possible way to conduct lessons was sitting rigid at the table, with small cold fingers pushing a slate-pencil up and down compound addition or into the intricacies of dictation, or standing with hands behind your back to repeat your task. And no child could ever be learning while it looked as happy as Mary and Phoebe did. Susan’s new status of grandmother to be edged her tongue: “What is all this? I thought the children were at lessons, Jenny.”

“They are,” Jenny laughed over Harry’s black head. She was always laughing, though how she could have the face, with her

younger sister already almost a mother . . . "I'm telling them about the Pillars of Hercules," said Jenny.

"Pillows of Harkales? What next, I'd like to know?" Susan at a loss was always very superior.

"The Bed of Procrustes next," said Jenny. She knew it was wicked in her, for, after all, mothers are mothers even if only Susans. But if she had taught Brevis things, he also had taught her. "It's dishonest to pretend to yourself what you know isn't true," he said. And although Jenny retorted that no woman could live unless she occasionally believed what she knew to be untrue, one had to concede that Brevis was right. Mamma trying to be superior only made a fool of herself, and Madam's granddaughter knew it as truly as ever Madam did. Here Mary, who never had the wit to be silent, volunteered: "It isn't feather pillows, Mamma. It's stone *pillars*."

Susan pounced. Before Madam she was a worm and always would be. But where was the use of producing a nursery if you couldn't turn in it? Her broad dull face quickened and reddened. Her voice went up: "You are a very forward little miss, Mary, and I wonder at you. Go stand in the corner this instant, and what I'm to do with you, always being punished, I can't think. Yesterday you upset your poor papa, and now you're at it again. Phoebe never does, and she's a half-hour younger."

In the corner simple Mary bellowed. Yesterday had been terrible, what with Papa appearing in the sudden way he had and asking questions to which no one knew the answers. And indeed she had tried her best; and when Papa asked, "How is Tasmania governed?" she remembered what Mr. Beverley had said last week and answered, "Fairly well." And then Papa had ordered her into the corner, and here was Mamma doing the same. And although Sister Jenny always kissed and comforted afterwards, life was very ha-ard.

Here Mary's crying so overcame her that Susan got in before Jenny, and kissed and forgave. And so went off, leaving Jenny to gather up the shattered morale of the school-room and stay it with *Mangnall's Questions* (in black), *Butler's Spelling* (in dull red), *The Child's Guide* (in a light marble), and Dr. Lardner's *Common Things* in a colour to match. Jenny knew that she

was probably a very bad teacher because she found life so gay, even in school-rooms. But to-day it was not gay, with Brevis and Mab away after the bush-rangers ; and only God knew what was to happen before night.

Downstairs Susan fretted ; scolded Cook out in the great kitchen ; scolded Golly for running her finger round the yellow crinkled cream on the dairy pans before she used the skimmer. She was thinking of Mark, of Charlotte. Finally she put on her bonnet and sent for the barouche. " Lottie may need me," she said to Madam, who, having roused the Captain's temper by refusing to let him follow the hunt, was glad to get rid of her. On arriving at Bredon Cottage she found that Charlotte, shaken out of her calm for once by thought of Mark out on the ranges among the bullets, had need of her indeed.

" Now, we'll have the doctor here in no time, Lottie, my love," said Susan, competently, and took off her bonnet.

It was so perfect a day that Jenny found it hard to bear. Hot and still, as though it held its breath in suspense. Toward evening she could bear it no longer.

" Get on your habits, girls, and we'll go to meet them," she said.

But Fanny preferred to finish her drawing. Fanny, with her pale gold hair and skin like an inner shell, rarely did anything vital. A maiden asleep, this pretty sentimental Fanny, waiting for love to waken her long slender limbs and blue languid eyes. . . . But she'll never get out of it half of what I do, thought Jenny, riding off with the sturdy twins ; all three buttoned into the tight dark habits with skirts almost trailing the ground, all three nearly extinguished by the broad felt hats with their dark sweeping feathers.

The last evening glow bathed the world in gold, leaving the distant ranges blue feather heaps on a pink sky. Horses and cattle stood contented in the paddocks, their black shadows stretching far on the tawny grass. In the warm, close woods bronze-wing pigeons and doves were cooing, and a flock of shining grey summer birds rose from a native cherry tree that had rooted near a tall clump of blackwoods by a creek and melted into the woods like soft smoke. . . . The native cherry can't live alone, because

it lives on the roots of others, Jenny thought, watching the twins race their ponies on the grassy side of the road. . . . Am I a native cherry? I don't feel I could live without Brevis.

Was this, she wondered, love or partly the natural incompetence in which she had been so carefully trained as her younger sisters were trained now? Obey your elders. Do as you're told. Remember that we know best. It is not nice for young girls to ask such questions. How she knew those slogans by heart! Lottie, thinking herself so wise, had gone to Mark ignorant as a baby, merely exchanging one domination for another. Her cry now was always "I'll ask Mark," just as it had been "I'll ask Mamma." And Mamma had always asked Papa, who really knew no more than the rest of them, but was accepted as infallible because he was a man. Fanny would go to her husband—she would marry the first man she was allowed to—even less informed about life than Charlotte, because she was not naturally inquisitive. And Jenny would go to Brevis . . . ?

Well, what she had learned she had learned for herself, with, she knew, much of it distorted and with many gaps between. But life with Brevis would put all this in perspective, round out the angularities, give solid ground to tread on. . . . And anyway, she thought, puckishly, I know that Lottie is going to have a baby, although they all think that I don't. . . . She contemplated with delight Susan's shocked amaze, Lottie's embarrassment when, on the day of its arrival, she would present it with a robe on which she had been working for months. . . . How indecent they will think me, she thought, trotting after the twins. Then she sighed. "All this waste of womanhood and crippling of intellect because men like us young and tender! Dear Lord, I thank thee," she murmured, "for Brevis's open mind."

Out of the twilight rode a cluster of dark figures. On the grassy side a cow feeding tolled its monotonous bell. Jenny pulled up with a sudden stound at her heart. Nor could she look until Brevis came riding, talking cheerfully of his hunger. Mab followed. He also tried to be cheerful, but did not succeed well. His face had a blotched look, as though too many emotions were at war there.

"No New Zealand this year, dear maid. We'll have to write off

that somehow. But when I think that Snow would have died at Port Arthur but for me . . .”

“He would never have been there but for you, apparently,” said Brevis. “Bury your mistakes, Mr. Comyn, as the doctors do. Man can’t afford to be weak with his fellows or they’ll get him down.”

“What a damnable creed!” said Mab, riding on with his head low. But Jenny rode with Brevis; and above them the wild black swans flew clanging by into the scarlet west, and behind in the dusk between the fragrant trees creaked a cart bearing the dead body of Snow and the suffering body of one of the young farmers who had been shot in the groin. Jenny, for once, had no pity for either of them. She had got her man back, alive, alive!

While she was brushing the twins’ hair before dinner Susan came into the room, so brimming with excitement that Jenny knew in a moment. Poor dear Lottie!

“I have wonderful news for you, Jenny, Mary, Phœbe!” cried Susan. “Your sister Charlotte has a dear little baby. A girl. What do you think of that?”

“Oh, where did she get it from, Mamma?” cried Mary.

Susan’s beatific, mysterious smile included her three daughters. “Why, the doctor brought it in his carpet-bag,” she said, and hurried out.

Jenny went to her room and unfolded by candle-light the robe rich with delicate stitchery and fine lace. She thought: I wonder if Mamma could stand it if I gave it to her just now.

IV

In Launceston Mab was very bitter with himself to Gamaliel. “You should kick me out,” he said, banging about the neat office where Gamaliel sat all day with his hat on and the brain under it working full time. “I’m a Jonah. I spoil everything I put my hands on. Did you know I had a block in Collins Street when Melbourne began? I’d be a millionaire now, only I sold it for a song. I can never hold on to anything, not even what better men intrust me with.”

"I beg thee do not talk nonsense," said Gamaliel, thinking that anyone with the looks and vitality of Mab Comyn had enough for which to thank the gods. "Next year may be better for New Zealand, in any case. Will thee give me thy opinion on these samples of raw hides?"

While Gamaliel sat late in his office Mab went home to the rooms they shared out on the Elphin Road. But the stuffed parrots and shell frames with which their landlady had so urgently furnished the sitting-room drove Mab mad to-night. All his bulwarks seemed to have gone down in this last smash. Was a man not to have pity on his fellows, try to undo his earlier wrongs? Bury them, young Brevis had said. Bury your mistakes. By hell! that was what Brevis would do, and he would always get on. He had taken Jenny from Mab, just as he would take any and everything he had a mind to. And now that Mab had sunk a thousand pounds in debt, with no hope of repaying Gamaliel, he longed for Jenny's comforting arms; for Julia, who would never comfort him any more. And then, sullenly, came the old suggestion: there were always other women.

With a fierce gesture he clapped on his hat and went out, going fast through the dark streets to a place he once had known. It was perhaps the most notorious house along that water-front so frequented by sailors and men from the ends of the earth; and the long sanded room was full when he went into it. Full with smoke and the fumes of spirits and men sitting at the little tables, with girls upon their knees. To the girl who came with bold eyes and immature shoulders that stuck out of her tawdry gown he submitted himself indifferently. They found a table and two brandies were brought. "Or wine?" said Mab. "Would you sooner have port?"

"Not yet," she said, sipping her brandy, talking in little phrases. But he did not hear a word she said. Already he wished that he had not come; knew that these stale pleasures had no more hold on him.

Back in the steamy smoke a rough voice was singing the catch of a sea-chanty:

"So, fare ye well, my bonny young girl,
We're bound for the Rio Grande . . ."

The girl smiled at Mab half wistfully. Her lips were young and full. He felt stupidly that he was not doing his share in the entertaining, and pulled his chair nearer. Now he could see, at the next table but one, a face that he knew and yet surely did not know. It could not be Brevis sitting there, drunken and dishevelled, his arm round the neck of a giggling girl who was playing with his hair? It could not be Brevis hiccuping out fragments of some little Italian song and beating time with a dark, delicate hand in a puddle of wine on the table?

Mab pushed back his chair so abruptly that it fell over. He went down the room and caught Brevis by the arm. "What in hell are you doing here, Brevis?"

Brevis looked up. His eyes were reddened and wild. His face was red. It had a loosened look, as though the moral disintegration which brought him here had extended already to his features.

"Hello, dear love!" he croaked, and burst again into song:

" Good-night, dear love. Goo-night, dear love.
H-Heav'n's fairest angels wash o'er thee . . . "

"You're drunk," said Mab. He was too bewildered to know how to meet this. To drink anywhere was sufficiently unlike Brevis. To be drunk here and under these conditions was unbelievable. "Anything wrong?" he said helplessly.

"Why, yes, dear love." Brevis waggled his head. "The world's wrong. You're wrong. We're all wrong. God's wrong——"

"Stop it!" said Mab, sternly. He felt the battery of wolfish eyes on them now from all corners of the room. "Get up and come out of this at once." It did not seem to him that he could bear to see the man whom Jenny loved sit there another moment. "You're mad," he said.

"Exactly," said Brevis, with profound gravity. He looked it, this cool, self-contained, cynical Brevis so suddenly gone to pieces. "Rebuke me not, dear sir, for I am kinsman to Despair." He lifted the girl away from him as though she had been a scarf or a coat, Mab thought, and began confidentially: "Not being able to have Jenny and not 'tending any more Frasquita, wha'd you do? I s-say . . . wh' you do, eh?"

Mab was terrified. What was this about Jenny? Not dead? She couldn't be dead. To the proprietor, who came up a little hectoring, he said abruptly: "Get me a cab at once and help me put this gentleman into it. He's a friend of mine. At once! Do you hear!"

The man did not wait to protest. He fled before this black imperious giant who looked as if he could have wiped the floor with him; and in a very few minutes Brevis was bundled into a four-wheeler with his hat over his eyes and Mab had jumped in beside him, slamming the door. Only then did he trust himself to speak. "Now then; what is this about Jenny?"

"Be gentleman . . . please." Brevis leaned against him "Do' m'shun ladies . . . public place."

"My God, man!" cried Mab, in anguish. "Tell me. Is she dead?"

"No," said Brevis, suddenly high and clear. "And neither is Frasquita. I've g-got 'em both. Mormon." And he suddenly began to weep.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

I

SOMEHOW Mab got Brevis upstairs and into his bed, where he was snoring loudly before his head reached the pillow. Unable to look at those puffy lips and eyelids, at the general ugly abandonment of him, Mab went hurriedly into the sitting-room and put the fire together.

"I have got to think this out," he said, trying to speak firmly. "I have got to think this out. Jenny . . . of course she will have to be told."

He knew that constructive thought never came easily to him, and as he lit his pipe with shaking hands and let himself down into Brevis's old leather chair his head went round and round. Frasquita, Jenny. Frasquita . . . there seemed no doubt that Frasquita was alive. Brevis's incoherencies as he was being helped into bed had covered the ground adequately if sketchily. Frasquita, as Mab made it out, had gone to Pisa, and from there Brevis had heard of her death. Now, from Pisa, had come a friend's letter saying that she was alive and looking for Brevis. Pisa? What did Mab know of Pisa? Something grotesque. Not the Leaning Tower. Yes; a painting in the chapel of a big black devil eating men. Chewing 'em up.

Chewing them up and rending them as Brevis was being rent, as Jenny would have to be rent. "Not," said Mab, stoutly, "not Jenny. Not my dear maid." But she would be, all the same. He was so shattered that he could not yet hate Brevis, whose selfish carelessness had done this to Jenny. Why hadn't he made sure? Oh, God! why hadn't he?

Firelight touched the gay goatish figure of the faun in the corner, explaining that, explaining all men. Yes, all men took their pleasures as they came and went gambolling after others, seeing (fettered or free, but seeing all the same) white limbs flash in the dusky trees ahead, hearing echoing light laughter. They

all bowed down before outlandish images like that icon up on the shelf ; praying dumbly, sometimes humbly, but never getting any answers. They all sought to pierce the treasure of Mona Lisa's smile—that smile quickening into such scornful laughter where the red firelight ran on the wall. Banged themselves against the inscrutable, the implacable, they did, searching for impossible heavens. And from her, the mid-note, the unattainable, they turned themselves again to the faun or to the icon. Mab had done it, would keep on doing it. Every man did.

Shadowy in the warm shadows he saw the young Julia with her child eyes as he had kissed her in the hut so long ago. He sprang up and began to walk about nervously. Jenny, now. He must concentrate on Jenny. Thank God they were not married ! And yet . . . he didn't know. She would have had some fulfilment of that deep passionate love of hers, while now . . . " Oh, I don't know," he groaned. How could one, knowing too that daring, loving woman that was Jenny ?

Something must be done, of course. Brevis must find Frasquita and divorce her. But that cost money, and Brevis had precious little and Mab none. He thought of those feverish days of hunting in the caves just after Snow was killed. A whole regiment of 'em, with shovels and lanterns. Collins's caches of silver plate and jewels and mouldy finery had been found, but Snow had done his hiding better. Collins ? He was an old story, just as the love of Mab and Julia in the summer-house on that hot night was an old story. But the scar was on them both yet, warping any other love that might have come. Jenny was a dimpled child then who was now a woman to be broken on the wheel which had broken those youthful lovers. And so the world went round.

" Something must be done. I must think it out very carefully," said Mab, and sat down to light another pipe. But before the dying fire, his troubled brain wearily fumbling at a matter too big for him, too big for all of them, he fell asleep.

II

It was broad day when he woke, with sunlight pouring in and Brevis standing by the dead fire, looking down on him. Quite

the usual immaculate Brevis bathed and brushed and saying in his usual tones : " You'll stay for breakfast ? I have ordered ham and eggs."

Mab drew a long breath. So it was all a dream, then ? A nightmare. He rubbed his hands over his face and looked again, seeing the new lines on the young man's face, the puffed and reddened eyelids, the twitching hands. No. It was not a dream.

" Won't you go into the bedroom and have a wash ? " said Brevis. " Here is the girl to light the fire."

Mab went in silence. He was always a little nervous of Brevis, who knew so much. These young people with their educated certainties which he had never had. He splashed head and neck in the cold water and felt better. Damn the fellow ! He'd have to answer to Jenny's uncle about this. He went back to the smell of frizzled ham and the crackling fire and to Brevis pouring tea and drinking it in great gulps.

" Well, Brevis," he said, " this is a bad business. Suppose we try to get to the bottom of it."

" Aren't we there now ? "

So that was how he meant to take it ? Sneering. On the defensive already. " Tea ? " he said. " Milk and sugar ? "

" Neither, thanks." Mab drank standing, a strange sensation of defeat creeping over him. Whatever Brevis might do, he would not ask advice or help . . . or pity, be hanged to him. Mab could appreciate that. Pride. That poor human pride, bitted and martingaled into control, which must not be stripped off Brevis to leave him naked.

" I think you might give me particulars, Brevis. You know . . . particulars . . . "

" Oh, certainly." Brevis, flipping out his napkin, glanced at him once. His eyes were strange. Like those of some unknown bird or animal peering out of its lair, its home that one could never get into. " Certainly. It was a civil marriage and perfectly binding. She was Roman Catholic, and so there can be no question of divorce. She is, apparently, alive, but I have not the least intention of finding and claiming her. Anything else you wish to know ? "

“By Heaven!” cried Mab, goaded. “I should think there was! What do you mean to do about Jenny?”

“That is my affair, I think. And hers.” Then for a moment his control tottered. He gave a croaking laugh. “This comes of being a gentleman! I am grateful to my father for bringing me up a gentleman——”

“Come, old chap,” said Mab, instantly moved. He went round and put his hands on Brevis’s shoulders. They were so thin that it felt somehow like touching a quivering watchspring. “Come now.”

Brevis looked up. Mab had always admired but never very much liked him. He was too fully the young generation which despises everything, is sure of everything. Brevis was not sure now. His face was all piteous and young. There were tears on his lashes. He said, faltering (how unbelievable it was to hear the assured Brevis Keyes falter), “Need Jenny know?”

“Need she know? What d’you mean?”

“I’ll make inquiries. It may be all lies, and then she would only have been hurt for nothing.” His look was appealing. . . . Surely, surely, it said, you wouldn’t want Jenny to be hurt for nothing?

“Inquiries?” Mab stood back, staring at him. “Don’t you know that you couldn’t authenticate inquiries from this distance in less than a year? Possibly two. Possibly never. Is it your intention to make free with her kisses and . . . and her love until you have authenticated your inquiries?”

“You’re hard, Mr. Comyn,” said Brevis, cold again, and stretching a steady hand to pour more tea.

“Your father would say the same.”

“My father will not know.”

Mab drew a deep breath. He had lost his moment and he knew it. He would never get near Brevis now. He thought of this young dangerous Brevis and that courteous old gentleman browsing among his Russia-leather bindings in his old library. But they were the same blood. They must fight it out. He said, “I shall tell him.”

“Excellent notion,” said Brevis, buttering bread. “And do you know what he would do? Stop my allowance and tell Madam

Comyn. And do you know what she would do? Make it public property and marry off Jenny to save her face. She has always hated me, anyway. An excellent notion."

Mab groaned. For all his hot coppers last night, all the anguish of spirit which had led to them, Brevis's calculating clever brain had gone straight to the root of the matter. If there was one way to turn the knife in Jenny's wound it would be that way. "What can we do?" he cried despairingly.

Brevis said nothing. He pretended to eat his breakfast, but Mab noticed that he did not swallow a mouthful. Presently he glanced at the clock. It was the gesture of dismissal, but Mab would not take it. Instead he said weightily: "Jenny must know. And I shall tell her."

Brevis flushed now. "That is my business, I think, Mr. Comyn."

"No," said Mab, getting up and buttoning his coat. It was a relief to be certain of something. "I don't trust you." Or Jenny either, he thought. He felt that no one could be entirely trusted when that old tempest of desire and denial which has blown through human souls down all the ages struck those two together. Brevis seemed about to flame out in a fury; then he suddenly leaned back in his chair.

"It might be best," he said, very wearily, and Mab knew that he had the same doubt of himself . . . and perhaps of Jenny. "Thank you, Mr. Comyn. I will write to her," he said, not looking up.

"Good-bye," said Mab, brusquely, and went out into the autumn wind smelling of fresh brown leaves, to get a day off from Gamaliel and ride to Clent for the breaking of Jenny's heart.

Oliver was at Clent for a few days, and the house was always the livelier for his suave presence. If he noticed Golly plunging about with the toast and porridge and dribbling sauces (good table-maids were hard to get, with wages so very high) he made no more comment than he did on the empty stables, badly kept fences, thistles and gorse increasing in the paddocks, and all the other troubles which the Captain never saw and William saw at every turn. William complained of many things to his brothers, walking them both off to the pigsties directly Mab arrived.

(Jenny was teaching in the school-room and must not be disturbed, Susan had said. And Lottie was getting on splendidly, and the baby a perfect marvel, but Madam hadn't been over to see her yet.)

"Our mother doesn't accept the status of great-grandmother with rapture," said Oliver, switching at a thistle with his cane. "You are responsible for a good deal, you know, Bill."

"I wish our father would allow me to be responsible for more," snapped William, who had been very bitter on the subject of Berkshires crossed with something. "You know how essential purity in breed is, but he would cross with a more prolific strain to get heavier litters. Look here," he said, dragging at his sandy whiskers above a pen of squeaking runts. "Even this lamentable result don't convince him."

"I should call it more pigculiar than lamentable," said Oliver, lightly, and Mab felt a sudden angry disgust at this elegant brother delicately jesting his way through life and never tumbling into any of the bogs of passion which other poor mortals lost their way in. Noll went on: "Pity he don't confine his energies to this sort of thing, though I grant you it's scandalous enough. But he's making a shocking to-do about this new suggestion of income tax. Old Louisa Sorley did not dare let old James see his letter in the *Tribune*."

But here, most surprisingly, William agreed with the Captain. "I consider it iniquitous that those who have developed the country from virgin bush to its present prosperous state should be mulcted of their rewards."

"Prosperous?" said Mab looking at the old wagon-sheds which needed a fire-stick to 'em, by George. "I thought you just told us Clent hadn't a cent left to throw at a beggar."

"How can we have?" cried William, his pinched parrot mouth twitching. "Transport is prohibitive, and by the time we've hauled our grain and wool to the wharf-side, there is no profit left. If they would only give us railways; or if my father would only allow us to retrench . . ."

Mab shrugged. Poor Bill, who had retrenchment on the brain and was never able to get it anywhere else. Of course, Mab said, those who had first colonized with a free hand and a be-damned-

to-expenditure attitude were bound to go under when it came to the pull devil, pull baker of civilized commercialism. Up and down the country the gay gentlemen adventurers were having their legs pulled from under them by the little folk grubbing about in the soil and finding these straddling colossi in the way. Down they must come, were already coming, with bumps and noisy protests. But those would not save them. "One wonders," he said, rubbing the velvet nose of Vanity's daughter over the gate, "if all this is the natural evolution of a race or a case of devil take the hindmost."

"And here's Richard wanting to go into a town office. An *office*," complained William, who had made no more plans for Richard's future than the Captain had made for his own sons. "I cannot imagine why."

"Can't you?" said Oliver, dryly. "Perhaps Humphrey could tell you. Well, good luck to young Dick the dandy. I may be able to put something in his way." If he did, would young Dick be grateful? he wondered. It would be very acceptable, a little gratitude in concrete form.

From the gate Mab saw Jenny on the worn path winding through the yellowing paddocks to Bredon. Perhaps she was going to see Charlotte, in her little black-velvet coat and cap with its jaunty orange plume. But because the black spaniel given by Brevis was with her, flapping his long ears as he raced through the tall timothy, it seemed more likely that she purposed a rat-hunt for him in the old huts.

But when he overtook her he found that she had been waiting for him. "Something special brought you down from town," she said. "I knew it the moment I saw you. Come in here." She spoke imperiously; turned imperiously on him in the dark little place. "It's Brevis," she said. "What has happened?"

"He . . . he's quite well. Not dead or anything, dear." She put that aside with a gesture. She knew that. Apparently she thought the heavens would have fallen to tell her that. "What is it?" she said. "Tell me quickly."

"He . . . Jenny darling, you must be brave. He has heard that Frasquita is still alive, my dear."

He could not look at her, and for a minute she stood silent, as

though she were weighing this, taking it in. Then she laughed contemptuously. "Is that all? Nonsense! I don't believe it."

This was easier. But he had to make her believe it. He went over the details as clearly as he could, with Gyp snuffing round their feet, snuffing round the old 'possum nests in dark corners, and Jenny standing very still with her big bright eyes upon him. But at the end she said again, quite firmly, "I don't believe it."

"Dear maid——"

"Uncle Mab, you don't understand. You can't. If she had been alive I would have known it. I would have known it *here*." She held her two hands close over her breast. "If that woman was still between us I would have known. Any woman would."

"You—you didn't even know of her existence when you first loved him, did you, dear?"

"Then? Oh," she said, and her faint laugh had a falling cadence that touched his heart. "What was my love *then*? I hadn't begun to know the meaning of the word then."

"Brevis is afraid——"

"Poor Brevis. I will go to him at once and tell him. It is only a rumour, Uncle Mab. I will make him understand it isn't true." She smiled at him, but he saw that her lips trembled. "Oh, why didn't he come to me himself?" she said piteously.

"He . . ." Mab felt ashamed. They might have trusted Jenny. But he had in his mind Julia and her wild scenes, and Brevis would have had Frasquita. "He wanted to, but I . . . I thought it might be easier . . . You see, he believes it, Jenny dear."

"What does that mean?" she cried, alarmed at last. "Is he . . . is he going to look for her?"

"No. But he will have inquiries made. You see, he thinks of her as his wife, Jenny dear."

She shut her lips on a sharp cry. She shut her eyes as though meeting a sharp pain. Then she slipped her cold little hand in his. "To-morrow you will take me to Launceston to see him."

"No, dear. I can't do that."

"Then I will go alone. I am going. Now we had better turn back. . . . Come, Gyp."

He followed her out helplessly. Without doubt Jenny was Madam's granddaughter, and without doubt he had made another

mess of things. Far, far better have let them meet here, with all her well-known inhibitions to restrain her. But Jenny in this mood in Brevis's rooms . . . She mustn't go there, whatever happens, he thought, and knew that she would go there.

Autumn was in the air, and in shady places the log fences were white with rime yet. In the next paddock sheep were munching turnips. Mab heard the click of their little dry hoofs on the hard ground, the sharp grate of their coughing. But still with graceless love abandonment the magpies went calling.

It was pretty sentimental Fanny without any memories who asked Jenny that evening to sing her favourite song. And Jenny sat down to the piano at once, while Mab, by Madam's chair at the far end of the salon, told her that he was taking Jenny to Launceston in the morning. "I want her to see my rooms," he said, and Madam made three stitches on her embroidery frame before replying: "I will not bear this forever, Mabelle, and so you may tell Brevis. When Jenny returns I shall know what has happened, and I shall know what to do."

Would she? Almost Mab believed it. Then she knew about Brevis as she knew about himself and Julia. A wonderful woman, his mother: piercing into the privacies of the soul with those keen bright eyes; fighting so long as there were battles to be won, accepting the inevitable but never resigned. He sat back in his chair with a sigh, listening to Jenny singing.

"Oft in the stilly night,
Ere slumber's chain has bound me,
Fond memory brings the light
Of other days around me,"

sang Jenny in her rich mournful voice, and Mab thought on his memories of other days and wondered what his dear maid's were to be.

Brevis's letter came by the mail-coach that night, and Jenny carried it to her room unopened. She locked the door before she read it, then flung it on the floor and ran to the window, leaning far out into the night. It had taken Brevis three hours to write that letter, and Jenny trampled it under her feet as her mind trampled his words. "Wait, he says. I shall find out in time, he says. We must endure suffering as the saints did, he says. Pah!

Brevis and his saints ! I hate them, weak fools, and so does Brevis, but he does not know what to say. Let us see each other, and our hearts and bodies will know what to say. I shall go to him. I shall go to-morrow."

She flung herself on her knees, her forehead to the edge of the sill. "What is this that has so taken me that wherever I look I see only Brevis ? If I were knelt down at God's feet I would see only Brevis. How can I pray to God when he makes Brevis suffer like this ? But I will put it right. I will go to him to-morrow."

On a strange high note of defying the universe she went to bed without prayers, in spite of Miss Bean, who had a ghostly habit of recurring in half-sleep like some dim tocsin sounding repentance.

III

So the next afternoon Mab took Jenny (cloaked and veiled like a little nun) up the stair and into the room where Mona Lisa and Brevis awaited her. Then he went out and walked in the road, cursing himself for a fool and worse. . . . But what could I do ? he thought helplessly, and wondered if he should have consulted Oliver.

Brevis did not know how he felt toward Jenny coming quietly in, giving him her dark cloak and veil to lay aside, and sitting like a little green-and-white wavelet in his big chair. He had been annoyed and rather afraid. This was not the right thing or the wise thing for Jenny to do and Mab Comyn should have stopped her. But when she sat there with her soft clear face so serious, her red lips so faintly smiling, her slim, desirable little body so curiously tense with purpose and dignity, he realized that no one could have stopped her. She was being driven by the whole force that was in her, and this, he suspected, was greater than either he or Mab Comyn possessed.

"I came to tell you that I do not believe it, Brevis," she said gently. "People would think me unwomanly if they knew, but I do not care. It is not possible that anything could break our lives like this. It is not true."

He went on his knee by the chair, holding her little rigid hands. "Dear love; I'm afraid it is."

"No. Because I would know it. All my blood, every single bit of my body . . . I haven't the words, Brevis, and perhaps only a woman could have the feeling: but if that woman was alive between us I would *know*. I came to say that I will marry you when you like. To-day . . . now. I am ready, Brevis, and no one need know anything of it until you choose."

"That's like you. The most reckless, generous . . . oh, my darling!" He had her in his arms, kissing her lips, her throat, the blue veins on her temples where the riotous hair was drawn severely back. "Why did you come?" he said brokenly.

"I told you." She was glowing with his kissing now, laughing up at him. "I never did anything by halves, did I? And so when I tell you I belong to you, I mean it. You can take me whenever you like."

"Jenny . . . Jenny . . ." How superb she was in her utter ignorant surrender! This was what Mab Comyn had dreaded, Brevis knew. Mab who knew (if any one did) how weak as water a man may be. "Jenny, I cannot marry you while I think that my wife is alive."

"I am willing to take the risk of that. I know that she isn't."

He held her close, silently. Her breath was like violets always, and there was some fresh fragrance in her hair—rosemary. Good earth she was, this Jenny Comyn, with clean strong things growing in it. And he could take her when he chose. Have his private meat and drink while the world outside praised and aided his austere climbing life. It was not good to tempt a man like that. "You don't know what you are doing, dear love—coming to me like this."

"Yes, I know," she said softly, her lips on his shut eyes. "Some day we must be dust, but let us have our years together first."

Again he was silent. He knew that he could not go through any marriage ceremony with her. His legal mind and some secret cowardice in him refused it. To live in daily fear of attainment for bigamy . . . No. It would break his nerve, his powers. He would never get anywhere. But to take Jenny's love and all her loveliness, her gaiety . . . He could not think clearly here. He knew

that this hot storming desire for her which was mounting so rapidly had left his crude passion for Frasquita far behind. He knew that he had her in his arms and love was pounding in him like a sea . . .

Mab knocked on the door, and Brevis drew a long breath as though dragging himself back from some golden yet dangerous shore. "I will come to Clent," he said to Jenny, and got up and let Mab in.

IV

But Brevis was too busy to go at once to Clent. Never could there have been a better time for a clever and ambitious young lawyer than now, with the income tax, the carriage tax, the road tax and all being stoutly resisted by these stiff-necked old military pioneers who had been in the country before taxes. Captain Comyn refused to have the carriage tax collected in Trienna, and so many J.P.'s were with him there that the Government could enforce it only where the police came directly under their hand. But men went to prison over the income tax, and deputed Keyes Shone to get them out, and the Captain wrote such violent letters about everything that one editor was arrested for printing them.

In this atmosphere of battle and clang, with the Old Guard flaunting their banner of independence in the face of the world, Brevis felt his powers growing luxuriantly. He found loopholes for prosecution or escape where elder men had missed them. He gave advice to red-faced white-whiskered old colonels and majors, and sometimes they took it. "You're very young, sir, but presumably you know what all this damned mess is about. I don't." His firm was snowed under with demands from settlers when the Torrens Act (already adopted in the other colonies) tried its best to simplify titles and the transfer of real estate.

"But in a country where there was no registration of births until the second generation began to think about it for their own progeny, I suppose we can't expect the registration of lands to be anything but the maddest confusion," said young Frank Shone disconsolately, after he and Brevis had spent three fruitless days going through masses of yellowed papers in crabbed writings

concerning *Chesterfield vs. The Crown*. "These old fellows . . . all Grand Moguls, confound them . . . apparently they just took what they wanted and held on."

"We're all liable to do that," said Brevis, with Jenny always in the back of his mind. But only in the back of it just now; for with so much Crown Land coming on the market settlers were speculating wildly in all directions, and then finding their own land involved in the Crown claims and with no titles to prove against it. Dragon's teeth of discord they had sown, surely enough, these stout children of the dragon's blood who had never considered future generations. But Brevis and his like were there to pull those teeth.

William at this time was very much depressed. On Latterdale, Humphrey was always wanting improvements that couldn't be made. At Clent, the Captain was always making improvements that shouldn't be made, and some hill country on which Clent had always run cattle was now claimed by the Crown. The Captain swore that he had the titles; daily frothed papers out of his old tin boxes and frothed them in again. Meanwhile the cattle had gone to Latterdale and Humphrey complained of overstocking. "What shall we do if there is a hard winter?" he said.

William did not know that they should do if there was a hard winter. He sat cracking his nuts and staring gloomily across the table at young Brevis Keyes, who had come down at the Captain's request to "put this damned matter right. They can't take away land that I pre-empted near forty years back, can they, Brevis?" Brevis (the caution of these smooth young men!) wouldn't say until he had seen the papers, which of course he never would. William was certain they had never existed. Clent had no luck. Bredon, where Mark had turned out as good a farmer as Henry, was not losing any land. Those Sorleys had management and manure in the brain, although the Captain insisted that it was old James pulling wires. Old James who, according to the Queen's last decree, would retain the title of "Honourable" for life, in common with other cabinet ministers who had served three years. No such honours came to Clent, thought William, while the Captain declared loudly that he didn't care if the Sorleys were buying up Herefords everywhere.

He had brought Jerseys out with him, and nothing but Jersey cattle should ever run on his land. "Who wants beef," he cried, "while we can have merino mutton?"

"Herefords fetch higher prices," said Humphrey. Brevis watching him thought that the resiliency had gone out of Humphrey's voice and his stocky figure. Humphrey would never run off with Maria now; would never do anything but grub along fourteen hours a day on Latterdale. Jenny was the true adventurer of this family. He had had time for only a look, a word with her since he came, but at the far end of the crowded table—Clent table was always crowded—she sat as gay and buoyant as a wood-elf in her white muslin frock slipping off her shining shoulders and her leafy garland of green.

Madam had put Jenny next old Sir Stuart Somebody who was hunting his third wife, and Madam was looking all the daggers of her bright eyes at Brevis, whose pulses were hammering too hard for his comfort. In Launceston, steeped to the ears in litigation, it had been comparatively easy to keep things in their proper place, and he had not come to Clent until he had persuaded himself that they would stay there. He knew, of course, that Jenny's idea was madness; but some women have a way of making madness seem the only sanity, when they set their minds to it, and watching Jenny he found himself again revolving possibilities. Yet there were none. Short of stealing, there were none; and though Jenny in her deep trust and innocence—how damnably innocent women of her class were kept by the system of the day!—might allow herself to be stolen, he would not do it.

"Never, so God help me," he thought, sipping his port and listening to the Captain, who was asserting that 1867 would go down to history in a blaze of fame because the first reputed salmon had just been seen in the Derwent. He could not have been prouder, thought Brevis, if he had spawned the salmon, himself.

Then some one was asking Brevis about the new Immigration Act which offered Land Orders up to eighteen pounds a head for an adult and nine pounds for each child. Land, it was well known, had been set apart for them, after the happy practice of governments, in places where they could not reach it without roads or railways.

“We don’t want immigrants,” said the Captain. “Except the swallows, bless their little hearts. Let us grow our own flesh and blood.”

Brevis found himself arguing that ; explaining that immigration would stimulate roads and railways ; explaining how in the North plans for railways were very active and entirely on paper.

“Immigration will put them where they belong—on the earth. And railways will bring more enterprise.” He heard his voice rising, going on as people turned to listen. “Expansion, consolidation instead of speculation, money flowing in from Australia, new development of interest in England . . .” He was going to the Bar as soon as he could get there, and already he found that he could sway people. He had personality and he was cultivating a smooth flow of words. Dialectic was not so necessary now, but the old chaps liked it, and there was always an intoxication in a listening silence. He was carried away now ; earnest ; convincing ; and the knowledge that Jenny was for the first time hearing him speak with authority among his elders gave him the fire he sometimes missed, put an added polish to his periods. When he stopped at last, with a few words of apology to the ladies, old Sir Stuart clapped his hands.

“Young sir, that’s the first time I’ve heard the Government’s policy explained so I could understand it . . . and respect it. Allow me to congratulate you. I see in you one of our coming men.”

Pompous old ass ! Yet it was a small triumph in its way, and Jenny, squeezing his hand as she passed out with the ladies, made it a larger one. But when he caught her later in the wide hall where old Josephus lay still on the little table under the portrait of the child Robert Snow had painted, and drew her into the dark corner behind the grandfather’s clock to kiss her, all his heady pride and satisfaction fled. He so loved her and longed for her that the very touch of her soft cool flesh made him physically weak, but he did not mean to be stampeded by his senses. Suicide for them both, that would be.

Yet passion was stronger than it had been before he touched her. His voice was unsteady as he murmured words . . . more words.

"By and by, beloved. When we hear from Italy. I've set detectives to work. Perhaps in a year . . . two years . . ."

"Supposing you never hear?"

The whiteness of her face had an unearthly beauty in the dimness, and the touch of her light hands about his neck filled him with fire.

"God knows," he said, with sudden fierceness. "Jenny, Jenny, you mustn't tempt me. I can't marry you, and I won't . . ." He could not pursue that before her listening face with its soft parted lips. He shut them with his own. "When I start for myself, perhaps; when I'm established," he whispered, drunken again with her nearness, not knowing what he was meaning; "perhaps in a few years . . ."

"Oh, years, years," she said dully. Then: "I know my own mind, Brevis, and I will not change. We Comyns don't. What you want of me you can have, and I'll wait for the rest, if that is what you prefer."

"Prefer! That's cruel of you."

"Is it? Perhaps you're a little cruel too." Then she suddenly laughed. "How nice! We're squabbling as if we were really married. My dear, my dear, I wouldn't be cruel to you, and so long as we can have this sometimes and our letters we can get along. . . . I must go."

She disappeared, and he walked out to the veranda and round by the dreaming garden to her window. He had not said what he meant to say. He had not told her that he must no longer take her kisses and all the sweet trust and passion that she gave him. He looked up at the window with its broad stone sill. Swallows were chirring in their nests under the eaves. Little round heads peered out with a flash of white throats. A tall apple tree, its strong branches bare, reached almost to the eaves. He thought, "I could easily climb that . . ."—then shook his head and went indoors again.

V

Brevis slept that night without dreaming. And yet the old house with its throbbing life was full of dreams. In the big

nursery bed Mary dreamed thirstily of algebra, maps, and history, while the loosed spirit in Phœbe smelt dust, sheep, and tar as a Peri smells Paradise. Clutching Mary, she rejoicingly thought she was drafting hoggets through a gate. Susan, stickily hot by William behind the heavy moreen curtains, made little troubled murmurs about Richard, now brewery clerk for Jones, Jacobs & Jones. She saw him dancing at Government House with Lavinia Jones, who kept dropping her aitches and picking up gold. They both sat down on the floor to play with gold . . .

Next Madam's room slept Celeste, an obese brown mountain dreaming of Paris. Splendidly she was returning with such valuables of Madam's as she had been able to annex. Between her and Madam there was an affection . . . it would much pleasure her to wear the crystal earrings of Madame. She turned, bumping the wall, and in the next room the Captain choked and muttered: "Damme! that was a near shave! Give her her head at the gorse, Mab. She's not so young as she was."

Madam slept smiling, with cheek upon her hand. She was back in her youth, where she had been with dear Louisa Sorley all the afternoon. Louisa had said, "Let us talk of when we were young, Genevieve," and just now this old Madam was young. She stood in a hut door watching two who walked by a log fence with raised voices. Then James Sorley saw her and swept off his tall hat with a bow and a look. . . . Eh-h-h . . .

L'premier prit sa main blanche,
L's 'cond lui prit le menton.
Ce qui prit le troisième . . .
N'est pas dans la chanson . . .

Here was her *bonhomme* forbidding her to sing any more of that, and Sir John Franklin in his blue coat and tight white breeches clapping her, and those natives they had put into livery and white cotton gloves staring with round black eyes. And away went she and Sir John, leading *Sir Roger* down this despicable floor of Government House through a maze of shining shoulders and floating ringlets and rosy skirts and streamers of white and of silver-blue. Ah, Marion Boyd, you were lovely in silver-blue . . .

“ Drink to me only with thine eyes,
 And I will pledge with mine.
 Or leave a kiss but in the cup
 And I'll not look for wine.”

Noll was singing that. Dear Heaven, what a voice he had! No, Brevis was singing it to Jenny. (Here Madam began to sigh and toss. Even in her dreams Jenny troubled her.) What will you, *ma mie*? Why do you never trust me? Carry the torch . . . but it has never been lit. Are you waiting for him to light it? Eh, these dark shadows between, *petit oiseau*! These dark shadows . . . Madam felt for comfort with panic hands, found the fat shoulder of her *vieux*, and cuddled contented against it.

Fanny to-night could not sleep. Pretty as a doll in blue dressing-gown and white nightcap tied under a dimpled chin she had come, all full of pink-and-white blushes, to kneel beside Jenny's bed. Fanny, Charlotte said, was more than a trifle silly, always posing before mirrors, singing sentimental songs. But she was very earnest to-night, pretty pink Fanny.

“ He says he has loved me for years, Jenny. Isn't it wonderful? He's to speak to Papa as soon as I've come out at the Duke's Ball, and danced with other gentlemen and found that I don't like any of them. Isn't it wonderful? ”

Jenny thought it indeed wonderful. Sigurd with his fierce ideals, his thirty years, his Bohemianism, tumbling down before little pink Fanny. But that was how the world went: pouring out life; snatching one and another—any one and another, it seemed—to fulfil by them the endless relentless will. Pouring them all out, and mopping them all up again in the end.

“ Darling Jenny,” said Fanny, going away at last. “ I know I shall be deliriously happy.”

Of course she would be. Nothing against fair-haired Sigurd whose fair life you could put your finger on anywhere. Not like dark Brevis, burning away in his darkness.

Jenny turned in her bed, gripping the pillow with her arms, This life, this pageant, this masquerade . . . You ask me if I am going to the masquerade. I am at it.

VI

“All Brandy” was dead and buried with pomp, and Lady Berry looked very elegant in mourning. Some one told Mab so in a Launceston street, and that afternoon he went down on the brown marshes and shot duck until the blue twilight crept up, very cold and chill. Now it was his simple duty to offer marriage to Julia, and it surprised him to find how complex his feelings were. He had not been able to love another woman although he had tried, knowing himself naturally gregarious. Yet he could not look back with anything but pain and a kind of disgust on the last years of his connection with her. Perhaps now she would be changed, softened. . . .

Hoping it, he went down to Hobart Town six months later. But at the very beginning of his clumsy protestations she looked at him with the resentment of one forced to witness the conjuring up of ghosts better forgotten. “Far better forgotten,” she said, sitting very upright (she knew that she became podgy when she stooped) in her billowing skirt of crêpe, her crisp cap and bands.

Mab, taken aback, found himself still much more complex than he liked. Against a quite definite sensation of relief was a sudden agonized feeling of uprooting, of loneliness. Consciousness of her had so grown along with him for more than twenty years that the sudden notion of plucking her out staggered him. All that she had once been flooded back on him. She, the one light on his dark and stony road. She, the great desire which had glorified his manhood before she wrecked it. She, the tragedy he had so often waked to think of in the nights, guessing at her scar by the burning of his own.

Now, by Heaven, she was showing another side, and so he told her, flinging himself about among her bronzes and marbles, her cupboards with latticed fronts screening curios (she had an undirected passion for curios). The years that the locust had eaten, he said—and she the locust. The flax burned in the fire—and she the fire. The love that he had given, the love. Unexpectedly he felt that love rising in him again, like the last leap

of the lamp before it goes out. He found himself pleading with her, holding her hands.

"We're no longer young, Julia. We've both been through the mill, and perhaps we've learned something. But ever since we were boy and girl . . . It's so impossible to forget."

"One can do anything," she said primly, "by the help of prayer."

And then he laughed. And laughed. Dear Heaven, how he laughed! He could hear his voice going up and roaring on, a great strong human blast of laughter against all the shams, all the paltriness of the world. And she sat in her straight-backed chair, surprised, indignant, and knowing no more what it was all about than a canary. "Than a cana . . . cana . . ." He tried to say it and couldn't, and wiped the tears of laughter from his eyes to look at Julia sitting there, the outward and visible form of sanctity, of the sanctity of her calling as the widow and mother of baronets. He stopped at last with spasms still shaking his great body and looked at her good-humouredly. Funny fat Julia with her bronzes and her hands and her not understanding any more than a canary.

"I think," said Julia, with trembling voice, "that you have always been mad. You had better go."

He went. Oh, so gladly he went, gulping breaths of pure air (there had been a hint of incense somewhere; burning joss-sticks to All Brandy's portrait, no doubt), marching with swinging shoulders up the street. There went the last of it, then: of his youth, his man's love, his wild and beautiful dreams which were to bear them both to the stars. My Lady Berry had had the best of him, picking, pecking him over like a canary. The word brought up another heave of mirth, and he turned into a hotel for a drink, which, he suddenly discovered, he very much needed.

Oliver was there, called to town on some matter of Julia's business (he was Berry's executor, with fat pickings, Mab guessed) and lazily at liberty to hear news. Mab had very little from Clent. William had the rheumatism and the Captain gout. They suffered much from bad attacks of each other, and Madam was less concerned to come between them than of old, being so occupied with old Louisa Sorley, who would scarcely see the New

Year in. William, said Mab, hirpling out while Jenny wrapped the Captain's feet in flannel, made alterations which the Captain, bellowing with rage, upset next time poor old Bill was laid by the heels. Susan, treading like a grenadier and timid as a mouse with the Captain, was a public danger in the sick-room, and Mary had all but brought on apoplexy by correcting the Captain's count at spadille.

Oliver said thoughtfully, "How long d'you think Jenny will stand it?" But Mab was not to be caught. What ever did Noll mean? Noll meant, it appeared, that old Sir Stuart was attracted; that Madam was encouraging him; that Jenny, who really should begin to show some sense, remained blind. Jenny, of course, had more of Madam's quality than any of them. You couldn't bounce *la petite*, but . . . well, what the devil has Brevis been doing? Mab couldn't say. (His poor dear maid! Was her sorrow not to be sacred either?) And Noll's dark-lashed blue eyes, Noll's smooth smile (dash it, the fellow never seemed to get any older) now seemed to say: All right, my buck. You know, but naturally one must lie for the ladies.

So they left it there, for Mab had to take the coach which ran through a windy night to Launceston, delivering him cramped, cross, and sleepy, in time for a hasty breakfast before hurrying down to the tannery. Through the wakeful night there had been a queer sense of freedom, of desolation, a kind of chastened comfort like that of a small dirty boy who had been scrubbed and put in a warm bed against his will. There had been queer tumult which had ended for all time (he'd swear it) in *Down Julia, up Jenny*. He'd make his name yet, by gad! Make a fortune. Send Brevis to find that tomfool somebody and choke the lies out of him. Rescue Jenny from Madam, delivering himself not as victim but as reinstated god. He could do it. His lungs full of sweet morning air, his heart of conquest, he knew that he could do it, clattering into the office where good old Gamaliel sat in shirt-sleeves and broad hat. And how was old Gamaliel, eh? (tipping the hat over his eyes, smacking his soft shoulders). What mischief had he been up to with Mab away?

"Good morning, Mab. I hope you are quite well," said Gamaliel. Punctilious as Mark Antony, he paused for a reply.

Any sort suited old Gamaliel, who now pushed a paper across the desk for approval.

If Gamaliel knew business, Mab knew men. One learns 'em, going along. "Now this : Clarke's all right. You can take his note-of-hand for this. . . . Pshaw ! Fiske ! Now look here, Gammy, don't you trust Fiske further than you can kick him. What's his contract for ? If he agrees for five load of bark you have some one there to watch when it comes in or the bottoms of the wagons will be full of sticks. . . . I see Hewett's contracted for black wattle only, but he has a whole gully of scrub wattle that he wants to get rid of. Think I'll ride out that way while they're stripping."

He felt lighter of heart, surer of himself than he had for years. And if he couldn't get back that lost thousand he could save money now for good Gamaliel, who never would learn to mistrust his fellow-men. Always compensations if one knew where to look for them. Always compensations in this bewildered kindly old world.

Even Brevis became a compensation as time went on. Because Mab was his only outlet, his safeguard, Brevis was grateful, and life was not easy for him. Brevis, for all his aping of the cool, caustic superior, was a Jack-in-the-box of the emotions, winning his cases in the cold, quiet light of logic or in sudden impassioned flames that made every one giddy, and then—confound him—having hysteria or sick headaches afterward in his room. Made of subtler stuff than Jenny, who, all the same, distilled a far more undying quality of courage and fineness, Brevis, Mab thought, was something to pity, to be enraged with, almost to love in these days. He spent every penny he could spare on fruitless searches in Italy ; he kept away from Clent when Mab could see the very soul of the poor devil torn with longing to go ; he fastened like a tiger on his work, slowly climbing to that place where he had sworn he would be. Alternately in the mud and the skies, Brevis battled along in his private life with the world outside calling him cold.

VII

Now from a penal settlement Tasmania suddenly reached the glory of a society hostess giving her Queen's son to eat and drink and—if he had time, which seemed improbable—to sleep. The colony for the first time saw royalty, although only in the shape of the Duke of Edinburgh, and waved flags and made triumphal arches for him, while shopkeepers were pasting transparencies of all the royal family in their windows and lighting them behind with kerosene lamps.

Tasmania was delirious with loyalty and royalty. At last the hated stigma of *convict* was erased, although it seemed likely that England would not discover this for another half-century. At last her glassy slippers were put on and she danced with the Prince. To secure a bit of bread bitten by royal teeth (as Lydia Paige did) was triumph. To have one's toes trodden on by royalty (as happened to many) was a swooning ecstasy. A lad who loved Fanny at the moment secured for her a small silken flag stamped in pink with the royal arms, and this was to honour the birthday cakes of all Fanny's children and grandchildren, and do duty for several generations more. Children asked in awe, "Did God send the prince straight down from heaven, Mamma?" and men who had worn the broad arrow forebore to curse him. Were they not now citizens of a free country? For a little, Tasmanians strutted, conscious of the limelight of the world. Then it faded as such lights fade; the theatre fell empty, and in Downing Street ministers said: "I hope the Duke comes home safe from the Cannibal Islands. It really was rather a risky thing . . ."

Providence, if responsible for the safe carriage of the duke aboard *H.M.S. Galatea*, apparently concerned itself no further, for the weather was persistently bad. Wrapped in a cloak, Jenny saw the bonfires on Mount Wellington like bleared eyes through the mist. Under dripping umbrellas she and Charlotte watched a dauntless torch-light procession of boats struggle up the harbour to the foot of Government House. Through the rain she watched the Captain and Councillor Sorley go off to the levee, and through intermittent showers waved her kerchief while the foundation-stone of St. David's new cathedral was being laid. Very damp

and bored at the regatta, Julia Berry shook the drops from her veil. "It really might be England," she said. "The dear prince must feel himself quite at home."

Fat, fair, and almost forty, Julia was very beautifully resigned over her trouble and went daily to church in a long crêpe veil carrying a black-velvet prayer-book embossed with an ivory cross. Jenny (coming across it years later) found a tiny mirror and powder-puff in the money-pocket; but there was, she felt, no reason to doubt that Julia got as much good from the sermon as most people and prayed very earnestly for the new Sir Almeric still at Oxford. "I warn Almeric continually of life's dangers," she said. "Warnings intended to be preventive are usually incentive, of course, but our weak human nature will give them, all the same."

She was full of cheap philosophy, read a little wider than her fellows, and advanced the theory that all gentlemen were naturally evil and could be reformed only by ladies' prayers. "And so I feel it my duty to go regularly to church," she told Jenny one fine Sunday when Jenny longed to be out by the sea; only, on Sundays, no lady could possibly leave the house except for church. "I pray on Wednesdays for your Uncle Mab, and on Fridays for the Captain and your poor father."

Jenny found Julia—very comfortable in a white merino negligée with her stays off—quite refreshing. She said demurely: "Grandpapa's gout was terrible last Friday. You could hear it right out in the kitchens."

"One cannot expect answers immediately," said Julia, as though prayers went through the post and took time. "Your poor Uncle Mab! I wonder if I would be violating confidence if I said that he was still in love with me, Jenny."

Being assured that she would not (since Jenny didn't believe her), she proceeded to violate other confidences, bolstering them up with airy references to Darwin, Hegel, and physical urges. . . . Julia's Biblical reading has evidently extended freely to the Old Testament, thought Jenny. . . . What a Dean Swift she would be if she had the genius. . . . She was repelled, and yet pitying. All Julia's experiences—and she appeared to have had many—had not taken her to those heights and depths which Jenny

and Brevis reached in their talks, their long letters. There had been one especial afternoon last summer when they stayed on a sunny hill for hours, his black head in her lap, and talked of such wonderful things.

“You really must marry, Jenny, if it is not already too late,” said Julia. “The female sex is only half alive, let alone half educated, before marriage. You can know nothing, my dear, not having lived with a man as I have done.”

Suddenly Jenny was tired of this and her mischievous spirit asserted itself. “How do you know I haven’t?” she retorted, and went to the window, hoping to silence Julia.

She had. Half raised on the sofa, Julia stared at her with mouth open. Then dropped back, nodding to herself several times. So that was it! She had always mistrusted suave Brevis. Well! Jenny *was* a fool! But she had sinned through ignorance. Julia would insist to every one that it was through ignorance and pray for her on Fridays—no, that day was full up. Mondays, perhaps.

A maid came with a message for Julia, and Jenny, unconscious of what she had done, went to her room to put funny shocking old Julia into a letter for Brevis.

In the North, Brevis watched the duke turn the first sod of Tasmania’s first railway, heard him say the things dukes do say about progress and the Anglo-Saxon race, and saw him sail away where dukes do sail to. Brevis had lately decided to sail, too—at least as far as the mainland. In Melbourne, matters were going furiously ahead, and to take silk there would give him better status. Tasmania, he believe, could never be more than a hanger-on at the skirts of this enormous undeveloped wealthy continent just rising from its sleep of oblivion and beginning to rub its eyes, tuck its sleeves up. A little old impoverished parent it was already, with its national debt well over a million pounds to a population of one hundred thousand, and Lady Berry and other philanthropic ladies helping the governor’s wife with Ragged Schools, Benevolent Societies, and what not. A good place to get out for some years, at any rate, although he would keep in touch with it. Most valuable it was to keep in touch with every one who might have influence.

Of Jenny he thought with a pain that was almost physical.

This would be cruel to her. All that he had ever done to her had been cruel ; but now it was only right that they should separate finally. Probably he would never be able to marry, and in a year or so Jenny would have lost her last chance. An unmarried woman is completely on the shelf at thirty, he thought, and wrote to Jenny, asking if he might come to see her.

Because he was seldom so formal, Jenny went to meet him down the orchard where the English trees were veiling themselves again after the winter. Because she knew that if Brevis were to come to tell her that Frasquita was really alive she would probably become mentally unveiled, herself, she hoped for great support from them. There was green gloaming under the cherry boughs with their delicate canopies of blossom stretching down the slope to the dark pines. The air was sharp with pine scent and odours from the herb garden, and here came Brevis riding up the drive beyond the low stone wall.

Jenny, holding to the broken wall, tried to hold on to herself. Every one had taught her that it was better not to meet the unpleasant facts of life. If pushed up to them, shut your eyes, swear that they are not there. All round her she saw women and men doing it, but Brevis had taught her otherwise. How can you get anything straight if you don't know both sides of it ? he said. And that was the only way with life. Meet it. . . . Now Brevis was over the wall, holding her close, with Gyp going mad about them both among the little daffodils, and she didn't believe it. With eyes shut against his cheek, her heart prayed : " Don't hurt me too much. I have borne such a lot. You don't know . . . "

But it was not Frasquita, and so the world broke into a dazzling glow, and in the pines an English thrush was singing.

Brevis had a long explanation to make, and then he spoke of liberty. " I have been unjust to you so long, Jenny. Now you must be free to marry where you choose. "

Under the green boughs Brevis's face looked greenish. Flat like a dead face. Something was dead, Jenny felt. She began to laugh. " Thank you, kind sir. My heart has been married to you for so long that I refuse to commit bigamy, which is what you mean with your talk of liberty, isn't it ? "

" And I, " said Brevis, " also refuse to commit bigamy. It seems

that I shall never find Frasquita. Advertisement has yielded nothing. She . . . she can't read or write. She'll never hear of it, probably, especially as I don't know what name she goes by now."

Brevis always spoke of Frasquita as though she lived. Apparently he felt now that she did. This woman who had had the first of life with him was still nearer, realer than Jenny, who, it seemed, was never to be more than a little greedy ghost with big eyes. A weak ghost, she felt herself, shrinking into the shadows : one who couldn't hold Brevis against the vision of Frasquita, bold-breasted, confident in her wisdom of the ways of men. Jenny cried out to her, drowning in terror and grief, and Frasquita laughed, saying with Julia's voice, *You ! What do you know ?*

"And so," said Brevis (who had been speaking all the time, apparently), "you must be free to think of some other fellow. I have my work, but you have nothing unless you marry, my poor Jenny. That's the cruel part of a woman's life. That's why I feel so strongly . . ."

So Brevis really was like Mamma ; like the rest of the world. Any kind of a man, said Julia, does for a woman, but she ought to have some man. And any kind of a woman, said Julia, does for a man ; only, it needn't be only one woman. So she thanked Brevis, standing there. "Can you suggest any special fellow, Brevis ? I'm what Uncle Mab calls a bit long in the tooth."

"Jenny ! Don't look like that ! Jenny . . . what have I said, dear ?"

"Nothing. Only classed me with . . . all the other wantons, I think."

"My dear !" Funny Brevis. It was her use of the word shocked him most. Now he was very tender, very troubled. Did Jenny think he didn't feel it---this parting ? (So they were to part ?) Wasn't it misery beyond words for him to think of her wasting her life for nothing ?

This (she could have said as he went on talking), this is what I want to say to you, Brevis : Is our love, then, nothing ? Is this great dedication of ourselves to sorrow nothing ? We are immortal, and what does one life matter, so that we do not break the bond ? What were you and I made for, Brevis ? To perform the

common cycle of multiplication with any mate that offers? Or to suffer? To grow nearer and nearer through that suffering until even all the lives ahead will not be able to force us apart? That was what she wanted to say to Brevis protesting: "I only want what is best for you, always, always, darling heart. Don't you know it?"

The little bewildered boy that is in all men peered out of Brevis and the mother that is in all women came out of Jenny to meet it. She must think clearly. (God, Miss Bean's omnipotent God, help me to think clearly!) Brevis had already loved twice. Possibly more. He thought that she could do the same. When his lips and hers had pronounced the word "liberty" he would be at peace. He would feel that he had done for her the best he could. This was what he wanted; to take from her the one glory that remained. Did he really think that she could give her lips, her straining breast to Gamaliel Thompson, to old Sir Stuart, as she had given them to Brevis? . . . Oh, what are they made of, these men whom we so love? her wild heart cried.

"It is breaking both our lives," said Brevis. And suddenly he had her in his arms, her feet right off the ground. "Come with me. Come with me, Jenny."

But now she understood too well for that. "And spoil your career, Brevis?"

"Never mind. We'll go somewhere . . . do something . . ."

With Brevis weak, she could be brave. So brave that she even promised him that she would think of Sir Stuart; but it was heartening to see how he winced at that. Then she called herself free and at liberty, since Brevis seemed to like the words, and sent him to the stables with his horse while she walked back to the house through the daffodils.

VIII

Man forgives more in a man than he does in a woman, knowing his own frailty. But a woman, knowing only her strength, does not easily forgive another woman. Madam was now very hard on Jenny, who still refused to marry Sir Stuart or any one else, although Brevis had finally deserted her and gone to live

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

I

ON the day Fanny was married, in the *salon* at Clent, Jenny wore a saffron lutestring with frills—the frills were particularly irritating to Charlotte—and no cap. No cap on a woman of nearly thirty showed a wanton mind, and Charlotte wished she had thought to buy her one of those cheap lace things from Morten & Brown in Trienna. Jenny, who of course had no money and rarely got presents from Madam now, would have been so pleased.

Charlotte felt very majestic in her crimson satin with plenty of white lace. Very important, marshalling the guests, consoling Susan, who had been crying since dawn, lining Ellen, Jenny, and Maria up together on the left side of the great bell of white roses. “And the young ones and married relations over here. Brevis . . . oh, the bridesmaids will look after you. . . . Mary . . . Phœbe . . .” Because Jenny had let him slip through her fingers was no reason why Brevis should go out of the family. He was making a name, people said. It would be criminal not to do one’s best for Mary or Phœbe.

“How extremely good of such a busy man to come all the way from Melbourne just for this, Brevis! Fanny is immensely flattered.”

“A pleasure,” murmured Brevis, looking from Jenny to Fanny’s soft radiance and sheaf of Christmas lilies. It was six months since he had seen Jenny, and it gave him rather a shock to see her standing apart from all this young gay flutter of laughing girls and youths, with dowdy Maria beside her and wild-eyed mincing Ellen. She looked older, too. Graver, his poor Jenny, although the letters she wrote him were always gay, if less intimate than they once had been. It was something in those letters which had made him unable to resist the invitation, but already he was wishing that he had resisted. No use in opening the whole thing up now that he was beginning to get settled.

Jenny, Brevis saw, was much busier than fussy Charlotte. She had not had time to speak to him yet. She played the wedding-march ; led the singing of the hymn while Sigurd bent like an amorous cock of yellow hay over pretty Fanny ; ran here and there with glasses and biscuits ; brought the rice and rose petals for everybody to throw as bride and groom drove away in the new Sorley barouche which was so much smarter than Madam's. Brevis hated to see her there, waiting on them all like a servant while that egregious Charlotte made herself hostess. Yet that was what marriage meant to a woman. That was what Jenny had chosen to miss, for his sake. He went rather nervously to talk to Madam, all wrinkles and frosty laces in her high-backed chair.

"My compliments, Brevis. You have become celebrated, and so we shall not see much more of you."

Don't you wish it ! he thought. "I have a long way to go yet, Madam Comyn," he said.

"Get a wife to help you, then,"

"That is the advice all women give to all men. From you I had expected something more characteristic, Madam."

Marry Jenny, damn you, Madam nearly shot at him. *Dieu !* that might rouse him. But even she dared not. She looked after him forlornly as he moved away, imperturbable, assured ; a man hardly yet in his prime, with (they said) a great career before him. She called Susan. "Tell Jenny to sing, my dear. The company is growing dull. And ask James Sorley to come here." James could still amuse her, she felt, never knowing when he was made a fool of. But neither she nor anyone else could make a fool of Brevis.

Charlotte was feeling a little sentimental. Dear Fanny had now become Sigurd's spare rib, just as she was Mark's, and Madam was the Captain's, and Maria . . . That operation to be performed on Humphrey with regard to Maria was still postponed, seeing that Mrs. Beverley refused to die. Humphrey stood by Maria as usual, but they seldom talked now. Poor Maria had no ideas, and Humphrey worked like a labourer on Latterdale, and yet it never paid.

"How is the Scab Act affecting you, Humphrey ?" Charlotte asked, and Humphrey's deep-set eyes lost their moodiness. He

would gladly have sacrificed half the sheep in the country so that the other half might be clean. "For if we spoil our world-market we may never get it again," he said. "Yet sheep-owners won't recognize a simple . . ."

Charlotte moved on, having made Maria a present of the Scab Act. But Maria did not use it. She sat silent, her eyes fixed on the bell of roses which had crowned Fanny's nuptials, and Charlotte felt annoyed with her, because, of course, self-sacrifice never got you anywhere, and Humphrey (who had always wanted a family) must resent her devotion to her mother. Yet, equally of course, Maria must do her duty. Finding psychology somewhat complicated, Charlotte stopped to speak to Brevis, wondering for the hundredth time what scandal about Jenny Brevis could have discovered. There must have been something to end that affair, and naturally Brevis must have a wife above reproach. Brevis, with his graceful detached air and clean-shaven face among all these whiskers and Dundrearies, was perhaps the only person who ever daunted Charlotte.

"Congratulations on your last case, Brevis. We read the papers with much interest. What a very great deal you know."

"And so much of it evil," said Brevis, silkily. "Naturally you gathered that at the same time."

"Really, Brevis . . ." Charlotte went red, trying to remember if his last case had been the adultery one and not the forgery, after all. She went away hurriedly. Being a hostess was very difficult; and there was Jenny at the harp, singing quite passionately. So very unladylike to be passionate, but one could never depend on Jenny.

Brevis, leaning against the wall, watched Jenny. She looked young again, her slender arms and body against the tall gilt harp, she sang:

"Ne'er tell me of beauties serenely adorning
The close of our day, the still eve of our night.
Give me back, give me back the wild freshness of morning,
For her smiles and her tears are worth evening's calm light."

There were more tears than smiles in that beautiful voice now. Brevis could not bear it. He went out and smoked a pipe

and looked at the apple tree beneath Jenny's window. When all of Clent was asleep he went out again and climbed it.

II

Many years later another Jenny Comyn found Jenny's old diary, and read the following, all blotted and scrawled in faded ink on the yellowing paper. It began boldly :

We are immortal. Before God and man I stand to it that we are immortal.

Then, much more shakily :

Brevis came to me—oh, how shall I write it? I would not speak to him in the day because I was grown too old. So he came to me in the night. He climbed the apple tree that once I climbed down when my pony was ill, and he was into the room and knelt by the bed with his arms round me before I was aware. O God, O God Who made woman and man! And he was whispering, whispering: Why couldn't we be happy in secret, we who could never marry and had loved so long, so long? "Jenny, Jenny, let us have what we can," he was whispering. And I, half awake and my mind running all on Fanny like a clove-pink for sweetness and youth, I cried, "Nothing can give me back the wild freshness of morning. Nothing in all this world, oh my love, my love! Then—I cannot write it—and you may say what you like about Brevis being cold, but, *ma foi*, he is hot as hell fire and for a space we were both near in it. Jenny, Jenny, are you the fool he said you were to throw away joy? God, dear God, how I stood against him I do not know. It was not me, for I did not want to—I who would have wed him with the other woman looking on and borne his children in the proud knowledge that ours was the true marriage. But Brevis and I are as God and the Law made us. He cannot defy the Law and I cannot defy God.

His hair was wet on his black head in the heat and his face like a strip of the pale moon, and at his voice my heart near fainted in me, And never did I remember that my bed-gown had not even a lace frill, but I hope he did not notice.

So in the end he went, saying that in a few years he would go to Italy and make all clear. In a few years Brevis will still be young, but the treasure of my youth all spent, for so it is with a woman.

So he went back to his room in the New Wing, and I lay in my bed. Wear your panache now before the world, for you have need of it, Jenny Comyn.

Under date of a few nights later comes the next entry :

My hand shakes and I shall write worser than ever. Yet I laugh too, and Gyp on the floor at my feet whines and wants to sleep. And

here sit I still between the dawn and candlelight, with the first birds calling through the mists in the bush by the river.

Some hours since, Grandma sent for me when Celeste had prepared her for bed. Never did I see any one who lost so little of dignity in a nightcap. One could not take liberties with her even in her bath. I was uneasy, for I knew she would speak of how Brevis left early the morning after the wedding, and of the good Gamaliel who with his broad hat and broad clothes looked like a full-spread sail in the hall, and of that old Sir Stuart Maclean who has had two wives and would take me as a third, which is much more than any old maid of thirty has a right to expect. Of this Grandmamma reminded me, "You should be grateful, Jenny," she said, "and I have told Sir Stuart that you will be honoured."

"You have taught me to honour grey hairs," said I. "But what when there are none? Though indeed I do not suppose he is much older than Grandpapa, and he still has a few teeth."

"Gamaliel, then," said Grandmamma. "He comes of a good old Quaker family, and Quakers have ever been among our best settlers."

"True," said I. "Nor does he smell so evilly of hides and tallow, when he is away in Launceston." Grandmamma looked hard at that.

"Brevis?" she said. And I knew she would get to him in time, yet like the fool I am I jumped, and she looked harder than ever. Then she melted suddenly. "*Dans ton cœur fait-il beau temps, ma mie?*" she asked, and her voice so tender that I all but gave in and told. So much she has done and suffered for me and I grieve her so. But how could I tell? She is old, and the old cannot keep secrets. Soon it would be abroad in the land that Brevis has a wife in Italy, and they would give him no less than a dozen children, I'll be bound, and where would his future be then. So I said that I did not care to marry. Grandmamma shook her head.

"Do you think I do not see how it is?" she asked. "*Moi qui sais bien la vie? Vois-tu, chérie.* It is that surely Brevis was not good in his youth, as how could he be with those eyes and that temperament? And you have discovered and will not bend. You ask too much, my girl. Men are not saints. Marry him, my pigeon, and let me be glad at last."

What could I say but that I preferred to coiffer St. Catherine, and still Grandmamma kept looking at me with those black little eyes between the cap frills. She did not speak of all she has done for me. Nor could I speak lest I should cry and tell all. "*Bien.* Then so you shall," she said suddenly, and would make me reach her down a box from the escritoire. So she opened it and took out a lace cap which Charlotte had assuredly bought in Trienna by the look of it. The sort of cap trying to be jaunty that elderly women wear.

"Spinster!" she said, and set it on my head. And turned her face against the chair-wing with its chintz parrots and I knew that she wept. I ran out lest I should cry and tell all.

I ran to the nursery, empty now except that old Nurse (who was Uncle Mab's nurse near fifty years ago) nodded there over the fire. She looked up and saw and she stretched her arms. "Eh, honey dear," she said, and so I went to her arms and cried at last.

Love is a thorn, and yet I would not pluck it from my flesh. With-

out courage we are nothing. With courage we lack nothing. May I always have the courage to cherish this sweet thorn.

Pouf! I don't think much of Lottie's taste in caps. It is perhaps right to wear the things now. But Jenny Comyn is going to make her own.

III

While Charlotte was giving her children a Scripture lesson Jenny sat in the window-seat at Bredon Cottage, dividing her attention between a fat bumblebee in a pink foxglove and Charlotte very impressive in a low chair with the four children round her on green plush footstools. Cherubs, explained Charlotte, were little dead children who had no bodies because they had no sins.

"Oh, I wouldn't like that!" cried Patty. (Jenny felt that Patty could usually be depended on, thank goodness.) "I *like* my body."

Comyn, twisting his legs, asked, "Is it our bodies that make sin?"

"Yes, my love." Charlotte was very decided, having been slightly disturbed by Patty. "We are all born in sin."

"Was I, Mamma?"

Susan, who, in the rocking-chair, was tucking little Letitia's petticoat, ceased rocking. Jenny, who was doing nothing on the window-seat, said, "Was he, Lottie?"

Charlotte went red, which she knew was unbecoming. Jenny really was getting more like Madam every day. And Charlotte tried hard to bring her children up properly, with Scriptural subjects and the royal family on every wall. The engraving opposite ("Victoria, the Royal Oak," with all her married children branching out from her in neat little medallions) Charlotte thought particularly pleasing and often saw herself descending through Tasmanian history something like that. But the present moment was awkward, with all those eyes fixed so eagerly on her, and when Julia was suddenly announced she rose in a hurry. She had rarely been so glad to see Julia.

"Put away your books, my loves, and go out quietly," she said as Julia got rid of her gloves and shawl and hat, and put on a cap taken from a small basket. Jenny, although her hat was off,

never remembered to bring a cap-basket, but sat there with the sun in her hair until it absolutely dazzled. Charlotte felt with a sigh that there had always been something rather shameless about Jenny.

"Now," she said, bringing out a large basket of mending with the air of one producing a feast, "I want to tell you about Mary, Julia."

Susan sat up, and Jenny saw her pale eyes gleam. She was really licking her lips, for Mary's desire to leave home and become a teacher was filling the place that Jenny's misdemeanours used to fill.

"Oh, Julia," she cried, "Mary is distressing us so terribly."

"Of course we must not allow it," said Charlotte, stitching briskly. "There are certain conventions that really can't be broken. Unconventionality is almost a cardinal sin." (Susan tried to remember the others, and couldn't. But anyway, it was a comfort to have dear Lottie so sensible.) "We have to consider how such an unnatural step would reflect on others—on dear Sigurd's rich English relations, and on you, too, Julia. It would be very unpleasant for you to have a connection become a kind of servant."

"I am used to unpleasantness," said Julia, fanning herself languidly. But her blue eyes, which seemed to have become smaller since she had grown so fat, had a bright sharp look as though she had brought a dish to add to Charlotte's feast.

Jenny said from the window-seat: "How fortunate for Eve that she had no surplus daughters."

"What do you mean, Jenny?" cried Susan. "Of course she had no daughters or the Bible would have said so, though who Cain and Abel married—but they couldn't have married them, of course, and it is most unkind of you to call poor Mary a surplus."

"Now, Mamma, don't cry," said Charlotte. "Jenny didn't mean anything. She only meant . . ." She looked at Jenny crushing her pretty green muslin in a heap on the seat instead of sitting straight in a chair, and wavered.

"Yes, Lottie?" said Jenny. "Go on. It is so nice to be interpreted."

"I'm sure, Jenny, we only want to do what is best for Mary."

“Why not let her do it for herself?”

“But Jenny!” This was so shocking that Charlotte stopped stitching to answer. “How could she possibly know what is best? If young people were allowed to act for themselves, where would be the use of all the knowledge of their elders?”

“Ah!” said Susan with a long breath of relief. That would settle Jenny.

But in the window Jenny sat up suddenly, saying: “Elders, then, should use their knowledge in order to frustrate the impulses of the young? *Bon*, my Lottie! Now we know where we are. Mamma, possibly, wanted to become a nun, but Grandma Merrick forced her to marry Papa. You would undoubtedly sooner have been a cook, and Julia——”

“Ha, ha!” laughed Julia, piercingly. “How droll you are, Jenny!”

“We were not talking about marriage,” said Charlotte, repressively. “That is the natural destiny of every properly thinking young lady. Teaching is very different. It is almost vulgar.”

“By a natural corollary, then, to be taught must also be vulgar,” said Jenny, looking thoughtfully about Lottie’s room. In what category, she wondered, could one class all this bedlam of shell-and-plush boxes, crewel-work brackets, fretwork photograph-stands and wool mats? Almost as interesting as Lottie, this room of hers.

“It is necessary to be taught. But not by *Comyns*,” said Charlotte, sewing little gilt buttons down the front of a purple merino gown at a great rate. Susan echoed eagerly, “No. Never by *Comyns*,” and Charlotte added: “I do feel most intensely that ladies were never meant to earn their living in any way. It is a sufficiently tragic matter when gentlemen have to.”

“Oh, la, la!” cried Jenny, jumping up. She felt that the combination of Lottie and her room absolutely could not be endured another moment. “Let’s get down to men and women and a few damns. That’s more like human nature *jusqu’a bout les ongles*.” Susan gave a little squeak like a mouse. Lottie stared with pale eyes, her thread held out ready to bite, and Jenny felt a prick of remorse. “I am sorry, Mamma,” she said, and slipped away out through the window. Poor dears, how scared they always were

of fresh air let in on their mouldy old theories. And poor Mary!

“I have suffered enough!” cried Susan, tragically mopping her eyes. “What with Mab in hides, and Richard marrying into beer, with Madam forbidding his name to be mentioned. And Mary. And Jenny. I always feel that Jenny will disgrace us all yet.”

Julia sat up with a sigh of relief. She had been afraid that they would never get to it.

“Poor Jenny,” she began. “I suppose you noticed—didn’t you?—at the opening of the Longford and Launceston railway last month?”

“Oh, what a charming time we had!” cried Susan. “With Governor du Cane and all the fashion there, and dear Fanny looking so handsome with her hair down in curls under one of those new pork-pie hats and that new-fashioned skirt. But I shall always feel uneasy at seeing a lady without crinoline, although she assured me she was wearing four woollen petticoats. Sigurd is giving her a trip to England, Julia; did you know? There is not anything he don’t give her. And looking so extraordinary, too, in plaid knickerbockers and a small round hat . . . Shropshires or Derbys . . . I forget what they call them. Some place in England. Or was it Bucks, Lottie? I forget.”

“They are the very pink of fashion. But Jenny, Mrs. Comyn. Did you notice that people were . . . avoiding her?”

“Were they?” cried Lottie. “Then it was because she would go in her old turned poplin. I offered her my new green broche that I spilled claret down the back of, but it didn’t show in the least when one sat down. I said she could take some tucks in it, and she said she couldn’t take tucks in her individuality. She really does say the strangest things.”

“I am very much afraid that she has been doing the strangest things,” said Julia, so impressively that Charlotte turned with a sudden stiffening up of her whole body. She had always been prepared to hear something dreadful about Jenny. Susan wailed:

“Of course she does! Did you see her sitting up in one of those little open carriages where everyone could see her and permitting herself to be dragged off by that dangerous steam-engine as though she were a man? Of course it was Mab’s doing; but to go whizzing through the air at twelve or thirteen miles an hour

for a whole twenty miles is most unbecoming in a lady, and what she looked like when she arrived in Longford I can't think, although Mab said she had not looked so pretty in years. Jenny is a great grief to me, Julia."

"Now, dear Mamma, don't." Charlotte saw Susan's tears coming again as they so often did about this time if she had missed her afternoon nap. "She is a greater grief to Grandma, who don't let her forget it. But I think Julia has something special to tell us, haven't you, Julia?"

"Well, I felt that you ought to know. I can't bear repeating scandal, but when I consider it my duty . . ."

"Not too loud," said Charlotte, glancing over her shoulder and drawing her chair nearer. "Pull your chair up, Mamma. . . . Now, Julia? I have always feared . . ."

"Yes." Julia nodded, pressing her fan against her lips. "I know how observant you are. But staying at home to look after your children as you do, you haven't my opportunities. Wherever I go, Lottie, I hear people saying things about her and Brevis. You may have noticed that she don't get any invitations now?"

"What sort of things?"

"Hush, Mamma. Not so loud. You mean . . ." Charlotte prided herself on her plain speaking. She said, her eyes fixed on Julia's face: "Don't beat about the bush, please. Are they saying that she is Brevis's mistress?"

"Oh, Lottie! Oh, Lottie! How can you say it and live! Oh . . . my vinaigrette . . ."

"Are they?" demanded Lottie, holding the bottle to her parent's nostrils.

Julia gave a long sigh. "No use trying to hide anything from you, Lottie. You are far too clever. Mind you, I would never have *said* it; but since you knew it all the time and she has practically confessed to it, and . . . well, we all know there must be some particular reason for Brevis going off in such a hurry to live in Melbourne. He wanted to cut the connection, of course."

Julia was enjoying herself hugely, quite unconscious that this was the outcome of that long-past moment at Government House in Hobart Town when she had heard Jenny being proclaimed toast of the town in her stead; quite unconscious that it was she

herself who had set this devastating ball rolling. She honestly prayed for Jenny on Saturdays . . . or was it Mondays? Sometimes she mislaid her list. . . . and always insisted to everyone that poor Jenny had sinned through ignorance.

"If only she had married Valentine Paige!" she sighed. Once into the respectable cloak of matrimony, there was so much one could do, she reflected, although Mab had almost been foolish enough . . . she winced again at that long-past danger. If it hadn't been for Noll! But she had certainly repaid Noll for that, never even expecting to see her money again.

Charlotte was thinking hard. She was much more shocked than she liked to confess after Julia's compliments, and, while feeling that she must not appear surprised, was resolving on instant changes. It would never do to have Jenny contaminating darling little Patricia and Letitia, and with Patty nearly seven . . .

"Mamma, please stop crying. That won't help. . . . Thank you, Julia. It is much better we should realize that everyone knows it. We live so quietly now that we might never have heard, although when Sir Stuart married Clara Boyd, after coming to Clent so much, I was rather afraid . . . Oh, well; we must just bear it." Charlotte was surprised to find how easy it was to bear. "I think we might send her to Lovely Corners for a time. Grandma Merrick is really getting too much for Aunt Ellen since Grandpa died."

"Such a good mother I have been to my children!" sobbed Susan. "All the underclothing I made for Jenny's trousseau; and so very little of it would fit Lottie."

"Never mind, Mamma. You haven't had to buy her anything since. I am very annoyed with Brevis; but of course when a girl throws herself at a man's head . . . though I do rather wonder he never married her. He was so devoted at one time."

"He couldn't afford to marry then," said Julia, wisely. "And, of course, afterwards . . ."

They talked it over happily for an hour, and Julia went back through the shrubberies to Bredon feeling much more at ease. She would never, she felt, have mentioned the matter if Lottie hadn't begun it. And since Lottie had known all the time, it was well for her to realize that others knew, too.

IV

Up in the great presses, cool and deep as sweet water, Jenny helped Mary to lay away the week's linen. She thought how cleansing to the mind were the rich heavy feel of linen and damask, the fragrance from the sheaves of dried lavender, the sun-bleached wealth of the tall shadowy shelves stocked with the names of the generations. Her maiden name, her married name would never lie on any such. Not the name of Jenny Comyn, who did not even own the clothes she stood in, as Mamma so often reminded her. Not for the first time she envied Golly and Chrissy, who earned real money and bought their own boots and acid drops.

"Jenny," said Mary, suddenly, behind her. "I'm going to run away."

Jenny came out of the press in a hurry. Jane Beverley had once run away with a young farmer and been brought back and married to an elderly officer. But Mary had no lover. Or . . . had she?

"Oh, Mary, I'm glad! But where to, dear? And who with?"

Mary explained that she was running to Miss Horne in Launceston, where she had been at school for six months. Miss Horne thought it a pity to waste Mary's genius for mathematics when she could get her for twenty pounds a year as pupil teacher. "And kept, Jenny. So I can do it easily on that."

"Can you?" Twenty pounds seemed a great sum, certainly. "And, oh, Mary, you'll be able to spend it all yourself! But . . . to run away."

"It's my only chance of leading my own life," said Mary, very big and burly and untidy. "And I am quite determined to do that."

How splendid of Mary! But how impossible. "Papa and Mamma will never allow it."

"They won't know. It is all settled, and I'm going into Trienna to catch the coach early to-morrow. One owes a certain amount to oneself, Jenny; you've always told me so."

There was no passion about level-headed Mary, and so it must have been fancy that Jenny heard the echoes of her own passionate youth rebelling against restrictions, wanting to rush off and be

a pirate, a smuggler. And heard, too, those long shadowy discourses of Miss Bean, who had told her that rebellion against authority was the sin against the Holy Ghost. Having tracked that elusive sin for some years the small Jenny had been thankful to run it to earth, thankful to kneel with Miss Bean and wallow in long ecstasies of prayer which had builded so well. Immolation; dedication; expiation; every kind but expectation did Miss Bean floor her with. No roses in Miss Bean's teaching. Only thorns.

Jenny, brought up in a straight-jacket of restriction, looked at Mary with respect. Of course one did owe a certain amount to oneself, but one never expected to pay it. Mary, apparently, did and would. Suddenly Jenny waved an embroidered napkin round her head. "Hurrah!" she cried.

But later, as she filled the tall flower-pots down in the hall with flaming tulips, triumph deflated. The gods, it seemed, were such inveterate jokers. Madam's hot posset would be less sweet on the old palate when she drank Mary's defiance in the cup; and since the Captain could not write to the papers about Mary, his mind wouldn't be able to get rid of her. Jenny could see the two old dears together, very much ashamed because a Comyn lady had made herself conspicuous. "This Miss Nightingale," Madam had said at the time of the Crimea, "is making herself very conspicuous. *Mon Dieu!* That a lady should let herself get into the papers!"

Well, at least Jenny had not made herself conspicuous. She had merely faded out, been forgotten. How forgotten she had not guessed until she went to the opening of the railway. Faithful Gamaliel and a few more had been glad to see her: but the rest had gone after newer loves, and Jenny Comyn in a turned poplin and last year's hat was not the same Jenny who had once ruffled it so gaily.

She looked at the grave baby Jenny on the wall, and felt many other Jennys come round her. A demure wicked-eyed Jenny, slipping long-faded leaves into old Josephus for a long-forgotten Adam to find. A shy and blushing Jenny shrinking as Mr. Paige mumbled her hand before the company. A careless Jenny who had danced away so many Old Years in the arms of lovers who

would have given her what she would never have now . . . when the dark candle-lit floor was polished by feet languorous in the waltz, gay in the gallop, daintily flirtatious in the Varsoviana. A Jenny bringing the stirrup-cup which Madam dispensed with such witty grace to the cloaked officers and other gentry riding home through the dark dangers of the bush. A Jenny who had once whispered with Brevis in the dim corner behind the grandfather's clock. She thought : You have taken so much from me, oh, my lover. Was I foolish, I wonder, not to let you take more ?

As she stood among the glowing tulips, there came to her one of those strange familiar moments when barriers thinned ; when behind the barriers she felt that mysterious life, caught that sharp fleeting certainty of the ultimate meaning of this strain and confusion called living. Very still, hardly breathing, she knew you must keep then, or you frightened it, the spirit thing, so that it eluded you and was gone. Very still . . . and it came, the spirit thing, so serenely vast and live and certain that you felt your own little spark leap up in recognizing joy. Lives . . . such formless brittle handfuls of nothing lives were ; squeezed into such cranky, unmeaning shapes. Squeezed until the pith was out of them and the great Hand opened and dropped them again to earth. Squeezed . . . Yes, but the pith, the essential drop distilled when the great Hand squeezed ! That remained. That was what lived behind the barrier.

For one of those rare tremendous moments which had stayed her all her life Jenny grasped those beckoning hands behind the thinned barriers ; saw their lit eyes, their black-blown hair like comets ; heard their glorious trumpets, their triumphing laughter.

Then the old brown hall was about her again, with stray gleams from the well-rubbed brasses, bosses of colour from the glowing tulips, letters on the pierced silver tray—but none from Brevis. Strange how hard it was now to recall his face. The dark, thin, in-folded face, rather haughty among strangers ; the guarded-eyes ; the grace ; the narrowed lips. Oh, she could make an inventory of his features ; but where was he, the beautiful passionate young Brevis who had eaten with her of sacred bread ? Gone. Time had taken him. The noisy tide of life had carried him past

her door, blurred his eyes in the light of his midday sun, deafened his ears.

Jenny picked up the last of the tulip petals and took them away.

V

In the morning Mary was gone, leaving a note with her address and the request that her packed box be sent after her ; and when Clent gathered its scattered mind together again, the principal thought emerging was that Jenny must be to blame. Even Madam, who knew no more than Charlotte (sternly repressing Susan) chose to tell, agreed that it was like Jenny to advocate rebellion against authority. "Do as you like," said Madam, sitting very upright. "Celeste! Come and brush my hair this moment. I have *un mal de tête*." And the heartache too, she thought, but would not say so to Jenny when she came in to say good-bye.

Jenny, whose laughter had been what Charlotte called "ribald" when accused of corrupting Mary, was dismayed at the thought of Lovely Corners. There were no books, and books were the one thing that now bound her to Brevis. For a public man long and impassioned pleadings and speeches stuffed with rhetoric were the fashion ; and although Mr. Gladstone with his collars and that Disraeli person with his greasy curls added self-advertisement, Brevis preferred to depend on his mind, aided by Jenny's. His rare letters were now full of such demands as "I think Addison speaks somewhere of economic principles as applied to prisons. Will you try if you can find it?" Or, "In one of Plutarch's earlier *Moralia* he lauds the subtlety of the power of moral virtue—'Mendemus, then, born by the city of——' Please quote me the full passage. I remember it as telling, and the public, especially when one gets into the papers, gapes for quotation."

Brevis was very often in the papers now, and his court pleadings looked well there, although, he knew, nothing like so well as they sounded. It was a growing intoxication, this bending of men to his will and mood, especially at this time when a new civilization was making and all materials ready to his hand. They were such inspiring listeners, these tough red-shirted miners and

hard-mouthed business men whom one could hammer with facts, sting with irony, melt into tears with rhetoric. And if when he returned to his chambers he fell on his bed with exhaustion or cursed the gilded chrysanthemums which some admirer had bribed his landlady to put in his tall red vases of Venetian glass, there was no one to know, although sometimes he sat down and wrote it in a letter to Jenny. But as the legal atmosphere sank deeper into him he put fewer of his thoughts on paper. The cases he handled in court proved the danger of that.

Yet she was an excellent help, this Jenny who came in letters. But not, he felt now, not to be dreamed of otherwise. A successful young man—thirty-five is still young for a man although so ancient in a woman—with more smoking caps embroidered in forget-me-nots or holly berries than he can wear in a year, has no need of a wife. A household—good Lord! Sticky children, crying babies, a wife too busy to attend to his needs, a smoky fire, bills . . .

Thank Heaven, thought Bevis, putting the fire together neatly with the tongs where Mab would have used the toe of even such superlatively worked carpet-slippers as Brevis wore (he had forgotten who worked them), thank Heaven he had escaped all that. Thanks to Frasquita, who had helped him sow his wild oats and still stood behind him as a kind of ghostly protector. He never expected to hear of her now, but she was a shield. A shield from Jenny, who had never made him so much as a watch-chain, who would never allow the fire kindled for him to light another man's hearth. How he hated and worshipped her for that . . . and realized how emotional he still was, and how much his life took out of him; in a big speech in court, particularly. How he wanted a woman's arms round him when he came home after that! But not at other times. And especially not Jenny's. They would have claimed too much, of his heart as well as his body.

He did not write to her when he was recalled to Launceston, which had suddenly been thrown into frenzy by government demands for taxation on the projected Northern and Southern Railway. "What? Did we not foot the bill for our own Longford Line? Let the South look after itself," said the Northern citizens, and barricaded their doors and bought mastiffs and shot-guns for

the greeting of those who came to collect or distraint. Brevis arrived on a high windy day with yellow sand blowing and a scent of trampled geraniums in the gardens, to find magistrates refusing to prosecute, policemen to impound, or officials to do their duty in that state of oppression to which their oaths called them. Litigation, prosecutions, and arrests were sputtering up everywhere, and Brevis threw himself into the hurly-burly with enthusiasm.

“You old colonial gentry are making a fine hullabaloo, bless your hearts,” he told Mab, whom a neighbour had inadvertently shot in the arm while being helped out of a back window, and Mab said bluntly :

“We’re all willing to pay through the nose for the privilege of showing the Government what we think of it.”

Brevis interviewed his friends through barred windows and arranged bail for Gamaliel Thompson, whose tenets would not allow him to fight any more than his convictions would allow him to pay. But Gamaliel, who had just received some news from a fellow-prisoner, was very chilly to him, and went off at once to seek Mab. Arrived in Mab’s room, he thrust his broad hat back on his broad anxious forehead and plunged into the matter because he was too nervous to approach it skilfully : “Mab, will thee go down at once to Clent and ask Miss Jenny if she will marry me now ?”

“Hang it, man ! ask her yourself,” said Mab, staring.

“Thee might have more influence . . . say what I cannot.”

“I can tell her you’re a darned good fellow, of course, but——”

“Oh,” burst out Gamaliel, “man ! Hasn’t thee heard what they are saying about her and Brevis Keyes ?”

That poison, slowly working up through the country, had assumed virulence in the still rather isolated north, which was now explaining in the light of it why Jenny had been abandoned by Mr. Paige. When Mab heard what Gamaliel could tell he would have taken the gun in the corner to his search for Brevis, but Gamaliel still had the steadier head. “No, Mab. No. It would suggest that we believed . . . Possibly he is not to blame, although I do not understand why they never married.”

“That ?” said Mab, remembering. “Well, I know that.”

He went after Brevis with mixed feelings. He could not demand the obvious course, and what other was there, except that now Brevis must certainly make his marriage known? But Brevis, who could floor anyone with argument, must be approached cautiously, and Mab, who had never been cautious in his life, did not trust himself.

Brevis, he heard, had gone walking down on the flats by the river. He often did this after a hot hard day in the court or in running round the scattered town digging into small stray offices in search of information. It was wonderfully calm down here, thought Brevis, with the dark loom of the Cataract Gorge just touched along its fuzzy top by moonlight and the grey level of the river drawn out between the low bush hills by the tide of the distant sea. A wedge of black swan went over silently against the pale sky. One wild duck, astray from its nest, was quacking in the marshes. There were clumps of evening primroses, silky, gauzy like ladies' dresses, here and there on the sandy foreshore. The new buildings of Rowing Club, Archery Club, pretentious little piers, had faded into night.

Brevis walked slowly, feeling the needed rest to his nerves after the gunpowder and blood of the last few days. A queer lot, his fellow-men: parading the streets, tearing down fences, smashing windows; or padlocking themselves into their houses, where they let off pistols and crackers like defiant boys. Good citizens fighting steadfastly against their own ultimate interest because the notion of taxation seemed inherently abhorrent to the colonial-born. And this is the 'seventies, he thought. Lord! when are we going to become civilized!

He saw Mab Comyn striding over the sand, with moonlit water filling up the deep dents his hasty feet made and his retriever startling to an angry flutter the long-legged native hens pecking in the sedge, and thought with a sigh, Here comes one who will never be civilized. . . . He did not feel equal to great boisterous Mab to-night.

The native hens scuttled off like bobbing shadows, and trailing his shadow behind him Mab came up with the light white on his face, as though in a hurry to speak. But he did not speak. Straddled like Colossus against the pallid river he stood, dragging

at his moustache and staring at Brevis. Brevis waited, somewhat amused. Mab usually brought an explosive with him. Then Mab burst out :

“ Brevis, did you know that Jenny is being cut everywhere ? Do you know what people are saying ? They are saying that you and our Jenny have loved too well.”

CHAPTER NINETEEN

I

BREVIS was glad later that his first thought had been for Jenny. But hard on the heels of it came : It hasn't harmed me, anyhow. These good people still like a Don Juan. . . . Nothing can harm me now but for them to know of Frasquita. . . . He stood silent, trained at last to resist unguarded emotions, and saw very clearly how that would almost certainly harm him ; almost certainly turn this foolish undirected force called the public mind full cry after him. He would be a blackguard, a deceiver of innocence, a monster of immorality posing as that which he was not. Oh, he knew it all ; had often used those very expressions himself when pleading in court.

“ Well ? ” shouted Mab, in a fury at his immobility. “ What are you going to do ? ”

“ What do you advise, Mr. Comyn ? ”

That was just like Brevis, Mab felt. Always driving the war into the other man's country with that cold legal mind of his. “ Marry her,” he said.

“ I have not heard that Frasquita is dead.”

“ I should think she must be by now.”

At the hopeful ingenuousness of this Brevis laughed curtly. “ What you think or I think don't alter facts. I am not dead, and she was the younger.”

“ Heavens, man ! you must do something ! One would almost think . . . ”

“ What, then ? ”

“ That it was true,” said Mab, with a gulp. He did not feel so certain as Gamaliel did about Jenny. She was too like himself.

Brevis stood silent so long that Mab began to quake. This Brevis standing so motionless on the grey satiny stretch of mud, below the dark hills, under the white moon, seemed no more than the outline of a man ; remote as a figure in an etching. It was impossible to get at his mind. He cried, almost imploringly, “ Brevis ? ”

"I wish to God it had been true," said Brevis, bitterly. "At least we would have had something out of all these years."

"It has been terrible for you both, I know," said Mab, always easily disarmed. "But now we must think of Jenny. Of course when it is known that you are married—and that must come out now——"

"It would only make it worse," cried Brevis, sharply.

A sudden terror chilled him. He must combat this with all his force or his career was finished. The Attorneyship of the Crown. The Judgeship. Judge of the Supreme Court. All that promised so clearly before him now was finished if this came out. He knew men's minds too surely not to be sure of that. Jenny would have to go. Until Mab spoke he had not known that he had made his choice, but now he knew that he never had been in doubt. It would be madness to sacrifice everything for what, at best, could not clear Jenny. Nothing could clear her. One couldn't stop talk, but only divert some of the venom . . . Jenny will have to go, he thought, with Mab stamping about in the little puddles and shouting: "It can't make it worse. It would help folks to understand."

"It would make it worse." How glad he was now of that power which had learned to argue from either side. "If the public knew that we couldn't marry they'd be the more certain that we did without it. If it doesn't know, it can't prove anything and the whole story will die out for want of fuel."

This sounded plausible. Mab said with an oath, "If I could only get hold of the fellow who began it!"

"A woman, Mr. Comyn. It's a woman's story, this."

"I'd wring the bitch's neck!"

Brevis shrugged. Mab was always setting off useless fireworks. He stooped and picked an evening primrose, smoothing the soft silky petals with his thin fingers. Inside he felt as hard as flint. By and by, he knew, there would be the reaction, but just now he was purely the cold calculating fighter.

"Does Jenny know?" he asked presently.

"She didn't. Here's the letter I had from her this morning. You can read it."

Obscurely he felt that Jenny's letter might do more for her

than he could do. He walked away, whistling to his retriever hunting duck in the brown bending sedges, and left Brevis reading the letter in the white light of the moon.

Jenny's letter was more waywardly puckish than ever. Brevis could understand that. At Lovely Corners one must be gay or the dry rot would consume the soul. She wrote :

I am still blowing my trumpets and banging my drums for Mary, who writes that she is very happy. It only needs Phoebe to run off with Tom Belton, as I pray that she may, and the Comyn women will have done their duty. As for me, since I will not marry great-grandfathers and have not the wit to teach anything, my duty is to rub Grandma Merrick's legs when she gets her rheumatics, and sometimes to dress Aunt Ellen. It is a very great secret, but I am sure Aunt Ellen would like you to know that, to the delight of us both, she has a lover out in the bush. Not visible to my eyes (unfortunately), and named sometimes Sir Walter Raleigh or Boswell (who intends writing her Life) and sometimes merely My Snow. When Grandma is safe in bed of nights I help dress her for conquest, and this is the real rose-gold moment of the day, the almond icing on the cake, and Aunt Ellen is not one to skimp the icing.

Behold, then, Aunt Ellen drawing a blue tarlatan which she might have worn at Mamma's wedding low on her yellow shoulders (oh, so pitifully bony!) and clasping seed-pearls with a hair-clasp on her yellow neck. "I think I'm a little pale to-night, Jenny. I would be loath to have him think me ill." A few crushed geranium leaves, Aunt? He'd never know. "But that is deception, my love. Honesty and purity are so essential in a maid." She lets me rub them on, all the same, prinking in the mirror which has mould on it like all else here. "My white silk mittens, Jenny. My fan with the pink-and-white shepherdesses." I give them, and the Pamela bonnet such as Jilla Berry wore when I first saw her, and the scarf with the metallic beetles' wings, and the laced handkerchief. "Do you think he'll like me to-night, my love?" so coy that I must break my heart or laugh. "He'll love you," says I, "but which is it to-night? So she taps me with her fan and giggles and vows I shock her. And down we creep to the side door, hushing the many dogs in the yard, and off she goes a-tiptoe to her tryst, while I run back to listen to Grandma's bell. Some day I shall go up with her and perhaps see what she sees—the dead bush-ranger Snow and all. Realities, I am coming to believe, are far less real than shadows, and this is a queer world that has us one moment in shallows and the next struggling out of our depths. Plato says a brave soul can find nutriment for itself. Oh, the smug old gentleman! I fear he lies. And then I go out and walk in the bush, and cry where only the 'possums and snakes can hear that cry of Cyrano de Bergerac when all the pageant of the world went by and left him lonely: "Wear your panache." That is it, "Wear your panache, Jenny Comyn."

"Well?" demanded Mab, tramping anxiously back.

Brevis folded the letter and gave it to him. "I can't help her. I can't help her, Mr. Comyn."

His voice seemed to go by them like a grey wind, cold and cruel. Mab pocketed the letter and went off without a word. But on the edge of the dim-lit town he stopped and looked back. Brevis was still standing on the grey satiny mud under the moon, plaiting delicate primrose petals in his thin fingers.

II

In the *salon* Charlotte was plotting with Susan over the possible marriage of Phœbe, and Madam snatched her gold-headed stick and went away from them through the open French window and into the garden. All this mating . . . how necessary, but, *mon Dieu*, how distasteful now one was old! Such things should be come at through the medium of youth only, when each female and male had a glamour. No glamour could Madam find now even in her own man, with his snorts in the night, his descending red cheeks like wattles. James Sorley was no longer one at whom to make eyes over a fan. How had he ever been, the old cabbage? Mab with that great beard like a bushman, those eyes that had grown tired in straining after lawless joys . . . who had once thought him beautiful? Richard, the spoiled child of the house, selling his birthright for a mess of pottage prepared by Mr. Jones . . . what was he for all his looks but a beer barrel? Noll, with his melodious voice singing:

"I did but see her passing by
And yet I love her till I die. . . ."

whom had he ever loved but himself? So there they all went, these wonderful men, driven like sheep along the ways. Baaing for something to fill their stomachs, like sheep, thought Madam, looking down over the old stone balustrade to the home paddock where a flock was being driven in from the hills for the dipping.

Mab came up the garden from the stables. Mab . . . ah, how Madam remembered him with his flushed boy face and his frilled shirt and Young Lochinvar manner, leading a delicately immature Julia out to see the harvest moon on the river! But now he came speaking of Jenny! "I am going over to Lovely Corners to

see Jenny," he said. Madam would not speak now of Jenny, who also had made her a sport of the gods. What ghosts, then, accompanied the child, that she should choose them instead of a living man ?

She wanted to ask Mab that ; but he seemed so far off, standing there with the twilight welling up about him, absorbing him along with the spikes of lavender, the blue pea, the roses. Only the daisies looked up clearly still. Little marguerite daisies, innocent-eyed like children yet unborn.

" I am tired of Jenny, Mabelle," she said. Oh, Jenny with the visions ! One saw them in her eyes. But for the old there were no visions. " She has made of her life nothing, and you have helped her there."

Mab answered her out of the twilight. He had gone with the lavender into the twilight. She would never find him any more. " None of you understands Jenny. She has a great soul," said Mab and went away (or the twilight took him entirely), and Madam limped painfully down the steps to meet the Captain, returned from a meeting in Trienna.

" Well, my darling. We had a splendid meeting," he cried, kissing her. And suddenly Madam clung to him. Here was life and love yet. These good things of youth do not pass when we are old. She turned her head toward the splash of water where Mab was unmooring the boat under the weeping willows. " Give my love to *la petite*," she cried in her sweet old broken voice, and went gaily into the house on the Captain's arm.

III

In the dim light Joe Merrick pottered about the yard as usual, bedding down the old cob, turning out the cows, and carrying the milk cans on a yoke to the kitchen door where a blowzy maid received them sulkily. He said nothing. He rarely did. But to-night he was thinking more than usual, for he had driven cattle into Trienna that day and had there heard the most surprisin' talk about Jenny and the lawyer chap, Brevis Keyes.

He fumbled the matter in his slow brain all the way home and all through the evening work with the animals in the yard ; but

he had come to no decision about it when he went at last into the room with the stuffy air and the oil-lamp of yellowish glass on the coarse table-cloth, and began to take his way heavily through plates of cold meat and hunks of cheese washed down with cups of milkless tea.

Sometimes he stopped, his jaws moving slowly, to stare at her. A queer thing to have happened to pretty, lively Jenny, who was pretty and lively still although her eyes had grown so large and her pointed face so thin. He hoped it wouldn't make her queer like Ellen. This love! And how the fellers had the nerve. He'd never had the nerve for anything like that. . . . Sent her over here because they was ashamed of her, did they? he thought with the grumbling resentment rising in him. . . . That's Lottie, I'll be bound. I'll tell her she's welcome here as long as she likes to stay. Ah, more than welcome.

Jenny, sitting between them, chattered and laughed. There was cherry-pie out in the garden, white moths in the apple trees, and Ellen was going to take her with her on her tryst to-night. The spirit of adventure was strong in Jenny still, although she would never have dared go right up there in the bush alone after dark. But it would be gay to do it with Ellen, who got so much more fun out of her old love-affair than ever Jenny had done. Ellen, up in the bedroom, was very fussy and nervous. Her bony fingers shook as she tied her sandal strings, and under the pink Pamela bonnet the hollows in her cheeks were dark.

"You know how it is, Jenny. Gentlemen are naughty creatures and young ladies must not make themselves too cheap. That is why I need a chaperon when I go to meet Orlando. Put on a dark cloak, Jenny, and cover your hair. It is not necessary for him to notice you specially, but one sometimes requires the moral effect."

With gaunt body swaying the huge crinoline, with her pack of tragic fancies and her giggle, Ellen went down the stair and into the yard with Jenny following. It was very quiet in the yard; very quiet on the opposite tussocky hill. An owl hooted up in the dim bush topping it under the quiet stars, and Ellen whispered, "That's Orlando."

It seemed likely. A very suitable signal. Jenny began to laugh.

She had dressed Ellen so often for this that the affair had long since lost its strangeness ; and adventure was entering into her and the soft chattering mystery of the river through the night.

“ Hush,” whispered Ellen. “ We must wait till he calls again.”

She minced off down the yard into the shadow of the hayrick, and Joe came lumbering up to take Jenny by the arm.

“ Jenny,” he said hoarsely. “ I want to tell yer that you’re welcome here as long as yer likes to stay.”

“ Thank you, Uncle Joe,” said Jenny, wondering a little and watching the peahens mincing off to roost. They looked so exactly like Aunt Ellen.

“ Even if they’re ashamed to have yer at Clent any more, *I’ll* be good to yer, Jenny.”

“ What ? ” She turned quickly, staring up at him. His loose lower lip hung down in the grey beard, and without his glasses his pale eyes were anxious and kindly. “ I don’t know what you mean, Uncle Joe.”

“ Yes, you know, Jenny. What they’re sayin’ all over town about you lettin’ that Keyes chap make too free wi’ yer . . . same as Snow did wi’ yer aunt. I don’t unnerstand you women . . . but there it is. You know.”

Jenny stood dumb. She was not conscious of her body, of herself. She thought of Brevis. If this should harm Brevis !

“ You know,” repeated Joe. “ Too free. But he had orter married yer, Jenny dear. It were diff’runt wi’ Snow. But *I’ll* allers be good to yer, Jenny. Don’t forget that.”

His heavy tread went rustling off over the hay the young calves had pulled from the rick, but still Jenny stood unmoving. She did not seem able to get beyond her terror for Brevis. Of course Uncle Joe had got it all mixed, and people would be talking of Frasquita and Brevis. That meant that she was here, and what would people be saying of Brevis ? Undoubtedly he had posed as a bachelor all these years. Undoubtedly every one had once thought him engaged to Jenny. And here he was, the great Brevis Keyes, soon to be Prosecuting Attorney for the Crown, with a judgeship when he chose to take it . . . here he would be confronted by a Frasquita. Brevis would be laughed at, sneered at, belittled. She saw him fighting it ; his face still

carrying its ironic smile but all his proud sensitiveness bleeding.

"Oh, I must go to him," she thought wildly; found her feet moving, and stopped. That only would make it worse. Her name was mixed in it already. . . . If he wants me he'll come to me, she thought, taking to herself the forlorn comfort of all the waiting women of the world.

"Jenny, Jenny. Are you deaf?" Ellen was shaking her arm. "I've screamed and screamed at you. Orlando has called three times and he will be gone if we don't hurry." She picked up her crinoline and ran off under the tilted shafts of the dray, past the pigsty and out through the gate on to the hill. Her lean legs in their white stockings twinkled in the dusk, and Jenny ran after her because any motion was better than keeping still.

Up the slippery dried grass of the hill Ellen ran fast, moths rising round her in faint points of light through the gloom, and a domestic hen bouncing out of a near-by gorse bush with a noise like a cracker. Jenny smelt the nutty odour of the gorse as she passed, and the good smell of the grass and of the gum trees scattered on the hill, each communing with his own shadow where the moon, just slipping over the hilltop, touched them. The sound of a horse cropping grass somewhere was very loud, and the breath of the bush meeting them tasted like wine.

At the top was a small kangaroo-clearing sunk in a hush of thick trees, and here the owl (or Orlando) called again. "Keep back," said Ellen, imperiously, and Jenny sank down in the long grass. She tried to think, but her heart was thumping, her head whirling. She lay flat, watching Ellen reeling out like a wrecked ship into the clearing.

As the moon rose, the shadows of the trees flitted silently like phantoms. The place had a phantom silence which Ellen's cracked singing in the shadows, in the moonlight did not break. There was a curious immobility in these few light clouds above the moon. Jenny thought, They are listening to everybody laughing at Brevis. . . . And suddenly she began to cry as she had not cried for many years.

Ellen, sidling like a crab about the clearing, was talking melodrama after the best models of kitchen literature. "I wonder, sir, that you will still molest me. May not a poor maid come out to

take the air but some bold fellow intercepts her? No, fair sir, I am not for such as you. There is another."

She came over suddenly and sat down by Jenny. "I flirt with them all. One does, you know," she said in her usual tones. "But my Snow is the only one I really care for."

Until Joe's revelation Jenny had classed Snow with Orlando and Sir Walter Raleigh among Ellen's wild fancies. Now she suddenly remembered, suddenly understood. She rubbed the tears from her eyes and looked at Ellen. There she sat, the wrecked ship with the grotesque figurehead, the yellow strings of naked neck like a harp. There she sat, her blue tarlatan taken by the night which takes so much, so that Jenny saw only her starved hands and face, her pink-and-white shepherdess fan. Suddenly she was terrified. . . . Oh, Brevis, Brevis, she thought. . . . Don't leave me to get like this! Don't leave me!

"There's Sir Walter back among the honeysuckles," said Ellen. "Ah, sir, I see you. I see you." She went off, her gauzy streamers and scarfs fluttering, and Jenny got up and walked out to the edge of the hill. It was necessary to get hold of herself somehow; stop this crying that was shaking her.

Far down across the slip of river like a dinner knife Trienna church and its graveyard stood on the hill like a heap of little white stones. Quietly, confidently those small decorous lozenges above the cracked cups and bottles full of cottagey flowers would be telling the moon: I am Lucy, wife of Jonathan Bolders. I am Sarah, the beloved wife . . . Mary, dearly beloved wife . . . Deborah . . . Back through all the marching ages, while honeysuckle bloomed and lily petals fell and the great seas went round the world, dead women told the living, accenting with dignity their state: *I am Fulvia, a Roman matron. . . . Heracles the Greek, loving me more than life, raised for me this tomb. . . .* Even in pale old Egypt: *I am Nerfertis, wife . . .*

Back in the clearing Ellen was laughing. The night turned and sighed, knowing all the long, half-human mystery of earth and grass and trees, the long, pitiful, gay history of human life. Mab came up over the shadowy hill and took Jenny in his arms.

At first she could not speak for the beating of her heart. Then: "Frasquita?" she whispered.

"Lord, no!" said Mab. Then he held her off, trying to see her face. "What made you think of her? What have you heard, Jenny?"

"Uncle Joe told me people were saying things. I thought he meant Frasquita. You're sure she isn't found?"

"Sure as death. Jenny, old Gamaliel still wants to marry you. I think you'd better let him."

Jenny's mind brushed past Gamaliel. "What about Brevis? Tell me. *Tell* me. Has anything been said that can hurt him?"

"No. I wish it had been. It's you who are hurt, dear maid. D'you think that kind of talk can hurt a man? He'd laugh at it."

"But when . . . Uncle Mab, I don't understand. Are people saying that Brevis and I are . . . had . . ." she began to laugh shakily, "had illicit relations? Is that it? Well, when Brevis makes it clear, I'm so afraid he'll explain about Frasquita."

"You needn't be. He won't explain anything. Jenny, can't you think of yourself a minute? Brevis is all right. He'll get a little added glory, perhaps. But . . . but things have been so close between you for so long. It won't be easy to explain it away. In fact . . . oh, my darling," said Mab, brokenly, "if you knew as much of the world as we do, you'd know it's one of the things that can't be cleared up. Once a damnable story like that gets going it's impossible to stop it. But if you'll marry Gamaliel . . ."

"You . . . you mean that everybody thinks *that* of me!" said Jenny, quivering.

"A good many do, I'm afraid. Damn fools."

She was silent. He stroked her hair, murmuring tender words.

"Wear your panache, Jenny Comyn. Dear maid . . ."

Ellen's tryst was over. She had gone home down the hill. Far off in the river frogs were calling, but on the hilltop it was very silent, very still.

"Brevis says you might as well have had your years of happiness together, since it ends in this just the same," Mab told Jenny. "People would——"

"Oh, people!" Suddenly that indestructible something in Jenny began to bubble and laugh. "And I did so think I was not being conspicuous. Oh dear! Poor Mamma! Poor Lottie! Oh, Uncle Mab, what a thing to happen in poor Lottie's family!"

Part Three

REALIZING

CHAPTER TWENTY

I

THIS was the Christmas of eighteen ninety, and the Queen whose virginity young officers of the regiments had once toasted in broken glass was now an old fat widow in a black bonnet. And most of the officers with their scarlet coats and little waists and their whiskers were dead. The Captain had died years before, having gone off in an apoplectic fit while writing to the papers because the railway from the North to the South was not to pass through Trienna. And old James Sorley was dead. But Madam was still alive, with Charlotte just about to celebrate her ninety-third birthday for her quite as every one expected Charlotte to do it.

Charlotte stood in the doorway, looking down the *salon*, her fat ruddy face critical, her big body in its bright purple satin and lace somewhat uncomfortable across the bust where dear Louisa Sorley's diamonds flashed, her vast hips very conscious of their lacings. "*Il faut souffrir d'être belle,*" Jenny had told her when helping her into the dress; and although Charlotte was always a little doubtful of Jenny's compliments, she was conscious that to-night she was looking her very best. Even the weather helped: hot, genial Christmas weather, with no clouds up in the dazzling blue, and air too languid to stir the pollen out of the buttercups and off the fronds of the rich grasses. Birds, silent all day, were now singing across the lawns and the fragrant gardens out in the balmy evening, and through the open French windows a few moths came in to circle whitely about the lamps.

Jenny, rather like a little moth in her soft grey silk, was flitting about the lamps, turning them up or down, arranging the fringed shades. Charlotte looked at her affectionately, because she always felt that she had "rescued" Jenny. After that dreadful time in the 'seventies when the scandal about Jenny and Brevis Keyes came out and Mab wanted to take Jenny off to New

Zealand, Charlotte had sent for Oliver. The tribal instinct was always strong in Oliver, and it was he who had told Charlotte that there was only one thing more ill-bred than talking scandal and that was admitting that you had heard it.

"We Comyns must stand together," said Oliver, whose knowledge of the world even Charlotte respected, although Madam had never forgiven him for going to live with Richard. "Have her home, Lottie, and take her about with you everywhere. People will not dare insult her if she is under the protection of Mrs. Mark Sorley."

In his hot, rough way Mab had objected. "Jenny wants to go to New Zealand, and I'll take her," he said. But providentially—Charlotte always felt that Providence helped her—the Captain died just then, and Jenny came back to Madam, who was crying for her. Later on, Charlotte took her about, and people accepted her as much as Tasmania had accepted the Scotch thistle which caused so much agitation in the 'forties but which, when left alone, exterminated itself in time. By now Jenny had virtually exterminated herself, Charlotte felt; never blowing now into other folks' paddocks or turning up prickly leaves everywhere. And there was no doubt that Susan and William and Madam would have been a double handful for Charlotte without her.

"I do hope the beer won't be warm," she said anxiously to Jenny. "It was so good of Richard to send two barrels from his new breweries, and he was quite pleased to be asked, although Mark did object. But seeing that all this expense will come out of Mark's pocket—and it will be very heavy, what with getting four Fremps from Trienna to help wait, and all the things from town—well, it seemed only right . . ."

"To try and get something for nothing. Agreed, my Lottie. One so often has to pay for what one doesn't get at all."

"I never do that, I hope. But there is plenty of wine, and champagne for the toasts. I really do think there is enough of everything, though I haven't had one refusal, Jenny."

Charlotte felt she had indeed reason to be proud of that. Mab was coming from New Zealand and bringing Richard's youngest son with him. Her own married Patty had just arrived at Bredon with her children, having come all the way from North

Queensland. There would be Harry and his wife from Sydney ; Harry's daughters from Melbourne ; in fact the whole of the Comyn clan from all the ends of the New World would be gathered to-night at Clent for the first time.

What an opportunity, thought Charlotte, to bridge differences . . . some of these very acute . . . to inspect new relations and see which would be worth patronizing, which one could meet as equals, and which must be snubbed from the very beginning.

Jenny came up, dusting her finger-tips daintily with a lacy shred of handkerchief, and Charlotte wished for the hundredth time that, since her hair was quite white long before she was fifty, Jenny had not given up caps when the fashion went out. Charlotte never would. Otherwise Jenny looked very nice, and her cheeks were pink ; but that might have been the roses. Jenny stood smiling at the roses. Young hands—Patty's, Letty's, Fanny's, lovely Nan's—had so wreathed and filled and enchanted the old *salon* with roses that the pinkness and whiteness swam in the dark shining floor as though it were still water, and the fresh fragrance of them was like kisses on the lips. Nan, who always did the right thing, had wound white moss-rose buds round the delicate Isabcy miniature of Madam's mother, and deep rich-hearted crimson blooms on the gilt frame of Madam herself (all drooping curls and lap-dog) in her wedding-gown, just opposite the big chair where Madam would sit when she came down after dinner.

How Madam and Jenny were disliking all this fuss ! And yet they had submitted, Madam floored by age, of course, and Jenny by . . . what ? By Lottie's wealth and position, partly ; for Lottie was a very big lady now that poor Henry Sorley had gone at last and Mark, the only son to follow the land, had inherited Bredon and entered Parliament where Lottie would some day procure him a twopenny title. But partly, too, by the half-humorous, half-sad knowledge that what to Lottie was a great occasion was to them so little a thing. Jenny had slept with Madam ever since the Captain died, and sometimes they turned and clutched each other in the night. But Jenny was not the Captain, and Madam was not Brevis, and the groping hands knew it and fell away again and the sleeping lids closed over little sighs.

" I hear wheels," said Charlotte, stepping with dignity into the

hall. But Jenny, suddenly finding that she had forgotten her belt, dashed off upstairs like a girl. Jenny would still dash about Clent like a girl, thought Charlotte, irritated. No repose. No sense of her years, in Jenny. Charlotte had told Papa and Mamma to be ready in the hall, but of course they were not, and it devolved on Charlotte to welcome the first guests, which she felt was, after all, Providence's recognition of what was only her right.

Oliver climbed stiffly out of Richard's fine brougham, followed by a swarm, and Charlotte modulated her greetings carefully :

"Pleased to see you, Uncle Noll. . . . Delighted, dear Richard . . . dearest Lavinia" (Lavinia's diamonds were better than the Sorley ones). "And the dear girls. . . . And this is Colin?" She dealt them into the house like playing-cards with all their unfamiliar faces uppermost. "Yes, Richard dear. Only Clent folk and their belongings."

Mab walked into the hall, followed by Brevis ; and Charlotte's face amused Oliver more than anything had done for years, while Richard turned away to hide a grin and the young ones frankly gaped.

"Well," said Charlotte, recovering with an effort ; "this is indeed a . . . an unexpected honour, Brevis."

By now Brevis was used to conferring honour on those he visited. He said easily : "Mab told me it was Madam Comyn's birthday, and as I was passing through I thought I would call in and pay my respects. So many years since I saw her." He glanced round. "The old place has not changed," he said, and went through with Richard and the other men to hang his coat in the old brown presses of the back passage.

Susan descended on Lavinia and the girls, and Charlotte clutched Oliver, gasping ! "It will be in all the papers ! What can I do ? People will say . . . what won't they say ! Only Uncle Mab would have done a thing like this."

Oliver agreed that only Mab would have done it, while certain that both men were unconscious of the bomb they had dropped. Brevis would not know and Mab would have forgotten that it was an affair so intimate to the family. He said dryly :

"Well, my dear, what can they say but that we are all recognizing that old story very handsomely at last ?"

“ Oh, don't ! Oh, this is terrible ! The papers . . . ” For the first time Charlotte wished that the doings of Mrs. Mark Sorley were not chronicled so frequently in the papers. But she had actually arranged for two reporters to be here to-night. “ Oh I can't bear it, Uncle Noll ! ”

Oliver was alarmed. For the first time in her life Lottie was nearly in hysterics. “ Nonsense,” he said sharply. “ Brevis is so famous now that his coming has put a cachet to the whole thing. And twenty years turns a scandal into a romance when one of the parties has had a career so naturally romantic as his.”

But, because old age had made him cruel (and he had never been very kind), he hoped that he might see the meeting of Jenny and Brevis, and also Brevis's face when he found out the inner meaning of this occasion. Oliver would have liked to tell him ; but Brevis Keyes, Judge of the Supreme Court of Tasmania and a very able man in private life, was not so easy to tell things to, and Oliver's wit was less nimble than it had been.

Other guests were coming in, and Charlotte plunged forward bravely. Richard and Lavinia were being very nice to Susan, who was kissing them violently with a wet face. Richard was sniffing approvingly around. The old smells, he said : polished wood ; potpourri ; lavender. Charlotte tripped over Lavinia's old-gold train, and greeted Sigurd and Fanny's lovely Nan (so like dead Fanny that it gave every one a shock) and Harry, and that rude husband of Phœbe's.

Here they all were, she thought, trying to steady herself. All her letters and plannings and thoughts turning into hot flesh and blood and shaking hands, kissing and slapping backs. Here they were ; breaking up the silence of old brooding Clent like boys breaking a dim mirror ; breaking the dark passages into ripples of red and cream-colour and blue, into laughing faces.

But behind all that she was thinking, How shall I explain to the papers about Brevis ?

Jenny came down with Mab—who had not thought to mention Brevis—and met him just at the stair-foot. Oliver saw her go so white that he feared she would fall, and moved forward. But Jenny saw only Brevis, whom she had not seen for seven years and felt deep in her body that he was here to take her at last. It

must be so or he would never have come at such a time, she knew, feeling some wild thing which she had long thought tamed leap up and race shouting through her blood, deafening her ears, blinding her eyes.

"Charmed to see you looking so well, Miss Comyn," said Brevis. "I was just trying to remember how long since I was last here. The place has not changed." He smiled pleasantly at Jenny. No one could say the same of her. Time which had passed by so lightly had taken its full toll of her. A pity, but it always was so with women. It gave him an unpleasant shock to see that bronze hair so white, though; to see those big, almost hungry eyes. . . . Surely to goodness she has forgotten all that ages since he thought, annoyed. . . . Her own proper pride, if nothing else. . . .

Jenny's voice had not changed. It was the same as when it had thrilled him long ago. "How long? Twenty years since you saw me and one since I saw you. That's about what we look like, isn't it? Except that the suggestion of age might embarrass you I would say that you had worn well."

He flushed a little. It sounded as though she knew how hard he was fighting old age. Perhaps she did. She had always had almost devilish intuition. He muttered something about seeing her again, and moved away.

"Good-bye, Brevis," said Jenny as though to herself, standing on the lower step. The brothers looked at each other and Oliver said:

"He don't know that it is a special occasion, Jenny. Mab brought him." Jenny turned her eyes slowly from Brevis's slim back disappearing into the crowd.

"Then Uncle Mab must have his dinner in the nursery, for this will upset the table," she said lightly, patting Mab's arm as she ran off.

II

The tall wing-chair with chintz parrots had come out of Madam's bedroom to be smothered with a fringed and golden shawl and heaped with scarlet cushions for the support of the tiny old, old black-clothed bundle within it. After many years here sat Madam to receive in her *salon* again, with a silver vinaigrette, a fan, and a buhl table beside her to hold her presents. Charlotte had even brought up the harp that Jenny seldom played now, to complete the group which comprised Susan and William, and she stepped back, considering it with the air of a photographer.

"So now I am a full coat of arms with my supporters," said Madam in her thin little voice. "An excellent *bonne-à-tout-faire* was wasted in you when Mark married you, Lottie. . . . Let them in, Jenny."

Charlotte felt that she had enough to bear without Grandma comparing her to servants and talking of the company as though they were chickens coming to be fed. But she was consoled by the recollection that she meant to present even her own sons with ceremony to the heroine of the day, and she hoped there would be no awkward *contretemps* with Brevis, who had just been saying that there were none left like Madam now. "She has ensconced herself beyond immortal ramparts while we of to-day can only dig ditches," said Brevis. And although Charlotte had not the least idea what he meant, she took it as a compliment.

Jenny came up the *salon* with Oliver the stiff old dandy and Mab the Black Brunswicker who would never be wholly tamed. She led them over the drowned roses, under the canopies of roses, but Charlotte did not intend to allow that. She touched Madam's shoulder. "Grandma! Here is Uncle Noll."

It was twenty years and more since they had met, this tiny tired woman with the ancient eyes and this old man, polished like rare old furniture and—like it—a little shaky in the legs. Madam lifted a heavily ringed hand and a faint flush stained her cheek. Never would she forgive Noll, although she had quite forgotten why. Her voice sounded like far-away little bells: "Since this is ceremonial, you may kiss me, Oliver, unless you have forgotten your manners in all these years."

“What son of yours could ever forget them?” said Oliver, amused. Egad, the old lady was a good hater; and what would she say to Dick the brewer? He touched her withered cheek with dry lips and delivered himself gracefully of an epigram: “I thought it would be necessary to meet in order to realize how long it was since we had met. Now I realize it less than ever.”

“I don’t,” said Madam, grimly. “Go and look in the glass.”

“Less than ever,” retorted Oliver, departing with a bow. Madam’s mouth relaxed. He had power to amuse her still, this *méchant* Noll. Then she cried:

“Mab! Ah, my dear, my dear! Why did you stay in that wild country so long?” and pulled his face down to hide her own in that black beard and feel his vitality surge through her like a sea. ‘Eh, Mabelle——’

“Grandma!” Charlotte shook her gently. “They are waiting.”

“And why should they not wait? But for my body they might have had to wait for ever.”

“Humphrey and Maria,” said Charlotte, hurriedly. “Please pass on, Maria. Grandma will be getting tired.”

Maria, who had been Humphrey’s wife for two years, was very happy on Latterdale and very unhappy to-night. She was suddenly conscious that her hair was coming down and her bustle crooked and that her jabot of cheap lace did not put such a finish to her old drab poplin as she had expected. Bald and stocky Humphrey was her lover still, but Charlotte liked to remind Maria that she had caused Humphrey to miss all his chances and degenerate into a rough farmer who never left Latterdale except for the sheep sales. “Please hurry along, Humphrey. Please hurry, Maria,” cried Charlotte, very conscious that this was the dangerous moment. Richard’s wife, who somehow made you feel your stays were tight, your face red: Richard’s wife, and Richard, a most distinguished pair at whom Grandma would probably raise her lorgnettes, inquiring how many more were coming of the bourgeoisie. But one never could tell with Grandma, whose delicate bones seemed to gather together as though she rose at a fence, whose gracious smile met Richard, Lavinia, and passed them on as the hostess meets the conventional guest in a crush. It was most kind, said Grandma, of these young people to come

so far to honour an old woman. And she did not ask if the large bottle of cologne which Lavinia put on the table contained beer.

So that was safely over, thought Charlotte, and now Richard would probably ask Patty to stay with them in Hobart and go yachting. Sigurd, big broad-backed Sigurd, was bewildering the old lady a little, although Charlotte whispered urgently: "No, no. You mustn't ask him about Fanny, Grandma. You never will remember she's been dead for seventeen years."

Sigurd's second wife was not going out just now, so there was no reason for Grandma to remember about her; this old Grandma touching Sigurd's golden-bearded face with trembling hands, saying: "So for you also are there sleepless and sad nights, my dear? But take courage——"

"Yes, yes, Grandma," cried Charlotte, whispering to Sigurd: "You mustn't mind, Sigurd. She forgets, you know. Grandma . . . Here is Judge Keyes. Judge of the Supreme Court in Hobart, you know."

Brevis, stooping to kiss Madam's hand, thought that Charlotte probably had put it this way to deceive Madam. But she was not deceived, this old bundle of lace and grey curls which acknowledged him only with a momentary gleam of resentment in sunken eyes that saw the past. He stood back from the murmuring crowd, a little resentful himself. Whose fault was it but Jenny's own if she had preferred being cut and come again to Brevis all her life, instead of marrying elsewhere? And for these twenty years it had been cut only, since he had never been to Clent except with his hosts when staying at Bredon or Tingvalley. His letter to Jenny at the time had said, among other falsehoods, that it was best for her it should be so, and her brief answer had agreed. But he knew, and Jenny would know, that cowardice was at the bottom of that. He could be so plausible, so convincing with others. He was so universally admired by others. But all the time Jenny would have seen through him. The hard crust of complacent years had cracked a little just now under Jenny's eyes, and he felt a curious nervous longing to vindicate himself, explain. Yet how explain? It couldn't be done. He stood still under the roses and watched Policeman Charlotte marshalling the nondescripts of the procession.

A ludicrous business, this, of Harry with an ordinary wife and an ordinary job on the tin-mines of Mount Bischoff; of Phoebe striding ahead of her farmer husband, the bracelets on her arms jangling like cart-chains; of Schoolmistress Mary with her spectacles catching in Madam's lace and being scolded in quite the old manner. A business of the trooping together of young things, sons and daughters of these prolific elders . . . young things, starry, shy, as though just life-evoked, advancing like summer. Oh, the pageant of youth, thought Brevis, never ceasing to rebel against age. No wonder the Greeks knelt to it.

III

Madam, beginning to be very drowsy and remote, felt herself sitting as some old idol might sit, or His Holiness the Pope with his toe, while slim fragrant girl children kissed her nervously with soft red lips and tall men children brushed her cheek with adolescent moustaches. *Le premier prends sa main blanche* . . . She could remember all that gay song when she was in her boudoir. It was not fair that she should be dragged from the gracious presences surrounding her in her boudoir and submitted to pecks and breathings and grins and giggles: there was one girl giggling like a kitchen-maid. Why did not Lottie put her out? And what were all these new names tumbling from Lottie's mouth like pebbles? Maurice and Phyllis and Hilary; Evelyn, Leonard, and Flo; Sinclair, Rosamund . . .

"Is my Mabelle your father?" she asked Rosamund. "Or Humphrey?"

Here Rosamund betrayed herself as the girl who giggled. *Fi donc! Le fou rire*. . . . It does not passion me, thought Madam, crying with sudden energy, "But which are Humphrey's sons?"

There was a laugh which grated unpleasantly on Madam's fastidious ear. Some one said, "*Sh-h!*" and some one else, "He should have brought his merino rams." Then the laugh sputtered and died again, and Madam found it all very strange and uncivil and far away, and whispered to Jenny bending over her, "*Petite*, I do want to see Humphrey's sons."

“Never mind, darling,” said Jenny. “They are going to drink your health now. Here is your fan.”

A middle-aged Golly and Chrissy—butlers were now no more than a Clent tradition—pounded up over the sunken roses and falling petals, presenting to the chattering, laughing groups champagne in Madam’s old French glasses with the square stems (helped out by Bredon’s best crystal). Richard and Sigurd and Brevis made wonderful speeches: Charlotte told them afterward how wonderful they were and hoped they hadn’t noticed that Madam was asleep all the time. Brevis watched Jenny while they drank Madam Comyn’s health with honours—grey men and women, laughing girls with lovers at their shoulders—and envied her smile. Jenny must get a good deal of fun out of life yet. More than Brevis. But he had never got much; always working too hard.

Madam heard the cheers go up and saw the rose-leaves fluttering down on rounded arms, shining heads, and all about her the ghosts came out. . . . *Eh, les revenants*, she thought gladly. These, coquettish through their ringlets, courteous over their stocks, these were the quality she knew.

William was to have replied to this toast, and for the last month he had been replying assiduously, in the sheep-yards or wherever he happened to be, getting what Jenny had written for him more confused every time. But Madam, sitting upright with a sudden glow, scuttled William as she had done all her life. Never, William felt, had he had his chance. Even when he had wanted to read the lessons in Trienna church before the days of a clergyman . . . never a chance.

“*Mesdames et Messieurs*,” said Madam, looking about with her dimmed yet still stately regard into the bright silence. She felt a little dazed and desolate. *Le bonhomme* was not here, nor dear Louisa, nor James. That was not Marion Boyd in the blue gown. No. She remembered. Lottie had said . . . These, God have mercy, were her own blood in a new vintage.

“*Mesdames et Messieurs . . .*”

Brevis fully savoured the drama of the moment. Madam’s children, he’d dare swear, would be too nervous; and these young ones, to whom she was but a show, too amused. But how amazingly, triumphantly some women nurtured sex until the last!

She could stir men yet, this shrivelled weak old woman, just as Frasquita in her coarse great-bosomed way would stir men still. Just as Fanny's Nan (leaning forward in the yellow gown that made her like a primrose) stirred the pulse of every man she looked at. For men did not grow old, like most women, to that attraction which slew Actæon, which woke the Cæsars from their sleep. Primroses, daisies, eternal fields of asphodel . . . were men ever too old to stray plucking there, with eyes if not with hands ?

Looking on Madam, on Fanny's Nan, Brevis never once thought of Jenny.

"For your graciousness in assembling to honour an old woman I thank you," Madam was saying in that tiny far-away voice that tinkled so clear. "And yet it is but your own house you honour, your own blood." She paused and Fanny's Nan looked at her, wondering. To Nan, late home from an education in England, here sat the last of those great souls the pioneers. Here the last of a dazzling epoch. Here race, undiluted as her posterity was diluting it (Nan loathed her Aunt Phœbe's sons). Here humour and dauntless courage ; distinction which old age so often misses ; womanhood. To the end, it seemed, Madam would carry the great tradition of her family. To-night she held in her hand this ill-assorted company of forty-odd people, just as (it was almost fable now) she had held the military society of Hobart Town when William the Fourth reigned.

"My day," said Madam, flagging a little, "is done. And the day of the Captain many of you will not remember. But it was a great day and I know it, I who tell you. In the bush were the bush-rangers, the tarantulas, the snakes, and many times in the houses also. We made our own wine, our own clothes, our own bread, our own laughter. How we laughed then ! So this is what I would say to you, children," said Madam, rousing a little : "Laugh. At yourselves, should you find nothing more amusing, and truly I think there never is." She brooded while her sons looked at each other. Lord, lord ! had she not vainly tried to teach them that two full generations before ?

"Out of difficulties grow miracles," said Madam, drowsily. "How do I know, I ? But certainly we found difficulties ; and as for the miracles, they are for others to decide and perhaps to

perform. I do not know, I. The heritage for which the Captain so laboured is now yours, and I would say to you, descendants of Captain Comyn, do not betray it. There are some . . .” She faltered, and Charlotte quaked until her silk bodice creaked. Now we should have the bourgeoisie and the beer, and good-bye to Patty’s chance of yachting with Richard. But Charlotte always forgot that Madam was a great lady.

“There are some here will bring glory to that heritage,” said Madam, slowly. “I see it . . . and I thank you . . . on my husband’s behalf and mine. We came a long way, children, and we learned much. And many were the mistakes we made . . . and he always would write to the papers. But the torch was lit . . . and life goes on . . . and nothing stands without . . . love . . . and courage. . . . Jenny, my dear, I am tired. Will you beg the company to excuse me if I retire? Perhaps Noll will sing. Young ladies are ravished when Noll sings.”

They lifted her from her chair. With Mab’s arm, William’s arm, she passed out from among them. On the elders, on the laughing young ones had fallen a strange stillness as though more than a tired old woman passed.

IV

“There goes a great lady,” said Brevis, and the *salon* drew a breath as though a spell were gone from it. Sound, colour, scent, straining forms began to rush about, evoke changes. Chairs, tables, rugs yielded themselves madly to the embrace of the young men, who carried them to the doors, to the French windows, and there left them. Out went Madam’s harp on to the veranda under the bougainvilleas. One loud protesting note it made and was answered by a native hen down at the river. The band was on the veranda, setting out seats, tuning up. There was a crescent moon, a strong scent of magnolias, the wine at dinner had been very good.

In the doorway leading to the hall Brevis watched the young folk swing into the dance. Presently he himself would dance with some of those shining girls. It was good for his digestion; and he liked it, too, being always able to choose his partners. Again he tasted very pleasantly the experience of being famous

as one and another came up to talk. He held quite a levee among the elder men there at the door.

“It was Lottie had this door cut through into the hall,” said Harry. “She thought it so ridiculous for people to have to go along the veranda. My grandmother said it spoiled the seclusion of her *salon*.”

“So it has,” said Richard. He had a fruity laugh and fruity voice. A prosperous man who would be useful, thought Brevis. “And much Lottie would care! She is all for common sense, our Lottie.”

And that Madam never was, thought Brevis. Nor Jenny. He felt a little quickening sense of possession; a pity for himself that he had had to lose her. And it had been difficult for him, too, at the time of all the talk. If he had not been living in Melbourne and making himself a name there, some of the old brigade (not too strait-laced themselves) might have got him down.

It was a pretty sight to watch in Madam's old *salon* with the roses. Girls floating, flying, laughing with a marvel of bright hair and bright eyes in the arms of their lovers who were not like the young men of Brevis's youth. Sturdy fellows, these; brown and keen and hard of body and mind; indifferent to the little courtesies; sterner in the grain, abstemious. Very well able to look after himself, this new colonial man, and a tough customer in the witness-box, by George, with little reverence for his betters and little of the ancient grace. He laughed, this confident young colonial, at the old Victorian elegance, and Brevis had to meet him with a sharper note than the polished periods of the 'seventies and early 'eighties.

The orchestra was the best to be found since the real military bands had gone with the last of the real military, these twenty years past. In the musky dusk of the veranda it clattered out a polka, then mourned out a waltz.

“For she is not dead and she is not wed,
And she loves me now as she loved me then,”

sang the young people gaily to the music. Mab named some of the dancers to Brevis, who was asking for introductions. That fairy thing in white was Richard's Phyllis. There was Harry's Audrey pretty in blue. The rose-coloured Emily with chestnut

hair Mab couldn't place. It was Charlotte's Comyn who had just picked up the shy little girl with the snub-nose. Good Comyn was extraordinarily like his great-grandfather, the Captain ; always in a hurry, always kind. That lanky fellow with the long chin was engaged to Emily. And the black-avised chap called Brian was the man whom Nan would marry.

"It seems a regular family gathering," said Brevis. "Am I the only outsider?" He saw the men look at one another, and went cold with a sudden shock. Good Heavens! If it was meant to be only family, what was he doing here? What interpretation would every one place on his coming? What would Jenny think?

Afraid to ask, he went to dance with Charlotte, Mary, Phoebe, and Maria. Jenny was apparently still with Madam ; he had not seen that soft grey silk, those pearls anywhere in the crowd. When she came he must speak to Jenny ; explain how he came to be here.

And now he was dancing with Nan. Heavens! it was good to dance with Nan, avoiding long trains and flying feet dexterously, going up and down under the heavy scent of the roses. This young Nan with lips like wine was such magic that he forgot Jenny and when the waltz changed to a polka he would not give her up. So they danced it, stamping, singing :

"Oh, can't you dance the polka?
Oh, won't you dance the polka?
The joys of earth are little worth
Unless you dance the polka."

Nan sang it glowingly, putting her feet down delicately like a mettlesome young filly, flinging back her shoulders until the young curve of the breast showed. The golden braids above her forehead had slipped sideways, giving her a roguish look. Some Pan should have come from the woods to crown her with asphodel. Brevis remembered Jenny revolving, crinolined, and demure, in the "Blue Danube." The music stopped.

"Oh, here you are, Brian!" said Nan, and was gone into the night. So there went young lovers, and he was an old man and out of breath, and here stood Jenny at the door.

"Shall we go and have some claret-cup, Jenny? Dancing's hot work."

Jenny smiled. She had been "Miss Comyn" to Brevis until Nan warmed him up. He had always needed to be warmed up, cynical, excitable Brevis with his thin face worn so much thinner by the years, like a much used coin stamped with some rare Greek head. He had always been sensualist as well as ascetic, wanting what both heaven and earth could give. Well, he had loved her a little, thinking it much . . . and that had gone. And she had loved him with all her powers . . . and that would not go. Yet she would not hurt him to-night, since just to see him and talk to him would be a memory for quiet years.

"It's Lottie you should give claret-cup to. You nearly killed her," she said. "But she couldn't refuse the Judge of the Supreme Court."

He nearly said, "Could you?" and remembered that this was not Nan with whom he had had so many jokes. He felt strangely afraid of Jenny, and moved nervously about the library where so many were drinking and laughing, until rosy Phyllis, handling the big ladle, began to tease him. This was youth again, and he was hungry for it to-night. They squabbled, laughing over the strips of lemon peel in the silver bowl among the flat goblets, and Jenny sat by the window, thinking how very, very old Grandma had looked, lying still, with the night-light making ghostly shadows about the curtained bed while the pouncet-boxes and silver bottles on the table winked with wise eyes.

Jenny had cared for all these things since Celeste went to Purgatory instead of the Paris she had collected her endless thefts for. It had annoyed Celeste very much to leave them all behind. "*C'était bien la peine,*" she had said bitterly. But Jenny had promised to put them all back and say nothing, which (said Celeste) was the least she could do since she was to go on living.

"Have you finished, Jenny? Shall we dance?" asked Brevis. He was frowning because Phyllis had just run out with Dick's boy, Leonard. His face had a dashed look as though he had cried to youth, "Play with me," and it wouldn't. Pitifully Jenny got up and went with him. It was going to take Brevis a long time to learn what until to-night she had thought she'd learned perfectly.

In the dance Brevis showed no life. His hand had no pressure. He looked over his shoulder at Nan and at rosy Phyllis. Jenny

thought with sudden fierceness : Yes ; I've been your ploughed field all my life, and though you never sowed anything there, you expect to find the daisies that are in other men's fields. I shall say something to hurt you presently, Brevis.

"Rather warm for dancing, don't you think ?" said Brevis, and Jenny stopped promptly under the rose festoons, seeing Nan waving her hand as she galloped by with skirts tossing.

"Now, do you know, Brevis, I had thought you rather cold."

"If I have said anything to annoy you I'm sorry," he said, frostily.

"Let me see. You said it was a charming dance and how well Grandma looked, No ; neither of those sentences annoyed me. Did you produce any more ? For I'm afraid I didn't hear them."

"Come out here," said Brevis, abruptly, and marched her on to the veranda. But there was no privacy there, with the musicians lounging about between the dances and the gardens full of fleeting laughing figures. So nervous that he was as clumsy as Mab, Brevis said : "I feel that I must apologize for being here to-night. I had no idea that it was to be a purely family gathering or I most certainly would not have come."

Jenny could just see the lean outline of his jaw in the edge of light, and she wanted so terribly to kiss it that instead she struck him with the cruelest words she could find : "Oh, you needn't be afraid. No one will put any interpretation on your coming at this late hour. If you had come twenty years ago, when I needed you rather badly, they might have interpreted it as the action of a man, anyway. Now every one knows that you are so superior to men that, like God, you are enabled to be the judge of ordinary men's shortcomings."

She left him before he could speak. But passing through the hall a little later she saw him again in the ball-room, skirting the wall, graceful as a tom-cat, going after Phyllis, after Rosamund, after Flo.

"Oh, how frightfully funny life is," she said, slipping an arm through Mab's.

Mab hugged the arm warmly. He had seen too little of Jenny through these years which had taken him so often to New Zealand, where Thompson & Comyn, Hide and Tallow Mer-

chants, had established a branch office in Wellington. He had even had a wife there for a short time. A kindly creature soon drowned in crossing a wild New Zealand river. Mab did not remember her very often. Not so often as he remembered the young Julia.

"I should say so, dear maid," he said, thinking that Tasmania was really very much behind the times. Old Gamaliel needed jigging up. Old Bill needed a lot of jigging. And here came Humphrey, who looked as though he needed a tremendous lot of it. "Congratulations on that merino ram you sold in Sydney, Humphrey. A very fine price, by Jove."

Humphrey said he had wanted to keep him for the stud, but could not afford to. It had taken such years of culling to produce Emperor. Humphrey, without exactly complaining, was depressing, as though some jingling scarlet coach he had run to catch had gone by, leaving him standing in the rain.

"Uncle Mab, if you want a good laugh you must go to Latterdale," said Jenny. "Tell him some of the things your galahs say, Humphrey. Or I will."

Jenny mimicking galah parrots talking like angry bushmen with Maria trying to quiet them soon did away with depression, and Dick laughed loudly. Mab thought that Dick was rather loud all round; seeming always about to stick his thumbs in his armpits and throw out a diamond-buttoned waistcoat although never actually doing it. But he gave good advice about shares. Humphrey had benefited from brewery shares which had pulled Latterdale through when fluke, foot-rot, and scab were having a glorious innings in the Midlands; when crops were ruined by rain, and potatoes at scandalous prices had to be imported from New Zealand. Now scab, said Humphrey, cheering up wonderfully, had been finally scotched some years ago, and Tasmania would be a million pounds yearly the better for it. "But still," poor Humphrey always had a *but*, "there are the rabbits."

"There are," said Dick. "As we came past Blackfellow Knob this morning it looked so tawny in the sun that I hardly knew it. And then it suddenly turned over. I give you my word that it was solid with rabbits that went rolling off it like a wave."

"Dick always has a good story," said Jenny, appreciatively. She went a little further into the hall, looking out through the wide

doors on the night. Pale dresses, pale shirt-fronts gleamed and faded among the flower beds, along by the balustrade. Scents of crushed flowers—cherry pie, geranium—drifted in on the wings of laughter, of murmurs and loitering feet. All the difficult business of life turned into a game, a raree-show. "You ask if I am going to the masquerade," she murmured. "I am at it."

Dick said it was a pity old James Sorley had died before he got his Rabbit-proof-fence-across-the-island Bill through the House, although there was no other cause to regret him. Too many old men about. But not Mab, he added genially. Mab would never be old. Nor Noll. It gave him much pleasure to grease the downward slope for that dear old gentleman. "He lends us a tone that is too rare now, I assure you. And you should see the elegant way he patronizes us all, and how we all enjoy it. To be approved by Oliver Comyn is perhaps the greatest achievement in Hobart society, and it doesn't occur too often." He looked round complacently: a big, florid, handsome chap, prospering on the weaknesses of his kind and possessed of few himself. A chap, Humphrey thought, of whom Oliver Comyn would not secretly approve, however much (for the sake of that greased slope) he might pretend to.

William came sidling up, and Mab saw Humphrey and Dick look at each other as though wondering how such a vague old specimen had happened to produce them. William's head was bald and his manner deprecating, but he had fought once. Fought for Clent against the cranks of Government, against weather, against the Captain, just as the Captain had fought against blacks, bush-rangers, isolation, and all the other stark devils of the pioneers. William and the Captain had their definite places in the creation of a new land. But Noll, who had never fought anything, was Paris holding the apple of award in Hobart society.

"Bless you, Dad," said Dick, taking him jovially by the arm, "you look tired. Come and have a nip."

"A soda-water and sandwich," said William, nervously. "With my digestion I assure you that I dare not . . ."

V

Later, over his soda-water, among the knots of black shoulders and white shoulders round the sandwich plates, William began to be reminiscent. In the old days matters had been very difficult.

"They're difficult now," said Richard, tossing off a whisky "Now that Hobart has her civic rights and every government is trying how many taxes it can clap on before it goes out of power. They are wanting me to stand at the next election, but I don't know."

"When we first came here," said William, "we had to drink from a small lagoon with a dead horse in it, and I remember the water being boiled in a billy over a fire of fuchsia that made it taste of onions. Your father said it was quite good soup . . . or was it your grandfather?" He caught at the ribbons of a pretty child slipping past his chair. "Which was it, my dear? I get somewhat confused . . . so many of you."

"You are my grandfather," said slim Emily. She patted his arm and went out with the young Sir Almeric Berry who was Julia's grandson. Julia who had brought four grandchildren an hour ago, considered Almeric mad to dance again with Harry Comyn's Emily. She sat in Madam's chair with the scarlet cushions, mixing finance with religion, and scandal with coquetry. Her bustle and train were enormous, and her diamonds beat Lavinia's, for Charlotte had not got the best of Louisa Sorley's diamonds, any more than she was going to get Almeric for any of the Comyn girls. Julia intended to arrange Almeric's future, she thought, eagerly talking mining with Oliver.

Oliver said that Mount Bischoff had lately been declared by experts to be the only mountain of pure tin in the world, and Julia had been extraordinarily lucky to get in on velvet; and if ever a grateful country should honour a man, Tasmania should honour James Smith, who had wandered so many years in the wet trackless forests of the west coast before he discovered it. But Julia said that people had been too busy buying scrip, and raging because bullock-drays with the ore got bogged on the bad roads, to bother about that, and even though she had bought cheap years

before the Launceston furnaces started in 1884, Noll should not talk about luck.

“It’s all prayer, Noll. I always believe, and so I know that it must be. Are they really playing euchre in the library? You must take me there at once.”

Mab was there, and Julia demanded to sit in at his table.

“You always played for high stakes, Mab, although you didn’t always win,” she said, coquettishly reminiscent with her face deep-lined like a fox’s mask.

Oliver left her arranging her bustle and went to talk to Jenny. Of all the Comyns he knew himself to be the only one who fully appreciated Jenny. Mab loved her, but that was a smaller thing. Jenny carried Clent on her shoulders, and no one knew it. She had carried Brevis Keyes until he found his feet, and no one knew it. She carried like a gay banner all her burdens, and no one knew it. No one, that is, except Oliver, who always felt a warm stimulus on coming near anything so gallant. But, egad, he was sorry for Julia, because, after all, what is woman when youth forsakes her unless she has a broad philosophy like Jenny’s? Nothing broad about Julia except her hips, he thought.

“Did you speak, Uncle Noll?” asked Jenny, watching Brevis coming through the hall as though he were looking for something. His lost youth, she guessed, suspecting how youth had unconsciously cast him out from among them. Poor Brevis, who could only be a revered judge when he wanted so terribly to be the gay young spark he never had cared to be in his own youth. He saw her and half stopped, his thin guarded face almost wistful. Jenny smiled, waving her hand. He would never love her again, and so she would stiffen her back and let them be friends for an hour. Strange, oh, very strange it was, to be friends with one who had been her lover!

“With more sensuality,” said Oliver to Brevis, “I might have enjoyed life more. But it takes a cool detachment to enjoy people.” He meditated to Brevis on life, with a tolerant cynicism. Over his thin high-bred nose the skin stretched tight. There was about him, thought Jenny, the faint sweet aroma of dead things blossomed long ago. His cool sunken eyes turned this way and that. Like so many people who achieve nothing else, he had

achieved in essence the art of appraising others. Noll Comyn was, Jenny knew, considered a connoisseur in taste ; one of the world's triumphs ; decorative and useless to it as a butterfly ; walking through it graciously, twirling a tasseled cane, a glove, dropping a sharp-edged jest or two, a compliment.

Uncle Noll, thought Jenny, had never been really of the world. Never crashing into the depths and climbing out with his mouth full of oaths and his eyes on the stars, like Uncle Mab ; never earnestly slaving himself into stupidity, like Papa and Humphrey ; never tilting with gallant cheers at every windmill, like the Captain nor taking the tide at the full and being resentful because it would not let him back into the shallows, like Brevis. (Time, standing by, purring over its victims, winked at Jenny. There seemed a suppleness, a fluid vision in the air. . . . Well, well, said Time, there you all go down the chute together, arms, legs, and puzzled heads together, and perhaps we'll make a better job of you all, next try.)

Oliver thought the rooms had a tousled look. Scraps of artificial flowers, of ribbons, of rosy tulle lay about. With all exits open young men passing still smelled of perspiration, and white collars had been discarded again and again until the dressing-room on the first floor was disgusting. And they would keep it up until daylight, all flames and confusions and languorous longings, and then pile out noisily to their carriages and saddle-horses and probably sing all the way home. "Too much noise, too much assertion. In fine, too much youth," he complained to Brevis. "It fore-shadows the decay of intelligence."

"What does that matter, so long as we have the intelligence of decay?" said Jenny cheerfully. "That's what you and I are achieving, Uncle Noll."

"A much less robust matter, my dear," said Oliver. But he looked pleased, and Brevis thought: She always says the right thing. . . . And then remembered what she had said to him just now, and walked away. But he was not so sure as he had been that Jenny hadn't said the right thing then. Perhaps if he had held on to that bright valiancy all these years success would have tasted less like ashes in the mouth.

The band turned a mazurka into "Myosotis," and in the *salon*

where lamps smoked and went out among the roses and the lilting feet that never tired young voices sang :

“ Oh, love for a year, a week, a day,
But alas for the love that loves always . . . ”

and Nan, her yellow tulle all crumpled against Brian, knew that “ Myosotis ” was nonsense and only the Songs of Solomon real. And the painted faces on the wall looked down wondering : Why are we so soon forgotten ? Is the day of life, then, done so soon ?

When everyone was putting on cloaks and hats under the pink dawning Brevis spoke to Jenny on the stair. She had been at everyone’s call throughout the night, and her little peaked face was white, but she showed no signs of flagging.

“ Jenny,” he said abruptly, “ may I come again to Clent sometimes ? ”

“ Clent never shut its doors to any but bush-rangers, Brevis. Come if you like,” said Jenny, and passed on, her arms full o cloaks. But at the angle of the stair she stood a moment, shutting her eyes. Why hadn’t she stopped him, he who was the greatest bush-ranger of them all ? Ah, well ; *faut être philosophe*, and she knew her own mind. She would rather have the little Brevis could give, and feel hourly pain at that little, than have nothing of him at all.

The girls crowded into the carriages, and the young men rode near the windows or raced in rollicking knots down the Main Road which had now become very respectable except for a few tramps. One sat under the raking hawthorn hedge in the sweet grass and the warmth and had her moment of sentiment as the riotous parties passed. A pipe and a full stomach—Jenny never sent one empty from Clent—had temporarily put old Mary among the beatitudes.

“ Aw, bless ’em,” she said. “ May they never taste sorer.” Then suddenly she thought that they might know. These gentry so gay and so pretty might have seen him. She scrambled to her tottering feet. “ Has anyone seed my man ? ” she cried into the impassive dust of fifty years.

VI

Jenny found Madam very much at ease among her pillows, talking to people who were not there, while the sound of wheels died away on the carriage-sweep. "But certainly I will dance with him, Gillaume. He passions me . . . ah, will you never understand? It is you I love, but I cannot always be good. . . . Always I have broken circles as I broke yours, Major Sorley. And you could not mend it, although forever you revolved within it, good little James . . ." Her shrunk hand went groping over the coverlet for Jenny's. "Had I not broken circles, possibly you and Mab had not. *Petite*, was the fault mine? Possibly all mine?"

Jenny put her arms round Madam. So little of gay Madam Comyn now but fine nainsook and lace, a faint scent of sandalwood the last flicker of an indomitable spirit. Life . . . What is it but an endless march of adjustments, a heaping up of courage or despair? . . . For we have to build *something*, thought Jenny, The only choice we seem to have is which it shall be. . . . She kissed Madam.

"Dearest, dearest: I'm so sorry for all I couldn't do!"

"No matter," said Madam, with her hand on Jenny's white hair. "You are very young yet, child, and always I have hope. But remember that *canaille* cannot become aristocrats, and do not marry among the bourgeoisie. There were some people here recently," she said, dropping her voice, "and I think they must have been friends of the good Susan, otherwise they could never have got into Clent. They carried no torch, but merely a fire to warm the *pot-au-feu*. It was not fit, my love, that they should be entertained by the Comyns of Clent."

She raised herself in Jenny's arms; her shrunken brown face and dim eyes suddenly alight. "Eh! The torch! The torch! I said that he would bear it. Look, child! Here he comes: Mabile, beautiful as the morning . . ."

She fell back, and at Jenny's cry Mab came hurriedly, his grey hair on end, stumbling over dressing-gown tassels. Madam did not notice him. She looked at Jenny, a flicker of mischief along with the happiness in her face. "An assignation . . . *avec mon bonhomme*," she whispered, and presently went to keep it.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

I

“WHITE hair should look like watered silk, and not like a bunch of thistledown,” complained Charlotte, stooping—at sixty-odd it was quite an effort—to pick up Jenny’s gardening scissors off the hall floor.

“Brevis prefers it this way,” said Jenny, carelessly, continuing to arrange branches of pink may and lilac in the brass floor pots which Charlotte had never taken away because she thought her own bamboo stands so much prettier.

“Ah, yes.” Charlotte plumped down on the carved hall stair; loosed the strings of her print sunbonnet, and threw back her silk dolman with an air of determination. It was precisely because someone must speak to Jenny about Brevis that Charlotte had walked out in all this heat with so many daddy-long-legs rising in the grass that she had to keep her mouth shut for fear of swallowing them. “Yes. I hear that Judge Keyes is travelling north next week on his way to Melbourne. I have written asking him to stay a night at Bredon.”

“He’ll be here to-night. I’ve just been making up his bed,” said Jenny. She whistled a few bars of a music-hall song that her great-niece (another Jenny who was convalescing here after measles) had been singing, dropped the scissors again, and moved off to another pot. Charlotte turned red.

“Really, this is becoming scandalous!” she burst out.

“Why?” Jenny turned with an expression of innocent surprise. “I didn’t say *our* bed.”

“I don’t know what to make of you,” cried Charlotte, nearly in tears with heat and vexation. “I think you might consider your relations a little.”

“I thought I did. Dick’s Leonard always sends his family here when they’ve been ill. So does Phœbe’s Flo and . . . well, you all do, don’t you?”

“They have probably been unwise . . .” Charlotte stopped. It

would never do to have all the family connections convalescing at Bredon, which was what would happen if she prevented their coming to Clent. "You must know how people talk about you and Brevis, Jenny."

"Still?" murmured Jenny, her head on one side as she settled the lilac. Brevis loved lilac as she loved everything that to him meant youth. "Are they talking still, Lottie? I thought that search in all the orphan asylums for little Keyes to the mystery had been abandoned long ago."

"I won't listen. You are indecent," said Charlotte, upset at finding that Jenny knew of the part she had taken in that. "I certainly think you should either marry him or send him away."

"Oh, so do I!" cried Jenny, warmly. "It's so nice to have you agree with me."

Charlotte fanned herself with her gloves. This must stop, she thought, although not quite sure what she wanted to stop. The Keyes-Comyn connections which had grown so extraordinarily close again in these last eighteen or nineteen years certainly did lend distinction to the family, although if they could be persuaded to marry even now . . .

"Of course I realize that anyone who has such control of the morals of society as he has could hardly be expected to condone your behaviour. But . . ."

Jenny began to laugh. Then said solemnly: "Well, there you are. Nobody could expect him to condone my behaviour, particularly since he is the only person who knows what it was. Isn't this pink may a joy? I climbed up on the kitchen wall to pick it."

"Well, I think at least you might get me a glass of cider," said Charlotte, giving it up as she always had to in the end.

Mab was filling up the bottle-rack in the cellar when Jenny went down the worn stone steps into the shadowy coolness. New Zealand and hides and tallow were too much for an old man, he had decided, when Jenny was left alone at Clent by the death of William six years before. Perhaps the suspicion that Lottie would have turned Jenny out and put in her widowed Patty had something to do with it, for he was a very energetic man still, a huge gaunt, powerful framework of a man pottering about among the bottles with his hands stained with wine.

“Lottie wants to drink my health and Brevis’s, Uncle Mab,” said Jenny, her green-cotton gown making a ray of cool light in the rich browns of the cellar.

“Give her that bottle. It’s corked,” said Mab.

He enjoyed making cider, although there was no longer the old trace-horse turning in a circle endless as time, nor labourers in corduroys and bo-yangs pouring in apples out of tip-drays—gleaming, glowing scarlet rivers of apples. But cider made in a hand-press was very good. “You get the world in it,” he used to tell Jenny. “Sharpness, sweetness, spurts of acid, and plenty of warm sun. You are God pounding people out in essence when you make cider and pour it into great barrels to ferment and then draw it off into separate bottles to mature.”

Jenny understood that. She and Mab and Brevis had been maturing in separate bottles so long. Mab, she felt, had matured the most; for Brevis still fermented for that which had gone by him, and she for what she had never had. Mab took a swig from a pannikin under a spigot.

“Prime stuff! We’ll keep that for Brevis. Give Lottie the corked bottle. How long does Brevis stay this time, dear maid?”

“A week,” she said. “He needs a rest, he’s been so dreadfully busy.”

Mab nodded. Brevis always came to Jenny for rest—and always got it just as he got the best sheets and the best of everything else, including Jenny. But since she chose to have it so, it was not Mab who would deny her, although he would never understand what there was in the chap to have held a woman like Jenny so long.

Jenny poured the corked wine for Charlotte without a quiver. She knew that Lottie had no palate. Not like Brevis, whose fastidiousness seemed to refine with age, so that it was worth while making Clent beautiful for him. With Chrissy’s help she set the dinner-table; laburnum, lilac in the tall crystal vases, early strawberries and clotted yellow cream in the worn old silver bowls. “And the judge will sit here, Chrissy, because he likes to look out on the gardens, and the hyacinths and narcissi are so very lovely just now.”

She ran up to dress, a little cynical with herself because the

coming of Brevis still made her heart beat as though she were still a girl. Up in the attic above her head she heard a girl's laughter where Young Jenny was talking to Comyn Sorley's youngest boy, Adam.

II

Young Jenny—playing tennis, bathing with young men, smoking cigarettes, or the like—had managed to contract measles ; and when she was convalescent her father Leonard (son of Richard) sent her to Jenny at Clent because it was the habit of the family to send children recovering from sickness or incipient love-troubles to Jenny.

Young Jenny had an evanescent frailty about her still, and Adam kissed the blue shadows under her eyes more than once as they sat on the attic floor against an old brown hair trunk and talked cricket and business. They were both practical young people, and both going into business. Young Jenny meant to be a journalist, although, she complained, there were no such goings-on now as those Aunt Jenny talked of.

No thin-lipped James Sorley now, to flog people into his way of thinking with the mere weight of words. No more Captains banging violent drums. No more bush-rangers or stage-coaches. Tasmania, said Adam, had got rid of its experimental megatheriums and pterodactyls and gone in very properly for the domestic animals. One might almost say, agreed Young Jenny—since most of the old homes descended through the generations along with the rat-tailed spoons and family names—that Tasmania rather specialized in domesticity. Gentlemen (how the word had gone out of fashion !) travelled now by rail instead of in their own carriages, paying for tickets and taxes like good citizens, and never resorting to shot-guns. And they played golf and tennis instead of politics, leaving these, quite in the new English fashion, to their inferiors.

Steamers also rushed out of Australasian ports almost daily, taking the young men away to something new. Adam hoped to go soon, to build bridges in China. Australasia, they agreed, was no longer a place where the English quality threw its chicken

bones. It had reared up like a giant, though still rather unsteady in the legs, and England had begun to look up surprisedly from shooting grouse in August stubbles or selling balloons in the Mile End Road, and listen to Australia calling herself a commonwealth, sailing out under her own flag, sending her regiments to the Boer War.

"Tasmania," said Adam, "is too small to ever have a pull in commonwealth matters. It will have to do as it is told. I'd advise Melbourne or Sydney for your journalism, Jenny."

"I suppose so. But I'll hate to leave dear little Tassy."

She got up and leaned out of the window. Larks sang in the sky and their song came in like a river. Flowers were abloom in the garden below and their scent came in like a song. A lovely old place, Clent, dreaming its dreams of the past, with all its out-buildings going to pieces because Uncle Mark meant to pull it down when Aunt Jenny died. Too expensive to keep up, he said, and of course all Clent belonged to him now. Young Jenny wished that Aunt Jenny need never die.

"Oh, Lord! Just look at this," said Adam. He had pulled from a heap of yellowed music in the old hair trunk a faded song with a crinolined lady, a languishing gallant holding a crush-hat like a soup-plate over his heart. "To Miss Jenny Comyn with the respectful admiration of Adam Sorley, 1857," was written neatly in the corner. "You and me," said Adam grinning. "And here's an old Confession Book . . . 'Maria Beverley.' . . . I say, old Great-aunt Maria loved 'a dark blue eye,' and her favourite colour was 'bridal white.' Frisky old thing! . . . Oh, here's Aunt Jenny."

They both bent close. Here might be some clue to Aunt Jenny at last. But there wasn't. Jenny Comyn's colour was "the green in your eye." Her favourite dish "food for reflection." Even in the simple inanities of a simple age it appeared that Aunt Jenny hadn't given herself away.

"I doubt," said Young Jenny, thoughtfully. "if anyone ever got to the bottom of her, excepting perhaps Judge Keyes."

"Look here, Jen," said Adam, seriously. "He should have married her, you know. It was simply rotten of him to get her talked about all her life. Aunt Lottie says that for years no one

would speak to her ; and see the way she waits on him still as though she weren't ten million times too good for him, the sweet thing."

"He's a darling, though. I'm in love with him, myself. There's no one with such manners as Judge Keyes now. . . . Oh, Adam, here's a ripping duet with nothing but *I love you*, over and over. We can make a splendid sentimental catawauling over that."

Jenny, going to her window below to pick a rose to put in her gown, heard them at it. Young Jenny and Young Adam, and history repeating itself in the one-idea'd adorable way it always would. Oh, infantile quaint life, she thought, insisting on nests and dens and gentlemen thrushes still with their young-man slimness overtaken by the hasty necessity of feeding families. Jenny saw them at work on the lawn now, their elegant young whiskers all slimy with worm-juice, their movements half rebellious, half dismayed. And up in the attic were the human thrushes joyously preparing for the same business.

But once, forty . . . fifty years ago, she had sung that duet with Brevis. She went down to open the door to him now because Golly was making the horse-radish sauce.

III

Brevis, coming in, suddenly remembered Ellen Merrick, who had earned his childish hate by kissing him once in the hall. It was many years since Ellen had eloped one night with one of her fantasies and been found dead next day on a tussocky hill. Then Joseph married the cook, who showed off Mrs. Merrick as a kind of heirloom to all her relations, and let her go on keeping the cash-box, and always called Joe "sir." But Mrs. Merrick—and to Brevis this somehow seemed quite shocking—had retained life and her faculties to the age of one hundred and three.

Then he forgot Ellen and ran his thin fingers through his iron-grey hair, with a long breath of content.

"It's good to be here again, Jenny," he said.

Young Adam, all ardencies and plans, Young Jenny with skin like white violets and one of those new close gowns which are

so divinely revealing, were at dinner, and for a while Brevis liked to look at them and hear them talk.

"Grandfather is to get a title at the next Birthday Honours, but don't tell," piped up Young Jenny, indiscreet and exquisite as a moonbeam on a cloud. Brevis privately thought it very likely. Dick Comyn's beers had probably made more men drunk than any others in Australasia, and it was more than probable that he'd sent a barrel to the King.

"Well," said Mab, judicially. "I could have told you that ten years ago. For services rendered in the Boer War, you know. England's just getting out the awards."

"Impulsive lady, England," said Jenny, eating strawberries.

"That Boer War has had a most pernicious effect on the young men," said Brevis, twirling his wine-glass and watching his thin brown wrist beneath the white cuff. "They're swollen with conceit now; mistook physical travel for mental travel, of course, as half the world does, and now they won't settle down and farm the country."

"I wonder if a week here will be enough to get you well again," said Jenny, with exaggerated sympathy.

Brevis laughed. Jenny always would be provocative, and her eyes with their delicate sweep of dark brows were making a Gainsborough-Reynolds lady of her beneath the piled waves of white hair in the soft candle-light.

"You have not always been so tender with the young men," he told her.

"I am now. When they're in love, which is the normal state of young men, they always want to kiss me. I let them do it. My colour doesn't come off. Does it, Adam?"

"Confound you!" Brevis straightened up with a jerk. "You're dangerous! How did you guess that I was . . . admiring it?"

"Oh, la, la! I've had long enough in which to guess that you never fully trust anyone, haven't I?"

"Blame my profession. Not me."

The young things were staring at Aunt Jenny daring to chaff the "greatest man in Tasmania," and Brevis felt a little annoyed. He was certainly very tired. There had been some unusually heavy cases at the late Criminal Sessions, and his summing-up

(everyone said, and he knew it himself) had been masterly. Quite intoxicating still, it was, to touch the pulse of life with the finger-ends; to lay bare, delicately, firmly, a man's uttermost soul for all the world to see. Quite intoxicating to sit up before all men, august, irrevocable, like God.

But what a relief it was when the young people raced off somewhere, and he lay in a long chair on the veranda with cigars and coffee and knew that he need not speak another word unless he chose.

The deep stone veranda was still warm with the sunshine pouring into it all day, and against the house walls honeysuckle and yellow and white jasmine loosened their sweets into the dusk. Their thick stems belonged to the days before the stubborn English pioneers had submitted to climate and allowed verandas to spoil the dignity of their Georgian houses. Brevis said, musing: "How these old fellows hated evolution! Yet I suppose that without that stiff-necked defiance of surroundings England would never have colonized as she has."

"They drank life as if it were old port, every mouthful to be well savoured on the palate," said Jenny. "Now it is tossed down like a fizzy drink."

"No body to it," agreed Bevis. "The gods who brew it now are grown goatish and old. Even crime is not Homeric any more."

"I think life's pretty much of a hurdle-race still," said Mab, his Wellington nose shining faintly in the starlight.

"The whole of Australasia is a hurdle-race," said Brevis, crossly. "Not the smallest, most sporadic of townships but has its own course and its retained jockeys. Not like the old days of gentlemen riders." He looked down the garden path where bosses of white pinks gleamed dimly although roses and adjuratum had sunk into the dark, and remembered a steeplechase he had won at Trienna against Mab Comyn . . . how many years ago? Young Jenny, Young Adam laughing down in the leaky old Clent boat on the river, hurt him a little. He and Jenny, he felt, should have done so much with their own youth. He should have ignored Frasquita, or she should have ignored her conscience. To-night he felt quite inexplicably distressed that Jenny should have

refused to marry him when Susan died in 'ninety-nine, although he had really been neither distressed nor disappointed then.

The young ones had splashed off in the boat. Frogs began chanting down by the river. There was a soft stir in the trees. Across the moon drifted light fleeces faintly golden. The night smelled drowsy and strangely sweet, and Mab Comyn slept, his big knees drawn up, his white shirt-front hiding now quiescent depths. Brevis said suddenly. "Jenny, will you marry me now?"

In the next chair Jenny moved so he could see the pale pointed outline of her face. Her voice was mischievous, though tender: "My very learned and distinguished friend, how damned sorry you'd be to-morrow if I said I would! As I told you before, Brevis, you don't want me in that way now. It's too late to merge our individualities now. You climbed alone, and a man so famous as you is better alone. He has his clubs, his parties; he is rude to his valet, who understands his little ways as a woman couldn't. In the light that shines on him he has no fear of the tongues that would be set wagging again if you married Jenny Comyn at last. He can still dream of kisses that no lips could give him now."

"Yours might. But you will never give them."

In the back of his mind he knew, as he had known before, that she was right. But the springtime in the blood, Young Jenny, Young Adam had upset him, and he really was very tired. The cogs of the will are apt to slip a little then. To-night he wanted a woman's arms, a woman's kisses.

"Very well," said Jenny, sitting up. "We accept that, I will never give them. And now for once I have something of my own to say. If I gave you too much in those early days, if I cheapened myself a bit, I don't regret it. I wouldn't trade the memory of that love for all the tea in China. I am proud to have given you all the love I ever had for a man, Brevis. And if I lost your love, as I did, it was with my full consent. I would not try to hold you."

"You never really lost it, Jenny. Let us make the most of what is left."

"We are. It's the only way we can do it now." She laid her hand on his. "Let the young ones kiss and lie together and love. That's not for us, my dear. That's not for us any more. And I

really could not sink into being Brevis Keyes's wife after all the thrills I can still give successive generations who look on me as a mystery."

"Perhaps you're right," said Brevis, with a sigh. Jenny in her lightsome way seemed to have mastered that most difficult chapter which we all have to read in the world's books, supposing we live long enough. The lovely tragic flight of time past our clutching hands had not left her so disillusioned as Brevis. "I wish I could meet old age with your gay dignity, Jenny. I wonder how you'll meet death."

"Why, with cap cocked, I hope, and flower behind the ear, and swagger-stick under the arm. It will be such a lark, Brevis. I shall ride comets (I've *always* wanted to ride comets), and burst all the drifting light-balls into new worlds and wash my hands in the glory. I, Jenny Comyn, who has never yet even crossed Bass Strait!"

Jenny's mind, Brevis thought, recklessly tilting through space, somehow carried him limping with it. Behind Jenny's whirling words you saw (she made you) other stars, conceptions vast, heroic, serene. Good medicine, Jenny, for a man whom the doctors had lately warned: a heart . . . failing arteries . . . But not a word of that, for pity's sake, to Jenny putting Monsieur Death into his place, making of him a footstool to vault from into the skies.

"You do me good, Jenny," Brevis said, feeling almost with anguish how cruel it was for them both that all the flame, all the love and laughter which still was Jenny Comyn was to go down uninherited into the dust. Since, in spite of her, one could not believe in her fantasies. Jenny patted his arm. There was a brief silence, broken by the rapturous chanting of the frogs. Then happily, easily as always, they began to squabble about their opinions.

Jenny blamed the times only for the convicts. If Raleigh and Drake had lived in Victoria's instead of Elizabeth's reign, they would both have ended up in Port Arthur, she declared. "Other queens, other manners. Victoria loved her statesmen, but it was her adventurers for good old Bess."

"You needn't think I uphold officialdom," said Brevis; "especially of the mediocre man abruptly invested with power."

Brevis saw officialdom in those early days drunk on power and with no one to say "Don't" to it. "Once the mediocre man looks on himself as a symbol, he goes Druidic and starts sacrificing everything and everyone to the glorious dawn of what he thinks is his mind. That's what made the bush-rangers and, to a certain extent, the pioneers. Something in that breed which doomed them forever to hit officialdom on the nose."

"Bless them," said Jenny, who went all the way with the pioneers there.

"A fine instinct," said Brevis. "Where would all the young nations of the world have been without it? All built on rebellion of some kind, the young nations. When I have to pass sentence on one of those brown hard-eyed fellows, whose very vitality has made him a sinner, I think: Sir; it's your kind in the bulk that is going to keep the world living when all the old nations have gone to sleep over the fire. . . . It is, too."

"How you people talk!" said Mab, waking with a grunt. "Fellow can't get a wink of sleep."

"It's getting cold, anyway," said Jenny. "Let's all go to bed. Young Jenny went upstairs long ago."

She said good night to Brevis in the hall. Perfection of a courtly old gentleman, Brevis, with his little twisted moustache and white imperial giving his thin dark face a delicately foreign look. He had begun to grow them when the rest of the world went back to shaved faces, and that was so like Brevis, who never could bear to be just like others. He held Jenny's hand, which was an unusual ceremony, while Mab climbed the stairs.

"I'm no better than most men," he said, "but I'd like you to know that I have been faithful to you since I first loved you, Jenny."

"Well, I appreciate that, Brevis, though I dare say you missed a lot of fun by it. . . . Don't get up to breakfast. Golly will bring it in."

She went through to the *salon* to put all straight for the night. Faithful? Strange Brevis, who had never been faithful to any but his own fastidious temperamental self! Idealists, all men: believing that by striking attitudes and formulating oaths they can alter elementary forces. Women know better, thought Jenny,

pushing the furniture an inch this way and that, as a woman will with the things she loves. Women generally accept what is ; and if they squabble, it is generally with one another and not with God. And if they laugh, it is generally not with one another but with God.

Madam's harp, the pictures, the old tambour frames and fauteuils seemed exhaling a faint sweet life ; movement stood on the edge of expression, sound on the edge of all the silences. Surely they were all here, the dear ghosts, for so often she nearly saw them. Almost she heard Grandpa come down the stair and go into the dining-room for his after-dinner nip, or Humphrey whistling as he trod overhead, taking down riding-whips and spurs from the bedroom wall. And surely on some quiet nights it was Fanny scrambling with Pepper and the puppies along the upper corridor, or Grandma singing in her boudoir some gay little French song.

"Someday I'll be a ghost myself," she thought. "But I wonder who'll want to see me as I so often want to see Grandma."

Drawing the curtains, she looked over the balustrade and the paddocks, to the distant dark smudge where two old huts had stood until Mark cleaned that corner up and made it a fine shrubbery. Looking out, one wondered what the sheep thought, standing there in the long grass and the dew, with wet round bodies. They, too, would see the stars and the gleam of the hurrying river, and the dim mist of moths over the evening primroses, over the sweet clover. One wondered what they thought of it all, waiting to be dumb before the shearer Life, waiting to shut their round mild eyes before the slayer Death.

Jenny stayed there a long time before she, too, went up to bed.

IV

Golly, the faithful friend of a lifetime, always jolting the heavy Chrissy into action, always putting her shoulder to extra wheels, had been spirited away by fat old Alsode Fremp. Pan piped from the woods, and the ancient nymph went dancing, pirouetting to a fresh servitude. So all that year and round into the next

autumn Jenny was rising early, and on this morning the pump was stiff with frost and the skimmer creaked at the half-frozen cream when she drew it round the pan. Golly had not been replaced because Charlotte thought "a certain amount of light work very good for Jenny, and Judge Keyes can always come to Bredon if she finds him too much for her now."

"Damn Lottie," said Jenny, working at the pump, and stopping for breath. But there was a robin with his breast blood-red up on the wall-top, and the walnut trees smelled clear and clean, and there were the rooks teaching the young ones to fly. Disgruntled Chrissy, clop-clopping about the yard (where the stones had worn unevenly as though they knew where the child Jenny had lightly run, where the Captain had trudged with his heavy bag of duck from the marshes), called Jenny to breakfast, and Mab was waiting in the red morning sun, very jovial. And there were two letters for Jenny, and a telegram.

"About the new iron for the pigsties, I suppose," said Jenny, opening it.

She remembered afterwards that Mab had been sitting at the table like the great bronze figurehead of a ship, that the porridge was in the blue bowl she had tried to find for the cream, and she didn't like the cream in that pink jug. She was still thinking of the pink jug as she went into the hall and rang up Charlotte. Charlotte, hearing Jenny's voice as she sat at breakfast, told Mark that it was just as she thought, and he shouldn't have put the telephone in at Clent three months ago.

"Here's Jenny always wanting something. . . . What is it? *What?*"

Could Jenny (she asked it very composedly) have the car at once, please Lottie? She wanted to go to Hobart. Brevis was ill.

"*Well,*" said Lottie to Mark (she had just presence of mind to put her hand over the mouthpiece). "What do you think of that, I'd like to know!"

Mark thought that Jenny had better have the car.

"I'll be over in ten minutes," cried Charlotte into the mouthpiece; "and then we can just catch the nine-forty-five at Milton, Mark says."

Jenny's voice came back very clear, and Charlotte could tell

that she was looking just like Grandma. "No need for you to come. I'll have Uncle Mab. Thanks about the car."

Jenny put up the receiver and Charlotte hurried Patty upstairs to look for a hat that was not too gay. "Of course he's dying, though I won't suggest it to him. I'll wear my brown silk and turn in the tartan trimming at the neck."

Charlotte knew that she had not been so excited in years. Now she would at last get to the bottom of the mystery, for people always spoke the truth on their deathbeds and not wild horses should keep her out of the room. Besides, it was only right for the protection of Jenny's name that she should be there, and as for her not going to Hobart, Charlotte would like to see Jenny prevent her.

Jenny did not try, but Mab did. Charlotte said: "She needs a *woman* with her. You don't understand, Uncle Mab. Let me see the telegram." Jeffson (who was Brevis's man) briefly informed Miss Comyn that the judge had had a seizure and wanted her. It added that the sooner she came the better.

"Oh, hurry, hurry, Atkins!" cried Charlotte to the chauffeur, her heavy black veil which had done duty at many funerals blowing across Mab's face. But Jenny sat looking like Madam, and never said a word. Jenny, thought Mab, defying the civilizations and the centuries, defying disaster abroad in the frosty air where hawks sheered in the thin blue . . . little Jenny who had been so set apart from life. . . .

The nine-forty-five rattled them at last down through the apple orchards of the Bagdad Valley. Red and yellow globes of light still loaded the trees, and carts stood under them, and girls in sunbonnets picking. There were glints from tin pails; and, later on, glints from the sea at Bridgewater Ferry. Charlotte, after trying unsuccessfully to comfort a Jenny who did not appear to need comfort—perhaps she had never really loved him, after all—thought that there was sure to be a public funeral and certainly splendid obituary notices for Brevis. England might even mention him in *The Times*. And Jenny, of course, would insist on going to the funeral in the first mourning carriage, supported by Charlotte. Brevis (how surprising when one thought of it!) had no relations. A lonely tower he had risen and stood above

Tasmania. A lonely tower he would fall. Unless, indeed, there had been a secret marriage. Oh, the glorious limelight that would fall then on Jenny, sitting so quiet that Lottie could have pinched her! The limelight that would fall upon them all!

V

Jeffson took them up the carpeted stair with a very bare lady holding a lamp in a niche; knocked softly on a heavy carved door. The judge had given orders, he explained, looking askance at Charlotte, curious and deferential towards Jenny. Jeffson had always thought Miss Comyn a perfect little lady, and he hoped the judge would put things right at last. But no parson had been sent for.

A brisk young doctor came out of the room; seemed much surprised to see Charlotte; said that nothing could make any difference. "A mere question of time, madam," and went away, still looking much surprised and not seeing Jenny at all. Jenny walked straight in and over to the bed. A nurse standing there stepped back and raised the blind so that light fell on the bed. Jenny stooped.

"Hello, Brevis," she said in her warm, strong, husky voice.

Charlotte stood shocked by the door. If that wasn't just like Jenny, when one should speak in whispers, move on tiptoe! Charlotte did both, approaching the nurse. Somehow she didn't feel quite equal to approaching Brevis lying back among the pillows, very tired and foreign-looking, his little white moustache and imperial deliberately distinguished. Charlotte wondered if they would put a bust of him in St. David's. But of course Brevis never went to church.

"See what it is to be a great man and asked to so many rich dinners," said Jenny, sitting down and taking his hands. "Well, I suppose I'd do just the same."

Charlotte began tearing off her tight kid gloves, seeing Jenny's bare hands. Jenny, most amazingly, had thought of everything. She had even brought a rose for Brevis to smell. "From the damask bush by the balustrade," she told him. "Shut your eyes

and remember how the scent comes out on dewy evenings when the frogs are croaking."

Brevis smiled. He shut his eyes. The troubled look went off his face. Charlotte thought how courageous Jenny was. Never once asking how he felt, or saying she was sorry to see him like this, or anything.

The evening light flooded the bed with unsteady gold ; flooded the room. A very funny room, Charlotte thought, though probably expensive. That stiff thick strip of queerly figured embroidery on the wall. That stiff gilt Pieta (or was it gold ?) hung over the mantel, that queer stiff smiling woman with beautiful hands. On a pedestal with no drapery a marble head staring. Just a head. Scarcely anything else in the room at all. In some way it made Charlotte forget the Brevis in the bed and remember the man, lean, courteous, with inscrutable eyes and a good cigar between thin brown fingers.

And there Jenny sat, smiling down a little at Brevis among the pillows, his eyes shut.

Now, thought Charlotte, was Jenny's chance to make him marry her. Feeling it her duty to suggest it, she approached the bed. But neither saw her. They were looking at each other and smiling, and she hesitated, wondering if it were possible that there had been a secret marriage after all. Then—she was surprised at her nervousness—she touched Jenny's arm. Jenny glanced round. She had thrown her hat off, and with her white hair and pale green frock she looked a most unsuitable person to be at a death-bed. Charlotte was glad that she had not taken off her own black veil. "Jenny . . . a clergyman," she whispered urgently. "For the sake of your name, you know. He can't refuse you now."

Jenny turned back to the bed as though she had not heard.

"Don't tame all the comets, Brevis," she said. "I'll like 'em a little wild."

Brevis whispered something, and Jenny bent over and kissed him on the lips. Then again they sat still for so long that Charlotte, missing her tea and feeling very neglected, fell asleep in the big chair in the corner.

"Come soon," said Brevis, clearly, from the bed.

"I will," said Jenny, just as clearly.

Charlotte awoke with a start, to hear Jenny marrying herself to Brevis at last. And there was the clergyman . . . But it was only the nurse saying, "I think you had better take the lady away now."

Charlotte could hardly believe that it was all over and nothing confessed nor pardoned; nothing done. Jenny wouldn't even wait for the funeral. "Brevis would hate me to," she said.

In the railway carriage (Mab had reserved one) Charlotte put her arms round Jenny and said how glad she was to have been there as a support, dear Jenny.

"Oh, were you?" said Jenny, blankly. And then Mab took Charlotte by the arm and marched her down to the other end of the carriage. "You stay there, Lottie, and keep your mouth shut or I'll give you the worst spanking you ever had in your life," he said. Charlotte stayed. It was dangerous to provoke a madman, and if Jenny didn't care enough to cry she did . . . and would. She sat and wept for disappointment and anger; and it was all a piece with the rest if Brevis had not left Jenny his money after all.

VI

The canaries sang riotously in the window just as their far-away progenitors had sung for Madam. Sunlight was doing wonders for the canaries and the gilt cages. They were the Taj Mahal, Marco Polo's cities of gold; they were all the fine webbing of the centuries which never can quite hide the immortal song within. Jenny in a blue print frock stood on tiptoe to let Solomon and Robert the Devil fight for the seed between her lips. They fluffed out, balls of angry down, and Mab came in at the front door with some news from Bredon.

"Dick's done it," he cried. "A baronet, no less."

"Oh dear! What would Grandma say," cried Jenny, plumping down on the window seat. They looked at each other guiltily, these two miscreants from whom Madam had expected so much.

"And I've never even won a ticket in Tattersalls," said Mab.

"But the Comyn name has come to honour at last," cried Jenny. "Through beer!"

They laughed until Jenny mopped her eyes. Then, by a like impulse—they so often thought in common, these two—they looked through the window. After last night's frost brown leaves dropped gently from the walnut trees. In and out of the branches ricketed bright parrots come down from the ranges. Over Clent hills sparkled Comyn Sorley's new fences, browsed Comyn Sorley's sheep.

"Comyns and Sorleys all one at last," said Jenny. "But there are no more pioneers." Then she cried with a sudden glow: "But, oh, Uncle Mab, isn't it fun to think of all the lives and lives ahead of us still!"

