

Gibbs George

# The Splendid Outcast



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### CHAPTER I

### THE CONVALESCENT

Jim Horton awoke in high fever and great pain but the operation upon his skull had been successful and it was believed that he would recover. Something as to the facts of the exploit of the wounded man had come to the hospital and he was an object of especial solicitude by both surgeons and nurses. They had worked hard to save him that he might be alive for the decoration that was sure to come and the night had brought a distinct improvement in his condition. The nurse still watched his breathing eagerly and wrote down the new and favorable record upon the chart by his bedside. Miss Newberry was not in the least sentimental and the war had blunted her sensibilities, but there was no denying the fact that when the dressing was removed from his head the patient was extremely good to look at. He rewarded her on the morrow with a smile.

"How long have I been here?" he murmured hazily.

"Six days," she replied; "but you mustn't talk."

"Six – ? Wounded – "

"Sh – . In the head, shoulder and leg, but you're doing nicely."

"Won't you tell me – ?" he began.

But she soothed him gently. "Not now – later perhaps. You must sleep again. Drink this – please."

Horton obeyed, for he found himself too weak to oppose her. It was very restful here; he wriggled his toes luxuriously against the soft sheets for a moment. If things would only stop whirling around... And the pain ... but that seemed to cease again and he slept. Indeed his awakening was only to half-consciousness. Other days and nights followed when he lay in a sort of doze, aware of much suffering and a great confusion of thought. But slowly, as he grew stronger, the facts of his present position emerged from the dimness and with them a mild curiosity, scarcely lucid as yet, as to how he had gotten there. At last there came a morning when the fog upon his memory seemed to roll aside and he began to recall one by one the incidents that had preceded his unconsciousness.

There had been a fight. Some fight that was. Huns all over the place – in a ring around the rocks, up in the branches of the trees – everywhere. But he had held on until the Boches had started to run when the American line advanced. He remembered that the Engineers could do other things besides build saps and bridges. Good old Engineers! Something was wrong – somewhere.

Out of his clouded brain, slowly, the facts came to him – things that had happened before the fight – just before. Harry – his twin brother Harry, lying in the ditch just behind Jim's squad of Engineers, a coward, in a blue funk – afraid to carry out his Major's orders to go forward and investigate. A coward, of course! Harry would be. He had always been a coward.

Jim Horton sighed, his mind, ambling weakly into vacancy, suddenly arrested by a query.

*What else?* – What else had happened? Something to do with the remarkable likeness between himself and Harry? The likeness, – so strong that only their own mother had been able to tell them apart.

Memory came to him with a rush. He remembered now what had happened in the darkness, what he had done. Taken Harry's lieutenant's uniform, giving the coward his own corporal's outfit.

Then he, Jim Horton, had gone on and carried out the Major's orders, leaving the coward writhing in the ditch.

By George! – the fight – he, Jim Horton, had won the victory at Boissière Wood for the – th Infantry – *for Harry!* – *as Harry!*

Perhaps, he was really Harry and not Jim Horton at all? He glanced around him curiously, as though somewhat amused at the metempsychosis. And then thoughtfully shook his head.

No. He was Jim Horton, all right – Jim Horton. There was no mistake about that.

But Harry! Imagine meeting Harry in a situation like that after all these years! A coward! Not that that was a very surprising thing. Harry had always been a quitter. There was nothing that Harry could do or be that wasn't utterly despicable in the eyes of his brother Jim, and after having spent the best part of five years trying to live the memory of Harry down –

The nurse appeared silently and looked into Jim Horton's eyes. He closed them a moment and then smiled at her.

"How do you feel?" she asked.

"Better – lots better," he answered; "you see, I can really think – "

"I wouldn't try to do that – not yet."

"Oh, I'm all right." And the nurse was ready for the first time to believe that her patient was to remain this side of the border line of the dim realm into which she had seen so many go, for his eyes were clear and he spoke with definite assurance. But the question that he asked made her dubious again.

"I say, nurse, would you mind telling me what my name is?"

She gazed at him a moment as though a little disappointed and then replied quietly: "Lieutenant Henry G. Horton, of the – th Infantry."

"Oh," said the patient, "I see."

"I think you'd better sleep a while, then I want the Major to see you."

"Oh, don't bother; I'm coming through all right, now. I'm sure of it. But I want to tell you – "

The nurse silenced him gently, then felt his pulse and after another glance at him moved to the next bed. It had been a wonderful operation, but then they couldn't expect the impossible.

Jim Horton closed his eyes, but he didn't sleep. With the shadow of death still hovering over him, he was trying to think charitably of Harry, of the man who had worked such havoc in the lives of those nearest him. The five years that had passed since the death of their mother – poor, tired soul who until the end believed the whole thing a mistake – could not have been fruitful in anything but evil in the life of the reprobate twin-brother who had robbed the family of what had been left of the estate and then fled away from the small town where they lived to the gay lights of New York. And now here he was – an officer of the United States Army where commissions do not come without merit. What did it mean? Harry was always clever enough, too clever by half. Had he quit drinking? Was he living straight? There seemed but one answer to these questions, or he could not have held his job in the army. His job! His commission wouldn't last long if his commanding officer knew what Jim Horton did.

They all thought that the patient in the hospital bed was Harry Horton, a Lieutenant of the – th Infantry, The corporal had won the lieutenant some glory, it seemed, instead of the ruin that awaited the discovery of the cowardice and disobedience of orders. But the substitution would be discovered unless Jim Horton could find his brother Harry. And how was he going to manage that from his hospital bed?

A gentle perspiration exuded from Jim Horton's pores. Being surrounded by Boches in the wood was distinctly less hazardous than this. And so when the nurse returned with the Major, he did his best to straighten out the tangle. The Major was much pleased at the patient's progress, made a suggestion or two about a change in the treatment and was on the point of turning away when Horton spoke.

"Would you mind, sir – just a word?"

"Of course. Something bothering you?"

"Yes. You see – " the patient hesitated again, his lip twisting, "this whole thing is a mistake." The doctor eyed the sick man narrowly.

"A mistake?" And then kindly, "I don't understand."

Horton frowned at the bed-rail. "You see, sir, I'm not Henry G. Horton. I – I'm somebody else."

He saw the nurse and the doctor exchange glances,

"Ah, well," said the medical man with a smile, "I wouldn't bother about it."

"But I *do* bother about it, sir. I've got to tell you. I'm another man. I changed uniforms with – with another fellow in the dark," he finished uneasily.

The same look passed between nurse and surgeon and then he saw Miss Newberry's head move slightly from left to right. The doctor rose.

"Oh, very well. Don't let it bother you, my man. We'll get you all untangled presently. Just try not to think; you're doing nicely."

And the Major moved slowly down the ward.

Jim Horton frowned at the medical officer's broad back.

"Thinks I'm nutty," he muttered to himself, and then grinned. The story *was* a little wild.

When the Major had left the ward, the nurse came back and smoothed Horton's pillow. "You're to be very quiet," she said gently, "and sleep all you can."

"But, nurse," he protested, "I don't want to sleep any more. I told him the truth. I've taken another man's place."

"You did it very well, from all accounts," she said with a smile; "and you'll take another man's before long, they say."

"What do you mean?"

"Promotion," she laughed; "but you won't get it if you have a relapse."

"I'm not going to have a relapse. I'm all right. Better every day, and I'd like you to understand that I know exactly what I'm saying. I took another man's job. He was – was sick and I took his place. I'm not Lieutenant Horton, nurse."

"You may be whatever you please, if you'll only go to sleep."

"Bless your heart! That isn't going to change my identity."

His positiveness rather startled her and made her pause and stare at him soberly. But in a moment her lips curved into a smile, rather tender and sympathetic. It wouldn't do to let this illusion grow, so gently she said: "Your authenticity is well vouched for. The report of your company Captain – the Sergeant-Major of your battalion. You see, you've become rather a famous person in the – th. I've seen some of your papers, they're all quite regular. Even your identification disk. It's here in the drawer with some other things that were in your pockets, so please relax and sleep again, won't you? I mustn't talk to you. It's contrary to orders."

"But nurse – "

She patted him gently on the arm, put a warning finger to her lips, and silently stole away. His gaze followed her the length of the room until she disappeared through the door when he sank back on his pillows with a groan.

"Nutty!" he muttered to himself; "wonder if I am." He touched the bandage and realized that his head was beginning to throb again. "No, I'm Jim Horton all right, there's no doubt about that, but how I'm going to make these seraphic idiots believe it is more than I can see. That Sergeant! And the men... By George! And the Sergeant-Major. Probably looked me over at the dressing station. Oh, Lord, what a mess!"

Things began whirling around and Jim Horton closed his eyes; he wasn't quite as strong as he thought he was, and after a while he slept again.

Downstairs in the Major's office two surgeons and the nurse in charge were discussing the case.

"Queer obsession that. Thinks he's another man. There may be some pressure there yet. It ought to have cleared up by this."

"It's shock, sir, I think. He'll come out of it. He's coming on, Miss Newberry?"

"Splendidly. That's what I can't understand. He *looks* as though he knew what he was saying."

"Any chance of there being a mistake?"

"None at all, sir. Doctor Rawson came down with him in the ambulance, his own company captain was there when the patient was given first aid. He would have known his own lieutenant, sir. There can't be any mistake, but he has scarcely any fever – "

"Never mind, keep an extra eye on him. The wound is healing nicely. He'll come through all right."

So Nurse Newberry returned to the ward, somewhat gratified to find her charge again peacefully asleep.

The next day the patient did not revert to his obsession, but lay very quiet looking out of the window. His failure to reveal his secret left him moody and thoughtful. But his temperature was normal and he was without pain.

"You say there were some things in the pockets of – of my blouse," he asked of the nurse.

"Yes, would you like to have them?" The patient nodded and she gave them to him, the identification disk, a wrist watch, some money, a note-book and some papers. He looked them over in an abstracted way, sinking back on his pillow at last, holding the letters in his hand. Then at last as though coming to a difficult decision, he took one of the letters out of its envelope and began reading.

It was in a feminine hand and added more heavily to the burden of his responsibilities.

"Dear Harry" (it ran):

"I'm just back to my room, a wife of three hours with a honeymoon in a railway station! It all seems such a mistake – without even an old shoe to bless myself with. If I've helped you I'm glad of it. But I'm not going to lie just to square us two with the Almighty for the mockery I've been through. I don't love you, Harry, and you know that. I did what Dad asked me to do and I'd do it again if he asked me.

"He seems restless to-night, and talks about going back to Paris. I suppose I could do something over there for I've lost all impulse for my work. Perhaps we'll come and then you could run up and see us. I'll try to be nice to you, Harry, I will really. You know there's always been something lacking in me. I seem to have given everything to my painting, so there's very little left for you, which is the Irish in me saying I'm a heartless hussy.

"Soon I'll be sending you the pair of gray socks which I knitted with my own hands. They're bunched in spots and there's a knot or two here and there, but I hope you can wear them – for the Deil's own time I had making them. Good-night. I suppose that I should be feeling proud at my sacrifice; I don't, somehow, but I'll be feeling glad if you have another bar to your shoulder. That might make me proud, knowing that I'd helped.

MOIRA."

"P. S. Don't be getting killed or anything; I never wanted to marry anybody but I don't want you done away with. Besides, I've a horror of *crêpe*.

M."

Jim Horton read the letter through furtively with a growing sense of intrusion. It was like listening at a confessional or peering through a keyhole. And somehow its ingenuous frankness aroused his interest. Harry had been married to this girl who didn't love him and she had consented because her father had wanted her to. He felt unaccountably indignant on her account against Harry and the father. Pretty name – Moira! Like something out of a book. She seemed to breathe both



youth and hope tinged horribly with regret. He liked her handwriting which had dashed into her thoughts impulsively, and he also liked the slight scent of sachet which still clung to the paper. He liked the girl better, pitied her the more, because her instinct had been so unerring. If she had thrown herself away she had done it with her eyes wide open. A girl who could make such a sacrifice from lofty motives, would hardly condone the thing that Harry had been guilty of. A coward...

There was another letter, of a much later date, in a masculine hand. Jim Horton hesitated for a moment! and then took it out of its envelope.

"Harry boy," he read, "so far as I can see at this writing the whole thing has gone to the demnition bow-wows. Suddenly, without a by-your-leave, the money stopped coming. I wrote de V. and cabled, but the devil of a reply did he give. So I'm coming to Paris with Moira at once and it looks as though we'd have to put the screws on. But I'd be feeling better if the papers were all ship-shape and Bristol fashion. You'll have to help. Maybe the uniform will turn the odd trick. If it don't we'll find some way.

"I feel guilty as Hell about Moira. If you ever make her unhappy I'll have the blood of your heart. But I'm hoping that the love will come if you play the game straight with her.

"Meanwhile we'll feather the nest if we can. He's got to 'come across.' There's some agency working against us – and I've got to be on the scene to ferret —*instanter*. Moira got some portraits to do or we wouldn't have had the wherewithal for the passage. As it is, I'll be having to make the move with considerable skill, leaving some obligations behind. But it can't be helped, and Moira won't know. The world is but a poor place for the man who doesn't make it give him a living. Mine has been wretched enough, God knows, and the whisky one buys over the bar in New York is an insult to an Irishman's intelligence, to say nothing of being a plague upon his vitals.

"Enough of this. Come to the Rue de Tavennes, No. 7, in your next furlough, and we'll make a move. By that time I'll have a plan. Moira sends her love.

"Yours very faithfully,

"BARRY QUINLEVIN.

P. S. There was a pretty squall brewing over the Stamford affair, but I reefed sail and weathered it. So you can sleep in peace.

B. Q."

Jim Horton lay for a while thinking and then read the two letters again. The masculine correspondent was the girl's father. Barry Quinlevin, it seemed, was a scoundrel of sorts – and the girl adored him. Many of the passages in the letter were mystifying. Who was de V – ? And what was Harry's connection with this affair? It was none of Jim Horton's business, but in spite of himself he began feeling an intense sympathy for the girl Moira, who was wrapped in the coils of what seemed on its face to be an ugly intrigue, if it wasn't something worse.

Strange name, Quinlevin. It was Moira's name too, Irish. The phrase about having Harry's heart's blood showed that Barry Quinlevin wasn't beyond compunctions about the girl. But why had he connived at this loveless marriage? There must have been a reason for that.

Jim Morton put the letters in the drawer and gave the problem up. It wasn't his business whom Harry had married or why. The main thing was to get well and out of the hospital so that he could find his brother and set the tangle straight.

He couldn't imagine just how the substitution was to be accomplished, but if Harry had played the game there was a chance that it might yet be done. He didn't want Harry's job. And he silently cursed himself for the unfortunate impetuous moment that had brought about all the trouble. But how had he known that he was going to be hit? If he had only succeeded in getting back to the spot where Harry was waiting for him, no one would ever have been the wiser. No one knew now, but of course the masquerade couldn't last forever. The situation was impossible.

Meanwhile what was Harry doing? Had he succeeded in playing out the game during Jim Horton's sickness, or had he found himself in a tight place and quit? It would have been easy enough. Horton shivered slightly. Desertion, flight, ignominy, disgrace. And it wasn't Harry Horton's good name that would be in question, but his own, that of Jim Horton, Corporal of Engineers. As a name, it didn't stand for much yet, even out in Kansas City, but he had never done anything to dishonor it and he didn't want the few friends he had to think of him as a quitter. Nobody had ever accused him of being that. What a fool he had been to take such a chance for a man like Harry!

In the midst of these troublesome meditations, he was aware of Nurse Newberry approaching from the end of the ward. Following her were two people who stopped at his bed, a man and a girl. The man was strong, with grizzled hair, a bobbed Imperial and a waxed mustache. The girl had black hair and slate-blue eyes. And even as Jim Horton stared at them, he was aware of the man confidently approaching and taking his hand.

"Well, Harry, don't you know me?" a voice said. "Rather hazy, eh? I don't wonder..."

Who the devil were these people? There must be a mistake. Jim Horton mumbled something. The visitor's eyes were very dark brown shot with tiny streaks of yellow and he looked like an amiable satyr.

"I've brought Moira – thought ye'd like to see her."

The patient started – then recovered himself. He had forgotten the lapse of time since the letters had been written.

"Moira," he muttered.

The girl advanced slowly as the man made place. Her expression had been serious, but as she came forward she smiled softly.

"Harry," she was whispering, as he stared at her loveliness, "don't you know me?"

"Moira!" he muttered weakly. "I'm not – " But his hands made no movement toward her and a warm flush spread over the part of his face that was visible.

"You've been very sick, Harry. But we came as soon as they'd let us. And you're going to get well, thank the Holy Virgin, and then – "

"I'm not – " the words stuck in Jim Horton's throat. And he couldn't utter them.

"You're not what?" she questioned anxiously.

Another pause of uncertainty.

"I – I'm not – very strong yet," he muttered weakly, turning his head to one side.

And as he said it, he knew that in sheer weakness of fiber, spiritual as well as physical, he had made a decision.

The Satyr behind her laughed softly.

"Naturally," he said, "but ye're going to be well very soon."

They were both looking at him and something seemed to be required of him. So with an effort,

"How long – how long have you been in France?" he asked.

"Only three weeks," said Quinlevin, "watching the bulletins daily for news of you. I found out a week ago, but they wouldn't let us in until to-day. And we can stay only five minutes."

Then Moira spoke again, with a different note in her voice.

"Are you glad that I came?" she asked. "It was the least I could do."

"Glad!"

The word seemed sufficient. Jim Horton seemed glad to utter it. If she would only recognize the imposture and relieve him of the terrible moment of confession. But she didn't. She had accepted him as Quinlevin, as all the others had done, for his face value, without a sign of doubt.

And Barry Quinlevin stood beaming upon them both, his bright eyes snapping benevolence.

"If ye get the V.C., Harry boy, she'll sure be worshipping ye."

Jim Horton's gaze, fixed as though fascinated upon the quiet slate-blue eyes, saw them close for a moment in trouble, while a quick little frown puckered the white forehead. And when she spoke again, her voice uttered the truth that was in her heart.

"One cannot deny valor," she said coolly. "It is the greatest thing in the world."

She wanted no misunderstandings. She only wanted Harry Horton to know that love was not for her or for him. The fakir under the bed clothes understood. She preferred to speak of valor. Valor! If she only knew!

Jim Horton gathered courage. If he wasn't to tell the truth he would have to play his part.

"Everybody is brave – out there," he said, with a gesture.

"But not brave enough for mention," said Quinlevin genially. "It won't do, Harry boy. A hero ye were and a hero ye'll remain."

Horton felt the girl's calm gaze upon his face.

"I'm so glad you've made good, Harry. I am. And I want you to believe it."

"Thanks," he muttered.

Why did she gaze at him so steadily? It almost seemed as though she had read his secret. He hoped that she had. It would have simplified things enormously. But she turned away with a smile.

"You're to come to us, of course, as soon as they let you out," she said quietly.

"Well, rather," laughed Quinlevin.

The nurse had approached and the girl Moira had moved to the foot of the bed. Barry Quinlevin paused a moment, putting a slip of paper in Horton's hand.

"Well, *au revoir*, old lad. In a few days again – "

The wounded man's gaze followed the girl. She smiled back once at him and then followed the nurse down the ward. Jim Horton sank back into his pillows with a gasp.

"Well – now you've done it. Now you *have* gone and done it," he muttered.

## CHAPTER II

### THE MYSTERY DEEPENS

In a courageous moment, a day or so later, the patient requested Nurse Newberry to try to get what information she could as to the whereabouts of his cousin, Corporal James Horton, B Company, – th Engineers, and waited with some impatience and anxiety the result of her inquiries. She discovered that Corporal James Horton had been last seen in the fight for Boissière Wood, but was now reported as missing.

Missing!

The blank expression on the face of her patient was rather pitiful.

"It probably means that he's a prisoner. He may be all right. H.Q. is pretty cold-blooded with its information."

But the patient knew that Corporal Horton wasn't a prisoner. If he was missing, it was because he had gone to the rear – nothing less than a deserter. Nevertheless the information, even indefinite as it was, brought him comfort. He clung rather greedily to its very indefiniteness. In the eyes of the army or of the world "missing" meant "dead" or "prisoner," and until Harry revealed himself, the good name of the corporal of Engineers was safe. That was something.

And the information brought the wounded man abruptly to the point of realizing that he was now definitely committed to play the role he had unwittingly chosen. He had done his best to explain, but they hadn't listened to him. And when confronted with the only witnesses whose opinions seemed to matter (always excepting Harry himself), he had miserably failed in carrying out his first intentions. He tried to think of the whole thing as a joke, but he found himself confronted with possibilities which were far from amusing.

The slate-blue Irish eyes of Harry's war-bride haunted him. They were eyes meant to be tender and yet were not. Her fine lips were meant for the full throated laughter of happiness, and yet had only wreathed in faint uncertain smiles.

Barry Quinlevin was a less agreeable figure to contemplate. If Jim Horton hadn't read his letter to Harry he would have found it easier to be beguiled by the man's genial air of good fellowship and sympathy, but he couldn't forget the incautious phrases of that communication, and having first formed an unfavorable impression, found no desire to correct it.

To his surprise it was Moira who came the following week to the hospital at Neuilly on visitors' day. Jim Horton had decided on a course of action, but when she approached his bed, all redolent with the joy of out of doors, he quite forgot what he meant to say to her. In Moira, too, he seemed to feel an effort to do her duty to him with a good grace, which almost if not quite effaced the impression of her earlier visit. She took his thin hand in her own for a moment while she examined him with a kindly interest, which he repaid with a fraternal smile.

"Father sent me in his place," she said. "I've put him to bed with a cold."

"I'm so glad – " said Horton, and then stopped with a short laugh. "I mean – I'm glad you're here. I'm sorry he's ill. Nothing serious?"

"Oh, no. He's a bit run down, that's all. And you – you're feeling better?"

He liked the soft way she slithered over the last syllable.

"Oh, yes – of course."

All the while he felt her level gaze upon him, cool and intensely serious.

"You are out of danger entirely, they tell me. I see they've taken the bandage off."

"Yesterday," he said. "I'm coming along very fast."

"I'm glad."

"They promise before long that I can get out into the air in a wheel-chair."

"That will do you all the good in the world."

In spite of himself, he knew that his eyes were regarding her too intently, noting the well modeled nose, the short upper lip, firm red mouth and resolute chin, all tempered with the softness of youth and exquisite femininity. He saw her chin lowered slightly as her gaze dropped and turned aside while the slightest possible compression of her lips indicated a thought in which he could have no share.

"I have brought you some roses," she said quietly.

"They are very beautiful. They will remind me of you until you come again."

The sudden raising of her eyes as she looked at him over the blossoms was something of a revelation, for they smiled at him with splendid directness.

"You *are* improving," she laughed, "or you've a Blarney Stone under the pillow. I can't remember when you've said anything so nice as that at all."

He was thoughtful for a moment.

"Perhaps I have a new vision," he said at last. "The bullet in my head may have helped. It has probably affected my optic nerve."

She smiled with him.

"You really do seem different, somehow," she broke in. "I can't exactly explain it. Perhaps it's the pallor that makes the eyes look dark and your voice – it's softer – entirely."

"Really – !" he muttered, uncomfortably, his gaze on the gray blanket. "Well, you see, I suppose it's what I've been through. My eyes *would* seem darker, wouldn't they, against white, and then my voice – er – it isn't very strong yet."

"Yes, that's it," she replied.

Her eyes daunted him from his purpose a little, and he knew that he would have to use extreme caution, but he had resolved whatever came to see the game through. After all, if she discovered his secret, it was only what he had tried in vain to tell her.

"I'm sure of it," he went on. "When a fellow comes as near death as I've been, it makes him different. I seem to think in a new way about a lot of things – you, for instance."

"Me – ?" He fancied that there was a hard note in her voice, a little toss, scarcely perceptible, of the rounded chin.

"Yes. You see, you oughtn't ever to have married me. You're too good for me. I'm just a plain rotter and you – oh, what's the use?"

He paused, hoping that she would speak. She did, after a silence and a shrug.

"Father wanted it. It was one way of paying what he owed you. I don't know how much that was, but I'm still thinking I went pretty cheap." She halted abruptly and then went on coolly, "I didn't come here to be thinking unpleasant thoughts – or to be uttering them. So long as we understand each other – "

"We do," he put in eagerly, almost appealingly. "I want you to believe that I have no claim upon you – that my – my relations with Barry Quinlevin will have nothing to do with you."

"And if I fell in love with another man – That never seems to have occurred to either of you – "

He laughed her soberness aside. "As far as I'm concerned, divorce or suicide. I'll leave the choice to you."

He gained his purpose, which was to bring the smile to her lips again.

"Your wounds have inoculated you with a sense of humor, at any rate," she said, fingering the roses. "You've always been lacking in that, you know."

"I feel that I can laugh at them now. But it might have been better for you if I hadn't come out of the ether."

"No. I don't like your saying that. I haven't the slightest intention of falling in love with any man at all. I shan't be wanting to marry – really marry – " she added, coloring a little. "I've begun my work. It needed Paris again. And I'm going to succeed. You'll see."

"I haven't a doubt of it. You were made for success – and for happiness."

"Sure and I think that I was – now that you mention it," she put in quaintly.

"I won't bother you. You can be certain of that," he finished positively. And then cautiously, "Things have not gone well – financially, I mean?"

"No. And of course father's worried about it. Our income from Ireland has stopped coming – something about repairs, he says. But then, I suppose we will get it again some day. Dad never did tell me anything, you know."

Horton thought for a moment.

"He doesn't want to worry you, of course. And you oughtn't to be worried. Things will come out all right."

"I intend that they shall. Father always gave me the best when he had it. I'll see that he doesn't suffer now."

"But that's my job, Moira. We'll get some money together – some way – when I get out."

"Thanks. But I'm hoping to do a lot of painting. I've got one portrait to begin on – and it doesn't cost much in the Quartier."

Horton sat up in bed and looked out of the window.

"I'll get money," he said. "Don't you worry."

He saw her eyes studying him quietly and he sank back at once in bed out of the glare of the sunlight. He wondered if he had gone too far. But he had found out one of the things that he had wanted to know. She knew nothing of what Barry Quinlevin was doing.

Her next remark was disquieting.

"It's very strange, the way I'm thinking about you. You've grown different in the army – or is it the sickness? There's a sweeter look to your mouth, and a firmer turn to your jaw. Your gaze is wider and your heart has grown soft, with the suffering. It's like another man, I'm seeing somehow, Harry, and I'm glad."

"Suffering – yes, perhaps," he muttered.

She leaned forward impulsively and put her hand over his, smiling brightly at him.

"We'll be good friends now, alanah. I'm sure of it."

"You like me a little better – ?"

"Sure and I wouldn't be sitting here holding hands if I didn't," she laughed. Then with a quick glance at her wrist watch she rose. "And now I must be going back to father. Here is the nurse. Time is up."

"You will come soon again?" he asked slowly.

"Yes – with better news, I hope. *Au revoir, mon brave.*"

And she was gone.

The visit gave him more food for thought. But he hadn't learned much. What he did know now was that the girl Moira trusted Barry Quinlevin implicitly and that he had managed to keep her in ignorance as to the real sources of his livelihood. The Irish rents had failed to reach them! Were there any Irish rents? And if so, what had "de V" to do with them? He took Quinlevin's letter from under the pillow and re-read it carefully. Nothing about Irish rents there. Perhaps other letters had followed, that Harry had destroyed. In any case he would have to play the game carefully with the girl's father or Quinlevin would find him out before Horton discovered what he wanted to know. The quiet eyes of the girl Moira disturbed him. Her eyes, her intuitions, were shrewd, yet he had succeeded so far. If he could pass muster with the daughter, why shouldn't he succeed with the father? The weakness, the failing memory of a sick man, could be trusted to bridge difficulties. If there had only been a few more letters he would have been better equipped for the interview with Barry Quinlevin, which must soon follow. He inquired of Miss Newberry, but she had given him everything that had been found in his uniform. He scrutinized the notebook carefully, which contained only an expense account, some addresses in Paris, and a few military notes, and so he

discarded it. It seemed that until Quinlevin came to the hospital "de V" must remain one of the unsolved mysteries of his versatile brother.

But Moira's innocence, while it failed to enlighten him as to the mystery, made him more certain that her loveless marriage with Harry had something to do with the suspected intrigue. Did Harry love the girl? It seemed scarcely possible that any man who was half a man could be much with her without loving her. It wasn't like Harry to marry any girl unless he had something to gain by it. The conversation he had just had with Moira showed exactly the relationship between them, if he had needed any further evidence than her letter.

As to his own personal relations with Moira, he found it necessary to fortify himself against a more than strictly fraternal interest in her personality. She was extremely agreeable to look at and he had to admit that her very presence had cheered up his particular part of the hospital ward amazingly. Her quaintness, her quiet directness and her modest demeanor, were inherent characteristics, but they could not disguise the overflowing vitality and humor that struggled against the limitations she had imposed. Her roses, which Nurse Newberry had arranged in a bowl by the bedside, were unnecessary reminders of the giver. Like them, she was fragrant, pristine and beautiful – altogether a much-to-be-desired sister-in-law.

The visit of Barry Quinlevin was not long delayed and Jim Horton received him in his wheel chair by an open window in the convalescent ward. He came in with a white silk handkerchief tied about his neck, but barring a husky voice showed no ill effects of his indisposition. He was an amiable looking rogue, and if the shade of Whistler will forgive me, resembled much that illustrious person in all the physical graces. It would be quite easy to imagine that Barry Quinlevin could be quite as dangerous an enemy.

"Well, Harry boy, here I am," he announced, throwing open his coat with something of an air, and loosening his scarf. "No worse than the devil made me. And ye're well again, they tell me, or so near it that ye're no longer interesting."

"Stronger every day," replied Horton cautiously.

"Then we can have a talk, maybe, without danger of it breaking the spring in yer belfry?"

"Ah, yes, – but I'm a bit hazy at times," added Horton.

"Well, when the fog comes down, say the word and I'll be going."

"Don't worry. I want to hear the news."

Quinlevin frowned at his walking stick. "It's little enough, God knows." Then glanced toward the invalid at the next window and lowered his voice a trifle.

"The spalpeen says not a word – or he's afflicted with pen-paralysis, for I've written him three times – twice since I reached Paris, giving him the address. So we'll have to make a move."

"What will you do?"

"Go to see him – or you can. At first, ye see, I thought maybe he'd gone away or died or something. But I watched the Hôtel de Vautrin in the Rue de Bac until I saw him with my own eyes. That's how I took this bronchitis – in the night air with devil a drink within a mile of me. I saw him, I tell you, as hale and hearty as ye please, and debonair like a new laid egg, with me, Barry Quinlevin, in the rain, not four paces from the carriage way."

The visitor paused as though for a comment, and Horton offered it.

"He didn't see you?"

"Devil a one of me. For the moment I thought of bracing him then and there. But I didn't – though I was reduced to a small matter of a hundred francs or so."

"Things are as bad as that – ?"

Quinlevin shrugged. "I bettered myself a bit the next night and I'll find a way –"

He broke off with a shrug.

"But I'm not going to be wasting my talents on the little officer-boys in Guillaume's. Besides, 'twould be most unpatriotic. I'm out for bigger game, me son, that spells itself in seven figures. Nothing less than a *coup d'état* will satisfy the ambitions of Barry Quinlevin!"

"Well?" asked Horton shrewdly.

"For the present ye're to stay where ye are, till yer head is as tight as a drum, giving me the benefit of yer sage advice. We'll worry along. The rent of the apartment and studio is a meager two hundred francs and the food – well, we will eat enough. And Moira has some work to do. But we can't be letting the Duc forget I've ever existed. A man with a reputation in jeopardy and twenty millions of francs, you'll admit, is not to be found growing on every mulberry bush."

Horton nodded. It *was* blackmail then. The Duc de Vautrin —

"You wrote that you had a plan," he said. "What is it?"

Barry Quinlevin waved a careless hand.

"Fair means, as one gentleman uses to another, if he explains his negligence and remits the small balance due. Otherwise, we'll have to squeeze him. A letter from a good lawyer – if it wasn't for the testimony of Nora Burke!"

He was silent in a moment of puzzled retrospection and his glittering generalities only piqued Jim Horton's curiosity, so that his eagerness led him into an error that nearly undid him.

"Nora Burke – " he put in slowly.

"I wrote ye what happened – "

"I couldn't have received the letter – "

He stopped abruptly, for Quinlevin was staring at him in astonishment.

"Then how the devil could ye have answered it?"

Horton covered the awkward moment by closing his eyes and passing his fingers across his brow.

"Answered it! Funny I don't remember."

The Irishman regarded him a moment soberly, and then smiled in deprecation.

"Of course – ye've slipped a cog – "

Then suddenly he clapped a hand on Horton's knee.

"Why, man alive, – Nora Burke – the Irish nurse who provides the necessary testimony – Moira's nurse, d'ye mind, when she was a baby, who saw the Duc's child die – now do ye remember – ?"

Horton ran his fingers over his hair thoughtfully and bent his head again.

"Nora Burke – Moira's nurse – who saw the Duc's child die," he repeated parrot-like, "and the Duc – de Vautrin – " he muttered and paused.

"Thinks his child by this early marriage is still alive – " said Quinlevin, regarding him dubiously.

"Yes, yes," said Horton eagerly. "It's coming back to me now. And de Vautrin's money – "

"He'll pay through the nose to keep the thing quiet – unless – "

Barry Quinlevin paused.

"Unless – what?"

There was a moment of silence in which the visitor frowned out of the window.

"I don't like the look of things, I tell ye, Harry. Ye're in no fit shape to help 'til the fog clears up, but I've a mind that somebody's slipped a finger into the pie. Nora Burke wants more money – five hundred pounds to tell a straight story and where I'm going to get it – the devil himself only knows."

"Nora Burke – five hundred pounds!" muttered Horton vaguely, for he was thinking deeply, "that's a lot of money."

"Ye're right – when ye haven't got it. And de Vautrin's shutting down at the same time. It looks suspicious, I tell ye."



He broke off and fixed his iridescent gaze on Horton. "Ye're sure ye said nothing to any one in Paris before ye went to the front?"

Of this at least Jim Horton was sure.

"Nothing," he replied.

"Not to Piquette Morin?"

Here was dangerous ground again.

"Nothing," he repeated slowly, "nothing."

"And ye wouldn't be remembering it if ye had," said Quinlevin peevishly as he rose. "Oh, well – I'll have to raise this money some way or go to Galway to put the gag on Nora Burke until we play the trick – "

"I – I'm sorry I can't help – " said Horton, "but you see – I'm not – "

"Oh, yes, I see," said Quinlevin more affably. "I shouldn't be bothering ye so soon, but may the devil take me if I know which way to turn."

"Will you see de Vautrin?"

"Perhaps. But I may go to Ireland first. I've got to do some thinking – alone. Good bye. Ye're not up to the mark. Be careful when Moira comes, or ye may let the cat out of the bag. D'ye hear?"

"Don't worry – I won't," said Horton soberly.

He watched the tall figure of Quinlevin until it disappeared into the outer hall and then turned a frowning gaze out of the window.

## CHAPTER III

### THE GOOSE

Jim Horton had had a narrow escape from discovery. But in spite of his precarious position and the pitfalls that seemed to lay to right and left, he had become, if anything, more determined than ever to follow the fate to which he had committed himself. There now seemed no doubt that Moira was in all innocence involved in some way in the blackmailing scheme which had been the main source of livelihood for the Quinlevin family for many years. And Moira did not know, for the Duc de Vautrin, of course, was the source of the Irish rents to which she had alluded. And now he was refusing to pay.

It was clear that something unpleasant hung in the air, an ill wind for the Duc de Vautrin and for the plotters, Moira's father and Jim Horton's precious brother. And it seemed quite necessary in the interests of honesty that he, Jim Horton, should remain for the present in the game and divert if possible the currents of evil which encompassed his interesting sister-in-law.

One thing he had learned – that by taking refuge behind the barriers of his failing memory, it might be possible to keep up the deception, at least until he was out of the hospital and a crisis of some sort came to relieve him of his responsibility. Indeed there was something most agreeable in the friendly regard of his brother's loveless wife, and under other circumstances, the calls of this charming person would have been the source of unalloyed delight. For as the days passed, more and more she threw off the restraint of her earlier visits and they had now reached a relationship of understanding and good-fellowship, most delightful and unusual in its informality.

Jim Horton was progressing rapidly and except for occasional lapses of memory, easily explained and perfectly understood by his visitors, gained health and strength until it was no longer a question of weeks but of days when he should be able to leave the hospital and accept the invitation of his newly discovered relatives to visit the studio apartment. He had made further efforts through the hospital authorities to find some trace of the missing man but without success, and in default of any definite plan of action chose to follow the line of least resistance until something should happen. Barry Quinlevin visited him twice, but spoke little of the affair of the Duc de Vautrin which it seemed was being held in abeyance for the moment, preferring to wait until the brain and body of the injured man could help him to plan and to execute. And Jim Horton, finding that safety lay in silence or fatigue, did little further to encourage his confidences.

Thus it was that after several weeks he impatiently awaited Moira outside the hospital. It was a gorgeous afternoon of blue and gold with the haze of Indian Summer hanging lazily over the peaceful autumn landscape. An aromatic odor of burning leaves was in the air and about him aged men and women worked in road and garden as though the alarms of war had never come to their ears. The signing of the armistice, which had taken place while Horton was still in his bed, had been the cause of much quiet joy throughout the hospital. But with the return of health, Jim Horton had begun wondering what effect the peace was to have upon his strange fortunes – and upon Harry's. He knew that for the present he had been granted a furlough which he was to spend with the Quinlevins in Paris, but after that, what was to happen? He was a little dubious too about his relations with Moira... But when he saw her coming down the path to the open air pavilion with Nurse Newberry, all flushed with the prospect of carrying him off in triumph in the ancient fiacre from which she had descended, he could not deny a thrill of pleasure that was not all fraternal.

"Behold, *mon ami*," she cried in greeting, "I've come to take you prisoner."

He laughed gayly as he took her hand.

"And there's a goose in the pantry, bought at a fabulous price, just waiting for the pan – "

"Be sure you don't kill your prisoner with kindness," put in Nurse Newberry.

"I'll take that risk," said Horton genially.

"Sure and he must," put in Moira. "It isn't every day one brings a conquering hero home."

"Especially when he's your husband," said the artless Miss Newberry wistfully.

Jim Horton had a glimpse of the color that ran like a flame up Moira's throat to her brow but he glanced quickly away and busied himself with a buckle at his belt.

"I want to thank you, Miss Newberry," he said soberly, "for all that you've done for me. I'll never forget."

"Nor I, Lieutenant Horton. But you're in better hands than mine now. A week or so and you'll be as strong as ever."

"I've never felt better in my life," he replied.

They moved toward the conveyance, shook hands with the nurse, and with Harry's baggage (which had just been sent down from regimental headquarters) upon the box beside the rubicund and rotund cocher, they drove out of the gates and toward the long finger of the Eiffel Tower which seemed to be beckoning to them across the blue haze above the roof tops.

Neither of them spoke for a moment. In the ward, in the convalescent rooms or even in the grounds of the hospital, Moira had been a visitor with a mission of charity and cheer. Here in the *fiacre* the basis of their relationship seemed suddenly and quite mysteriously to change. Whether Moira felt it or not he did not know, for she looked out of her window at the passing scene and her partly averted profile revealed nothing of her thoughts. But the fact that they were for the first time really alone and driving to Moira's Paris apartment gave him a qualm of guilt on account of the impossible situation that he had created. He had, he thought, shown her deep gratitude and respect – and had succeeded in winning the friendship that Harry had perhaps taken too much for granted. It had given Jim Horton pleasure to think that Moira now really liked him for himself alone, and the whole-heartedness of her good fellowship had given him every token of her spirit of conciliation. She had had her moods of reserve before, like the one of her present silence, but the abundance of her vitality and sense of humor had responded unconsciously to his own and they had drawn closer with the artless grace of two children thrown upon their own resources. And now, here in the ramshackle vehicle, for the first time alone, Jim Horton would have very much liked to take her by the hand (which lay most temptingly upon the seat beside him) and tell her the truth. But that meant Harry's disgrace – the anguish of her discovering that such a friendship as this with her own husband could never be; for in her eyes Jim Horton had seen her own courage and a contempt for all things that Harry was or could ever hope to be. And so, with an effort he folded his arms resolutely and stared out of his window.

It was then that her voice recalled him.

"Can't you smell that goose, Harry dear?" she said.

He flashed a quick smile at her.

"Just can't I!" he laughed.

"And you're to help me cook it – and vegetables and coffee. You know" – she finished, "nothing ever tastes quite so good as when you cook it yourself."

"And you do all the cooking – ?" he asked thoughtfully.

"Sometimes – but more often we go to a café. Sometimes Madame Toupin helps, the *concierge* – but father thinks my cooking is the best."

"I don't doubt it. I shall, too." And then, "where is your father to-day?"

She looked at him, eyes wide as though suddenly reminded.

"I forgot," she gasped. "He asked me to tell you that he was obliged to be leaving for Ireland – about the Irish rents. Isn't it tiresome?"

"Oh," said Horton quietly. "I see."

He turned his thoughtful gaze out of the carriage window into the Avenue de Neuilly. The situation had its charm, but he had counted on the presence of Barry Quinlevin.

"How long will he be gone?" he asked.

"I don't know," she replied, "a week or more perhaps. But I'll try to make you comfortable. I've wanted so to have everything nice."

He smiled at her warmth. "You forget that – that I've learned to be a soldier, Moira. A blanket on the floor of the studio and I'll be as happy as a king – "

"No. You shall have the best that there is – the very best —*mon ami*– "

"I don't propose to let you work for me, Moira. I can get some money. I can find a *pension* somewhere near and – "

She turned toward him suddenly, her eyes very close to tears. "Do you wish to make me unhappy – when I've tried so hard to – to – "

"Moira!" He caught her hand to his lips and kissed it gently, "I didn't mean – "

"I've wanted so for you to forget how unkind I had been to you – to make this seem like a real homecoming after all you've been through. And now to hear you talking of going to a *pension*– "

"Moira – I thought it might be inconvenient – that it might be more pleasant for you – "

He broke down miserably. She released her fingers gently and turned away. "Sure Alanah, and I think that I should be the judge of that," she said.

"We'll say no more about it," he muttered. "But I – I'm very grateful."

Moira's lips wreathed into an adorable smile.

"I've been thinking the war has done something to you, Harry. And now I'm sure of it. You've been learning to think of somebody beside yourself."

"I'd be pretty rotten if I hadn't learned to do some thinking about *you*," he said, as he looked into her eyes with more hardihood than wisdom.

She met his gaze for the fraction of a minute and then raised her chin and laughed merrily up at the broad back of the cocher.

"Yes, you've changed, Harry dear. God knows how or why – but you've changed. You'll be paying me some compliments upon my pulchritude and heavenly virtues by and by."

"Why shouldn't I?" he insisted soberly when her laughter subsided. "Your loveliness is only the outward and visible sign of the inward and spiritual grace. I'm so sure of it that I don't care whether you laugh or not."

"Am I lovely? You think so? Well – it's nice to hear even if it only makes conversation. Also that my nose is not so bad, even if it does turn piously to Heaven – but there's a deep dent in my chin which means that I've got a bit of the devil in me – bad cess to him – so that you'd better do just what I want you to – or we'll have a falling out. And that would be a pity – because of the goose."

He laughed as gayly as she had done.

"I've a notion, Moira," he said, "that it's my goose you're going to cook."

"And I've a notion," she said poisoning a slim gloved finger for a second upon his knee, "I've a notion that we're both going to cook him."

It seemed too much like a prophecy to be quite to his liking. Her moods were Protean and her rapid transitions bewildered. And yet, under them all, he realized how sane she was, how honest with him and with herself and how free from any guile. She trusted him entirely as one good friend would trust another and the thought of any evil coming to her through his strange venture into Harry's shoes made him most unhappy. But her pretty dream of a husband with whom she could at least be on terms of friendship must some day come to an end ... And yet ... suppose the report that Harry was missing meant that he was dead. A bit of shrapnel – a bullet – he didn't wish it – but that chance was within the range of the possible.

They had passed down the avenue of the Grande Armée, into the place de l'Étoile, and were now in the magnificent reaches of the Champs Élysées. Jim Horton had only been in Paris for five hours between trains, little more than long enough to open an account at a bank, but Moira chattered on gayly with the point of view of an *intime*, showing him the places which they must

visit together, throwing in a word of history here, an incident or adventure there, giving the places they passed, the personality of her point of view, highly tinged with the artist's idealism. From her talk he gathered that she had lived much in Paris during all her student days and except for the little corner in Ireland where she had been born and which she had visited from time to time, loved it better than any place in the world.

"And I shall teach you to speak French, Harry – the real *argot* of the *Quartier*– and you shall love it as I do – "

"I do speak it a little already," he ventured.

"Really! And who was your instructress?"

The dropping intonation was sudden and very direct.

Jim Horton looked out of the window. He was sure that Harry wouldn't have been able to meet her gaze.

"No one," he muttered, "at least no girl. That's the truth. We had books and things."

"Oh," she finished dryly.

Her attitude in this matter was a revelation. The incident seemed to clarify their relations and in a new way, for in a moment she was conversing again in a manner most unconcerned. Friendly she might be with Harry for the sake of the things that he had accomplished, companionable and kind for the sake of the things he had suffered, but as for any deeper feeling – that was another matter. Moira was no fool.

But at least she trusted him now. She dared to trust him. Otherwise, why did she conduct him with such an air of unconcern to the apartment in the Rue de Tavenne? But he couldn't be unaware of the alertness in her unconcern, an occasional quick and furtive side glance which showed that, however friendly, she was still on her guard. Perhaps she wanted to study this newly-discovered Harry at closer range. But why had she chosen the venture? He had given her her chance. Why had she refused to take it?

The answers to these questions were still puzzling him when they drove up the hill by the Boulevard St. Michel —*Boul' Miché* she called it – reached the Luxembourg Gardens and then turning into a smaller street were presently deposited at their *porte cochère*. Her air of gayety was infectious and she presented him to the good Madame Toupin, who came out to meet them with the air of one greeting an ambassador.

"Welcome, *Monsieur le Lieutenant*. Madame Horton has promised us this visit since a long time."

"*Merci, Madame.*"

"Enter, Monsieur – this house is honored. Thank the *bon Dieu* for the Americans."

Jim Horton bowed and followed Moira into the small court and up the stairway, experiencing a new sense of guilt at having his name coupled so familiarly with Moira's. Harry's name too – . And yet the circumstances of the marriage were so strange, the facts as to her actual relations with her husband so patent, that he found himself resenting Moira's placid acceptance of the appellation. There was something back of it all that he did not know... But Moira gave him no time to think of the matter, conducting him into the large studio and showing him through the bedroom and kitchen, where she proudly exhibited her goose (and Jim Horton's) that she was to cook. And after he had deposited his luggage in a room nearby which he was to occupy, she removed her gloves in a business-like manner, took off her hat and coat, and invited him into the kitchen.

"*Allons, Monsieur*," she said gayly in French, as she rolled up her sleeves.

"We shall now cook a goose, in this modern apparatus so kindly furnished by the *Compagnie de Gaz*. There's a large knife in the drawer. You will now help me to cut up the potatoes – Julienne, – and the carrots which we shall stew. Then some lettuce and a beautiful dessert from the *pâtisserie*– and a *demi-tasse*. What more can the soul of man desire?"

"*Rien*," he replied with a triumphant grin of understanding from behind the dish pan. "*Absolument rien*."

"Ah, you do understand," she cried in English. "Was she a *blonde – cendrée*? Or dark with sloe-eyes? Or red-haired? If she was red-haired, Harry, I'll be scratching her eyes out. No?"

He shook his head and laughed.

"She was black and white and her name was Ollendorff."

"You'll still persist in that deception?"

"I do."

"You're almost too proficient."

"You had better not try me too far."

She smiled brightly at him over the fowl which she was getting ready for the pan, stuffing it with a dressing already prepared.

"I wonder how far I might be trying you, Harry dear," she said mischievously.

He glanced at her.

"I don't know," he said quietly "but I think I've learned something of the meaning of patience in the army."

"Then God be praised!" she ejaculated with air of piety, putting the fowl into the pan.

"Here. Cut. Slice to your heart's content, thin – like jack-straws. But spare your fingers."

She sat him in a chair and saw him begin while she prepared the salad.

"Patience is by way of being a virtue," she resumed quizzically, her pink fingers weaving among the lettuce-leaves. And then, "so they taught you that in the Army?"

"They did."

"And did you never get tired of being patient, Harry dear?"

He met the issue squarely. "You may try me as far as you like, Moira," he said quietly, "I owe you that."

She hadn't bargained for such a counter.

"Oh," she muttered, and diligently examined a doubtful lettuce leaf by the fading light of the small window, while Horton sliced scrupulously at his potato. And when the goose was safely over the flame she quickly disappeared into the studio.

He couldn't make her out. It seemed that a devil was in her, a mischievous, beautiful, tantalizing, little Irish she-devil, bent on psychological investigation. Also he had never before seen her with her hat off and he discovered that he liked her hair. It had bluish tints that precisely matched her eyes. He finished his last potato with meticulous diligence and then quickly rose and followed her into the studio where a transformation had already taken place. A table over which a white cloth had been thrown, had been drawn out near the big easel and upon it were plates, glasses, knives and forks and candles with rose-colored shades, and there was even a bowl of flowers. In the hearth fagots were crackling and warmed the cool shadows from the big north light, already violet with the falling dusk.

"*Voilà*, Monsieur – we are now *chez nous*. Is it not pleasant?"

It was, and he said so.

"You like my studio?"

"It's great. And the portrait – may I see?"

"No – it doesn't go —*on sent le souffle*— a French dowager who braved the Fokkers when all her family were *froussards*— fled in terror. She deserves immortality."

"And you – were you not afraid of the bombardments?"

"Hardly – not after all the trouble we had getting here – Horrors!" she broke off suddenly and catching him by the hand dashed for the kitchen whence came an appetizing odor – "The goose! we've forgotten the goose," she cried, and proceeded to baste it skillfully. She commended his

potatoes and bade him stir them in the pan while she made the salad dressing – much oil, a little vinegar, paprika, salt in a bowl with a piece of ice at the end of a fork.

He watched her curiously with the eyes of inexperience as she brought all the various operations neatly to a focus.

"*Allons!* It is done," she said finally – in French. "Go thou and sit at the table and I will serve."

But he wouldn't do that and helped her to dish the dinner, bringing it in and placing it on the table.

And at last they were seated *vis-à-vis*, Horton with his back to the fire, the glow of which played a pretty game of hide and seek with the shadows of her face. He let her carve the goose, and she did it skillfully, while he served the vegetables. They ate and drank to each other in *vin ordinaire* which was all that Moira could afford – after the prodigal expenditure for the *pièce de résistance*. Moira, her face a little flushed, talked gayly, while the spurious husband opposite sat watching her and grinning comfortably. He couldn't remember when he had been quite so happy in his life, or quite so conscience-stricken. And so he fell silent after a while, every impulse urging confession and yet not daring it.

They took their coffee by the embers of the fire. The light from the great north window had long since expired and the mellow glow of the candles flickered softly on polished surfaces.

Suddenly Moira stopped talking and realized that as she did so silence had fallen. Her companion had sunk deep into his chair, his gaze on the gallery above, a frown tangling his forehead. She glanced at him quickly and then looked away. Something was required of him and so,

"Why have you done all this for me?" he asked gently.

She smiled and their glances met.

"Because – because – "

"Because you thought it a duty?"

"No – ," easily, "it wasn't really that. Duty is such a tiresome word. To do one's duty is to do something one does not want to do. Don't I seem to be having a good time?"

"I hope you are. I'm not likely to forget your charity – your – "

"Charity! I don't like that word."

"It *is* charity, Moira. I don't deserve it."

The words were casual but they seemed to illumine the path ahead, for she broke out impetuously.

"I didn't think you did – I pitied you – over there – for what you had been and almost if not quite loathed you, for the hold you seemed to have on father. I don't know what the secret was, or how much he owed you, but I know that he was miserable. I think I must have been hating you a great deal, Harry dear – and yet I married you."

"Why did you?" he muttered. "I had no right to ask – even a war marriage."

"God knows," she said with a quick gasp as she bowed her head, "you had made good at the Camp. I think it was the regimental band at Yaphank that brought me around. And then you seemed so pathetic and wishful, I got to thinking you might be killed. Father wanted it. And so – " she paused and sighed deeply. "Well – I did it... It was the most that I could give – for Liberty..."

She raised her head proudly, and stared into the glowing embers.

"For Liberty – you gave your own freedom – " he murmured.

"It was mad – Quixotic – " she broke in again, "a horrible sacrilege. I did not love, could not honor, had no intention of obeying you..." She stopped suddenly, and hid her face in her hands. He thought that she was in tears but he did not dare to touch her, though he leaned toward her, his fingers groping. Presently she took her hands down and threw them out in a wild gesture. "It is merciless – what I am saying to you – but you let loose the floodgates and I had to speak."

He leaned closer and laid his fingers over hers.

"It was a mistake – " he said. "I would do anything to repair it."

He meant what he said and the deep tones of his voice vibrated close to her ear. She did not turn to look at him and kept her gaze on the fire, but she breathed uneasily and then closed her eyes a moment as though in deep thought.

"Don't you believe me, Moira?"

She glanced at him and then leaned forward, away – toward the fire.

"I believe that I do," she replied slowly. "I don't know why it is that I should be thinking so differently about you, but I do. You see, if I hadn't trusted you we'd never have been sitting here this night."

"I gave you your chance to be alone – "

"Yes. You did that. But I couldn't let you be going to a *pension*, Harry. I think it was the pity for your pale face against the pillows."

"Nothing else?" he asked quietly.

His hand had taken the fingers on the chair arm and she did not withdraw them at once.

"Sure and maybe it was the blarney."

"I've meant what I've said," he whispered in spite of himself, "you're the loveliest girl in all the world."

There was a moment of silence in which her hand fluttered uneasily in his, while a gentle color came into her face.

Then abruptly she withdrew her fingers and sprang up, her face aflame.

"Go along with you! You'll be making love to me next."

He sank back into his chair, silent, perturbed, as he realized that this was just what was in his heart.

"Come," she laughed, "we've got all the dishes to wash. And then you're to be getting to bed, or your head will be aching in the morning. *Allons!*"

She brought him to himself with the clear, cool note of *camaraderie*, and with a short laugh and a shrug which hid a complexity of feeling, he followed her into the kitchen with the dishes. But a restraint had fallen between them. Moira worked with a business-like air, rather overdoing it. And Jim Horton, sure that he was a blackguard of sorts, wiped the dishes she handed to him and then obediently followed her to the room off the hall where his baggage had been carried.

She put the candle on the table and gave him her frankest smile.

"Sleep sound, my dear. For to-morrow I'll be showing you the sights."

"Good-night, Moira," he said gently.

"*Dormez bien.*"

And she was gone.

He stood staring at the closed door, aware of the sharp click of the latch and the faint firm tap of her high heels diminishing along the hall – then the closing of the studio door. For a long while he stood there, not moving, and then mechanically took out a cigarette, tapping it against the back of his hand. Only the urge of a light for his cigarette from the candle at last made him turn away. Then he sank upon the edge of the bed and smoked for awhile, his brows furrowed in thought. Nothing that Harry had ever done seemed more despicable than the part that he had chosen to play. He was winning her friendship, her esteem, something even finer than these, perhaps – for Harry —as Harry, borrowing from their tragic marriage the right to this strange intimacy. If her dislike of him had only continued, if she had tolerated him, even, or if she had been other than she was, his path would have been smoother. But she was making it very difficult for him.

He paced the floor again for awhile, until his cigarette burnt his fingers, then he walked to the window, opened it and looked out. It was early yet – only eleven o'clock. The thought of sleep annoyed him. So he took up his cap, blew out the candle and went quietly out into the hall and down the stairs.



He wanted to be alone with his thoughts away from the associations of the studio, to assume his true guise as an alien and an enemy to this girl who had learned to trust him. The cool air of the court-yard seemed to clear his thoughts. In all honor – in all decency, he must discover some way of finding his brother Harry, expose the ugly intrigue and then take Harry's place and go out into the darkness of ignominy and disgrace. That would require some courage, he could see, more than it had taken to go out against the Boche machine gunners in the darkness of Boissière Wood, but there didn't seem to be anything else to do, if he wanted to preserve his own self-respect...

But of what value was self-respect to a man publicly disgraced? And unless he could devise some miracle that would enable him to come back from the dead, a miracle that would stand the test of a rigid army investigation, the penalty of his action was death – or at the least a long term of imprisonment in a Federal prison, from which he would emerge a broken and ruined man of middle age. This alternative was not cheering and yet he faced it bravely. He would have to find Harry.

\* \* \* \* \*

The feat was not difficult, for as he emerged from the gate of the *porte cochère* of the *concierge* and turned thoughtfully down the darkened street outside, a man in a battered slouch hat and civilian clothes approached from the angle of a wall and faced him.

"What the H – are you doing at No. 7 Rue de Tavenne?" said a voice gruffly.

Jim Horton started back at the sound, now aware that Fortune had presented him with his alternative. For the man in the slouch hat was his brother, Harry!

## CHAPTER IV OUTCAST

When Jim Horton, Corporal of Engineers, took his twin brother's uniform and moved off into the darkness toward the German lines, Harry Horton remained as his brother had left him, bewildered, angry, and still very much afraid. The idea of taking Jim Horton's place with his squad nearby did not appeal to him. The danger of discovery was too obvious – and soon perhaps the squad would have to advance into the dreadful curtain of black that would spout fire and death. He was fed up with it. The baptism of fire in the afternoon had shaken him when they lay in the field. It was the grinning head of Levinski of the fourth squad that had done the business. He had found it staring at him in the wheat as the platoon crawled forward. It wasn't so much that it was an isolated head, as that it was the isolated head of Levinski, for he hadn't liked Levinski and he knew that the man had hated him. And now Levinski had had his revenge. Harry had been deathly ill at the stomach, and had not gone forward with the platoon. He had seen the whites of the eyes of his men as they had glanced aside at him – and spat.

Why the H – he had ever gone into the thing ... And now ... suppose Jim didn't come back! What should he do? Why had the Major picked him out for this duty! His thoughts wandered wildly from one fancied injury to another. And Jim – it was like him to turn up and plunge into this wild venture that would probably bring them both to court-martial. And if Jim was shot, what the devil was he to do? Go on through the service as Jim Horton, Corporal of Engineers? He cursed silently while he groveled in the gully waiting for the shots that were to decide his fate.

For a moment he gathered nerve enough to pick up Jim's rifle and accoutrement with the intention of joining the squad of engineers. But just at that moment there were sounds of shots within the wood, followed by others closer at hand, and then bullets ripped viciously through the foliage just above him. By a movement just ahead of him he knew that the line was advancing. He couldn't ... his knees refused him ... so he crawled into the thicket along the gully and lay upon the ground among the fallen leaves. More shots. Cries all about him. A grunt of pain after a shrapnel burst nearby ... the rush of feet as the second wave filtered through ... then the rapid crackle of the engagement in the wood. Jim was there – in *his* uniform. He'd be taking long chances too. He had always been a fool...

From his cover he marked the dawn while the fighting raged – then sunrise. The fire seemed to slacken and then move farther away. The line was still advancing and only the wounded were coming in – some of them walking cases, with bandaged heads and arms. He eyed them through the bushes furtively – vengefully. Why couldn't he have gotten a wound like that – in the afternoon in the wheat field – instead of finding the head of Levinski and the terror that it had brought? Other wounded were coming on stretchers now. The gully near him made an easy path to the plain below and many of them passed near him ... but he lay very still beneath the leaves. What if Jim came back on a stretcher...! What should he do?

Then suddenly as though in answer to his question two men emerged from the hollow above and approached, carrying something between them. There was a man of Harry's own platoon and a sergeant of the company. He heard their voices and at the sound of them he cowered lower.

"Some say he showed yellow yesterday in the wheat field," said the private.

"Yellow! They'd better not let *me* hear 'em sayin' it – "

They were talking about *him* – Harry Horton. And the figure, lying awkwardly, a shapeless mass – ?

At the risk of discovery, the coward straightened and peered down into the white face ... Jim!

Harry Horton didn't remember anything very distinctly for a while after that, for his thoughts were much confused. But out of the chaos emerged the persistent instinct of self preservation. There was no use trying to find Jim's squad now. He wouldn't know them if he saw them. And how could he explain his absence with no wound to show? For a moment the desperate expedient occurred to him of thrusting himself through the leg with the bayonet. He even took Jim's weapon out of its scabbard. But the blue steel gave him a touch of the nausea that had come over him in the wheat field... That wouldn't do. And what was the use? They had Harry Horton lying near death on the stretcher. What mattered what happened to the brother? There was no chance now to exchange identities. Perhaps there was never to be a chance.

He sank down again into the thicket, pulling the leaves about him. He would find a way. It could be managed. "Missing" – that was the safest way out.

That night, limping slightly, he emerged and made his way to the rear. It was ridiculously easy. Of the men he met he asked the way to the billets of the – th Regiment. But he didn't go where they told him. He followed their instructions until out of sight of them, and then went in the opposite direction.

He managed at last to get some food at a small farm house and under the pretext of having been sent to borrow peasant clothing for the Intelligence department, managed to get a pair of trousers, shirt, coat and hat. He had buried his rifle the night before and now when the opportunity came he dropped the bundle of Jim Horton's corporal's uniform, weighted by a stone, into deep water from a bridge over a river. With the splash Corporal James Horton of the Engineers had ceased to exist.

At the end of two weeks, thanks to some money that he had found in Jim's uniform – and a great deal of good luck – he was safe in a quiet pastoral country far from the battle line. Here he saw no uniforms – only old men and women in blouses and sabots, occupying themselves with the harvest, aware only that the Boches were in retreat and that their own fields were forever safe from invasion. He represented himself as an American art student of Paris, driven by poverty from the city, and offered to work for board and lodging. They took him, and there he stayed for awhile. There was a girl in the family. It was very pleasant. The nearest town was St. Florentin, and Paris was a hundred miles away. But after a few weeks he wearied of it, and of the girl, and having twenty francs left in his pockets stole away in the middle of the night.

Paris was the place for him. There identities were not questioned. He knew something of Paris. Piquette Morin! He could get her help without telling any unnecessary facts. As to Barry Quinlevin and Moira – that was different. It wouldn't be pleasant to fall completely in the power of a man like Barry Quinlevin – even if he was now his father-in-law. And Moira ... No. Moira mustn't ever know if he could prevent it. And yet if Jim Horton in Harry's uniform had been killed Harry would be officially dead. He was already dead, to Moira, if Jim Horton had revived enough to tell the truth. It wasn't a pretty story to be spread around. But if Jim were alive ... what then?

There were ways of getting along in Paris. He would find a way even if ... Moira! He would have liked to be able to go to Moira. She was the one creature in the world whose opinion seemed to matter now. She would have been his on the next furlough. He knew women. If you couldn't get them one way you could another. Already her letters had been gentler – more conciliatory. His wife – the wife of an outcast! God! Why had he ever gone into the service? How had he known back there that he wouldn't have been able to stand up under fire – that he would have found the grinning head of the hated Levinski in the wheat field? Waves of goose flesh went over him and left him cold and weak... A sullen mood followed, dull, embittered, and vengeful, against all the world, with only one hope... If Jim were alive – and silent!

That opened possibilities – to substitute with his brother and come back to his own – with all the honors of the fool performance! It was *his* name, *his* job that Jim had taken, and his brother couldn't keep him out of them. He could make Jim give them up – he'd *make* him. If he couldn't

come back himself, he would drag Jim down with him – they would be outcast together. In the dark that night he would have managed in some way to carry out the Major's orders if Jim hadn't found him just at the worst moment. What right had Jim to go butting in and making a fool of them both! D – n him!

He found his way into Paris at the end of a dreary day of tramping. He had a few francs left but he was tired and very hungry. With a lie framed he went straight to the apartment of Piquette Morin. She had gone out of town for a few days.

That failure baffled him. He had a deposit in a bank, but he dared not draw it out. So he trudged the weary way up to Montmartre, saving his sous, and hired a bed into which he dropped more dead than alive.

Thus it was that two nights later, unable yet to bring himself to the point of begging from passersby, with scant hope indeed of success, his weary feet brought him at last to the Rue de Tavennes. Hiding his face under the shadow of his hat he inquired of the *concierge* and found that the apartment of Madame Horton was *au troisième*. He strolled past the *porte cochère* and walked on, looking hungrily up at the lighted windows of the studio. Moira was there – his wife, Barry Quinlevin perhaps. Who else? He heard sounds of laughter from somewhere upstairs. Laughter! The bitterness of it! But it didn't sound like Moira's voice. He walked to and fro watching the lighted windows and the entrance of the *concierge*, trying to keep up the circulation of his blood, for the night was chill and his clothing thin. He had no plan – but he was very hungry and his resolution to remain unknown was weakening. A man couldn't let himself slowly starve, and yet to seek out any one he knew meant discovery and the horrible publicity that must follow. The lights of the *troisième étage* held a fascination for him, like that of a flame for a moth. He saw a figure come to a window and throw open the sash. He stared, unable to believe his eyes. It was a man in the uniform of an officer of the United States Army – his own uniform and the man who wore it was his brother Jim! Alive – well, covered with honors perhaps – here – in Moira's apartment? What had happened to bring his brother here? And Moira ...

His head whirled with weakness and he stood for a moment leaning against the wall, but his strength came back to him in a moment, and he peered up at the window again. The light had gone out. Jim masquerading in his shoes – with Moira – as her husband – alone, perhaps, in the apartment! And Moira? The words of conciliation in her last letters which had seemed to promise so much for the future, had a different significance here. Fury shook him like a leaf, the fury of desperation, that for the moment drove from his craven heart all fear of an encounter with his brother.

There was a sound of a door shutting and in a moment he saw the man in uniform emerge by the gate of the *concierge*. He walked toward the outcast, his head bent in deep meditation. There was no doubt about its being Jim. With clenched fists Harry barred his way, the thought that was uppermost in his mind finding utterance.

Jim Horton stopped, stepped back a pace and then peered at the man in civilian clothing from beneath his broad army hat-brim.

"Harry!" he muttered, almost inaudibly.

"What are you doing here – in this house?" raged Harry in a voice thick with passion. And then, as no reply came, "Answer me! Answer me!"

One of Harry's fists threatened but his brother caught him by the wrist and with ridiculous ease twisted his arm aside. He was surprised as Harry sank back weakly against the wall with a snarl of pain. "D – n you," he groaned.

This wouldn't do. Any commotion would surely arouse the curiosity of Madame Toupin, the *concierge*.

"Keep a civil tongue in your head, Harry," he muttered, "and I'll talk to you."

He caught him firmly by the arm, but Harry still leaned against the wall, muttering vaguely.

"A civil tongue —*me*? You – you dare ask me?"

"Yes," said Jim gently, "I've been trying to find you."

"Where?" leered Harry, "in my wife's studio?"

Jim Horton turned suddenly furious, but shocked into silence and inertia by the terrible significance of the suspicion. But he pulled himself together with an effort.

"Come," he said quietly. "Let's get away from here."

He felt Harry yield to the pressure of his fingers and slowly they moved into the shadows down the street away from the gas lamps. A moment later Harry was twitching at his arm.

"G-get me something to eat. I – I'm hungry," he gasped.

"Hungry! How long – ?"

"Since yesterday morning – a crust of bread – "

And Jim had been eating goose – ! The new sense of his own guilt appalled him.

"Since yesterday – !" he muttered in a quick gush of compassion. "We'll find something – a *café*– "

"There's a place in the Rue Berthe – Javet's," he said weakly.

Jim Horton caught his brother under an elbow and helped him down the street, aware for the first time of the cause of his weakness. He marked, too, the haggard lines in Harry's face, and the two weeks' growth of beard that effectually concealed all evidence of respectability. There seemed little danger of any one's discovering the likeness between the neatly garbed lieutenant and the civilian who accompanied him. But it was well to be careful. They passed a brilliantly lighted restaurant, but in a nearby street after awhile they came to a small *café*, not too brightly lighted, and they entered. There was a polished zinc bar which ran the length of a room with low, smoke-stained ceilings. At the bar were two cochers, in shirt sleeves, their yellow-glazed hats on the backs of their heads, sipping grenadine. There was a winding stair which led to the living quarters above, but through a doorway beside it, there was a glimpse of an inner room with tables unoccupied. They entered and Jim Horton ordered a substantial meal which was presently set before the hungry man. The coffee revived him and he ate greedily in moody silence while Jim Horton sat, frowning at the opposite wall. For the present each was deeply engrossed – Jim in the definite problem that had suddenly presented itself, and the possible courses of action open to do what was to be required of him; Harry in his food, beyond which life at present held no other interest. But after a while, which seemed interminable to Jim, his brother gave a gasp of satisfaction, and pushed back his dishes.

"Give me a cigarette," he demanded with something of an air.

Jim obeyed and even furnished a light, not missing the evidences of Dutch courage Harry had acquired from the stimulation of food and coffee.

It was curious what little difference the amenities seemed to matter. They were purely mechanical – nor would it matter what Harry was to say to him. The main thing was to try to think clearly, obliterating his own animus against his brother and the contempt in which he held him.

Harry sank back into his chair for a moment, inhaling luxuriously.

"Well," he said at last, "maybe you've got a word to say about how the devil you got here."

"Yes," said Jim quickly. "It's very simple. I was hit. I took your identity in the hospital. There wasn't anything else to do."

Harry glowered at the ash of his cigarette and then shrugged heavily.

"I see. They think you're me. That was nice of you, Jim," he sneered, "very decent indeed, very kind and brotherly – "

"You'd better 'can' the irony," Jim broke in briefly. "They'd have found us out – both of us. And I reckon you know what that would have meant."

"H – m. Maybe I do, maybe I don't," he said shrewdly. "It was you who found me – er – sick. Nobody else did."

"We needn't speak of that."

"We might as well. I'd have come around all right, if you hadn't butted in."

"Oh, would you?"

"Yes," said Harry sullenly.

Jim Horton carefully lighted a cigarette from the butt of the other, and then said coolly:

"We're not getting anywhere, Harry."

"I think we are. I'm trying to show you that you're in wrong on this thing from start to finish. And it looks as though you might get just what was coming to you."

"Meaning what?"

"That you'll take my place again. This – !" exhibiting with a grin his worn garments. "You took mine without a by-your-leave. Now you'll give it back to me."

An ugly look came into Jim Horton's jaw.

"I'm not so sure about that," he said in a tone dangerously quiet.

"What! You mean that – " The bluster trailed off into silence at the warning fire in his brother's eyes. But he raised his head in a moment, laughing disagreeably. "I see. The promotion has got into your head. Some promotion – Lieutenant right off the reel – from Corporal, too. Living soft in the hospital and now – " He paused and swallowed uneasily. "How did you get to the Rue de Tavannes?"

"They came to the hospital – Mr. Quinlevin and – and your wife. I – I fooled them. They don't suspect."

"How – how did you know Moira was my wife?"

"Some letters. I read them."

"Oh, I see. You read them," he frowned and then, "Barry Quinlevin's too?"

"Yes – his too. I had to have facts. I got them – some I wasn't looking for – "

"About – ?"

"About the Duc de Vautrin," Jim broke in dryly. "That's one of the reasons why I'm still Harry Horton and why I'm going to stay Harry Horton – for the present."

If Jim had needed any assurance as to his brother's share in this intrigue he had it now. For Harry went red and then pale, refusing to meet his gaze.

"I see," he muttered, "Quinlevin's been talking."

"Yes," said Jim craftily, "he has. It's a pretty plan, but it won't come off. You always were a rotter, Harry. But you're not going to hurt Moira, if I can prevent."

It was a half-random shot but it hit the mark.

"Moira," muttered Harry somberly. "I see. You haven't been wasting any time."

"I'm not wasting time when I can keep her – or even you – from getting mixed up in dirty blackmail. That's my answer. And that's why I'm not going to quit until I'm ready."

Harry Horton frowned at the soiled table cover, his fingers twitching at his fork, and then reached for the coffee pot and quickly poured himself another cup.

"Clever, Jim," he said with a cynical laugh. "I take off my hat to you. I never would have thought you had it in you. But you'll admit that living in my wife's apartment and impersonating her husband is going a bit too far."

The laughter didn't serve to conceal either his fear or his fury. But it stopped short as Jim's fingers suddenly closed over his wrist and held it in a grip of iron.

"Don't bring *her* into this," he whispered tensely. "Do you hear?" And after a moment of struggle with himself as he withdrew his hand, "You dared to think yourself worthy of her. *You!*"

"Be careful what you say to me," said Harry, trying bravado. "She's my wife."

"She won't be your wife long, when I tell her what I know about you," finished Jim angrily.

He saw Harry's face go pale again as he tried to meet his gaze, saw the fire flicker out of him, as he groped pitifully for Jim's hand.

"Jim! You – you wouldn't do that?" he muttered.

Jim released his hand, shrugged and leaned back in his chair.

"Not if you play straight with me – and with her. You want me to pay the penalty of what I did for you – to go out into the world – an outcast in your place. Perhaps I owe it to you. I don't know. But you owe me something too – promotion – the *Croix de Guerre*– "

"The *Croix de Guerre*! Me – ?"

"Lieutenant Harry G. Horton to be gazetted captain – me!" put in Jim, with some pride. "Not you."

A brief silence in which Harry rubbed his scrawny beard with his long fingers.

"That might be difficult to prove to my Company captain," he said at last.

"You forget my wounds," laughed Jim. "Oh, they're *my* wounds all right." And then, with a shrug, "You see, Harry, it won't work. You're helpless. If I chose to keep on the job, you'd be left out in the cold."

"You won't dare – "

"I don't know what I'd dare. It depends on you."

"What do you mean?" broke in Harry with some spirit. "I couldn't be any worse off than I am now, even if I told the truth."

Jim laughed. "I tried to tell in the hospital and they thought I was bug-house. Try it if you like."

Harry frowned and reached for another cigarette.

And then after awhile, "Well – what do you want me to do?"

His brother examined him steadily for a moment, and then went on.

"I don't know whether you've learned anything in the army or not. But it ought to have taught you that you've got to live straight with your buddy or you can't get on."

"Straight!" sneered Harry, "like *you*. You call this straight – what you're doing?"

"No," Jim admitted. "It's not straight. It's crooked as hell, but if it wasn't, you'd have been drummed out of the Service by now. I don't want you to think I care about *you*. I didn't – out there. It was only the honor of the service I was thinking about. I'd do it again if I had to. But I do care about this girl you've bamboozled into marrying you – you and Quinlevin. And whatever the dirty arrangement between you that made it possible, I want to make it clear to you here and now that she isn't going to be mixed up in any of your rotten deals. She isn't your sort and you couldn't drag her down to your level if you tried. I'll know more when Quinlevin gets back and then – "

Jim Horton paused as he realized that he had said too much, for he saw his brother start and then stare at him.

"Ah, Barry Quinlevin – is away!"

Jim nodded. "Yes," he said, "in Ireland."

Harry had risen, glowering.

"And you think I'm going to slink off to-night to my kennel and let you go back to the studio. You in my uniform – as *me*– to Moira."

Jim Horton thought deeply for a moment and then rose and coolly straightened his military blouse.

"Very well," he said, "we'll go back to her together."

He took out some money and carelessly walked toward the bar in the front room. But Harry followed quickly and caught him by the arm.

"Jim," he muttered, "you won't do that!"

"We'll tell her the truth – I guess you're right. She ought to know."

"Wait a minute – "

His hand was trembling on the officer's sleeve and the dark beard seemed to make the face look ghastly under its tan.

"Not yet, Jim. Not to-night. We – we'll have to let things be for awhile. Just sit down again for a minute. We've got to find a way to straighten this thing out – to get you back into your old job – "

"How?" dryly.

"I – I don't know just now, but we can work it somehow – "

"It's too late – "

"You could have been captured by the Boches. We can find a way, when you let me have my uniform."

Jim Horton grinned unsympathetically.

"There are two wounds in that too, Harry," he said. "Where are yours?"

And he moved toward the door.

"Listen, Jim. We'll let things be as they are for the present. Barry Quinlevin mustn't know – you've got to play the part. I see. Come and sit down a minute."

His brother obeyed mechanically.

"Well," he said.

"I'll do what you say – until – until we can think of something." He tried a smile and failed. "I know it's a good deal to ask you – to take my place – to go out into the world and be what I am, but you won't have to do it. You won't have to. We'll manage something – some way. You go back to the studio – " he paused uncertainly, "You're not – ?" he paused.

Jim Horton read his meaning.

"Making love to your wife? And if I was, it would only be what you deserve. She doesn't love you any too much, as it is."

Harry frowned at the floor, and was silent, but his brother's answer satisfied him.

"All right. You go back – but I've got to get some money. I can't starve."

"I don't want you to," Jim fumbled in his pockets and brought out some bills. "Here – take these. They're yours anyway. We'll arrange for more later. I've an account at a bank here – "

"And so have I – but I don't dare – "

"Very good. What's your bank?"

"*Hartjes & Cie.*"

"All right. I'll get some checks to-morrow and you can make one payable to yourself. I'll cash it and give you the money. And I'll make one out at my bank for the same amount, dated back into October, before the Boissière fight, payable to bearer. You can get it cashed?"

"Yes."

"Who?"

"A woman I know."

Jim shrugged. "All right. But be careful. I'll meet you here to-morrow night. And don't shave."

Harry nodded and put the bills into his pocket while Jim rose again.

"You play the game straight with me," he said, "and I'll put this thing right, even if – "

He paused suddenly in the doorway, his sentence unfinished, for just in front of him stood a very handsome girl, who had abandoned her companion and stood, both hands outstretched, in greeting.

"Arry 'Orton," she was saying joyously in broken English. "You don't seem to know me. It is I – Piquette."

The name Quinlevin had spoke in the hospital!

Jim glanced over his shoulder into the shadow where Harry had been, but his brother had disappeared.



## CHAPTER V

### PIQUETTE

She wore a black velvet toque which bore upon its front two large crimson wings, poised for flight, and they seemed to typify the girl herself – alert, on tip-toe, a bird of passage. She had a nose very slightly *retroussé*, black eyes, rather small but expressive, with brows and lids skillfully tinted; her figure was graceful, *svelte*, and extraordinarily well groomed, from her white gloves to the tips of her slender shiny boots, and seemed out of place in the shadows of these murky surroundings. For the rest, she was mischievous, tingling with vitality and joyous at this unexpected meeting.

Horton glanced past her and saw a figure in a slouch hat go out of the door, then from the darkness turn and beckon. But Jim Horton was given no opportunity to escape and Harry's warning gesture, if anything, served to increase his curiosity as to this lovely apparition.

"Monsieur Valcourt – Monsieur 'Orton," she said, indicating her companion with a wave of the hand. And then, as he shook hands with her companion, a handsome man with a well-trimmed grayish mustache, "Monsieur Valcourt is one day de greatest sculptor in de world – Monsieur 'Orton is de 'ero of Boissière wood."

"You know of the fight in Boissière – ?" put in Jim.

"And who does not? It is all in *le Matin* to-day – an' 'ere I find you trying to 'ide yourself in the obscure *café* of Monsieur Javet."

She stopped suddenly and before he realized what she was about had thrown her arms over his shoulders and kissed him squarely upon the lips. He felt a good deal of a fool with Monsieur Valcourt and the villainous-looking Javet grinning at them, but the experience was not unpleasant and he returned her greeting whole heartedly, wondering what was to come next.

And when laughing gayly she released him, he turned toward Monsieur Valcourt, who was regarding her with a dubious smile.

"For all her prosperity, Monsieur 'Orton," Valcourt was saying, in French, "she is still a *gamine*."

"And who would wonder, *mon vieux*! To live expensively is very comfortable, but even comfort is tedious. Does not one wish to laugh with a full throat, to kick one's toes or to put one's heels upon a table? *La la*! I do not intend to grow too respectable, I assure you."

Jim Horton laughed. She had spoken partly in English, partly in French, translating for both, and then, "Let me assure you, Madame," said Valcourt with a stately bow, "that you are not in the slightest danger of that."

But she was already turning to Horton again.

"A 'ero. The world is full of 'eros to-day, but not one like my 'Arry 'Orton. *Allons*! I mus' 'ave a talk with you alone. Lucien," she said sharply, turning to Valcourt, "I will come to de studio to-morrow. Monsieur le Duc t'inks I am gone away, but now I would be a poor creature not to give my brave soldier a welcome."

"If Monsieur will excuse me – " said Valcourt, offering his hand.

Jim Horton took it, wondering where the adventure was to lead. She was a very remarkable person and her *élan* had already carried him off his feet. Taking his hand in hers, with a charming simplicity, she led him into the room at the rear, now occupied by a number of persons of both sexes, and bade Monsieur Javet himself serve them. And when they were seated at a table, her hand still in his, she examined him with a new interest.

"It is indeed you," she said gayly, "and yet you seem different – more calm, more silent. What is it?"

"I've had two months in the hospital."

"And you're quite strong again?"

"Oh yes. And you have been well – Piquette?"

"Well – but *so ennuyée*. It is why I come back here to de *Quartier* to get a breath of fresh air. I've been posing for Monsieur Valcourt —*La Liberté*. He says my figure is better than ever. And Valcourt knows."

"I'm sure you are very lovely."

"*La, la, mon vieux*, but you are the *grand serieux*. Of course I am lovely. It is my business. But you do not *show* me 'ow lovely I am, for you are so quiet – so cool – "

Jim Horton laughed and caught her fingers to his lips.

"You are – Piquette. That is enough."

"*C'est mieux*. But you are change'. One does not look deat' in de eyes wit'out feeling its col' touch. Oh, but I am glad that you are come back to me. You s'all be 'ere long?"

"I don't know – when I shall get my orders."

"But until then – t'ings s'all be as dey were wit' us two, eh, my little one? An' I s'all 'elp you now in de great affair? But Monsieur de Vautrin becomes more onpleasant. He is a very tiresome ol' man..."

Jim Horton started unconsciously. Then remembered that it was in connection with de Vautrin that Quinlevin had mentioned this very girl Piquette. He understood better now the reason for Harry's gesture from the outer darkness. The meeting had been a stroke of Fate. Perhaps she held the key to the riddle.

"Tiresome, yes," he said slowly, "all old men are tiresome – "

"And *difficile*," she mused, sipping at her glass. "While I am pretty he likes to have me nearby. But I know. He cares not'ing. He will leave me not'ing. I am not content. So I say I want to help in de great affair. You have planned somet'ing in the hospital – you and Monsieur Quinlevin?"

"Er – nothing definite."

"Monsieur le Duc still pays?"

Horton meditated for a moment.

"No," he said, "he has stopped paying."

Piquette Morin leaned further over the table, frowning.

"Ah! Since when?"

"For – er – three months or more."

"Then you t'ink he suspects somet'ing?"

"I don't know. It looks so, doesn't it?"

"Yes, perhaps." She paused a moment and then, "I make him talk about de past, as you ask' me to. I am no saint and de *bon Dieu* has taught me to look out for myself. I shall continue. If he tries to get rid of me de way he did wit' his wife, he will find me troublesome."

Horton laughed. "I don't doubt it." And then, carefully, "You heard how he got rid of her?" he questioned.

"It was 'er riches, of course. 'E spent 'er *'dot'* in a few month gambling at Monte Carlo, and den when 'e came to 'er for more 'e abuse and beat 'er." She paused and her dark eyes snapped viciously. "'E would not have beaten me," she finished.

"And then?" he asked, wondering whither the conversation was leading.

"And den, as you know, she ran away to Ireland – "

"To Ireland – " he muttered eagerly.

"Of course," she said with a glance at him. "And when 'e got enough money 'e sail 'round de worl' enjoying himself. Even now sometimes 'e is a beast. It is den I come back to de *Quartier* where I am born and bred – to be merry again." She sighed and then laughed gayly. "But to-night we mus' not talk of dis tiresome matter. It is your night, *mon vieux*, and we s'all make it 'appy."

He kissed the rosy palm she thrust to his lips, with difficulty concealing his curiosity.

"But the child of Monsieur the Duc – " he urged after the moment of *badinage*. "He said nothing – ?"

He paused as though in doubt.

She shrugged carelessly and lighted a cigarette.

"Monsieur is cautious. 'E spoke not'ing of de child, except to say dat it died wit' de mother. De money came to 'im. Dat was all 'e cared about, *mon 'Arry*."

To Jim Horton no light seemed to dawn. And how to question without arousing the girl's suspicions was more that he could plan. But he remembered Quinlevin's uncertainty in the hospital – his thought that Harry might have talked to this girl. So he took a chance.

"You asked the Duc no questions that might have aroused his suspicions?"

"No. I t'ink not. And yet I remember once 'e ask' me if I know Monsieur Quinlevin."

"And what did you reply?"

"Of course, dat I never heard of 'im."

He frowned at the cigarette in his fingers as Harry would have frowned and imitated as nearly as possible the sullen mood of his brother.

"The money has stopped coming to Quinlevin. We've got to do something."

"*Parfaitement*," said Piquette carelessly. "De time 'as come to produce de girl Moira and de papers."

Her glance was not upon his face or she would have seen the look of bewilderment and surprise suddenly distend his eyes. But she heard him gasp and turned again toward him. But by this time the missing pieces of the puzzle were at his fingers' ends and he gathered them quickly. It was Moira who all these years had unconsciously impersonated the dead child who would have inherited. And Quinlevin had bled the Duc for years with promises of silence. Harry had connived at the plot and now the coup they planned meant a sum of not less than "seven figures." And Piquette knew all. Blackmail it was – of the blackest.

For a moment he did not dare to speak for fear of betraying himself. And then only assented safely to her suggestion.

"Yes; it is the only thing to be done."

"It mus' be manage' carefully. You are sure de papers are all correct?"

"It is as to that Monsieur Quinlevin has gone to Ireland."

"Ah, I see – we mus' wait until 'e comes back. But I s'all 'elp you, *mon ami*. You will rely upon me, *n'est ce pas?*"

"Yes, I will."

His mind was so full of this astonishing revelation that he sat silent and motionless while she changed the subject and chattered on. The charm of the chance encounter was gone. *Gamine* she might be, and irresponsible like others of her kind in Paris or elsewhere, but she was not for him. He had a standard to measure her by.

"You are so *triste*, 'Arry," she broke in suddenly. "I do not t'ink I like you so *triste*. What s'all we care, you and I, for Monsieur le Duc an' 'is money? To be young an' in love – "

She caught both of his hands across the table and held them. "You are not yet well, 'Arry. I can see. It is dat for so long you do not know comfort an' 'appiness. *Allons!* I s'all make you laugh again, until de *triste* look come no more into your eyes."

He was about to give some token of his appreciation that would satisfy her when he saw her glance past his shoulder toward the door which led into the bar.

"Your frien' who was wit' you – 'e 'as come back again," she whispered.

"Ah – " he turned and saw Harry peering through the door.

"'E wants you to come? *C'est embêtant!* Sen' 'im away."

"I'm afraid I – " He rose uncertainly and turned. "Wait," he said, "I'll see." And then walked out into the bar where Harry obstinately awaited him.

"I've had enough of this," growled his brother. "You come out of here with me or I'll – "  
"Don't be a fool. You could see that I couldn't help it."

"You can help it now – "

"All right. We'll have this thing out, you and I – to-night. You meet me at the corner toward the Boulevard in twenty minutes. I'll get rid of her."

And without waiting for a reply he returned to Piquette, his mind made up.

"I'm sorry," he said to her, "but I've some urgent business with this man. It can't be put off. But I must see you soon – "

She pouted and rose.

"I can't explain – not now. You won't be cross – "

"It is not – anodder woman – ?" she asked shrewdly.

"Another – ? How can you ask? No. There are no other women in Paris, Piquette."

"You are cruel," she muttered in a low tone, her dark eyes flashing.

"No. It is a matter of importance. Will you let me have your address – ?"

"№ 82 Boulevard Clichy – de same place."

"Good. To-morrow I will write you."

Without a word she gathered up her cloak and led the way out, looking about curiously for her enemy of the evening. But Harry had disappeared. She said nothing and they went out into the street where Jim Horton found a cab and put her into it.

"Méchant!" she whispered softly.

"It is not my fault, Piquette. Soon – "

He gave the address to the *cocher* and she was gone.

Jim Horton stood for a moment listening to the sounds of the retreating *fiacre* as it rattled away over the cobblestones and then turned slowly back, his anger at his discoveries, long repressed by the necessities of his masquerade, suddenly bursting the barriers of his self-control. Moira – innocent – the catspaw, the stool-pigeon for these two rascals! How much did she know? How could Quinlevin have carried the deception out all these years without de Vautrin suspecting something? And if, as it seemed, he was suspicious of them now, who had told? His own duty seemed very clear. Every impulse of honor and decency urged that he find this Duc de Vautrin and tell the whole truth. But there was Moira ... his first duty was to her. But telling her meant revealing the secret of Harry's disgrace and his own part in it. That would be a difficult thing to do, but he would have to do it. He would tell her to-morrow.

As for Harry – he would make short work of *him*. He went with long determined strides to the appointed spot and Harry met him with a threatening air.

"What the Hell has she been saying?" he muttered.

Jim Horton was angry, but he kept himself well in hand, aware of his own physical superiority to this blustering shell of intrigue, deceit and cowardice, built in his own image. If earlier in the evening he had had his moments of pity for his brother's misfortunes, if he had planned to make restitution for the imprudence that had resulted in their undoing, he had no such gentle feeling or purpose now.

As he didn't reply, his brother continued angrily. "You've gone about your limit, I tell you. What did she tell you?"

"Everything. I've got the whole story. And I'd like to tell you before we go any further that you're just about the crookedest – " He broke off with a shrug.

"What's the use? The worst thing I could say would be a compliment. But you've come to the end of your tether. I don't know why I hoped there might be a chance of getting you to go straight – for her – but I did. The interesting revelations of this charming lady have removed the impression. The money you took from the estate, your questionable deals in America, your habits, put you outside the pale of decency, but the blackmail of the Duc with your own wife as stool-pigeon – "

Harry in a sudden blind fury that took no thought of consequences struck viciously, but Jim, who had been watching for the blow, warded it, tripped his brother neatly and sent him spinning against the wall where he fell and lay motionless. But he was unhurt – only bewildered by the result of his own incapacity.

"Get up!" Jim ordered. "Somebody will be coming along in a moment and we'll both be going with the police."

Harry saw reason in that and slowly got to his feet, pale, still trembling with rage, rubbing his hip joint, but subdued. The place they had chosen was in the shadow and the hour was late, and no one was about, but Jim Horton took a glance up and down the deserted street before he resumed his interrupted remarks.

"I don't want any man's uniform when it's been defiled. You ought to have known that. I'm going to take it off and give it back to you."

He saw the eager surprised look that came into Harry's face and raised his hand in warning – "But not yet. First I'm going to tell your wife the truth and then I'm going to warn the Duc de Vautrin."

Harry started back as though to dodge another blow, the reaction of his venture setting in with the terror of this information.

"Jim!" he whispered, clutching at his arm. "You wouldn't do that, Jim. My God! It's ruin to me – and you too."

"I'm prepared for that – "

"Don't, for God's sake don't! Wait. I've met you half way, haven't I? I'll do anything you say. I'll steer Quinlevin off and drop the thing. It was his idea – not mine. And he wouldn't have thought of it if the old man hadn't shut off the allowance – "

"Tell me the truth," Jim broke in sternly. "How much money did Quinlevin owe you?"

"Twenty thousand dollars – "

"And that was Moira's price – " contemptuously.

"I wanted her. I loved her. I swear to God I did. I love her now. I'd give anything to be able to go to her to-night – "

"You – ! You forget what I know."

"It's the truth."

"How much were you to get of this money of the Duc's?"

Harry halted, mumbling, "That wasn't settled."

"Well, it's settled now," said Jim, with an air of finality, turning aside.

"What are you going to do?"

"Tell her – in the morning."

"You can't, Jim. Why, she'd go right to Quinlevin."

"I expect her to – and the Duke."

Harry leaned back against the wall, his fingers working at his trouser legs, but he was speechless.

"That's about all, I think," said Jim dryly. "Good-bye."

"Then you won't listen – not if I promise – "

"What – ?"

"Anything. Why, you've got me, Jim. I can't do a thing with you ready to tell Moira – even if I wanted to. What's the use? It only means ruin for you. Wait a few days and we'll have another talk; just wait until to-morrow night. Give me a chance to think. I'll even – I'll even get out of France and go out West somewhere and make a fresh start. I will. I mean it. I did you a dirty trick once, but I'll try to square myself. Give me a chance. Think it over. Meet me to-morrow. I'm all in to-night. Promise you won't speak."

"No," said Jim, after a moment of deliberation. "I'll promise nothing, but I'll meet you to-morrow night at Javet's – at twelve – with the money."

Harry gasped a sigh of relief and straightened, offering his hand. "Thanks, Jim. To-morrow. And you won't tell her, I know. You couldn't. It would be too cruel. She'll suffer – my God! You know her. Can't you see how she'd suffer?"

"I – I didn't start this thing – "

"But you'll finish it, Jim. She believes in *him*, even if she doesn't believe in me. It will kill her."

He saw that he had made an impression on his brother. Jim stood silent, his head bowed.

"Don't tell her to-morrow, Jim," Harry pleaded. "Promise."

Jim shrugged and turned.

"All right," he said at last. "I'll sleep on it."

He turned away and walked slowly out into the dim light of the street, moving toward the Rue de Tavenne. He did not even turn his head to see what became of his brother. Already he had forgotten him. The heat of his passion had suffered a strange reaction. To resolve to tell Moira the truth, even to threaten to tell her was one thing, but to tell was another. And curiously enough Harry's picture of the consequences, drawn even in the stress of fear, was true enough – Jim knew it – was true. He knew her pride, her spirit. The revelation would kill them – and destroy her.

She was so dependent on him. She didn't know how greatly. And he had been until the present moment so dependent upon her. He realized what her visits had meant to him, how deep had been the joy of their evening alone in the studio. He did not dare to think of her now as he had been thinking of her then – for during the weeks of his convalescence and the culmination of their friendship to-night Harry had seemed far off, vague and impalpable. But their meeting had changed all this and he was thankful that he had had enough manhood to keep his wits when he had been alone with her. Moira – the pity of it – had given him signs (that he might read and run) that the mockery of the marriage was a mockery no longer. And it was her very confession of indifference and pity for Harry as she had known him, that seemed to give Jim the right to care for and protect her. He *did* care for her, he was now willing to confess in a way far from fraternal. He had always been too busy to think about women, but Moira had crept into his life when he was ill and unnerved, needing the touch of a friendly hand, and their peculiar relationship had given him no chance of escape – nor her. She had captured his imagination and he had succeeded where Harry had not in winning her affection.

It was a dangerous situation and yet it fascinated him. The knowledge that he must cause her suffering had weakened his resolve for a moment, but as he walked into the Rue de Tavenne he saw it for the fool's paradise that it was. He would spend to-morrow with her – just to-morrow – that could do no harm and then – she should know everything.

He found his way into the court and up the stairs. The studio door was closed, implacable as the destiny that barred him from her.

He went into his room, closed the door and slowly undressed. Then lay on the bed, staring for a long while at the reflection of the street-lamp upon the ceiling: Moira ... happiness ... reputation – and dishonor. Or ... outcast ... but honorable.

## CHAPTER VI

### YOUTH TRIUMPHANT

But weariness and anxiety had to pay tribute at last and he slept. It was broad daylight when he awoke to the sound of a loud hammering upon the door and a high, clear, humorous voice calling his name.

"Lazy bones! Get up! Will you be lying abed all day?"

"A – all right – "

He opened his eyes with an effort and glanced at his wrist watch – Eight o'clock.

"Coffee in the studio, Harry dear, in ten minutes."

"Oh! All right – "

The hammering stopped, foot-steps retreated and Jim Horton tumbled out, rubbing his eyes and gazing at the golden lozenges of light upon the wall. It was a most inspiriting *reveille*, arresting as the shrill clarion of camp on a frosty morning; but sweeter far, joyous with promise of the new day. It was only during the progress of his hasty toilet that the douche of cold water over his head and face recalled to him with unpleasant suddenness and distinctness the events of the night before, and he emerged from vigorous rubbing exhilarated but sober. There was a lot of thinking to be done and a difficult resolution to make, and with Moira at his elbow it wasn't going to be easy. But by the time he knocked at the door of the studio, the pleasure of the immediate prospect made ready his good cheer for the morning greeting. He heard her voice calling and entered. A new fire blazed on the hearth, and an odor of coffee filled the air. She emerged from the door of the small kitchen, a coffee-pot and a heaping plateful of *brioche*s in her hands.

"Good morning! I've been waiting for you an hour or more. You've been developing amazing bad habits in the hospital."

"Why didn't you call me before?"

"Sure and I believed you might be thinking I was anxious to see you."

"And aren't you?"

"And do you think I'd be telling – even if I was?"

"You might."

"And I won't. Will you have your coffee with cream and sugar?"

"If you please."

It was real cream and real sugar – some magic of Madame Toupin's, she explained, and the *brioche*s were unsurpassed. And so they sat and ate, Moira chattering gayly of plans for the day, while the ancient dowager upon the easel who had braved the Fokkers and the long-range cannon looked down upon them benignly and with a little touch of pity, too, as though she knew how much of their courage was to be required of them.

Horton ate silently, putting in a word here and there, content to listen to her plans, to watch the deft motions of her fingers and the changing expressions upon her face. Once or twice he caught her looking at him with a puzzled line at her brows, but he let his glance pass and spoke of casual things, the location of the bank where he must get his money, the excellence of the coffee, the kindness of Nurse Newberry, aware that these topics were not the ones uppermost in his mind, or in hers.

"You're a bit subdued this morning, Harry dear," she said at last, whimsically. "Maybe that goose was too much for you."

"Subdued!" he laughed.

"You have all the air of a man with something on his conscience. You used to wear that look in America, and I let you be. But somehow things seemed different with us two. Would you be willing to tell me?"

"There isn't a thing – except – except your kindness. I don't deserve that, you know."

She looked at him seriously and then broke into laughter.

"Would it make you feel more comfortable if I laid you over the shoulders with a mahl stick?"

"I think it would," he grinned.

"Sure and that is one of the few pleasant prerogatives of matrimony – in Ireland."

"And elsewhere – " added Horton.

"But I do want to know if anything's troubling you. Are you still worried – " she took a *brioche* and smiled at it amiably, "because we're not appropriately chaperoned?"

"No – not so much. I see you're quite able to look out for yourself."

"And you derive some comfort from the fact?" she asked.

He looked at her, their eyes met and they both burst into laughter.

"Moirá – you witch! But you'd better not tempt me too far."

"Sure and I'm not afraid of you, alanah," she said, sedate again and very cool, "or of any man," and then, mischievously, "But your doubts needn't have kept you from kissing me a good morning."

"It's not too late now," said Horton, abruptly rising and spilling his coffee. He passed the small table toward her but she held him off with a hand.

"No. The essence is gone. You'll please pick up your coffee-cup and pass the butter. Thanks. It's very nice butter, isn't it?"

"Excellent," he said gloomily.

"And now you're vexed. Is there no pleasing a man?"

"If you'd only stop pleasing – you'd make it easier for me to see a way – "

She was all attention at once, listening. But he paused and set his coffee-cup down with an air of finality.

"Stop pleasing! Sure and you must not ask the impossible," she said, her mouth full.

But he wouldn't smile and only glowered into the fire. "I want you to let me try to pay you what I owe you – to earn your respect and affection – "

"Well, I'm letting you," she smiled over her coffee-cup.

"I – I've gotten you under false pretenses – under the spell of a – a temporary emotion – a sense of duty," he rambled, saying partly what Harry might say and partly what was in his own heart. "I want to win the right to you, to show you that – that I'm not as rotten as you used to think me – " He didn't know how far the thought was leading and in fear of it, rose and walked away, suddenly silent.

"Well," he heard her saying, "I don't think you are."

Was she laughing at him? He turned toward her again but the back of her dark head was very demure. He approached quite close, near enough to touch her, but she held the coffee-cup to her lips, and then when she had drunk, sprang up and away.

"What's the use of thinking about the past or the future, alanah, when we have the present – with a gorgeous morning and happy Paris just at our elbows. *Allons!* You shall wash the coffee-cups and the pot while I put on my hat, for there's nothing like sticking something into a man's hands to keep them out of mischief. And then we'll be wandering forth, you and I, into the realms of delight."

He was glad at the thought of going out into the air, away from the studio, for here within four walls she was too close to him, their seclusion too intimate. If he only were Harry! He would have taken her tantalizing moods as a husband might and conquered her by strength and tenderness. But as it was, all he could feel beside tenderness was pity for her innocence and helplessness, and contempt and not a little pity for himself.

But the air of out-of-doors was to restore him to sanity. It was one of those late November days of sunshine, warm and hazy, when outer wraps are superfluous, and arm in arm, like two good comrades, and as the custom was in the *Quartier*, they sauntered forth, in the direction she indicated. There were to be no vehicles for them, she insisted, for *fiacres* cost much and money



was scarce. Life seemed to be coursing very strongly through her veins, and the more he felt the contagion of her youth and joy, the more trying became the task he had set himself. But sober though he was, within, he could not resist the spell of her enthusiasms and he put the evil hour from him. This day at least should be hers as nearly as he could make it, without a flaw. They turned down the Boul' Miche' and into the Boulevard St. Germain, past the Beaux Arts which she wished to show him, then over the Pont des Arts to the Right Bank. They stopped on the quai for a moment to gaze down toward the towers of Notre Dame, while Moira painted for him the glories that were France. He had lived a busy life and had had little time for the romances of great nations, but he remembered what he had read and, through Moira's clear intelligence, the epic filtered, tintured with its color and idealism.

Then under the arches of the Louvre to the Avenue de l'Opera, and toward the banking district. All Paris smiled. The blue and brown mingled fraternally and the streets were crowded. Except for the uniforms, which were seen everywhere, it was difficult to believe that hardly a month ago the most terrible war in history had been fought, almost at the city's gates.

When he reached his bank, which was in the Boulevard des Italiens, near the *Opera*, Jim Horton had to move with caution. But Moira fortunately had some shopping to do and in her absence he contrived to get some checks, and going into the Grand Hotel drew a check signed with his own name, and payable to Henry G. Horton, and this he presented for payment. There was some delay and a few questions, for the amount was large – three thousand francs – but he showed the letters from Moira and Quinlevin. It was with a sigh of relief that he went out and met Moira near the *Opera*. With a grin he caught her by the arm, exhibiting a large packet of bank-notes, and led the way down the avenue by which they had come.

"And where now, Harry dear?"

"I'm hungry. To the most expensive restaurant in Paris for *déjeuner*. If I'm not mistaken we passed it just here."

"But you must not – I won't permit – "

He only grinned and led her inside.

"For to-day at least, Moira, we shall live."

"But to see Paris, *en Anglais*, that is not to live – "

"We shall see."

The tempting meal that he ordered with her assistance, did much to mollify her prudence and frugality and they breakfasted in state on the best that the market provided.

Afternoon found them back in the Boulevard St. Germain again, after an eventful interim which Jim Horton had filled, above her protests, in a drive through the *Bois* and a visit, much less expensive, to a *cinema* show, during which she held his hand. And now a little weary of all the world, but happy in each other, they drifted like the flotsam of all lovers of the *Rive Gauche* toward the Gardens of the Luxembourg. They sat side by side on the balustrade overlooking the esplanade and lawn in front of the Palace, watching the passers-by, always paired, *piou-piou* and milliner, workman and *bonne*, *flaneur* and *grisette*, for the warm weather had brought them out. There was no military band playing, but they needed no music in their hearts, which were already beating in time to the most exquisite of interludes. Twilight was falling, the Paris dusk, full of mystery and elusive charm; lights beyond the trees flickered into being, and the roar of the city beyond their breathing-spot diminished into a low murmur. For a while their conversation had relapsed into short sentences and monosyllables, as though the gayety of their talk was no longer sufficient to conceal their thoughts, which, throwing off subterfuge, spoke in the silences. At last Moira shivered slightly and rose.

"Come," she said gently, "we must be going," and led the way toward the exit from the Gardens on the Boulevard St. Michel. Horton followed silently – heavily, for the end of his perfect

day was drawing near and with it the duty which was to bring disillusionment and distress to Moira and ostracism and hell to him.

But when they reached the studio Moira set with alacrity at putting things to rights and preparing the evening meal.

"We shall be having cold goose and a bit of salad, you extravagant person," she said. "I feel as though I had no right to be eating again for a week."

And so they dined upon the remains of their feast, but warmed by the cheerful blaze, both conscious of the imminent hour of seclusion and affinity. Moira had little to say and in the silences Jim caught her gaze upon him once or twice as though in inquiry or incomprehension, and wondered whether in their long day together, he had said or done anything which might have led her to suspect the truth. But he had been cautious, following her leads in conversation, and playing his discreditable role with rather creditable skill. The end was near. He would see Harry to-night at Javet's and to-morrow he would tell her, but it was like the thought of death to him – after to-day – and he failed to hide from her the traces of his misery.

"I wish that you would tell me what worries you," she said gently, after a long silence.

He started forward in his chair by the fire. "Er – nothing," he stammered, "there's nothing."

"Yes, there is," she said, evenly. "I know. I've felt it all day – even when you seemed most happy." And then quickly, "Is it me that you're worrying about?"

"About you?" he asked to gain time, and then, grasping at the straw she threw him, "about – you – yes – Moira," he said quietly.

It was the first definite return to the topic of the morning, which they had both banished as though by an understanding. But Moira was persistent.

"Why?" she asked.

"Because – because I don't deserve – all this – from you."

She smiled softly from her chair nearby.

"Don't you think I'm the best judge of that?"

"No," he said miserably. "No."

"You can't deny a woman the faith of her intuitions."

"And if I proved your intuitions false – "

"Sure and I'd never speak to you again," she put in quaintly.

"It might be better if you didn't," he muttered, half aloud.

She heard him, or seemed to, for she turned quickly and laid her hand over his.

"Don't be spoiling our day, dear," she said earnestly. "God has been good in bringing you back to me. Whatever happens I won't be regretting it."

His fingers caught and pressed hers and then quickly relinquished them as he rose, struggling for his composure.

"You *will* regret it," he said fiercely. "I tell you you can't thank God for me, because I'm not what you want to think me. I'm what the Harry you knew in America was, only worse – a liar, a cheat – "

He paused as she rose, saving himself the revelation on the tip of his tongue by the sight of her face in the firelight as she turned. It was transfigured by her new faith in him, and in her joy in the possession. She came to him quickly, and put her soft fingers over his lips, while the other arm went around his shoulders.

"Hush, alanah," she said.

"No – you mustn't, Moira," he muttered, taking her hands down and clasping them both in his. "You mustn't." And then, at the look of disappointment that came into her eyes, caught both her hands to his lips and covered them with kisses. Against the sweet allure of her he struggled, sure that never mortal man had been so tried before, but surer still that the love he bore for her was greater than all temptation.

She looked at him, flushed at the warmth of this formal caress, which left no doubt of him, but marveling at his renunciation of her lips, which had been so near.

"I can't be listening when you call yourself such names."

"You don't understand – and I can't tell you – anything more just now. I haven't – the will."

He noted the look of alarm which was a token of the suffering he must cause her and he led her to his chair and made her sit.

"I can't make you unhappy – not to-night. I – I'm sorry you read my thoughts. I shouldn't have let you see."

He had turned to the fire and leaned against the chimney piece. And after a moment, clear and very tender, he heard her voice.

"You must tell me everything, alanah. I've got the right to it now."

He shook his head in silent misery.

"But you must."

"No. I can't."

"Yes. You see, things are different with us two. You've made me know to-day how different. Last night I called to your mind the mockery we'd been through, calling it marriage. But it *was* a marriage, and the dear God has willed that my heart should beat for you as gently as that of any mother for its babe. It softened in the hospital, dear, when I saw you lying there so pale and weak against the pillows, and I knew that if God spared you for me I would make amends – "

"*You*– make amends – " he gasped.

"By giving you all that I had of faith, hope and charity. Whatever you were, whatever you are, dear, you're mine, for better or for worse, and I believe in you. And your troubles, whatever they are – I'll take my half of them."

"You can't – " he groaned.

"Not if they concern me," she continued simply, "for they're mine already."

He took a pace or two away from her.

"You mustn't speak to me like this."

"And why not? You're mine to speak to as I please. Is it that you don't love me enough, alanah?"

He knew that she wouldn't have asked that question, if she hadn't already seen the answer in his eyes.

"Love you – ?" he began, his eyes shining like stars. And then suddenly, as though their very glow had burned them out, they turned away, dull and lusterless. She watched him anxiously for a moment and then rose and faced him.

"Well – " she said softly, "I'm waiting for your answer."

"I – I can't give you an answer," he said in a colorless voice.

"Then I'll be giving the answer for you, my dear, for I'm not without eyes in my head. I know you love me and I've been knowing it for many days. And it's the kind of love that a woman wants, the love that gives and asks nothing." She paused, breathing with difficulty, the warm color rising to her temples, and then went on gently, proudly, as though in joy of her confession. "And I – it is the same with me. I've tried to make you understand... It is not for you to give only..." She halted in her speech a moment and then came close to him, her clear gaze seeking his. "I love you, not for what you have suffered, dear – " she whispered, "but for what you are to me – not because you are my husband, but because you are *you*– the only one in all the world for me."

"Moira," he whispered, tensely, as his arms went about her. "God forgive me – I worship you."

"God will forgive you that, alanah," he heard her say happily, "since I do."

He touched his lips to her brow tenderly ... then her lips.

"You love me," he muttered. "*Me*? You're sure that it's *me* that you love?"

Her eyes opened, startled at his tone.

"If it isn't you that I love, then I'm sure that I can't be loving any one at all."

"And you'll believe in me – whatever happens?"

"I will – " she repeated proudly. "Whatever happens – since *this* has happened to us both."

"Some day – you'll know," he muttered painfully, "that I – I'm not what I seem to be. And then I want you to remember this hour, this moment, Moira, as it is to me... I want you to remember how you came into my arms when I hadn't the strength to repel you, remember the touch of my lips in tenderness – and in reverence – Moira ... that love was too strong for me ... for it has made me false to myself ... false to you..."

She drew away from him a little, deeply perturbed. "You frighten me, alanah."

"I – I don't want to. To-morrow – " he paused, searching for strength to speak. But it did not come.

"To-morrow. What do you mean?"

The repetition of the word seemed like a confirmation of his resolution and shocked him into action. Quietly he took her hands down from his shoulders, kissed them in farewell, and turned away.

"What do you mean?" she repeated.

"That – that to-morrow – you shall judge me."

The tense expression of her anxiety relaxed and she smiled.

"You needn't fear what that will be."

He did not reply but stood staring fixedly into the fire. She came around to him and laid her fingers over his. "Why should we bother about to-morrow, dear? To-day was yesterday's to-morrow and see what's happened to us."

"But it shouldn't have happened," he groaned, "it shouldn't have happened."

"Then why should I thank God for it – ?"

"Don't – "

"Yes. Everything will be right. A woman knows of these things."

He smiled at her tenderly, but he didn't attempt to take her in his arms.

"Come," she said, "let us sit down by the fire near the blaze, and we will not speak of to-morrow – just of to-day and yesterday and the day before, when you and I were learning this wonderful thing."

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