IMAGE AND SUPERSCRIPTION

MR. J. LESLIE MITCHELL

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Novels

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ANCIENT AMERICA
HANNO, OR THE FUTURE OF EXPLORATION
THE CONQUEST OF THE MAYA (*in preparation*)

J. LESLIE MITCHELL

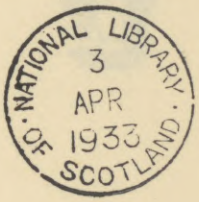
IMAGE AND SUPERSCRIPTION

A NOVEL

JARROLDS *Publishers* LONDON
Limited 34 *Paternoster Row E.C.*4

MADE AND PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN

First Published in Great Britain, March 1933



The Mayflower Press, Plymouth. William Brendon & Son, Ltd.

FOR

JOHN LINDSEY

AND HIS

STRICKEN GODS

IN FRIENDSHIP

Know, Friend in the Millennium, whose ways
Are those of Grace, of Liberty and Right,
That your least Heritage was in my days
The crux of fiery Argument and Fight.

For that most trifling Good which is your pride
I endured Hardship, waged a bloody Strife,
The Gods, Heaven, Hell, and Humankind defied :
A Stitch of your fine Cloak cost me my Life.

RUDOLF ROBERT

SECTION THE FIRST

SECTION THE FIRST

§ 1

"ONE of the earliest things I remember is a glimpse of the moonlight on my mother's breast, in the dark of that little room in Magpie Hill Road. I was often and continually a wakeful child, I'd lie quiet and uncomforted in a dark unsprayed by any such lighting as came that night, I'd lie quiet and listen to the quiet unbroken save ever and anon by the mating cats a-spit and a-squawl on the ragged fence at the kitchen's rear. But at sight of that bright white sword on my mother's body I crawled up erect in my cot, I remember, it creaked and I feared I would waken her, but I had to see that, I *had* to see it, I clung to the cot-bars and stared, and whimpered a little in wonder."

This is the opening intelligible paragraph of the *Journal* of Gershom Jezreel—not the opening paragraph, but the first set forth in the dull convention of sentence-formation from which he so loves to wander and experiment. Before and after the words I've quoted lie stretches that Gershom penned—in serious mood—as 'sub-conscious selections,' and as 'straying dementia' in the moments when he laughed at himself. And that indeed one finds often enough, unexpectedly. For in spite of the darkness that patches his chronicle, in spite of that Shadow that rose in his early life and glimmered and moved throughout his years, tenebrous and terrible, he had both an odd, irreverent humour and the un-pungent irony twin-born of pity. "Good lying and laughter are as old as men, older than the Shadow and outlasting Him, they belong to the days of the Golden Age huntsmen returning at night from following the deer, and setting the caves a-rock with the earliest hunting lies, the genial brag of the un-diseased."

He might have been four years of age, he thinks, that night when he crawled erect and stared at the pallor of the moonlight beam on his mother's breast. She seemed breathing scarcely at all and the clock at the other side of the close, dank room had stilled its tick to a hirpling whisper. " For once the amorous cats had ceased from troubling, I suppose, and were mated, abated, and sated. They left the silence unmarred, and more than that, the thing had come quietly alive, I heard it breathe with my mother's breath, perhaps it was God in the room, I thought. And then I forgot that, I'd disbelief even then in my father's god who pried and sneaked, it was only my own breath I heard. But I clung to the cot-bars still, my little soul held in the wonder that thus my mother, so great and active and dominant, sweetly and terribly my mother, could lie in the pity of the moonbeam's radiance, sleeping, unknowing, her face in shadow and the moon on her body, and be stared upon by the moon and me, and not laugh at us, order us to our places. . . . And then, I think it came only slowly, a kind of terror succeeded my wonder, was it mother indeed, that thing quiet-breathing in darkness and lambent-lit curvings, faceless there in the night ? My childish eyes grew blind in the picturing of Another who also rose from shadows, the Shadow that companioned my father in anger, the ' Good-God-what-an-image ' as my mother had called it. What if the Thing had killed her, eaten her, lay there in the bed where she had slept ? . . . And at that there came anger on me, determination came with it, and I forgot my fear, I set my teeth and climbed over the cot-rail and ran and padded that desert-waste, smooth, silver-gleaming, the bedroom floor. I was out to unveil the Thing——

" But in the last stretch I found myself, myself in the

moonlight beam, there was terror there, I forgot my mission. I flung myself on the bed and screamed, and my mother awoke, and was sleepy still, though astonished. Then she pulled me into the bed beside her, she was warm and kind, and she held me fast till I slept again, her arms were round and soft of flesh, I kissed the one that was round my neck. She laughed at that, but as though she would cry, and then asked what thing it was that had frightened me ?

" And I whispered, but I'd ceased to care, I was warm and drowsy, I whispered it was the ' Good-God-what-an-image,' and then I fell fast asleep."

§ 2

He was born in Gillingham in English Kent late in the autumn of the year 1895, and if he still lives he is rapidly nearing those forties that once chilled him as " remote and far for *my* feet to climb, the heights and the withered crags of age. My father was forty the day I was born, and he found in the double event some mythic connotation, as Ma Anderson told me in later days. He had the room where my mother lay in her travail set out with candles in a pattern of locking triangles, as so they are set on the Shield of David, he was taking no chances, for at last it might be, the signs so propitious, that the Wonder-Child himself, the Child Shiloh, was to enter the world, the seed of his loins. . . . And indeed, remote though he's grown, untender, and I shudder still at his memory, sometimes I've thought of my father with no shuddering at all, pity only, and a kind of wonder. For behind the gibbering ghouls of his creed there may have been a holy wonder unhorrific altogether, the knowledge

and belief that every child in its hour is the Child Shiloh, all mankind in the hour of birth potentially that child and that god."

It may have been the lighted triangles of candles, guttering throughout the long hours of that windy October day, it may have been the room's smallness and closeness or the aged lack of skill of the nodding midwife, but Gershom's coming to the world was slow and reluctant. Below in the parlour his father Gabriel knelt through those long hours, his shoulders draped in a praying-shawl, and a pattering of rain came blowing on the gale from the windy circuit of Chatham harbour; and still in the hands of Agony, swift and keen-fingered, a lyre for his touch, Myra Jezreel travailled and found no ease. The midwife, as Gershom was later to hear, had been brought to the house by Gabriel himself, a holy woman and a member of the Church of Israel " but unfortunately addicted to absorbing gin and sleeping with a fine placidity the while her patients tormented themselves from their beds of pain to an eternal unease in the hell of her church. And down to that dark pit we well might have gone, my mother and I, but that Ma Anderson came into my life before my life was begun."

She lived next door, Ma Anderson, the wife of a sailor, a great red-eyed, red-haired woman with a Roman nose and an enormous laugh. She ran her life, her household, and her husband, says Gershom, with a vast and friendly contempt and efficiency, and her view of the outside universe, its plaints and its antickings she summed up in an ironic appeal to 'Lord and God bless me!' This phrase she'd pronounce as 'Lorngoblimey,' her eyes cool, watchful beacons on the flanks of the Roman nose. Her children were boys, two of them, Will and John, and she'd borne

them with intent and purpose, even directing the cooking of the household dinner in the crucial moment of young John's birth. Now, with rolled-up sleeves and clean-scrubbed fingers, she assailed the knocker on Gabriel's door.

He had little liking for the Gentile woman, and would have opened the door but an inch or so. But Ma Anderson had come girded for battle in more senses than one.

'Here, Myra had the baby yet?'

'She is still in the hands of the Lord,' said Gabriel, and found the red eye in humorous regard of the praying-shawl. Then:

'Then it's damn well time she was in mine instead. Oh, drat the man, what's he dancing for? Here, out of my way.'

With which, says Gershom, retelling an oral saga oft heard in his childhood, she swept aside Gabriel, mounted the stairs, entered the room where his mother lay gasping, and acted therein like a waft from the gale that rattled at the window-hasp. The legions of evil that besieged the bed must have shivered and wilted away at once at sight of those red eyes riding into battle, the Roman nose in the van. First of the legions: the midwife went first, propelled by an ear and ironic admonitions to give heed to the step, now, *dearie*. The candles followed the midwife, Gabriel gaping up at the foot of the stair was caught in the pelting shower of guttering wax-ends. Then Ma Anderson opened the windows and punched the bed and straightened the sheets from the hot, pained limbs, and bent over the bed with kind, iron wrists for Myra to grip in the throes of pain. 'Lorngoblimey, 'twon't last long now. . . . Hold hard, my girl!'

Nor did it. Fresh air or Ma Anderson's freshening presence put an end to the woesome hours of travail, and out through the humble portals of all birth Gershom came into competent hands, and gasped, and was pounded to breathe, and did, and was washed and rolled and pounded again, and a roller of red flannel wrapped round his middle, to set him in life with a shapely stomach. Ma Anderson descended on Gabriel.

'Nip out and bring in some brandy for Myra. She wants a spot in a drop of hot milk.'

'Has the child been born?' asked Gabriel, rearing up his short, broad body from the knees whereon it had knelt the greater part of the day.

'Lorngoblimey, what else am I here for?'

'Then God be blessed. And it is—a son?'

Ma Anderson grinned at him, richly, with the florescent lewdness that coloured her life, a gay thing and poetry.

'Looked so to me—and I *ought* to know. . . . Here! Oh, lorngoblimey, he's at it again!'

For Gabriel was kneeling once more, his praying-shawl over his eyes, but those eyes unobscured, we need hardly doubt, to a vision, shining, assured, of the Child Shiloh at last descended on earth.

§ 3

"My father, I think (for my viewpoint of him was upward-gazing, from the lowly stance of childhood), was of medium height, built low and close to the ground, one imagined, because of that abnormal length of body. His face was the face of the Warwickshire peasant, open and broad and a little flat, but puckered in a strange contracting of skin around and below the eyes. They were hooded

eyes, almost, as a bird's are hooded, and I feared them, terrifying eyes, especially at those times when they vanished from his face and betook themselves to the face of that spitting and hitting and tortured Thing, the ' Good-God-what-an-image ' of my childhood fantasy. . . . But now I suppose those hoods were no more than skin-tightening induced through the travail in sun and rain of those ancestors who peered in the blow of spring winds or the glisten and flare of the summer skies. . . . His hands were short hands and were broad as well, they were spatulate hands, the right hand had the middle finger glistering a single dull, gold ring that I never examined in his life, though much after death. It was set with a crude design of that Flying Roll he had followed from Studley to Chatham some fifteen years before my birth."

Yet, in spite the waning of the years, its shames to the Faith and its tottering downfall, he followed the Flying Roll undaunted still. His son was to weed from innumerable rumours and evidences the story of his father's childhood in Warwick, his early days in the village of Studley, his conversion to the creed " of that crude calamity, James Jershom Jezreel, whose name I bear. I think it's a day that is over and done, put by, the day when the simple can still be enslaved with re-dreamings of Levantine night-mares, resurrectings of the hopes and fears of the ghoulish gods men planned and worshipped in their own sad images by the banks of the primal Nile. Whatever we meet, that phase is over, and my father, my poor, dull father surely the last to ruin his life for these strange obsessions. . . . So I set out his story for that, for that and the fact, ironic and pitiful enough, that he sold his mind and his soul to those ancient dreads because he was reared in the

creed of an atheism itself no more than a hideous superstition."

John Shaw had been once the name of Gabriel, and George, his father, the village blacksmith at Studley in Warwick, a blacksmith of unusual bent and calibre, " Bradlaugh his prophet, not Longfellow." His atheism was a scandal in the village and might well have been more but for the high excellence of his smithying. So in time they had left him in peace, this squire and that parson, to rear his two sons (their mother being dead) and sit in the evening glow outside his smithy, reading openly and aloud from the writings of Bradlaugh and Ingersoll.

Now, in Studley it was that John Wroe had risen, preaching the doctrine that gave birth in the world to the Christian Israelite Church. " Moses and Christ were at strife in the world, and salvation denied the people ; and John Wroe rose up to reconcile the Gentile and the Jew." Scores flocked to hear him and answer the call, accepting the rigour of his rule, the wearing of uniform, the non-cutting of hair, even, in a darkened chamber and two minutes of fumbling agony, the rite of circumcision.

Smoking his pipe, George Shaw would lean up against the door of the Studley smithy and laugh aloud of a Sabbath morn when the Christian Israelites passed bowed in prayer to their Christian synagogue. And to George and John, his sons, he would tell that there was no God. " For this fact a man named Darwin (my grandfather held) had arisen and proved, tracing man's beginnings to the primal slime, through a family tree of apes and tigers and fish and such-like, ungodlike beginnings enough. My grandfather befouled his own ancestry with pleasure and relish, unable to contain his joy that God was so routed. The

Bible tales and all tales of like kind were lies or demented ravings, there was no God, there had been no Christ, there was nothing in the sky to love or in hell to fear. You seized on this and that and you held to it if you could ; if you could not a fellow-descended beast came snarling and snatched it away from you. There was no order at all in the universe, no plan, no threat, no law, nothing but a fight to feed the stomach and plant the seed of the genitals."

The elder son, George, one gathers, flourished on this hardy diet ; that revolt of the heart that was John's neither touched him then nor later in life, he accepted the creed of the beast with ironic complacence. But one night the younger son came back to the smithy, pale with blood-loss, and stared at his father and brother, and told them " I have become a man newborn ; I have entered the Christian Israelite Church." And he stopped, and waited to be mocked.

But it was worse than mockery that came, pity and a kindly tolerance and his father's guffaw of laughter and a clout on the shoulder from the great smith's hand.

' Well, by God, you're in need of a drink, boy, if you've been shortened like that ! '

John Shaw had refused the drink but not the subsequent debate. For he told his father and his brother George that hell yawned red-lipped and awaited them did they not renounce their pagan foulness and follow the teachings of the great John Wroe, who had come to reconcile the teachings of Christ and Moses. Whereat (as the tale was told to Gershom) George Shaw had stroked his great beard, a puzzled look in his eyes. " Christ and Moses ? One was a Syrian Jacobin and the other a desert thief. How have they fallen out ? " And he had closed his eyes, fat and

merry, and wheezed, and bellowed his great guffaw again, while his elder son glanced from father to brother and grinned in ironic tolerance of both.

But the brothers shared the same room, the same bed, and that night, looking curiously on the mutilated John, young George had questioned, abstractedly, 'If it isn't just softening of the brain, this Christian Israelitishness, what else can it be?' And John had flushed with anger, 'Oh yes, you're the clever one, educated, and think that books tell you everything. But you're for hell, hell and undying fire, unless you come and be saved.'

So George had yawned and remarked, 'Well, I'll give it a try,' and next evening had gone to the synagogue meeting. Unfortunately, as he stood there puzzled by the side of his brother, an elder drew near and tapped his shoulder, 'Young man, have you found Christ?' And young George had replied absent-mindedly (immersed in appraisal of the gathering), 'I didn't know He was lost.'

It was plain to John Shaw then he could live no longer in a house of sin grown into a house of blasphemy. Obtaining employment from a fellow-believer, a baker, he slept at night in a cellar on a heap of sacking, and by early dawn was at work selling bread round the streets of Studley, while the two George Shaws lay in comfortable beds and the ease of unrepentant atheism. But in hell they would moan, they would burn, sweet and a savour to the Lord their burning, while the saved of Christian Israel looked down and mocked them in mirth.

Then it was that James Jershom Jezreel, once merely James White, a private of the 42nd Regiment ere God unsealed his eyes, came down on Studley, preaching his new, all-saving creed, and filching from the Christian

Israelites the young and sanguine to his standard. First of the converts was young John Shaw, drawn to this promise of a Second Coming within his own life, drawn as by a magnet by that promised gathering of the faithful one hundred and forty-four thousand to await that Coming about the Hill of Gillingham in Kent. By special sanction of the new-come prophet, he altered his name from Shaw to Gabriel Jezreel, and turned his back on Studley, and never saw it again, neither it nor his atheist father and brother.

§ 4

"And it was truly a great and a splendid vision which drew my father and many another to Gillingham. The Second Coming was imminent, James Jershom Jezreel himself the Man, or at least a close Forerunner. And, as told it was in Revelation, one hundred and forty-four thousand would gather in these latter days to be saved the world-catastrophe, and saved would live ten thousand years on earth with Christ Himself as their ruler. Logicians, all of them, armed and blinded with that pitiful logic and faith that have armed and blinded men so many ages, they flocked down through Kent in the wake of the sanguine James."

And at first the new faith flourished, the Prophet a wary man, wise in his generation, enforcing no more than the milder laws old Wroe had written in blood at Studley. Circumcision he declared a pagan rite, and would-be converts ceased from uneasy twitchings. But the hair was left to grow long, or curled up in rollers behind the ears, the style that Gabriel came to affect. And they awaited the Sign of the Coming, and wealth poured in on The Jezreel, the

pennies of the poor, the pounds of the rich, over thirty thousand in sterling was coffered by the House of Israel. So, awaiting the final Sign, they set to erecting a fitting temple whereneath would gather in the last, wild hour the legions of the saved.

And built it began to be. Higher and higher, in great floors, the temple rose into the astounded Chatham air. Bricks of superfine quality were dragged in great loads up Gillingham Hill, the horses panting, deep-breathing and heavily-lashed, while higher yet rose the House of God on the mountain-side around which the floods of the Second Coming would spume, to be stilled by the Voice of One. Cement, not mortar, bound and pilastered the arcing framework of brick and steel, and men foretold that a year or less would see the Second Advent in fire and flood. . . .

But that year came, the lambs cried and ran in the fields of Kent, heavy with the fleece of the apple-blossom, days rose with a splendour of sun and the rain came warping out of the seas across the Chatham roofs. " Those days and nights which never brought sound of His coming chariot. . . ." The coffers were emptied, James Jezreel died, the contractors halted in their work, the building ceased, and presently men came with great engines and crowbars to demolish the structure. But the wreckers drew back, astounded and beaten, in a few weeks' time, so firmly held the cement and brick of the temple built to withstand the Flood.

" ' And there it stands unto this day, to tell you if I lie ' —immovable, hideous, unfinished, a blot on the stars by night and the sun by day. . . . Ruined, it yet held my father and a few score others. They camped around in Gillingham, the Jezreelites, becoming bakers and grocers

and the like, going still unclipped for the sake of God, convinced still that the Second Coming was nigh, though Jezreel himself had failed and died, and his wife, the Queen Esther, bore no son. Yet sometime the Child Shiloh would come, upbuild to perfection the ruin that the Gentiles called Jezreel's Tower, and gather about Him the saved to life eternal."

§ 5

With this odd incursion through a by-way of history, Gershom's *Journal* returns to the blowing of that October night when he entered the world and was nursed by his mother and looked on at last by his father. "My father came up the stairs and examined me, prodded me (perhaps in the hope I'd squeak with divine afflatus) and prayed over me in some mystic fashion. Unaware of my elevation to the status of Child Shiloh I greeted his attentions with yells and cried, bitterly uncomforted, throughout his prayers, my mother too exhausted to intervene. But Ma Anderson did, she returned to the house and came flying up the stairs, to find my father crouching over me in exorcism or such-like exercise. She pulled him aside and erupted me heartily from my swaddling bands. 'A devil in him? Get out! It's only wind.'

"And wind it proved to be."

Myra Jezreel was a good three weeks ere she rose from her bed in the baker's house. She had gone through hours that left scarred her memory, and rose firm in the resolve that Gershom, her first child, should be her last. "My poor mother! She had never desired a child, she was by nature, I imagine, a lover and mistress, not a mother at all. And she found herself enslaved in my father's crude

hopes and lusts, pitiful things, pitiful things. . . . But my anger won't help them now, nor pity either, those incompatible two. Neither love nor hate can help them now."

She had been born in the Isle of Grain, that Myra Redlow who became the mother of Gershom, and Grain Island remained a dark, wistful love backgrounding her days and nights, her hatred and contempt of her husband, her philandering and adventurings, her boredoms and her loves. Grain: where the breakers cease from their mammoth-herd trumpetings, and creep like snow leopards, they pad in the dusk, across the wide mud flats. She remembered it always, salt-tingling, a land in a dream; that, and the house that the sea had devoured. Often, years after leaving it, she tramped to Grain to look at the sea which had swallowed the house where her father had lived. And once, one day of adventure, she stole out from the rooms in Magpie Hill Road and took Gershom there, they borrowed lifts from carters and country folk, and rode far on a summer day and at noon came down to Grain in the saltiness and the flying scud of the blue, sun-smitten weather.

"I was six years old at the time, the summer before my mother went out of our lives. But she'd little thought of disappearance then, or I either, we had freedom and holiday, we raced each other upon the sands, she a girl and no more, and far from a mother, my playmate rather. The long skirts of those years impeded her running, but only a little, I remember, for she kilted them, and was fleet and very swift and sweet. The sea-gulls came cawing about us as we ran."

They found an overhang then in the eroded coastline, the sea was out, a smoulder amidst the flats, and they sat

and ate the lunch they had brought. And then Myra Jezreel disrobed and Gershom stared, he had never seen her nude before, he cried 'Pretty mummy!' and she laughed at him, the sun on the splendour of long white body and glistening glory of loosened hair. He was afterwards to think he'd made no mistake in that cry, pretty indeed she must have been, with a loveliness keen and white that troubled other men than the praying fanatic who haunted the ruined gables of Jezreel's Tower. She took Gershom then and stripped him as well, invested him in bathing drawers, and caught his hand.

'But the sea's so far away,' he protested.

'Silly, it's near. And the mud—it's lovely after the first try.'

So he found it and they waded out, the sea-shimmer rose up and smote their eyes. Presently, looking back, they saw the land as a dim, dun haze that crouched and watched, the mud had streams that flowed and tickled, and little, lost pools that lay and awaited the tide; and far to the west a steamer wheeled and changed its course at the Medway mouth. Far out, by the actual brink of the tumbling sea, they came at last, tells Gershom, to the levelled walls of the house where his mother was born, she was carrying him then, he was tired, and she padded about the place, softly, in the swish of water, where once she had played in a garden, where her mother had borne her, and Gershom had no knowing of the strange, sad memories that came to her then, not even when her tears trickled down on him and he looked on her weeping, unshielded. He cried 'Mother, mother!' and she hugged him, the sunset was close. But she said never a word till he told her he began to feel cold; and then at last she turned round and went

from that place, and he said he would walk again. And the tide turned behind them, it was terror and delight racing it far to the shore, green and tenebrous it prowled in their tracks, swishing and seeping about the lost home of Myra ; and they reached to safety and the bank at last.

" It was late that night when we climbed up the Magpie Hill, my mother carried me sleeping, but I did not sleep when once we were inside the house and father rose louring from the chair where he'd sat awaiting us. In his hand was that whip I had seen before, his hair was loose on his shoulders, he closed the door behind us and then whispered at mother. I hated that whispering and whimpered at him, but he paid me no heed, asking ' Woman, where now have you been to shame my name in the mouths of Gentiles ? ' "

Myra, one gathers, answered to that contemptuously, truthfully, standing so in the lamplight with Gershom in her arms ; and Gabriel's anger burst forth in a torrent of rhetoric the while he gripped the whip tighter. . . . That whelming of her home and its evil memories, her father a heathen, her mother a harlot, was but forerunner of the whelming of all men's works, when Leviathan would rise from the deeps and the heavens would vomit on the earth. Under the seas to rot and crumble all would yet pass, the churches and palaces, the houses of pride and the houses of sin and this selfsame house in Magpie Hill Road. And up and across through the Kentish fields, through the orchards bright with blossom and the coming of the hops, that last dark tide would thunder, mountains high, with the blossom quivering and falling in the wind that roared in its van, coronaed in lightnings, London in its path, a smother and a wailing and a cry of the Gentiles, night upon them and

death on earth, hell and its torment beyond that death. Yea, even up into Studley in Warwick that tide would froth, blinding the fields in pounding slopes of foam, whelming and crumbling the house of sin where the atheists blasphemed God——

"I heard it, remember it, I kept it and stored it with other memories of childish hate, that frothing of words, that picture of demented rage that was my father—my father tortured to brutality with the foulness of lying creeds, my father twisted in the shape of a devil by the dark, wild fears that rose first in the Ancient East to shadow all the bright world of men, my father born with the tongue of a poet and the heart of a hunter, crippled and cabined and confined with my mother's loathing loveliness, with the fears and hopes of his insane creed, with the grind and wear and poverty of the bakery wherein he toiled twelve reeking hours a day. . . . To that peace and understanding I seem to have come, but then—he was terror, he was hate. . . . My mother flinched as the whip descended, her arms tightened about me, and then she was over-brave for that. She warded away the blows with a quivering arm, and pushed me, and bade me run, up the stairs to my room I must run. But I crouched and looked from the stairway, I saw it all, in the half-dark light sprayed from the kitchen lamp. And suddenly, as once before, I saw my father—my father no longer, a dark, enigmatic cloud that grew and grew, faceless, with writhing arms and body, the Cloud that moved without Form, tenebrous, terrible, muttering and raving a dreadful chant, the Image that haunted my childhood. . . . And then I think that I fainted."

§ 6

So Gabriel Jezreel had beaten his wife, as a man by the Law may do, and beaten her perhaps in tormented pride more than in outraged sanctity. For Myra had had men who paid her strange, secret visits, often it had been, and even Gershom's paternity was in doubt. That doubt we may image Gabriel thrusting aside in the days before Gershom's birth, pressing it away with a shuddering distaste, the belief that his God could trick him again, as before with the Man who had failed, The Jezreel who had sworn to life eternal on earth for himself and his followers, and himself had died with the gurglings of common death deep in a swollen throat. . . . So Gabriel had convinced himself of his doubtful fatherhood while there grew and burgeoned in his mind the insane hope of the promised Shiloh.

But Gershom differed in no measure from other children, wailing, irresponsible, prattling, a bore, with no aureole of lambent light and an eye that came to meet his father's fanatic eye with doubt and then a plain distrust. No Shiloh, but the child of lust and a child of sin—of a sinning outside the marriage bed, it was like. . . . Muted, heard through the glass wall of childhood's half-comprehension, there went on continually throughout those years a running commentary on his mother's lewdness, a storming of question and denunciation that confirmed his belief his mother was hated by his father—and that his father was hated by himself.

" There is a dank little photograph of myself of those days, I am clinging to my mother's skirts, which surely the photographer did not desire, with that rustic bridge

for background and rich cushions strewn for a seemly photographic squat. But so I am, my eyes too large as I see them now, large and watchful, the eyes that had looked on the Image, the 'Good-God-what-an-image' of my mother's contempt."

In after-years, in the writings of the psycho-analysts of Berne and Vienna, he was to find set forth in a bastardized Latin some crude theoretic approximations to that obsession which darkened his early childhood and remained as a hovering shadow through many a long year of his adult life. The figure of the Image and its early significance remains dim enough in his *Journal* because of those later theorizings superimposed. . . . But his father and his father's shadow, conjoint, half-lit in the flickering candle-glow, bending in threatening attitude over his mother—it was inexplicable, it was terror. And it came in time to be all the dark, wild, dreadful things of human life, it came to be humankind itself on the darkened stage of the universe. The Image became for him Man, it is his story and his story's leitmotiv.

§ 7

And then, he was barely seven years old at the time, his mother disappeared, in a night she disappeared, and his father was found a week later lying dead on the floor of his bakery.

"Yet, strangely, there had been no quarrelling in the immediate days before she went, indeed, I remember my mother gay and light-hearted, gay, if a little absent, and kind. She sewed much and often, at a bright new dress, the heavy flounced dress of those days. I would squat in the window-seat and watch when I came back from school,

she would sit and hum and tap on the floor with her shoe-point the while she worked. And then glance at me smiling, and away from me, out of the window, at the sunset on Chatham, at the coming night with a swift, sly mirth. . . ."

And then she disappeared. Returning one early morning from his bakery Gabriel Jezreel found her letter awaiting him on the parlour mantelshelf. He took it and read it and burned it and went out of the house, it was late in the forenoon before he returned, and then to find Ma Anderson urgently a-beat on his door and turning in a red-eyed impatience upon his slow approach.

'Lorngoblimey, and where have *you* been? There's something gone wrong in here—young Gerry's crying himself sick and I can't hear Myra.'

'You will hear her never again.'

'Eh?'

'The harlot who was my wife has left my house forever.'

Ma Anderson whistled through her teeth, ejaculated her war-cry consideringly, and then brushed aside those ultimacies of tragedy as she brushed aside Gabriel himself. Running up the stairs she burst into Gershom's room, where Gershom wept in hunger and fear and a general lostness.

'Now then, young Gerry, d'you think you're a water-works? Lorngoblimey, you'll bring on your father's Flood, and I'm sure. Up you get and come round with me and we'll see to a breakfast. Where's them trousers of yours? —or do you want another job first?'

"Weeping, I flung myself into her arms and admitted to 'another job's' urgencies."

Jane Anderson bore him off to her kitchen next door, he saw nothing of his father in the going, saw nothing of him until that evening when he came to the Andersons and

held brief converse with Ma and her husband, sitting the three of them " in the horrific plush of the parlour." Near the interview's end they summoned Gershom from the kitchen's delights—he and Will and John Anderson were practising diabolo to the danger of the unheeded crockery.

' Hi, Gerry boy, your father wants you. Come in here a minute.'

So Gershom crept in and stood off from his father and quivered in wide-eyed apprehension. It was the last time he was ever to see his father, and afterwards he tried to seek out the reason for that strange waning of repulsion that came on him then. " Suddenly I was afraid, but afraid not at all for myself—for him. He sat with his back to the lamp, his face in the darkness, leaning forward in weariness, I suppose, and I stared at that weary dejection, strangely, unboyishly heart-wrung, and heard nothing of the words he said. I suppose he told me to be a good boy and obey Mrs. Anderson, that she was to look to me now. I muttered and backed away and my father did not move. . . . And then as I closed the door I glimpsed for a moment a remembered thing, it was the Image itself that sat in that chair, but motionless, strange, with a strangeness that hurt me in my throat, not as once in my brain ; and I couldn't see for a while how to play diabolo because my eyes were blubbering and wet."

§ 8

He lived from the age of seven to the age of fourteen in the Anderson household in Magpie Hill Road. He grew, as is the nature of boys, and went out to the world and the council school and suffered tormentings from his smallness and the redness of his hair, and was bullied for

a time till an appalling incident put end to that sport. He himself emerged from the incident, dazed, with no very clear memory of details but a view of his enemy, " a loutish young youth and fat, poor pig," lying gasping and black in the face. He slept in a room with Will and John and far into nights there was often no sleep, pillow-fightings instead, and wonderings anent the moon and death, Kent's scores at cricket, the damnableness of school, how babies were born and girls should be pummelled, and why you should read ' Red Danger ' in *The Weekly Boy*. They breakfasted all three in a haste and hurry in the Anderson kitchen (Ma urged them with a flailing tongue of unfailing fluency and humour) and then fled her presence, by a shivering descent in winter, broiling in summer, to the council school and its waiting hostilities. He found interest in games, did Gershom, and forgot the Image and his mother, but for once, a Saturday when a strange compulsion came on him, and he sneaked out of Gillingham and tramped and rode to the Isle of Grain. There, unchanged, was the muted thunder of the breakers beyond the flats of dun, seething mud, and to and fro he paddled and played there a whole long day, and was wearied returning, and slept in a hedge, and came back but next day to Magpie Hill Road. There, gravely and inefficiently, Bill Anderson beat him, Bill back from a voyage and sweating great drops that so he must pain any living thing, for he was the gentlest of men. . . .

Gabriel Jezreel had died in his bakery, he had died of heart-failure, but he'd made before that a will leaving his effects to Gershom and the care of the Andersons. A hundred and fifty pounds was the heritage of Gershom, and worriedly (lest they rob him) the Andersons worked out the

matter for him, the while he stood negligent, listening, anxious to be back with Will and John, immersed in diabolo's dizzy manœuvrings.

'This money will just about feed and clothe you till you're fourteen or so,' said Ma. 'Then we'll find you a job, eh Bill? . . . Lorngoblimey, he's dreaming again. Poke him awake there, Gerry.'

Bill Anderson turned round his lion-like head and smiled slowly, tolerant, unruffled. 'I'm listening fine. Go on, then, woman.'

'Lord, them Scotchies! Who's a woman? Is that all you can call me?'

'Well, well, I aye thought you a woman—and the bairns seemed to prove it. But maybe I was mistook.'

Jane Anderson, spite her girth and her weight, was still young enough to engage in the mauling play of a young animal with the slow, quiet Scotsman to whom she was married. So Gershom, with a grin, abandoned them to *their* play and fled to his own, and there the matter of his heritage rested, contented himself, as the Andersons were.

"They cured me and loved me and covered me away from the world, as I think no others could have done. I was scared of the dark before I went to sleep in Will's bed—and he cured me of that by sitting up in bed and pretending to eat the dark in great gulps, until there was none of it left! He'd a cheerful grin, wide-mouthed, and the freckled skin of his Scottish blood, and presently my appreciation of his valour was vanquished in mirth at the display of it, and off I sank into sleep and awakened next morning cured and whole from that fear. You could hardly believe of an early morning, Bill home and Will and John there, Ma bustling around red-eyed and uplifting her voice

in astounded Lorngoblimey, there was anything mean or cruel on this planet. He took us great walks over the hills and down to the docks, the weeks he was home, did Bill, and fed us on sweets till our stomachs turned. But we writhed and were loyal, and crept to bed of a night and fought our writhings unvocal, lest Ma should hear and unleash her wrath on the head of our outrageous benefactor."

Bill's one other interest ashore, his family and his ward apart, was membership of the Royal and Antediluvian Order of Buffaloes. He would dream, says Gershom (who, for one who never entered a lodge, has much knowledge of its rules and rites), of his coming elevation to the rank of Knight, and on this topic the flow of Ma Anderson's ironic comments was quite undammable. 'Them blinking cattle,' she would call them, the Buffaloes, and transposed the mystic Buffalo toast M.B.F. (which stands, on Gershom's authority, for 'May Buffaloism Flourish') into '*More* Blinking Fools!' But Bill would merely sit quiet and grin, brow-corrugated, engaged in mysterious passings and grippings upon the air: he was in training for the ordeals of promotion.

And at last the day came, or rather, the night, and Primo Bill Anderson disappeared within the local Buffalo lodge—a back-room of The Gutted Hare—and there presumably passed his trial with triumph. For the next morning Ma Anderson, rousing the household for Sunday breakfast, directed special attention upon her husband.

'And here you, Sir Bill, are you to lie all day in bed because you're a blinking Knight? Or do you want me to bring up your horse and spear?'

"I remember that Will and John and I all stared our curiosity at Bill, embarrassed, the while we sat down to

breakfast. A Knight: but he looked just the same! . . . Remembering, I am left without wonder. For he was by nature a knight, valorous and kind and leal-hearted. The Buffaloes wrought better than they knew in their mummeries when they gave him the accolade—with a baton or beer-bottle or whatever esoteric weapon they used in the lodge of The Gutted Hare."

§ 9

He was twelve years old when he saw his mother again.

It was down by the docks, a sleeting day on the verge of winter, he had strayed down there from school on the rumour that a Zoo ship had come into harbour—a ship loaded up with monkeys and crocodiles and such-like fauna destined for the London Zoo. Unable to discover the ship, and urged on by a stomach complaining of supper neglected, he was trotting home, short and stocky as his father, his school bag flopping against his buttocks, when he came to the corner of Walker's Row, and hesitated only a moment, and then took the plunge up through it.

Walker's Row in those days was the brothel street in excelsis of Chatham, and known as such to all boys, all intelligent boys walking around and about the question of sex with the stealthy tread of high-minded cats. Men went there and lay with women, they knew, Gershom wondered on the matter, was a little sick, as most boys were, but curious as well, especially to see such women and the men who companioned them, impossible creatures that did such things. That Bill and Jane Anderson had done them as well he and Will and John also knew, but they left it undebated, concealed, and apart, in their code those two

were completely sexless. "Which I think would have greatly amused Ma Anderson, who probably loved her Bill with great vigour and sweetness, and had borne him his two sons with something of the jolly enjoyment that might well have attended their conception."

So his turning up Walker's Row was an act intentional enough, and hurrying he half-hoped to see some woman or man of whom they talked, half-hoped to unveil the mystery that came vexing you out of your fun and games, eating and sleeping's simplicities. It was then a dark and a twisting street, much straightened when next he saw it, that was ten years later. In that later year he searched but he could not find the place or the bulging house-front from which his mother kicked out a client into the gutter.

Almost she kicked him atop of Gershom, but he swivelled aside, again like a cat, to avoid the impact of the soldier's fall. Then he raised his eyes and saw her his mother, she was half-unclad, her hair on her shoulders, her voice and her colour high with excitement—and other aids he half-knew as he looked.

'You——!'

It was a stream of such curses as few women knew, efficient and foul, the little soldier staggered to his feet and fled one direction, Gershom another. But as he ran he looked back, the lights had come on in Walker's Row and one flickered its pale gas-flame on the steps of the house where his mother stood. So he saw her, he saw her and, running, he stumbled and gave a wild gasp.

It had ceased to be her. Bending from the doorway of that dank, foul place he saw the Image, remembered, clouded and dreadful, the superscription an obscene babble.

§ 10

He never told of that meeting to Ma, ten years elapsed before he passed again through the harlot's street; and he went then as a ghost half-seeking a ghost, and found nothing but change, immutable, change and faces and places unknown, unremembered.

" And what happened to my mother, how she came to that house and when she left it, I do not know to this day. But even then I did not pity, and I do not pity her now. She was beyond and above my pity, I knew, she lived as she wanted to live, cursing her soldier and defaulting client it was plain she did it with pleasure. . . . But for that wild vision from childhood she'd evoked I'd have gone home cheered and cheerful, I think, instead of the slinking boy who vexed Ma from her usual good-humour to sternness and administration of salts in a nauseously generous spoon.

" Exiled to bed, I blinded the window with a blanket and read far into the night a Public Library book I had got, it was Haeckel's *Descent of Man*; and only once or twice did the noise of the sleet on the panes, and a wheeling vision of that Image that had once been my mother, vex me out of my reading."

Will was fifteen and gone to sea, John, fourteen, had gone to London, to a shop and service there, and Gershom left alone with Ma Anderson in the house in Magpie Hill Road. At first their going had seemed to take with them the universe and its meaning, Gershom wandered the streets and the house in boredom, a squat, dark-faced boy with incongruous grey eyes and rusty-red hair, prowling unbidden ' in the way ' of Ma Anderson's sweeping activities. She had cried at last, vexedly, ' Lorngoblimey, then, can't you

sit down ? Read a book or something. How d'you ever expect to get took to sea—much less grow into a knight among cattle—unless you've a brain that don't rattle like an empty pumpkin ? '

For Gershom's expressed ambition was the sea. . . . He stood then and hesitated, grumbling.

' But I don't like books—lesson books, anyway.'

' Bless the boy, then can't you read a story-book ? Don't always have to hop about like a monkey with fleas. You're nothing but a walking proof for that chap who says we all come from monkeys.'

Amusingly, that arrested Gershom, he prowled down to the Public Library with Ma Anderson's ticket and demanded a book by the chap who said we all came from monkeys. With the *Origin of Species* and the essays of Huxley he wrestled through the succeeding two months, and slowly, as he educated unaccustomed eyes to the task, absorbed new meanings and excitements. He slipped further and further from the life of Magpie Hill Road. He read steadily, swiftly, presently with a passion and precision of grasp that was transferred to school-time lessons and amazed the teachers of a " pupil whom before I think they'd graded as a moron—if that term had then come wingèd over the Atlantic." The evolutionists took him to history and back, Haeckel was an early discovery, and far in the deeps of time with the early Humanoids that night of the Image's reawakening he went, and followed them up from the early prime, through sparring bout on bout as belligerent Haeckel held up here a tail and there a horn and the Deity shrunk back. . . . And other readings followed, history, romance, the great French romancers, Spaniards translated, the voyagers of the early world, history again and that spate of letters that

flowed from the rock that Darwin struck. . . . His grandfather and father commingled, he trod the tracks they had trodden, putting off his own judgment till a later day, though in dark hours of his night-time reading he would sometimes pause and shrink up in himself.

Men were cruel as beasts, by nature beasts, he read in those books, he could build from his reading an image of Man and know it the same Image as companioned his father. And the cloud was blown from about its face, the face of an ape was shown, snarling and slavering, the Ape that was Man and towered immortal over all the little likings and desires and dear hopings of men.

" And then I'd remember Bill and Ma Anderson—these, and the Ape ! "

§ 11

But you see him set wrong in the picture if you see him sullen and oppressed altogether. " I've filled up this part of my story falsely if you think of either my readings or the Image obsessing me morn till eve. For long times I forgot them together, I forgot my books, all the stirring plumes of thought on the downy chest of the chick who was I. Summer and the sketchy cricket of Chatham had come, and I learned that I was a bowler of merit and speed, I'd a twist to the wrist that lobbed snake-like balls to demolish the Lines' unauthorized stumps. Much in requisition I played up and down the Chatham games-fields that last summer before I was plucked from Chatham and the English scene like a whelk from one of those paper bags wherewith we would pant and halt and regale ourselves. Winter brought football, and, mitigating its joys, a shadow from the future. And as this bore and dark dread drew

near I pushed it aside with a book or games ; but it still closed in, unescapable it seemed, Ma Anderson and I discussed it again and again—if a discussion it could be that was all thesis on the one side, and on the other such reluctant grunting as would have pleased the Humanoids of Haeckel."

And this vexing shadow was the fact that the following October would find him fourteen years old, a man in the view of Chatham, " to get out and get on or get under—an acquisitive symphony, in fact."

But now he found the thought of a ship and the sea unendurable. Something had come with the books and within his head a spring was verdant, green with its shoots, things read of and dreamt of and pondered upon. The skies that once rested on Chatham, its hills and its harbour, had melted away to give him the planet itself for vision, for a footstool to stand and gape at the pointed glories of the Galaxy. . . . Lose that and all that went with it—for the stinks and stews of a ship, the batter of the rain and tides, long voyagings out in the dark and the mush, the brothels of Walker's Row his retreat when the ship came back——

In the mid-December of that year there came a great storm and the rumour of the foundering of Anderson's boat. Jane Anderson laughed when she heard the rumour, the red growing redder, deep-veined in her eyes, and with a casual insouciance closed the door in the gossiper's face. Then she sought the parlour where Gershom squatted in a chair and read, and he stared at her, her working face, and the lips that twisted a little from their cheerful grin as she told him the rumour. So only for a moment he sat and then he was across the room and standing beside her,

her great calloused hand came into his hand and gripped till it hurt.

'Lorngoblimey, they'd make you laugh! Bill's ship——'

She gulped and sat down and was presently honest as usual.

'And I'm nearly at the weeps—never *can* find that hanky, I'm sure. . . . Think you could make me a cup of tea, now, Gerry?'

He made the tea and returned with it, two cups of it, and they drank it and comforted each other, and you see them plain in Gershom's *Journal*, in that faded year at the far thither side of the War, the boy with the heavy face and the body not now so squat, he was growing to a ranging surprise, outreaching his trousers and vest in odd and unexpected moments; and his Warwick face had fined a little, browner and narrower; and his grey eyes were on Jane, I suppose. And Jane, immensely comforted, was drinking her tea in peace, but she nearly dropped the cup at her protégé's next remark.

'Look here, Ma, I'm not going to sea.'

'Eh?'

'No, I'm not. I'm not going to risk this kind of thing for the mess of a sailor's life.'

'Lorngoblimey, *what* kind of thing?'

'You sitting here crying,' he told her, stoutly, maturely, and scowled at the future. 'I might be married myself.'

She stared saucer-eyed and then shook her head. 'You're filled up with fancies like a sausage with grilled cat nowadays, Gerry boy. There ain't no life like the sea. Ask Bill. And what else could you do, anyhow?'

He got up and began to prowl the room. 'I just don't know. Shop, I suppose, like John.'

But John, coming home for Christmas, had little support for that plan, John thin and white from his basement life in a London warehouse. He spoiled the Christmas for Gershom with his tales of mean food, mean life and a meaner sinning, not even Bill's safe return from his laggard ship was much compensation. To Gershom's resolution to eschew the sea Bill listened with unwavering, gentle smile. 'Well, you ken your ain mind best, I suppose. But it's fine, a fine life, the sea.'

Ma Anderson acted in character, whipping littered plates from the Christmas table. 'Now then, you leave our Gerry alone! You Scotchies are all the same, 'cause you like something yourselves you think everyone else should like it. Be wanting Gerry to join up with them cattle of yours next——'

"I remember very vividly that winter, how it wore to spring in the grime and greyness of the Chatham streets, and my own odd alternate spurts of despair and revolt. A shop and the selling of lace or carrots, beef or beer, the plodding of errands—when I wanted—I wanted the world! I wanted life like a dream and life like a song, writers had had it and why shouldn't I? I wanted great skies of the tropic nights, the fires of dark tribes in the jungle wastes, the sledges that ploughed through drifts to the Pole, Egypt and the Sphinx at sunrise, mist on the mountains of Scotland —I wanted the world of my books, not that grimy actuality that awaited my fourteenth birthday. . . .

"And behold, the gods were good, they gave me the world I wanted. Perhaps they matter little in the end, Gillingham's stews, Palenque's ruins, and the change of scene was a little change. Unreprieved by a miracle I'd maybe have lived with no difference of fate or destiny, less

with colour and more in the drab, but essentially the same self still. . . . But I doubt it and am glad of the doubt. Whatever else it did, it took me far miles, it gave me some taste of that wandering, wild life that was once the life of all men on this planet and may again be so when the cities are smothered in grass and weeds and the Hunter returns to the earth."

§ 12

He had read far into that Saturday night. Now, with the nearing of morning he raised his head from his book and looked out at the cloud-drift clear from the stars. It was May; even in that hour and that place the night smelt green. Unveiled in the blow of the wind from the sleeping Lines, the Galaxy quivered in ivory and gold against the pallor of remoter stars. Millions of light years below, in a time and a space yet unquestioned by the prying of heretical astronomers, a young animal of the dominant species on a little planet of a second-rate sun, ceased from his reading and peered at them.

'Ain't half a glow. There's Mars.'

He leaned from the bed to look at other signs in that morning-stilled writing on the sky. Far down in the south was Saturn. Venus? Venus was as yet inapparent.

But it was to come—it was somewhere there in the morning.

He switched out the gas-light, slipped deeper in the bed, and, positioned anew, the window vignetted a fresh patch and fragment of the star-host. Immense and lighted, no crouching Image, a Figure sword-girded and splendid bestrode the sky. The boy whispered to himself with his knowledge from books.

' It's Orion.'

It was the Man with the Sword. Out on his endless quest through the morning skies. . . . Only a star-constellation, of course, Orion (he knew all about that). Nothing to do one with the other those stars, just the chance of positioning that made them look like a man. A million years back they'd have looked like that not at all.

And a million years back there hadn't been men—either ! The stars had changed and changed and come to fresh groupings as Haeckel's Humanoids had come to be men. Maybe there was some connection, maybe Orion and men had grown side by side, it was something of men themselves that bestrode the sky on that endless hunt ! . . .

§ 13

" It was Sunday dawn in Magpie Hill Road. The sun rose from the sea with that same trailing of mists it had brought in the wake of its surgence in the days when the Chatham hills harboured, unchancily in this rock-shelter and that, the inhuman precursors of men who left their bones in Piltdown and the mud of Cornhill. In the shimmering rise and fall of the days, that had seemed but a last night's dream to the Man in the Sky. It flowered its greenery of spring, this little planet, a skin and a fairy feathering, it blossomed white as with down in the apple-blossom and the cherry-blossom, it darkened to autumn's slow brown, it grew bare and it rose to green again. And amid this lush growing and dying, florescence and fading, a piping of little voices rose unending, unbeginning, a maggot-imagery and a maggot-swarming questioning the white hands of Space. . . .

" Once the woolly rhinoceros had shuffled and fled and his squeals risen through the morning silence of Magpie Hill Road. The great bear had prowled those slopes and sniffed the wind within three feet of the spot where I lay that morning. Once kith and kin of those mongrels that now met and frisked and sniffed in the gutter, cuddling the lamp-posts and with grave-pricked ears smelling at each other's bodies—their kin the wolves had loped over the Lines in long, skeltering packs, and from Medway forests the great Pliocene cats had spat and snarled at their passage. . . . Their descendants snarled now, backing amid the milk-cans. And the sun remained unaware the change and rose and grew.

" A crying of wakened babies rose with it. Scraps of singing rose up from the houses in Magpie Hill Road. Men awakened from sleep and threw dank blankets from their bodies, and yawned, and thanked Christ it was Sunday. And the women they had lain with rose from those beds and prepared them food, and yawned, and were slow and rheumatic. And young girls rose up and robed their budding breasts in their Sunday finery, in near-silk and the soft-washed linens of their mothers' scrubbings, and answered with gaiety to the questionings if they thought the breakfast could be kept warm for *them* ? . . . And they drew their stockings tight up to the knees, and then slipped the garters up under the knee and rolled down the stockings upon the garters, as was the new fashion of the time. And they thought it cute and went down to their breakfasts. . . . And boys—the boys like myself slept fast—the boys whom no miracle awaited, as miracle awaited me."

§ 14

Below him the house stirred to life about eight o'clock. Ma Anderson took in the milk, and banged the door and clattered the frying-pan briskly. Gershom wakened to the sound and listened and went to sleep again. Half an hour went by, and he came from sleep, his shoulder shaken by an urgent hand. Automatically in response he shrugged himself deeper in the blankets, and found the manœuvre unavailing, and reluctantly open gummed eyes. Beside his bed stood Ma Anderson, his boots and his Sunday clothes in her arms.

'Lorngoblimey, he's wakened at last. Here, get up and get dressed, it's near nine o'clock.'

Gershom sat up and yawned and said it was all right. 'What's up, anyhow? King coming for lunch?'

She grinned. 'You'll know soon enough. Got a clean shirt now? . . . Home too late last night to tell you the news. . . . And if you want any breakfast you'd better hurry.'

He crawled out of bed and took off his pyjamas and looked at himself with a sleepy disinterest, as he tells. The sunlight poured in through the window on a boy's body, sharp and muscular, narrow at the hips and waist and as yet undeveloped at the shoulder. He was nearing to puberty, nevertheless, and regarded the process and changes with interest, vexing to blushes the pallid librarian for books on the subject. "And I liked the shape of my legs. I remember that morning I found my legs the only objects to set on the credit side of a debit universe. For, as so often when awakening, my future was with me. . . . A butcher's boy in the High Street, that was the latest planning of Ma."

Dressed, he went down and sat and ate with Ma, herself unusually silent. But ever and anon he would find her stare at him strangely, he moved under that scrutiny restlessly, what on earth *was* up, were his ears not washed ? Ma said they would pass, don't crease your collar, I'll do the washing-up myself.

'But, Ma——'

'But nothing. I thought I'd tell you—but he'll tell you himself.' She sniffed. 'Oh, drat this bacon, pig was a boar, grandfather at that, I'll be bound——'

'Look here, Ma, you're crying, what is it ? Something I've done ? '

'You've done nothing, except be a dear. . . . Oh, drat the boy and his gogglings ! Here, get out, get into the parlour and wait. *Gerry !* You're to leave them dishes alone ! . . .'

So he left her to do the washing-up, and, considerably puzzled, prowled into the parlour, that horror in plush, and found a book and sat down to read it. But he found his attention wander at once. Who was coming, and why should his coming set Ma to sniffling like that ?

It was nearly church-time in Magpie Hill Road and Gershom sat and looked out at the church-goers. The steady labourers were the religious men, they had much for which to thank God, good jobs which kept them fed and free from the horror of the workhouse. Now they trooped down the road, they and their wives, into the hot steam rising from Chatham, leftwards the Lines sent up a thin smoke. An occasional young man, even sometimes a boy, slouched shamefaced in the rear of some family-party, his trousers very tight and his jacket very loose, neck scoriated with unwonted collar. "And the girls with the

rolled-topped stockings were there, though I saw nothing of the rolls and but little of the stockings: those were modest days. Two boys whom I knew went by: they 'made faces' at me, and it intrigues me to remember that I never saw them with their normal faces again!"

A noise far up the street made him crane his neck unavailingly for a view, the noise was a series of noises, sharply exploding, the backfire from an automobile exhaust. Now motor-cars in Magpie Hill Road were but rare phenomena, so steeply did the street slope down from the Lines. But the sound this time was quite unmistakable, Gershom searched his mind for possible explanations: a wedding, that must be it, or taking someone to hospital——

The window of the parlour darkened, a man had passed, slowly, with scrutiny. Then he passed again, and Gershom saw him and knew him this time, it was the man from the garage in George Street. Promptly there came a rap on the door and with it the voice of Ma Anderson calling from the kitchen, flat, and yet with a tingle of interest:

'That's him. You answer the door.'

'Shall I ask him in?' called Gershom, going down the passage.

'He's taking you out.'

'Hello,' said the chauffeur. 'You Gershom Shaw?'

§ 15

There was a swarm of children about the car. Gershom, still puzzling on the 'Shaw,' followed the chauffeur through the sardonic grinning of the juvenile throng, and stopped and hesitated as the man flung open the rear door and stood back. In the rear seat was a man who turned his head.

He might have been fifty years of age, narrow at the hips and broad at the shoulders, he'd have been a good runner before he grew old. Like Gershom himself he wore no hat, but the rest of his gear was morning clothes—so Gershom knew from window-displays, "and had he appeared in a mutcha and assegai, his garb would have been but a little less alien to Magpie Hill Road." A pair of pale blue eyes frowned down at Gershom from a brick-red face, at the corners of the nose and the down-turns of the lips that brick-red turned to black. Yet the forehead was neatly segmented, the lower half the prevailing shade, the upper a normal white. The man thrust out an impatient hand.

'That you, then, Gershom? Jump in. . . . Know a decent place for lunch, driver, out in the country somewhere?'

'There's the Bull down in Hoo, sir. They do you well there.'

'Drive there, then. . . . Come *on*, lad, jump in! Even the boys are paralytic in this blasted country. Right. Oh dammit, don't jam your boots on my legs. . . . Eh? What the hell next? Why don't you *jump* to it, man, and get out of this rat-run?'

The car creaked, jerked, and moved off down Magpie Hill Road. The children cheered. Gershom looked back at them, glanced at the window of the Anderson house, and then raised a shy, puzzled scrutiny on the man beside him.

'Here, there's been maybe a mistake,' he protested, whereat the brick-red face swung round on him like an angry moon and he stopped.

'For the love of God,' said the brick-red individual,

'don't spatter my chest with aitches. I'm your uncle, George Shaw.'

§ 16

"And it was no other—my uncle George in the throes of his usual morning dyspepsia. Unchancy feeding at unusual hours lit nightly the flames of hell in my uncle's interior, and from sunrise until near to noon his outlook on all matters human and divine was one of the blackest pessimism. Too busied with the ancient dead to see to the young and the quick, he had early in life outraged his stomach with such quantities of half-baked frijoles as only a crocodile might devour and, equanimous, endure untwitching. . . . So, when I knew him better, I was yet to tell him, but that morning while we drove to the Bull in Hoo I'd as soon have upbraided my father's God on the weather, so much was I dazed and at sea."

They sat in the Bull and lunched, in dead silence at first. George Shaw drank whisky with a scowling persistence and barked at the waiter, and then was abruptly human.

'Well, well, my lad, so you're young John's son? Not like him—much. Your mother, I suppose. . . . Eat up. . . . Suppose that scrofulous female who's kept you has half-starved you most of the time?'

He was to discover that another of his family could scowl. 'She ain't.'

'"She hasn't," you mean. Murder whom you will in my company, my lad, but not your own language. If you'd been without her as long as I have you'd appreciate the lady with her body unswathed, not draped in these Cockney rags. How old are you now?'

'Near fourteen.'

George Shaw winced again, as though stung. 'Oh well, time enough to finish your education when we've settled your fate. Did you ever hear about me before? Ever hear of your father?'

'Never heard about you. Father was potty, he was a Jezreelite. He died when I was seven years old and left Ma Anderson look after me.'

'So I heard from the woman last night. Well, your father was my brother John. His name was no more Jezreel than mine is—Huitzilopochtli.'

Gershom murmured something into his plate of beef. His uncle barked 'What?'

'Oh nothing. Just said he was the Aztec war-god, wasn't he?'

'Eh?' George Shaw sat erect as though stung again. 'What the devil—where'd you learn that?'

"And I believe that he loved me from that moment, that the decision he came to later in that day hinged on nothing greater than the fact that I knew of Huitzil, that at once he decided I'd been born an archæologist, as he himself had been born. He'd put me a quite unpremeditated test—and I'd passed it with triumph!"

§ 17

'And what did you do?' asked Gershom.

'A fair amount of things when your father left. I went through university, as you'll have to do—and if ever you call it 'Varsity God may forgive you, I won't. Then I got a job on a Liverpool museum, went out on an expedition it staffed—to B.H., which stands for bloody hell and also for British Honduras. Heard of it, hey? . . . Well, I've

been in Central America ever since, off and on. Till I gave myself a six months leave this year and came home and thought of looking up John. Found out he was dead and you his relict. All plain ? '

' Yes.'

They were down by the Isle of Grain, the chauffeur and the motor-car parked in a field, their own feet treading the pebbly beach. Behind them, dun and remote, the smoke-cloud of Chatham ; rightwards, far in the mud flats, the sea sighing in a cloud of May-time mist. . . . If you waded out there you'd come in time to mother's house lost in the tide, you hadn't been able to find it yourself, but mother had once, that time long ago. . . . Gershom came back with a start to the sound of George Shaw's voice.

'. . . And you'll have to go to a school, of course. Damned nuisance. There aren't any decent schools so you won't have an easy time. They'll twit you to hell with that ghastly accent of yours—and I shan't blame them. Do you good. . . . You'll start pretty low, of course.'

' No, I shan't.'

' Eh ? '

' I'm not going to any school to be bullyragged about the way I speak or the way I don't speak.' Gershom was suddenly angry. ' See ? '

' I see.' George Shaw had not paused a step, but the frowning eyebrows in the brick-red face twitched once or twice. ' And what are you going to do, then ? Sell papers in the street or get a job as a butcher's roundsman ? '

But the boy's slow-kindled anger was quite beyond staying now. " Something at the back of my mind wailed ' Hell ! ' as I proceeded to demolish the miraculous chance that had risen to save me from sea or a shop. But I didn't

care. I wanted to hurt him, to smash in that inhuman abruptness and sureness."

'Why shouldn't I, then? They're as good as you are, paper-sellers and butchers' roundsmen. We'd never hear about you and how famous you are if it wasn't that somebody sold papers; and if there weren't butchers you'd be in a bad way when you wanted another feed like you had back there at the Bull!'

He'd halted, speaking, stood red-eared, waiting for the beach to open and engulf him. He stared desperately out to sea, not looking at the bulky body which also had halted. And from the depths of that body there emerged a wondering chuckle.

'You damned little shrimp!... Here, let's sit down where we are. Dry place and we're out of the cut of the wind.'

The grass was rustling dry in the cove where they sat, the spring was yet laggard to green it anew. The whisper and pelt of the sea on the flats came borne to them on a thin, cold wind, George Shaw brought out a pouch and pipe and loaded one from the other. Smoking, he leant his head back in his hands and turned half-closed eyes on Gershom.

'Go ahead, then, tell me what you want me to do. If there's anything you want. I don't care a damn myself, but I'll help you whatever it is.... Think clearly about it. With a voice like that, without a tincture of letters, you'll hew wood and draw water all the days of your life. So what do you want to do?'

The boy drew a long breath and made the plunge, Ma Anderson, Chatham, Gillingham's Hill, the Tower of Jezreel and his father's Image no more than phantasmata grown already.

'I'm going back with you to B.H.,' said Gershom Jezreel.

SECTION THE SECOND

§ 1

FAR off, down where the forest sloped by the mule-track, a jaguar was coughing in the dawn.

It was almost as if a furnace-door had opened, that passing of the darkness. A hot, dry dawn blew out of the forest, you felt it before it became plain to your eyes, its heat foreshadowing its light. Then through the tree-boles the sky lightened and lightened, was painted with swift, brusque fingers impatient of picture and palette. Dead white changed then to a powdered grey, to an ambient amethyst, fell and faded and rose anew at a great brush stroke, sky-limned from a brush dipped deep in a jar of blood and of molten gold. Then came the sun, so quickly you heard the hiss of its coming, the hiss of the myriad javelins it flung, and abruptly the darkness crouching amid the tree-boles went scuffling through the aisles in hasting retreat. It left a world of jade, that coming and departure, the palms, the bushes, the ceibas' spread flung upwards so brilliant a green that between the openings of the tree-tops the sky appeared as a jadeite-blue. Here and there, in the crowding confusion of tree-trunks, orchids burst from the casement of night, great clots of honey or of blood they looked far up in the javelin-rain from the sun. Head pricked in the depths of the forest, the jaguar coughed again.

Gershom drew up his blanket about him and re-sought a soft place for his head on the saddle he used for a pillow. It was still very cold, spite the flare of the dawn's swift coming. Hunched in his blanket George Shaw, his head in the shadow of a tree, slept fast and silently not three feet away. Beyond him lay Mellison, his blanket had drifted away from him in some night-time unease, his shirt lay

open to the waist with his dark body-hair almost blue in that light, dark hair close curled like wool or the hair of a negro. Remotely down by the track the jaguar coughed once more.

Beyond Mellison's back a dark shape uncrouched and moved at that sound, and Gershom for a moment lay rigid. Then a covering slipped from it, it upended two arms, and yawned with a glint of great teeth ; Euriquito, the cook, a mozo whom George Shaw had re-hired in Sisal, was awake, reluctantly awake. He rose up, still yawning, and looked cautiously round and grinned with thick lips at Gershom, then lurched away light-stepping from the shadow of the boles, and so vanished.

Five minutes later he came back to shake Gershom awake from an after-sleep drowse. In the dawn-air now was the blue, thin reek of a wood fire, in Euriquito's hand a coffee-cup. Again in a silent exchange of grins the cup changed hands, and Gershom sat up and sat drinking.

That finished, he crawled from his blanket. He was clad in a khaki shirt and in khaki breeches, faced with grey leather the latter, and in grey woollen socks which tickled his feet. His boots and his puttees he had slept without, the latter rolled neatly on a ground-sheet corner. Reaching now to the boots, he upended them carefully, one after the other, one boot poised club-wise as the other was upended. From the second boot a great spider leapt out—leaping, not jumping or crawling, and it leapt again as Gershom struck. Phoo !

The spider was a smear on the leaves. Gershom choked back a surge of his early coffee, put on both items of footwear, and then slipped away under the trees in the direction of Euriquito's cooking.

Both mule-drivers squatted near the fire in their ponchos. Both grinned at Gershom.

'*'S dias.*'

'*'S dias.*'

'*Can I bring you water, Euriquito?*'

He spoke in the carefully-learned Spanish of a month-time's teaching. But Yucatecan Spanish differed from that of the textbooks, and Euriquito, as usual, frowned in perplexity. Then he caught on the syllables of agua, brightened, and pointed to a canvas bucket hung on a bush. Gershom caught it from there, swung under the trees, leaving busied cook and somnolent muleteers, and made down the slope of the track to the stream he had seen in the previous night. Already in the air was a drone of insects, in an air so heavy and unstirred it seemed almost liquid. Underfoot from the litter rose a pungent smell as your feet trod on it, even so light. Now he heard the stream, still in darkness, a babble and a murmur down in the trees that awaited the morning.

The jaguar coughed again, remoter, slinking into the undergrowth's ramparts; probably all night it had prowled the camp. . . . Jaguars never attacked a man in the day-time. But was it yet day? Of course. They feared to attack you even at night. Though there had been cases——

His spine a little chilled, not looking to the left or the right, Gershom went down to the stream. . . . The beasts would pad by the side of a horseman through hours in the dusk, through miles, and the traveller never see, only hear, the thing that companioned him. Nor would it ever attack. Except sometimes——

The forest was silent, nothing had followed him. He came to the stream brink, pushed through the grasses, and

squatted above the flow in his untied boots. There, halted a minute, he considered himself.

He had grown two inches in the last two months. "I looked down on a face tanned deep already, not at all the white face of my Chatham days. . . . And I squatted and stared a long time, I remember then, in that morning hush. Was it all a dream, a thing I'd imagined in the garret in Magpie Hill Road? But I knew that it wasn't, Chatham rather the dream, and a dream of one's childhood, faded, foregone. Two months—they seemed twenty years."

And, whistling abstractedly, he washed his face.

§ 2

The camp was violently in motion by the time he returned, George Shaw and Mellison both on their feet, seeing to the strapping of baggage and the cursing of the muleteers. Now those brush-strokes of colour had gone from the sky, the sun an inverted cup poured molten metal on the unstirred trees and the track that wound westwards through Chiapas. George Shaw swung round with a scowl at his nephew.

'Where have you been?'

'Washing,' said Gershom, and left it at that, drinking more coffee. The brick-red face towered over him murderously.

'And how often have I told you not to prowl around the bush in the morning? Do you think I dragged you out of the gutters of Chatham and a Cockney accent in order to feed you to the belly of some beast in Central America?'

Gershom felt his ears colour richly at that, but he'd abandoned long days before his first habit of retorting in

kind. He had developed already a curious compassion for his uncle's morning-time temper. So he drank the coffee and answered nothing, and George Shaw swung now on Mellison.

'You're supposed to look after the cameras. Call *that* one a load that's properly tied?' He jerked his thumb at a sagging bundle askew the back of the nearest mule. 'Hell, you're not fit to cart turnips to a market, let alone look after a digging pack.'

'Sorry, Mr. Shaw.'

'Sorrow be damned. Look after your work.'

He went striding away through the trees, convulsively, on an errand none ever enquired. Mellison's red flush faded and he looked at Gershom. Both grinned; Euriquito grinned; the muleteers grinned. 'God help that jaguar if he comes upon *it*,' said Mellison. And added, 'Some day I'll forget and sock him in the jaw.'

'He might sock you back.'

'Suppose he might.' Mellison sighed and rolled up his sleeves. 'Come on, then, and help me with this bloody mule. Why I ever left the comforts of Liverpool to mess about with these antique fauna I'm damned if I know.'

"But indeed Andrew Mellison knew very well. His father was the Egyptologist, Sir Kyrle, archæology was deep in his blood and bones. After Oxford he'd gone up to Liverpool as a curator and there had taken to American work as naturally and inevitably as his father to Egyptian. He would say it was only a fair repayment, America had squandered thousands to dig up the East, God alone knew why with her own excavating hardly begun. . . . In three years of books and exhibit-study he'd acquired as much knowledge of the Ancient America as book-learning and

exhibits may give. Opportunity for more came Mellison's way when he heard my uncle was in England and preparing to return for three seasons' digging at Palenque. He wrote to George Shaw and offered his services, and received a characteristic letter in reply:

"'Come if you please. But I don't pay anything except your keep. No Museum fal-lals or notions, mind. I'm the boss.'

"So he was and Mellison had accepted that condition, and now, as this morning, endured it. He was young, with head-hair as dark as his chest, a fine skin that came from a long line of forbears well-fed and well-bathed and wealthy. He could drink as no fish probably ever has drunk, and alone with myself in such moments would find odd amusement in our little expedition of three. Himself, an aristocrat, George Shaw, a peasant, myself, a slum-urchin—only Providence could have planned it so neatly. For of Europe—civilization, society—we were surely representative enough, our mission to pry in the why and where another civilization had vanished from the earth."

§ 3

Shaw was Shaw, he told Gershom, probably the last of the old-type antiquary, unhampered by museum or governing body, a man of the order of Schliemann of Troy and with a reputation to match.

'Something of a genius and something of a buccaneer and extraordinarily lucky, your uncle. Oh, he wouldn't mind me saying that, though he'd never say it himself. . . . Knows more of the Pre-Columbian American than anyone alive in the world to-day—which means he knows more of

human nature and history than three-quarters the doddering old fungi who grind out tomes on the subject and hold down university seats till their backsides are flattened with the exercise. He's the *Maya* Shaw quite as much as Maudslay was the *Maya* Maudslay.'

Gershom said he knew nothing about him—or them. What happened ?

So Mellison, from his reading and talking and listening to gossip, built up the tale of George Shaw's career. He had gone out to Mexico at first in a quiet and conventional way, under-curator in Museo Nacional, to ticket and sort and assort, and indent for a holiday now and then, and improve his Spanish and his knowledge of women. And from the first he'd refused to play the part, he acted instead as a destroying fiend, he ridiculed Museo's groupings and datings, and advanced wild theories on the Maya culture. He left Mexico in less than a year—the city not the country —and vanished to the south, he'd borrowed some money to outfit himself and the small expedition that was necessary. Chiapas heard of him next, then Guat, and the natives, terrorized, would sprint through the forest to show him the sites of the old ' stone houses.' Near Piedras Negras (though this was but rumour), he unearthed a tomb as full of treasure as an egg full of meat—not Maya treasure, for they never had any, but gold in great bars, a buried Conquistador cache. . . . This was the rumour, it remained unconfirmed, George Shaw at the least made no attempt to hand over the cache to the Government. Instead, he returned to the City, paid off what he'd borrowed, fitted out the next go as though Rothschild financed him, and thereafter, untrammelled, sought and studied as he chose. In the years since then he had worked to first place in American archæology—or

might well have done so but that half his reports had a gastric acidity which stung like an adder.

'And what's he going to do now, then?' Gershom had questioned.

'He's to tackle Palenque. Never heard of it? Well, it's the brazenest of all the Old Maya sites. They built it round about A.D. 400, "made proud with pillars of basalt, with sardonyx and porphyry"—and in less than a century it was abandoned overnight to the beasts and the jungle. . . . Why? God knows, and He's kept the facts still undivulged. Nobody'd seen the place till last century Charnay went there. Up to date your uncle has missed it, but its fate is upon it at last. He's set for three seasons there, digging and sketching and all kinds of doings. . . . Hell, isn't it hot?'

That was outside New Orleans he said that, the city itself riding the northwards horizon like a harlot—a mulatto one—bedecked for a banquet. Gershom liked New Orleans, the tall houses, the heat, the biscuits with honey, stuffed frogs for dinner, the grinning black faces, the wide-brimmed hats, all the scents and smells of this un-Nordic south. They had three days to wait till a ship would sail to Sisal or contiguous ports, and Mellison and Gershom ran errands for Shaw, and avoided him mornings, and listened to the music in the flower-bedded parks. The last day, with a list, they went out to the bookshops, Mellison sought and probed for the books he needed and the books George Shaw had commissioned him to buy. Once, frowning, he made Gershom look at the list and seek to decipher a scrawl thereon.

'It's a Latin Grammar—Sonnenbury's—no, Sonnenschein's.'

'Sonnenschein's? So it is. Looked Shaftesbury's to me.' Mellison grinned at Gershom from the list. 'Sonnenschein it is you're in for, my boy. May the Lord have mercy upon your soul.'

'Mine?'

'Who else's? The Grammar's for you—and half the rest of the books. While we excavate Palenque you'll be excavating Cæsar.'

'*Latin?*'

'Looks like it. *And* Greek and French. Spanish automatically.' Mellison grinned at the list again. 'Trig., Algebra, the Lord God alone knows what. If Shaw's hopes for his work at Palenque don't mature, he should at least emerge from the bush with a young prig full of learning as a Thanksgiving turkey with stuffing.'

This, as Gershom tells, wasn't his idea at all. So that night he tackled his uncle in person. 'Look here, when we made that agreement at Grain you said nothing about me learning Latin?'

'Oh, didn't I?' George Shaw canted his head to one side. 'Neither did I say anything about you *not* learning it. And learn you will though I've to hail you to your seat each day by the seat of your shorts. Soon's we get to Palenque that's set for your job.'

'But why Latin? It's dead. And I'm not to be a doctor or a chemist, am I?'

George Shaw drained down the long drink they call a muchacho in New Orleans. 'Nor a curate either, as far as I know. Listen, you told me you liked reading poetry?'

The boy nodded. His uncle reached into a case, and brought out a small, blue-bound volume and handed it

over. Gershom took it and stood in the white fall of light and looked at the page that was indicated.

'Read that, then,' George Shaw commanded.

He began on it haltingly, stumblingly at first, till his eyes caught the dash and the wash of colour in the wavelike, unaccustomed words:

'Men have lost their reason in nothing so much as their religion, wherein stones and clouts make martyrs, and since the religion of one seems madness unto another, to afford an account or rational of old rites requires no rigid reader. That they kindled the pyre aversely or turning their faces from it, was an handsome symbol of unwilling ministration——'

'And how much of that have you understood?' George Shaw enquired.

Gershom stood pondering. 'Half, maybe. What does a "symbol of unwilling ministration" mean?'

The heavy eyebrows twitched in the brick-red face. 'You'll know when you've learnt some Latin. I'll ask you the meaning inside six months.'

§ 4

Sisal. Gershom had been almost the first to see it on the little henequen-trader that crossed the Gulf. It came out of the morning in a golden glow, a long, far-flung beach, white, pelted with combers, and the wheel and dip of bright birds like the dotting of a signature against the waving veils of translucent jade. And Gershom stared with a quick-beating heart.

Sisal: Yucatan! The home of the Maya of whom he now heard so much, the strangest folk of that strange,

lost world in the West before Columbus' *Pinta* ploughed the Atlantic! A dark, wild civilization that had sprung, mysteriously mature, in the forests of night, a culture of stone tools and magnificent temples, a skilled astronomy, an infantile agriculture, high art and cannibalism, horrific gods and paternal rulers, a theocracy and a savagery. There, apart and alone from the life of the world it burgeoned in the morning of Time, and spread and endured and waged its wars, civilized the Americas—and then crackled and collapsed, mysteriously murdered, with the relics of its culture long centuries after astounding the hosts of Spain . . . Yucatan!

He ran below, down the close-smelling hatch, and summoned up Mellison from sleep and his bunk. George Shaw's assistant came up and stood looking, and yawned at the sight, but even his indifference quivered a little at that bright be-painting of the morning horizon. 'Yucatan? Well, well, I wish we'd come six hundred years earlier.'

'So do I,' said Gershom.

Mellison yawned. 'What, you too? What would you have done?'

Gershom was quite definite about that. 'Landed a strong party and marched to Chichen—or Mayapan or Ake—and seized whatever high-priest was handy——'

'Yes?'

'And compelled him learn Spanish and translate the Old Maya inscriptions.'

'Correct,' said Mellison, preparing to vanish. 'You pass with honours.'

George Shaw had heard that interchange from his bridge-deck cabin. An hour later as they sat at breakfast and drew into the shore, he sat in the flood of bright light,

and for once good-tempered even at such an hour, told them the origin of the name Yucatan. It was in 1517, and a slaver and gentleman, Francisco Hernandez de Cordoba it was, took a ship out from Cuba to explore the vague limning of coasts already known to rumour in the West. So he sailed, with uncertain winds that came and passed and left him becalmed and came again, for twenty-one days he sailed. But the twenty-second dawn came and the look-out sighted a wooded point with near it the surprising phenomenon of a town which glinted white-painted walls in the sun. A seaport of Titzimin, we now know that town, the port of a Maya state long sunk in decay, half-deserted, with the lichens sprouting on its walls.

But Cordoba and his crew knew nothing of that. They stared their amazement from every vantage-point, rigging and deck, and then, as they rounded the cape, saw a great stepped pyramid, ruined and deserted, swing past. Then a belt of trees marched down to the shore and cut off sign of the impossible town their look-out had sighted.

But a plausible explanation was offered, at last they'd arrived at the coasts of Ind, so long those coasts sought by Columbus himself. Here at last was the East and its wonders, treasures, and slaves. Cordoba cast anchor and gave order for the boats to be manned.

So they rode into shore, strange Indios were there, the first Maya to encounter the armed white. One stood forward a little from his fellows, the leader, and Cordoba had him questioned in Carib : What were his people and who was his king ?

The Maya stood wondering and tall and brown, in fibre sandals and embroidered loincloth, his head misshapen to an alien canon of beauty, himself that lost expedi-

tion of civilization that had run its strange course to an end long years before.

'Tectemal: I don't understand,' was what he said.

So Cordoba called the place Yucatan, as it sounded, and if you look on a map of the Gulf you will see to this day a peninsula curve out in the water, great, like a question-mark, so that maybe the misname remains descriptive in the end.

§ 5

Such was George Shaw's story as their ship steamed slowly into Sisal port and the flying odour that came on the wind from that mother of the henequen industry. Gershom wished to ask more, "like Cordoba's Maya, I didn't understand," why ever should the peninsula question the Atlantic?

He put it to Mellison that evening as they took their way back from dinner at the house of the American consul. George Shaw had remained behind to gossip: Gershom he'd sent home in Mellison's care. In that care he had wandered a round of wine-shops till Mellison, affirming 'One more and I'm drunk,' had reluctantly foregone that additional one and now made straying and uncertain tracks for the shore. A great moon was riding far off on the limestone wastes of the Yucatecan country as Gershom questioned what his uncle had meant.

'Possibly the excellent George was being allusive and literary. It's a disease that comes on the old. Look out!'

'What did he mean, then—whatever he was being?'

'Hell, you've a leech-like grip on a topic. Well, you see, this dying civilization—the Maya—was saying to the rising culture—the Spanish—"I don't understand."'

'Yes, but——'

Mellison stumbled over a cur which slunk snapping aside.

'For God's sake give an educator time to marshal his similies. Right: The Maya—the present-day world, doomed and cankerous and half-dead; the Spaniards—the rising forces of the world to be.'

Gershom pondered this as they plodded along. They came to the gangway before his question matured:

'And what are they?'

'Eh?'

Gershom persisted. 'The forces of the world to be.'

'They just aren't, or to speak in your argot, they ain't. When *our* civilization goes down, my lad, there's nothing to rise up and take its place.'

'What'll make it go down?'

'Wine, women, or war. Fire, flood, or famine. How the hell should I know? Ask the Old Maya, it happened to them.' He hiccoughed, and posed, one foot on the deck, in a drunken solemnity. 'And a damn good job.'

§ 6

Laguna de Terminos. George Shaw had chartered an unchancy fruit-boat, and for three days they crept along the Gulf from Sisal, that coast that Cordoba and others had followed, Montejo and Cortes and their steel-clad hosts, four hundred years before. There, to the left, where the jungle now massed, Mochcovoh, the ferocious Maya, had met in pitched battle and routed the whites, through generalship, not through ferocity. There Champoton had risen in that grey-green blur, then palaced and splendid, where the Tutul Xiu rested and plotted and planned while

in Europe they were preaching the first Crusade. There, while the warriors of William the Norman rode up to the Senlac palisades, Quetzalcoatl the Toltec had landed his flotilla, his refugee-army from the Mexican plains, and set out on his march to subdue the land. There——

Gershom's head reeled with the stories, the heat, the blinding glister of the blue Gulf water. To George Shaw this land was his land, he its, his enthusiasm for its present and its past was unbounded, it softened the blank frown from his brick-red face as no other thing on the earth could do. Of a vanishing order of archæologist, Shaw, he'd no belief a cold attitude was necessary to accuracy. For that reason his reports were like no other reports ever penned—unless those of Augustus le Plongeon.

'Augustus le who?' asked Gershom.

'Plongeon, a genius, but potty. Potty as a Gillingham Jezreelite, almost. But he knew the Maya, he drank up their tales, and then issued his fantastic books. Swore that so far from being moderns in the scale of culture, the Maya had been forefathers of the Egyptian and every other civilization.'

'And weren't they?' asked Gershom, and at that Andrew Mellison, sitting sweating in a topee and very little else, a stained notebook in his hands to check stores and gear, a litter on the deck of the one-time fruit steamer, groaned loudly.

'Go away. Good God, you're too ignorant to hold converse with a mule, let alone an archæologist. Not that they haven't got points in common. . . . Let up, there's a sweet, and go look at the scenery.'

So Gershom 'let up,' and from vexing archæologists, was speedily transferring his attentions to those fauna

with whom they'd points in common. The boat ran across the Laguna in a slight squall of rain, slight, said Shaw, though it seemed a blinding white torrent, and that night made the mouth of the Rio Tabasco. At the coming of the morning they ran close in a harbour—at which Gershom looked in the wonder of one to whom harbours were Chatham and stone piers and the wheeling of cranes against a leaden, soot-stained sky. Here the village, the world, and the harbour slept, bowered deep in green, overhung unendingly with the drone of insects, far off the Tabasco a ripple and a surge on the breast of the dark green land.

But George Shaw was in haste and the usual temper, he cursed rapidly and with fluency the morning, the steamer, the captain, and Gershom, did they think he'd come here on a blasted pleasure-trip, hey? Fortunately the village was exuding its porters by then, and Gershom, emerging from that acid-inspired wrath, looked down on his first Maya with close, critical eyes. Men and women, black-eyed, apathetic, dull-eyed and dull-skinned, with here and there even yet the sloped forehead and hooked nose of the pictures and talks. They set unloading the equipment with hardly a word, far less with that singing of the negroes that at New Orleans had so pleased and amused. They looked shrunken, deflated, in some way, thought Gershom, and was puzzled by that, they seemed healthy enough. But Mellison understood and nodded and was cocksure as usual.

'Mentally deflated, they're mentally old. The negroes are children, but these folk are born old. They've never recovered from the Maya Old Empire, there's failure and age in their blood. They'll look just the same, your descendants, my Gershom, if a stray Martian lands for a look at them on the Chatham hills a thousand years hence.'

Seven mules were purchased that day by George Shaw, and Gershom, with qualms of delight, realized he was expected to ride one of the beasts. His uncle had forgotten the fact he had never yet ridden, so Mellison was detailed to take him to practise. They went out that evening with the quietest of the mules: its quietness was deceptive. Extricating himself for the tenth time from the depths of a thorn-bush, Gershom saw Mellison seated in helpless laughter upon the ground, and decided to dispense with his help. So he drove the mule out to a more secluded spot, cut a strong switch, and rode to and fro his long-eared mount till his seat was secure—if an aching one. Returning long later to the guest-hut he found Mellison and his uncle fast asleep, and would himself have slept with a like tiredness and serenity but for a loud breathing and thump at the door of the hut as the night wore to morning. Wakeful at the thought of some wild beast on the prowl, Gershom struck a match—and looked into the eyes of his mule. The beast had conceived for him a violent affection and had come to pay him a call.

He was to find that affection had its uses in the days to follow. George Shaw had a permanent permit from the Mexican Government and had no need to have it restamped. Now he planned to strike southwards along the usual trade tracks till he came to the village of Huacachahoul, and then turn left and east for Palenque. . . . It was a week of burning heat, vexed in the day by flights of insects that stung and droned, lighted at night with the shimmering bodies of the fire-flies. The track wound now by precipitous ledges above the Tabasco's slow flow, now splashed unchancily through swamps that oozed great bubblings of foam, iridescent and glittering, malarial, from under the

hooves of the mules. Gershom clung grimly to his saddle, his mule benignant, and his soul expanded; he was never to forget the days of those rides. There were times when the forest came down and devoured them in long hours; there were times when a silence as of death came on it; there were times when it listened and waited, apathetic, or quivered in menace, the little grey monkeys would cease from their chattering of insults and squat shivering in colonies above the trek of the mules. Once the forest disgorged on their sight a detachment of soldiers, in fibre sandals like their Maya ancestors, rifles on the shoulders of their soiled cotton jackets, marching up north to seek out a bandit who was levying tribute on outlying haciendas. George Shaw made halt and smoked a cigarette with the detachment's commander, a lieutenant, one Maquene, whose grandfather had come from Boston and rejoiced in the designation M'Kinney. Introduced to Gershom, he raised hands in astonishment.

'But a boy in the wilderness—he should be at school in England!'

Shaw grunted. 'So I told him myself. But he wanted to inspect your admirable country.'

'A discerning youth,' the lieutenant agreed. 'But see, he cannot stay at the ruins through the wet seasons—if you stay three years. Send him to Mexico City—there's the admirable school of Dr. Ruiz there. There he will learn Spanish more admirable than in any place outside Castile.'

George Shaw translated for Gershom. 'Well, what do you say? Rainy season's only six weeks off. How about a trip to Mexico?' He conferred again with Lieutenant Maquene. 'The lieutenant here'll take you with him as far as Comitan, and get you sent on to Dr. Ruiz' school.

Mexico City's worth seeing, and you can come down to Palenque when the wet season passes.'

Gershom considered and then shook his head. 'I don't want a school in England or in Mexico either.'

'Damn fool.'

So Lieutenant Maquene shrugged his shoulders and smiled at Gershom and shook hands with him, and went on to hunt down his bandits. But, as they afterwards learned, it was the bandits who hunted *him*. They routed his little force under a bluff of the Rio Grijalva, in an ambush and a volley of Mausers, and Maquene himself was among the half-dozen captured. He was tortured for a week, his eyes put out, his genitals cut off, and then set adrift in the forest. Three days later his half-eaten body was discovered by a meztizo trader who brought down the news to George Shaw halted at Huacachahoul.

'Damn good job you refused Maquene's offer to take you to Comitan,' said Mellison, and translated the gist of the trader's remarks, and was suddenly sick. But Gershom didn't sicken, he just shivered and stared—stared out at the hell of naked pain veiled in the dull sleeping beauty and greenery of Chiapas. And that night it came back to him, the first time in long years, he saw tortured and dreadful the Image of old, it cried to him, cried to him, and he woke then crying himself, weeping in a passion of pity and rage.

"The moon was sinking, I lay and wept, my uncle and Mellison sleeping nearby. In the agony of that moment, the terror of that dream, almost I called to them, but they wouldn't understand. . . . Strangely then, mere boy as I was, it came on me clearly I'd to fight it for myself, fight through the nightmare and answer that cry if ever I could,

ever yet unveil the face of the Thing that had come from my childhood, that followed me here in the forests of the night."

§ 7

Huacachahoul village was a day's march behind that dawn when the coughing of the American tiger awoke Gershom from his sleep. Next stage on their road was Yaholan, they reached that at eleven along a trail seemly and reputable since the days when Stephens and Catherwood had crossed it. It was at Yaholan that Stephens met with the girl, an Indio girl ' of extraordinary beauty of face and figure,' who so dwelt in his memory and was written of in detail in the pages of his genteel, voluminous ' Travels.' ' Not that the damn fool slept with the girl,' said Mellison, riding abreast with Gershom through the squalor of the village. ' But he liked her modesty.'

' So do I,' said Gershom, unexpectedly.

Mellison raised his fine-pencilled eyebrows in mockery. ' Can it be there are prigs in the gutter ? Tell me, you've surely been blooded by now ? '

' Blooded ? '

' Slept with a woman.'

Beyond Yaholan : the forest discovered a stream that flashed in the sun and flushed redly under the ceiba boughs. But no such flush came to Gershom as Mellison expected.

' No, and I don't intend to.'

' Good Lord, and why not ? '

' There are lots of other things to do than be messy. . . . There's my uncle calling.'

At noon they came to the Yaholan's banks, and saw in

the coming the forward country march darkly and grimly, sky-aspiring, a forest that wheeled against the east on the ribs of a naked mountain. Up that wound the track. George Shaw slowed down and ordered a halt at the foot of the first incline, Gershom slipped away from where they lunched and stripped and swam in the seaward gurgle of the limpid waters. The heat of the day was blistering on the banks, and he came from his bathe in his panama alone, and George Shaw shouted an oath.

'Blast it, put on your clothes. Quick, there!'

Gershom stared in surprise as his uncle flung him his shirt and trousers. Mellison grinned as he put them on: he decided he liked Mellison less. On the brick-red face of the expedition's leader the heavy scowl smoothed.

'No doubt 'twould be pleasant enough doing without them—until you got saddle-sore. But you can't in this country.'

'Why not?' drawled Mellison. 'You sound somewhat reactionary. Victoria's dead.'

'And so's Queen Anne. But you'd look "somewhat" bloody, I think, with your genitals cut off and stuffed in your mouth—as they'd certainly be if you tried going naked here. These Indios are natives with a past, poor devils—the Maya past and the Catholic combined.'

They climbed up the mountain, with curses at the mules (all except Gershom's, but it was in love), and so found themselves on Tumbala, a crater. Here the lava had boiled and rocks leapt high in ages long antique to both Maya and mule. In the village the alcalde came drunk from his hut, a half-breed, Meztizo, and welcomed them with expansive solemnity to Tumbala's repose. Nothing else could be done for that day, it seemed, George Shaw grunted and

acquiesced to a halt. A meal was spread them in the alcalde's hut, and entering from the daylight the three stood a moment in darkness. And then Gershom's eyes cleared and he saw the girl.

She was perhaps his own age, and so far his senior in physical development. She stood dark and very still, waiting at table, and her beauty was neither Spanish nor Indian, but alone and apart, of youth and herself. The impassivity of the handsome young face surprisingly melted as her eye caught Gershom's. The alcalde waved to her, tipsily.

'My daughter Luz, señores, my Light as I call her. She will see to it you are tended and cheered.' He leered, his eyes passing from George Shaw's cold glare to the hot, dark eyes of Mellison. 'We teach hospitality here in Tumbala.'

'That is well,' said Shaw, 'we shan't trespass on it.'

The alcalde wilted a little from that glare and turned to the platter in front of him. The girl flushed and looked down. Gershom did the same and sat awkward and puzzled, eating pork without appetite and drinking his coffee, vexed by those glances of the girl, they seemed almost to appeal. . . . What was it she wanted?

The alcalde questioned them on the world and its ways, George Shaw rapped out staccato replies, the eyes of Mellison strayed to the girl, and the girl's eyes strayed, beseeching, to Gershom. It was all very strange.

The meal ended at last and Luz left the hut. So then did Mellison. The alcalde grinned. George Shaw lit a pipe, he seemed not to have noticed, but when Gershom rose up and was also to leave he reached out a gaunt arm to detain him.

'Wait a while, boy. I'll come out with you and show you a thing worth seeing.'

So Gershom waited, and Shaw completed his pipe, and then rose, and they went out together. They were there at the edge of the village, set high on its little plateau. George Shaw turned left by a worn path that wound through the rocks, and the ground rose quickly, so that soon they climbed.

Now in the evening light Gershom drew a deep breath as he halted by the side of Shaw.

Beyond and below, many hundreds of feet below where they stood, lay an immense ravine like a blow from a sword. It seemed one might leap from the summit to the depths and wheel and wheel and fall minutes in that leap ere one touched the bottom. Far across from their summit the other side of the ravine climbed skywards again in a saw-toothed range that ran westwards into the dying sun, they were dun and blood-coloured and crowned with gold. But beyond, low down yet tremendous, another range crowned the east. Something in its interstices gleamed and Gershom questioned that gleam.

'It's the Gulf, the Laguna de Terminos,' said Shaw, 'and those are Palenque's mountains.'

Palenque mountains! Nurtured on the name for weeks as he'd been, Gershom's blood came stinging in his face with excitement. 'Oh Gosh!' he exclaimed, inadequately.

George Shaw glanced down at him curiously. 'Palenque mountains. The dead city lies in their hollow, and we'll make it in a few days' time. This was what I wanted to show you. . . . More than Mellison could.'

He read a question in Gershom's silence, and snorted, and then blew his pipe with care. 'Women, and all the

foolishness that goes with them. I have shown you things that are better : Mountains.'

§ 8

South of Tumbala, in the wild lands that wound to the Usamacinta, the Indios lived as before Columbus, in the barbarism of the Old Empire's fall. Out of those lands would occasionally spawn a raiding tribe to fall on a village and loot it, and leave its inhabitants nailed to trees, and fade back to the green day-night of the jungle. So George Shaw related to his nephew and Mellison, his idea of light chat while they climbed and descended and clung by their eyelids to that giddy and ghastly twenty-seven miles of track that lies between Tumbala and the village of San Pedro. From Tumbala they scrambled and slithered and lurched to the deeps of the cañon that Gershom had glimpsed, far down, in the previous evening. There, directly in front, the path wound up, by giddy escarpments, and crumbling footholds, to the heights of that further range—a horror of unshielded earth in parts, in others an equal horror of slippery mosses and deceptive lianas. The mules plunged and kicked and reared in suicidal ecstasy by this brink and that ; Gershom and Mellison had long descended, they pulled and tugged, scared and apprehensive, but George Shaw might have ridden a tramcar in Chatham. He rode smoking, poised on the back of his beast, even while it seemed that beast was treading the edge of a razor. And between whiles he boomed out stories of the Land of the Unbaptized across the forested sierras.

Gershom had never so admired his uncle. And he read admiration in Mellison as well, Mellison himself sleep-weary and laggard this morning. He'd partaken of the

alcalde of Tumbala's hospitality in more senses than one, and paid for it, and now fought and struggled the horrendous paths without any great urge or enthusiasm. ' Still, it was fun while it lasted,' he affirmed to Gershom.

' I prefer the mountains,' said the sweating boy.

He had more than enough of his preference by nightfall. He fell into bed in San Pedro with an ache in every bone in his body, his pelvis was racked with shooting pains, his hands red-blistered. He slept like a log throughout the night and far into morning, and awoke to find George Shaw had delayed the start to give him a larger measure of sleep.

Beyond San Pedro was land without name or habitation all the length of the track to Palenque. Here the forest came down on the earth like a cloud, black, thick, overgrown, the forest of your books and your readings, not such as they'd previously seen since their landing in far-off Tabasco. Parakeets screamed and flirted bright wings in the murky depths ; far off in its inky shadows the pools of water would sometimes glister and gleam at the touch of a finger of sunlight reached down from the heights. Here even the insects seemed quiet and subdued of hum. So close was the bush around the track that riding was a high adventure, lest presently a bough scrape out your eyes or scrape you, unwarned, from the saddle. When they made their first halt all three of the whites were wet with sweat, George Shaw puffing under that moisture as though to turn it to steam, Mellison's skin wrung dry as tight-squeezed fruit, Gershom red as that fruit new-boiled. George Shaw ate beans from a can and chatted.

' The worst stretch is before us now.'

' Worse than this ? ' Mellison sounded aghast.

Shaw chuckled as dryly as his condition permitted. 'Wish yourself back in a museum arm-chair?'

'No, I'm damned if I do. Wouldn't miss this for anything. But I'd like it in easier stages, so to speak.'

Presently the forest died away and again came the hills. Here were the steepest ascents they had yet encountered. They dismounted from the mules and went clawing their way up pitches so steep it seemed that each succeeding foothold had a moment before been level with their eyes. The sun rose scorching, unshielded the heights, you'd not dare to look up and around. For below and around, in that first swift glimpse, was a world that canted and quivered, raced and swam, a great crinkling of mountain and forest, with the gleam of the Gulf long leagues away across the matted slopes. Then, on the mountain-crest, the track betook itself from the crumbling hog-back ledges to the edge of a precipice, sheer, a bare couple of feet overhung the depths. This was the place, Shaw told to Gershom and Mellison, where Stephens and Catherwood had crossed, sitting in chairs on the backs of the Indians.

It seemed to Gershom a precarious luxury. His head swam as he looked; and Shaw saw it and cursed him.

'Hold up and away your damned head. And mind your mule—it depends on you. Don't walk. Ride!'

Without that studiedly angry impatience for urge, Gershom was afterwards to realize he would never have succeeded in making that path. No wind blew. In the steely depths below, the air seemed to curl alive, hotly and moistly, malignant, awaiting his hurtling descent from the heights. In distance the depths were a cobalt blue, but once, seeming to look down for hours—it was only the fraction of a second—he sorted from that blue-grey jumble

the fronds of the waiting trees and the long, sentinel spears of the bamboo brakes. Behind him another curse came 'Look to the left, there, damn you!'

So Gershom looked and escaped that nodding nausea, over to the right, down and down. The day went on. They halted and then pressed forward again. More hills, more climbs, more descending. Night was near before they reached the final descent, and more than near when they'd made it. Shaw veered his party to the right, then, under the crags of that last descent, in search of a spring he'd been told of back in San Pedro.

The darkness came fast, the draping of a great black blanket over the forest. Tangled in its fringe came clouds of mosquitoes. The water was nowhere to be found till Gershom, sitting down to rest while the others searched, heard almost under his feet a gurgle and trill.

'There's water here,' he called to them, and didn't remember much more, except that he slept.

§ 9

They had passed the horrifying mountains at last. Next day, riding through the pasture lands that gird the village of Palenque, Gershom looked back on those mountains and the memory of them as an unquiet nightmare dreamt and ended. But in secret pride he surveyed his blisters, and remembered the curt smile of his uncle and the slap on the shoulder of Mellison when he'd staggered from the hut that morning. Wakening, he'd discovered himself completely undressed, in the one camp-bed, a mosquito-net tucked about him, and his body tired but fresh-feeling as well. Reason for that he'd learned from Mellison. It

was Shaw who had undressed him the while he slept, had anointed him from head to foot with oil, and had massaged him with an equal thoroughness—all the while he slept blissfully unaware. Gershom thanked his uncle for that, with some shyness, and was greeted with the usual morning scowl.

'What do you think I'd have done? Imagine I wanted an invalid on my hands?' Then the scowl had gone and for a moment a wintry smile gleamed out. . . . A feat at such hour, that smile!

And here was Palenque at last.

But not the Palenque of the ruins. That lay a good eight or nine miles distant, across atrocious tracks. This was the real Palenque, the dead Maya city of the bush has no name, long abandoned to the speech of men, and archæologists but name it from its modern neighbour. That neighbour young Gershom surveyed without excitement, better though it was than many a village they'd passed through since they left Tabasco. The iglesia stood high on a grassy slope; the houses of the Mexicans flowered their great tangled gardens; the huts of the Indios slept in the sunlight. At sight of Shaw's party Palenque emptied out its population in welcome, calling and questioning in a Spanish beyond Gershom's vocabulary. The prefeto lunched them and wined them and proved expansive. Doubtless they had come to work in company with the other señor who had left for the ruins three days before?

'Doubtless,' agreed George Shaw. 'But what was the señor's name?'

'Caldon. Almost he has cleared Palenque of flour. And of needles! . . . But we have much of other food if you need it?'

'I shall need at least some,' Shaw told him absently. He was puzzled, and that afternoon while he and Gershom and Mellison took their siesta, he told them why.

'Caldon—never heard of an Americanist Caldon. And I know of most Americanists alive, I think. If he came with the equipment the prefeto says, he can hardly be only a tourist or sightseer. Damn him. He's probably engaged the best of the Indios.'

'As well as the food. Not to mention the needles. Must be a damn neat soul, or else covered with rents. . . . Needles!'

George Shaw grunted. 'Umph. Ever hear of a Caldon yourself?'

'No, no Caldon in archæology I know of—unless it's the Egyptologist.'

'And *he'd* be a bit out of his beat down here. Some dollar-stuffed scholar from the Middle West, I suppose. Well, it can't be helped. Wish to God it *was* the Egyptian Caldon: he'd do us some good. Finest excavator alive, if you can go by his reports.'

Mellison also praised that Caldon and the two of them wandered into mazes of appreciation beyond Gershom's comprehension, he fell into a sun-stilled doze. Occasionally he more than despaired of ever hitching enthusiasm to such matters of digging and measurement and painstaking photography, matters on which Mellison and his uncle talked endlessly, had talked the moon into morning on more occasions than one.

A gibbous moon came up from the hills that night, and Gershom at the entrance of the prefeto's house watched its coming, and the racing of shadows on the westward bush. The light was a golden shimmer, faint, like faint

sunlight, spraying the sleeping lands. South : the Land of the Unbaptized, those wild relics of the Maya tribes who had never owned Spanish dominion. West : the tracks they had crossed. North : jungle and waste to the shores of Laguna de Terminos. And under and about that eastwards hill you could hardly see in the moonsheen—what wonders had once been there, what glory of gods and processions, prides and pomps and pageantry, where now beasts laired and the night had made for itself a dwelling-place. . . .

So it was that Mellison found him standing and staring at that shadow in the night which crowned ruined Palenque. He came through the moonlight, soft-footed himself, and suddenly smote the boy on the shoulder with a force that made him leap aside with a startled cry. Mellison grinned.

'Think it an Ancient Maya who had come for you ? So it is,—or his adjutant. George wants you to check up stores. Come along.'

So Gershom followed him. The road to Palenque was almost done. To-morrow and Palenque itself awaited them.

SECTION THE THIRD

§ 1

"SO it was, by ways and means unguessable, unpredictable, I met at last with Ester April Caldon. That Odyssey of mine from the slums of Chatham had her for its end as certainly as Penelope Ulysses'—if Penelope had but been Calypso! . . . And I try in faded allusions to guise my excitement recalling that encounter. In after meetings, when the years had brought down a curtain of change and custom upon us, I think she was often to find my eyes upon her, intently, absently, I was seeing her not as the Ester of *now* but the Ester of *then*——"

It was a day of the usual sizzling heat, but to that both Mellison and Gershom were at last accustomed. They set out from Palenque village at nine in the morning, the mules so loaded that riding was a thing of the past, unregretted at that. Besides muleteers and cook, half a dozen Palenque Indios had been hired to carry and dig and help generally in unearthing the city mislaid in the bush by their own remote fathers. These straggled along the uneven forest track loaded down with great bundles of freshbought provisions, live stock and dead stock, two chickens that were plucked and ready for the pot and three still squawking alive—these last designed to be set pecking in the ruins to supply the breakfast eggs of the party. Bacon, said Shaw, they'd dispense with.

The morning advanced; so did the party. At eleven they splashed through the Micol stream, meandering there perhaps a thousand years before when Palenque was alive with its aberrant cultus. Beyond that, and drippingly, they forded the Otula, and found then no break in the forest but abruptly masses of lichened stone rising up from the jungle.

The city stood entombed. Lianas drooped from the sculptured doorways with their sun-cracked stucco, wreathed like bright livid snakes the palace pilasters, blinded in a vegetal froth the ruined towers and disrupted plazas. Mouldering stone masses that fought the jungle; for the rest, the forest had long routed the masons and artists, the sculptors and priests and the strange civilization they had brought that dark place, nothing lived or moved; halting at the foot of the incline for breath, it seemed to Shaw's party that the place was deserted. And then Ester April Caldon came through the trees, down the crumbling pyramid that led to the palace, and halted, and stared on them no less surprised than they stared on her.

She was fifteen years of age then, with hair a dark red, like Gershom's, in a normal light. But it turned almost black indoors or in shadow, you stared at her hair and wondered; and then in the next fall of light, even dun light, the hair lighted up and glowed as though a lamp had been kindled in each strand and the web of the shimmering mass. . . . These are Gershom's words. She'd a square little head, with the forehead high, and eyebrows dark and eyes themselves grey, and her nose was distressingly humped in the middle—faintly, it gave character, courage, and insouciance to that elfish face. She'd a trick she had taken from her father, of stroking her smooth chin when in doubt on a thing, and she stroked it then as she looked down on the party come out of the forest to the pyramid's steps.

George Shaw walked uncarefully buttoned as usual, Gershom had dispensed with his shirt, and Mellison might well have dispensed with *his*, considering the rags in which it was hung. But the stranger they saw alien to sartorial self-consciousness as they themselves were, she was plainly

a girl, young though she was, but she'd made no emphasis at all on the fact. Across her left cheek was a smear of paint—or it might have been chocolate; her clothes were the clothes of comfort, not elegance or maidenly modesty, she was clad in soiled trousers rolled up to the knees from the tops of long shooting-boots—these, and a vest, and nothing else at all. Chin-stroking, she stood and regarded them, they her, and then far up the incline a voice called 'Ester!'

She turned round at that and called back 'All right!' Then glanced over her shoulder, smiled at George Shaw, and fled like a deer up the pyramid slope.

Mellison drew a long breath, the first to speak, his black eyes kindled and unquiet. 'If that's a descendant of the Palenque Maya, they were worth building palaces for. Who the devil can she be?'

Shaw grunted, unhumorously invoking an opposing authority. 'God knows. Come on, we'll take the mules up to the palacio.'

He knew the way by heart, though he'd never been there. It was steep, that climb up the terrace, littered with debris, almost formless now, but artificial as Gershom saw, like the second one that rose above it. Crowning this terrace, half-cleared from its trees and the jungle bush, was that building familiar to him in many a photograph and sketch, the palace of Palenque. Less familiar, not familiar at all, the man who came out of the palacio's main doorway; he was tall and grey-haired, with a black moustache, a pair of tweed trousers, a decayed-looking hat, and, most black and ill-smelling, a smoke-reeking pipe. He came down the slope in some haste, the girl Ester scampering behind him. Shaw instantly he selected as the party's leader.

'Digging?'

'Um. I'm Shaw.'

'Then I'm welcoming a king to his kingdom. Your territory, this. I'm Caldon from Egypt.' He turned round to the girl in the knee-rolled trousers. 'And this is my daughter Ester.'

§ 2

As the prefeto of Palenque had told them, Caldon had arrived at the ruins four days before. He and Ester had taken up residence inside the main corridor of Palenque palace, first clearing the jungle's detritus from walls and floors, and uncovering in the process the cheerful initials of other visitors in far-off years. Then they'd set up tarpaulins to ward off the rains that drew now so near, and had so discommoded Stephens and his illustrator more than a half-century before. Snakes and a puma had laired in the palace ("they kept the conventions of poetry in Palenque") before Caldon's coming, he'd had difficulty in finding it, so blinded it was in bushes and trailing green creepers.

George Shaw had also intended to live in the palace, all archæologists at Palenque lived in the palace. But that now proved impossible, they could hardly intrude on Caldon and the smear-faced elf with the clothes of a gnome. Strangely, Shaw submitted with a good enough grace to the task of house-hunting elsewhere, and they wound their way across the litter of the plazas to the building the sketch-maps call Casa No. 2, that other and lesser erection which was probably a temple of human sacrifice in the days when Hengist and Horsa first planted their heavy feet on shrinking Thanet.

'Funny my uncle seems quite pleased about it,' Gershom whispered to Mellison. The latter smiled airily, as usual.

'Too astounded to be angry. . . . Caldon of Egypt! What the hell can he be doing so far from his own lay?'

But Gershom hardly listened. He was staring at the building to which they had attained. It squatted in its ruins, blind-cloaked with bush, on the top of what had once been a great stepped pyramid. Forward either side of its square-cut door the figure of a man, garmented, belted, bizarre, overtopped by a head-dress of bewildering design, stared out in cold scrutiny on the green forest blaze. Once, Gershom was to learn, these figures had been painted. Now, void of that as any statue from Greek lands they stood, guarding the portals to that even more amazing sculpture within. To it presently Shaw and his party came, stumbling under their loads, George Shaw was to use Casa 2 as a store-house throughout their stay, if only as a dwelling till they'd built them a hut.

'By God!' said Mellison, with indeed more reverence in his voice than he'd have given to a vision of God.

For they stood and looked on the greatest sculpture in Ancient America, the masterpiece of an art and a culture long lost in the dark cañons of history. It covered all the rear wall: To right and left of a grotesque cross on which perched an immense and horrendous bird, two personages stood in act of worship. Rich-garbed and rich-decorated they stood in their stone and the glory of their sculptor's technique, their faces chinless and browless in that alien cañon, the one to the right with the figure of a god and the face of a devil. In their hands they upraised strange gifts, sacrifice, supplication, to that strange nightmare of long-

dead imaginings, the bird that squatted on the cross. Either side and about them stood row on row of the glyphs that no men may read—except for the dating to which Mellison came, the date which his Museum equated, wrongly, to the Christian year A.D. 223. . . . He glanced back, Shaw's assistant, and saw Gershom and his uncle also looking at the plaque, and for a moment their appearance distracted him abruptly.

'By God,' he said, gaily, startling them and himself from that awed contemplation. 'You do look alike!'

So indeed perhaps they did in the scowl of that mutual appraisal, Gershom's dark face sober as he looked his wonder, George Shaw with that gaze that had unravelled so many a riddle of the ancient Occident. . . . He transferred the scowl to Mellison.

'It's the plaque's looks that matter, not ours. Quick now, I've known first impressions reveal twice as much as experience—anything you gathered from the figures in the first flash of looking? . . . Don't consider!'

'Nothing——' Mellison hesitated. 'Except that I'd seen it before.'

'Of course you have.' Impatiently. 'Photographs and casts.'

'Not only that. Somehow as though I'd seen it—or details of it—in something else, something quite unconnected with the Maya.'

But George Shaw was disappointed. He said 'Um,' ungraciously, and turned to the stores, and he did not ask Gershom's opinion. . . . "That was a mixture of admiration and disgust and disappointment. Somehow I'd expected something different after all. Somehow——"

He stood at the door of Casa No. 2 and looked out over

the silence and sun-shimmer of the city's sleeping ruins. Mellison and Shaw busied themselves with the baggage, the Indios and muleteers came panting with their loads, the mules, released and refreshed, knelt down and rolled on their backs at the foot of the pyramid steps. . . . Palenque, the end of the road. And after all it was only, as was Jezreel's Tower, a stupidity, a ruin, though frightful, somehow.

" From that moment it is probable, though I put it in no words, the conviction came on me that whatever else I'd do, whatever else achieve, archæology would never provide my life's passion."

§ 3

Night. It swooped over the ruined city of the Mayas as a great bird might—perhaps that selfsame bird that the ancient sculptors had seen and immortalized in stone on the antique cross between the hands of the worshipping priests. Gershom raised his head from the book he sat reading—sprawled out on a packing-case the book, himself sprawled out on a camp-chair, the light flickering on the pages in the clouding flight of the swarms of insects that besieged the lantern.

He was alone for the hour in Casa No. 2. In the late afternoon the white-haired Caldon had descended from the palace, he'd come trailing in his hand a long coil of white-painted rope. As he halted at the door his eye fell on Gershom, absorbedly, abstractedly, the rest of Shaw's party at the moment invisible.

' Boy.'

Gershom waited ; Caldon stared over his head ; far down by the Tower of Palenque Mellison, measuring with a

tape-line, called figures to Shaw. It was drowsy in the ruins, and Gershom's own eyelids quivered.

'You're with Shaw?' The dreamer had awakened.

'I'm his nephew.'

'Good. Now tell him I'll be pleased to have him up to supper—young Mellison and him (I know Mellison's father) at eight o'clock sharp.' He pointed to the rope that coiled off up the hill through the jungle obscuring the palace itself. 'See this? That's for night-time traffic between the two camps. We'd find it dangerous with all the cracks and crevices. Good. Tell your uncle.'

He turned round and away, and then looked back again, stroking his chin. 'Somebody will have to stay and look after your stores, so you're not invited. Your turn later.'

An hour later Mellison and Shaw came back, they'd spent the last half of it attempting to induce the Indios to spend the night at the ruins. The attempt had been quite unavailing: As in Caldon's party, the natives demanded they be allowed to return every night to Palenque village. Stay in the ruins they would not, the ghoul-haunted Casas de Piedras.

'But your own ancestors built the damned place,' said Mellison.

'Señor,' the Indio headman replied, 'that perhaps is true. And now they burn in hell, where we also may burn for our sins. But we do *not* burn for theirs.'

'As complete a refusal of the sins of the fathers as I've ever yet heard,' commented Mellison as they climbed up the crumbling ledges to Casa No. 2. But George Shaw was unvexed.

'No excavator has yet succeeded in keeping his Indios overnight at Palenque.'

Gershom told them of Caldon's coming and invitation. George Shaw pulled at his lips and surveyed the thin, white rope that wound up through the dusk. 'That's good. He may tell us something of himself at last. You'll manage all right here, Gershom, while we're gone?'

'Oh, easily.'

'Right. Better begin on your lessons now, in fact. Read *Religio Medici*. Appropriate to your surroundings. . . . Needn't wait up for us unless you want to. If anything goes wrong call loudly and we'll hear.'

'But, for a change and our relief,' amended Mellison, 'little boys should be neither seen nor heard.'

So they'd left him, groping away in the mirk by the guiding-rope that Caldon had laid. Now Gershom sat deep in *Religio Medici*:

'We carry with us the wonders we seek without us: there is all Africa and her prodigies in us; we are that bold and adventurous piece of Nature, which he that studies wisely learns in a compendium what others labour at in a divided piece and endless volume——'

He heard a slight stir by the door. He thought it a lizard and barely heeded, then that stirring came once again and he heard in the darkness the sound of a light, quick breathing. He looked up, his hands on his book, and so saw the girl Ester Caldon standing in the doorway surveying him. In her hand she held a tray draped with a scrap of muslin.

'Hello,' said Ester April, with her voice, and with her eyes, and with the very poise of her slight, quick body so gracelessly be-trousered. Gershom answered 'Hello,' on a lower key, and hesitated, and then stood up.

She came forward, her hair went dead black then in the

light from the lamp, and Gershom saw the wonder of how fair her eyelashes were below her dark brows. She set down the tray atop the *Religio*, whipped off the cover, and then stood aside. Her face was grave as she looked at the tray, then glanced up again at Gershom. And suddenly the gravity vanished, the elfish gamin peeped out a moment.

'I'd a shocking time with that leg of chicken. Mislaid it twice in the dark—'n' the second time I found it I thought it squiggled. Might have been a lizard. . . . But it's the chicken all right. Like chicken?'

'Well, *if* it isn't lizard.'

'Oh no, though you'll have to brush off the grit a bit. I thought you'd be lonely 'n' forced to have supper out of a can while we guzzled at the palace. So I brought you a share. 'N' I was bored, anyhow. Father's throwing Egypt at the head of your uncle.' She lifted a bottle from the tray. 'I pinched some sherry as well, like sherry?'

'Oh, a spot, thanks.' (That was Mellison's word. Was it right? The girl seemed to think so.) 'Won't you sit down?'

'You eat,' said the girl, 'I've had my supper. I'll sit just here. Don't mind me.'

The chicken was good, if a trifle stringy. Ester Caldon sat and looked out at the night, her face turned politely away from contemplation of the activity of Gershom's jaws. Presently he reached his hand to the bottle she had brought, he wasn't quite sure when a man drank sherry, but he'd have to try it sometime since she'd brought him the stuff.

She'd half-turned round, and he caught a hint of wistfulness in the grey eyes.

'Will you have some?'

She stroked her chin, absurdly. 'Well, I shouldn't.' Inconsequently: 'But I hoped you'd ask. . . . No, thanks.'

Gershom found another cup and filled it recklessly. 'Come on.'

'All right.'

They eyed each other. Far down among the trees a night-bird screamed, the *moan*-bird of Yucatan. Ester said 'We should drink healths now, shouldn't we? What's your name?'

'Gershom.'

'Gershom Shaw?'

'Gershom Jezreel.'

'Goodness. Spell it.'

'J-E-Z-R-E-E-L. And yours is Ester Caldon.'

'Ester April Caldon. I was born in April. We should touch glasses 'n' then drink. . . . Phoo!'

That was how Gershom had felt also at the first mouthful. He gulped, his eyes watering. 'Not bad. Have some more?'

'I think we should sip it. How old are you?'

They put each other minutely through a questionnaired catalogue of ages, birthplaces, effects and affections. They drank more sherry, and presently Gershom had mislaid his shyness, Ester had never had any to mislay. They stood up to measure heights one against the other, Gershom won by an inch or so, and it was then that Ester suddenly giggled.

'It's that sherry. My head feels swimmy. Doesn't yours?'

It did. "I giggled in sympathy." . . . 'A bit. Let's sit down.'

She had done so already, with some abruptness. Now she reached out her hand and caught his and guided him

to his seat. They began to giggle again, till abruptly an idea came on the boy, he caught up the lantern and sprang to his feet.

'Come on and see what they look like at night-time.'

They scrambled back through the packages and bales George Shaw's expedition had piled in the chamber. So they came to the rear wall at last, and there, in the fitful light of the lantern, saw the sacrificing priests stand waveringly alive as they held up their strange offerings to the bird on the cross. Ester shivered and then shook herself, resolutely.

'It's horrible. . . . But I'm not afraid.'

'Aren't you?'

Gershom himself felt less certain. He turned and they groped their way back to the entrance, and, groping, he looked again at the plaque. The lantern fell from his hand with a clatter. . . . *The Image was following at his back.*

'. . . Silly!' The girl's hand touched his. She was stooping and searching. 'Here it is, 'n' it hasn't gone out.' She upended the lantern while he stared at her. She sat down and giggled. 'I know. Let's sing. Do you know any songs worth singing?'

§ 4

'What the hell,' said George Shaw, violently, 'is that?'

Mellison was later to tell of the scene to Gershom. They were sitting in the corridor of the palace of Palenque. Forward of them, Mellison and Shaw, the lamplight, the table, and Caldon. Caldon, indeed, had just finished speaking, his eyes turned away from his listeners, remote and away from Palenque altogether. And Shaw and Mellison

had sat listening in a stunned, dazed silence, or exchanging once in a while that swift look of comprehension that sane men exchange in the presence of those whose sanity they doubt.

Caldon of Egypt! The most brilliant of Egyptologists to have gone the same road as Augustus le Plongeon—only that road reversed. Almost incredible, and nevertheless true. Caldon had been explaining in the rolling periods of his time and type.

'Firstly, I was awakened to the possibilities of the thing by a purely chance encounter with Maudslay's *Biologia Centrali-Americana*. . . . You know it?'

They nodded. Mellison grinned faintly in his hands. Scientific Americanism was fathered by Maudslay's epic book; it is an archæologist's childhood primer. . . . But Caldon saw the grin.

'That, of course, seems childish to you both. But my work, you must remember, has been far from America—like too many Americans I've strayed further than I needed. Egypt and Syria, as with Petrie, have been my territory. I've no more than a layman's knowledge of cultures outside these fields. Once, indeed, a member of the French Academy wrote and drew my attention to the curious resemblances between certain archaic Hindu customs and those of old Egypt. I put down those resemblances to coincidence, of course, the fact that the human mind in all ages flows along much the same bournes of thought, and in widely diversified localities manufactures for itself implements of culture that differ but little. I actually believed that those phrases explained: I did not conceive that they blinkered thought.

'Till I came on Maudslay's book——'

He went on. He had looked in Maudslay's book. He

had taken to the research of comparison. Similarity of the human mind—could it account for the fact that the Winged Disc of Egypt should be reproduced, almost perfect in detail, on the lintels of a temple in Ocosingo—far off in the heart of tropical America? Could it account for the fact that the elephants of Guatemalan Copan were *Indian* elephants—in a continent like America where elephants were unknown? . . . He was responsible to no particular body, Robert Caldon, and his means at least sufficient to allow him research on his own. Abandoning Egypt, he sailed for New York, went down to his home in Kentucky with a stray Castilian, learned Spanish in six months . . . and was now down in Central America to answer for himself the great question: Had some items of the ancient Maya civilization originated from an Egypt even yet more ancient?

'But——' Mellison made the interruption slowly, carefully, as to one overwrought, 'have you thought of the wide difference in space and time between the two cultures, sir? First, Ancient Egypt lies four thousand miles or so from Central America. All kinds of geographical barriers intervene—continents and seas and islands which show no traces of the Ancient Egyptians. It seems proved to the hilt that Asia had never any connection with America in the days before Columbus. And then there's the time factor. Egypt was at its apogee about the year 2000 B.C. The Maya were at their apogee at least two thousand years later.'

'All that, of course, I know perfectly well. But is it indeed so certain there are no traces of Egypt in India, in Indo-China, in the Pacific? It's a matter I've not yet examined in detail; presently, however, I shall, and satisfy

myself on these points. Meanwhile, I'm here to make a thorough investigation of all the old Maya sites and collate what evidence there is. Even China——'

'China!' It was George Shaw's deep growl. 'What Egyptian influence was ever there, hey? Its culture was probably well under weigh before ever Egypt rose out of the Old Stone Age. Besides——'

But Mellison also had seen that 'besides.' 'Why, it would mean that all civilization—or nearly all—had originated at one central point and spread across the globe. It would mean that men are not naturally capable of civilization, of progressing up from a lower cultural point to a higher. It would mean the collapse of historically-applied evolution!'

Even Caldon was slow to reply to that. 'Even these things it might mean, though that's no concern of mine. We work inside a framework of hypothesis, and if the frame fails to hold the facts, we make a new frame. Now I'll show you something.'

He went into the darkness of the corridor alcoves and presently returned with a sheaf of photographs. 'I have had these taken by various people. . . . You've both heard of the Gorgon's Head? It's a legend of the Mediterranean peoples. Well——'

George Shaw picked up the first photograph, 'Italy' was the word inscribed on the reverse. It was the Etruscan conception of the Gorgon he looked on, a horrific caricature of the face of man, rounded, with jutting mouth and fangs and snaky locks. The second picture was Greek: the same monster, different at the eyes and mouth, but still with drooping tongue and snarling fangs. The third was of a different period and people, the head narrowed and more

bestial, with a bull-like skull. But it was still the Monster of the ancient tale. So was the fourth, square-cut, more crudely carved, a statue in crumbling stone. . . . A terrible Image that had haunted men.

And the second and third photographs were marked ' *Chawin, Peru*,' *and* ' *Tiawanako, Peru.*' Mellison and Shaw sat stunned. How had this nightmare everywhere arisen in the minds of men ? . . . Shaw's young assistant shook his head.

' It makes nonsense of history—if it's true. It makes history itself no more than a nightmare—civilization the nightmare of the Gorgon's head. It makes all mankind the victim of an accident, a delusion—Eh ? '

It was then that the sudden ejaculation came from Shaw's lips. All listened. Far across the ruins of Palenque two voices were raised, in the darkness and mystery of a jungle that had devoured a civilization, singing—to Mellison for a moment they seemed singing with the voice of mankind itself :

' Nobody knows the trouble I've known,
Nobody knows my sorrow :
Nobody knows the trouble I've known,
Glory hallelujah ! '

SECTION THE FOURTH

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§ 1

SEEN through the trees in that summer heat, the sun seemed an open wound, you supposed it was something in the air and refraction. Carrying the rod as they passed through the bush Gershom looked into Ester April's face and saw it with a mist of sweat on it then. It looked like a fine mist on a brown, quiet land.

He had discovered poetry by then, experimenting himself, in his three months at Palenque he'd already composed five sonnets, and, secretly, thought them good. "When I knew Ester Caldon better, I decided, I'd read them aloud to her, some time."

The forest was asleep. It lay and slept, with vague motions ever and anon, like a man in dreams, the trees moved and trilled, no wind though there was to move them. The silence broke under their feet, they seemed almost treading on the thing itself. Another turn in the path and Palenque was lost behind in the bush. The girl gave a sigh of content and ceased to haste at the pace they'd set.

'We're safe enough now 'n' they can't call us back. Was your uncle asleep?'

'He was shaking the roof of Casa No. 2. . . . And Mellison was sawing off his backbone.'

'Dad was a mile away—or a thousand years. We should have gone fishing before this time, only I've been so busy. 'N' you have too.' She stroked her chin. 'Learning Latin, dad says.'

'I wasn't too busy——'

She nodded. 'I know that now, since we met and talked about it this morning. But Mr. Shaw 'n' my father

haven't been very keen for us meeting since that first evening when we drank the sherry. . . . 'N' they think it's rather a mess, a boy and a girl of our ages together at the ruins. Here's the Micol.'

They squatted down in the grass in a place where the forest drew aside its green skirts and watched them. Threading the body of a slug on a hook the girl was intent, disregarding Gershom. He himself looked at her, remotely curious, she was only a girl, but this was fun, a change from that ghastly bore Cæsar. The heat was stifling this siesta hour, it was still the hot weather that awaited the rains. Loudly and inappropriately, somewhere in the ruins, a cock began to crow.

'Stand away clear now, Gershom. Oh, I'll call you Gerry.'

'All right.'

The hook spun out in the eddies and drifted and flowed, and Gerry, new-christened, glanced up as she made the throw, and suddenly, as he tells, realized intently, the first time in his life, the acute difference of sex. The chatterings of the Chatham back-alleys had taught him much, muzzily, but now he stared a moment with his heart in his throat.

For a dazzling moment the girl was a silhouette, a silhouette in silver, a wild curve and flow of breast and leg and thigh in that poise, the soiled overalls hardly a disguise at all. Gershom Jezreel drew a long breath.

'I say, how old are you?'

'Oh, damn it, it's caught. Clear now. . . . What, Sixteen next birthday, I'll soon be a woman.' She steadied the line and gossiped.' 'N' you a man. What are you going to do?'

'I don't know.'

'I do, I'm to be a painter, father says that only messy little mugwumps are painters, but that's because he himself can't draw at all. He thinks women should marry 'n' have babies, I suppose. But I won't.'

'Oh, I suppose you will.'

'You're blushing.' She was suddenly the elf. ''N' I don't know. They're fun, rather, babies. I might marry *you*, Gerry, just to have one.'

He'd recovered by then. 'I shouldn't mind.'

He was never to be sure of Ester April Caldon. Long after he invented a phrase for a frame of her in those days—'sophisticated innocence' was the phrase. But it turned uneasily in his hands now and then while he used it. . . .

'There's a catch. Shoo, only a branch— No, it's not, it's a catch!'

The molten silver of the stream was broken, it bubbled in miniature maelstroms. Gershom caught a branch and leant over and peered.

The fish rose out of the stream, gleaming like an opened sunshade. Curving, that silver silhouette again, Ester threw it on the bank and drew a deep breath, and spat delicately, and wiped her mouth. Gershom grinned; so, after a moment's stupefaction, did the girl.

'It's all run to brain, like father or your uncle. Like to try a throw now?'

'All right.'

The Micol swept away her laughter; repressing it, she rolled on the grass, convulsed. Gershom, with a scowl, climbed up the tree, disengaged the hook, and promptly had it tangled around his neck. By the time he reached down to the ground again Ester April seemed no more or less than a giggling insult to be instantly suppressed. He

smacked her, half-savagely, intimately, and instantly regretted it.

She ceased from giggling, looking up at him with a white, still face. Fascinated, he watched that little mist of sweat come out on the pallor now.

'You mustn't do that. I won't—no one can touch me.'

He turned from her, mumbling red-eared. 'I'm sorry. Only fun.'

'It wasn't fun, I saw your face.'

No, it hadn't been fun, a flame of anger; but she didn't laugh at him now, anyhow.

He cast the hook again, it glimmered and hummed like a hornet, he heard the girl cry out and he tried to dodge. But next minute the bait, disengaged, had struck him in the mouth, and a blind pain swept up in his head as the hook caught his eye. Instantly his hands leapt up to his eye, and as instantly his wrists were caught.

'Gershom.'

He stood still, the blaze of pain passing a little. His right eye refused to close. He struggled with Ester's hands.

'Don't do that. Sit down. It'll only take a moment.'

He sat. Something trickled wetly down across his cheek, he set fast his teeth and waited, his eyelid fluttering on the barb that nestled in the lip of the eye. Presently upon his face, for he could not see them, he felt the fingers of Ester, trembling, and at that knew certainly she'd blind him when she moved the barb.

'Keep still.'

'All right.'

'Oh, don't "all right" at me so often.' She sobbed, once, her fingers grew steadier. 'Keep still.'

It was a terror then in the sunlight, a fear that almost

turned the boy sick, years afterwards he would find his eyelids go fluttering at memory of that fear. His hands went up to his face, involuntarily. Thereat the pain bit deeper down in the folds of the lip.

Ester forced back his head and put down his hands, and suddenly her fingers were cool and quiet, she gave a swift sideways jerk, the flesh tore a little, but the barb was out. Gershom swore and winked his eye and the eyelid closed.

'There.'

He saw her face flushed and hot, her eyes scared. 'I was afraid I'd blind you.'

'So was I.'

She sat erect slowly, with her brown arms rigid, he saw the flex and stiffening of the muscles as that rigidity came.

'I heard—something.'

So had he also heard. It was something that moved close at hand in the ink-jet shadows of the ceiba, moved and was still and breathed a strangled breath. The sun was a blaze on the Micol. They looked at each other, looked back towards the trees that masked Palenque. And the thing in the daytime shadows moved again, swiftly, and a whiff of musk came out to them, and then a low, quiet growl, a soft, searing sound beginning far down a yawning throat. Gershom saw Ester's face grow blanched, and knew that his own was the same, they rose to their feet together, looking into the shadows of the tree.

But as they rose the purring rose also, so did the swishing, and then they saw it, the jaguar that had risen as they had and stood with the glare of its eyes on the face of Gershom. And in that instant he knew why it stared, why that dreadful

purr came from the hanging jaws, what thing it was routed the beast's customary cowardice.

It was the blood that welled from his face.

Smelling it, the beast crept forward towards Gershom; to Ester it paid no heed. The bigness of a wolf, with the markings of a tiger, the tiger of America, the night-beast of the ruins. . . . "And it was day, and the blood was running from my face, and now, aroused by that smell, I suppose, the brute had remembered its hunger. It crept nearer and nearer."

And then a strange intimacy with the beast came on Gershom as he and the girl stood paralysed, staring. He knew himself dumbly eager to touch that coat, those gleaming eyes, to be one with that swift, slow alertness, that slinking shape of musk. He heard himself breathe like a drowning man, gurgling; and then beside him Ester gave a small, dry cough.

The beast's head swung in a little arc to look at her, its eyes left the face of Gershom. And in that moment the boy awoke. The red of outrage and anger in his face, he leapt forward.

'Get out!'

The jaguar whirled and snarled; too late. Before it recovered Gershom's boot was in swift and crackling contact with its jaw. The forest awoke and yelped and screamed and screamed as the great cat spun itself in dizzying circles, and then, miaouing, leapt aside and away. A last bound and yelp and the trees devoured it.

The boy found himself breathing as one who had raced up a hill in the sun from a pit in the dark. He stared savagely into the palisaded forest; his voice was a croak that he scarcely recognized.

'It's gone. Blast it, it's gone. I wished I'd kicked its head off. Did you see its eyes? Damned eyes. I wish——'

'Like the Gorgon's eyes.' He found Ester's hand on his arm, she also was staring in the trees. 'Horrible eyes. But you beat it, you were splendid, splendid, Gerry! . . . Oh, dash it, I'm going to cry!'

§ 2

Blinding darkness, as though 'twas your head they'd wrapped in a hot, moist towel. And then the darkness split, you could hear the tear and the rive of the fabric, and then the night clove apart, torn linen, as the lightning came slashing on the trees. It came from the Gulf, Gershom thought, with the rain it brought, that torrent must have risen straight up like a geyser there, and then wheeled inwards and about and flung its lucent pillars on Palenque. For the real rains had passed, they'd ceased the last evening, Shaw had said that that was the last of them. "I liked his head in the doorway of the Casa as he told me that, it reminded me of something that I meant to ask him, and never had asked, seeing so his head and his body in shadow. . . . But I didn't ask, one didn't, you met in with men and with women, with girls like Ester, and behind them you saw stand suddenly the Image—in the blaze of the sun or the quiet of the evening, or the dawning brightness of the white, quiet stars. And the question leapt up—but you did not ask—had *they* ever seen It?"

But that night of the great Gulf geyser: Caldon had gone and left Ester April to the care of Shaw. He'd gone up into Mexico City, seeking a permit there for work in Ocosingo when he'd finished at Palenque, he might be

gone for a good six weeks, he had said. He'd kissed Ester absently, saying good-bye, she'd kissed him in return with insouciant care.

'Take care of yourself, dad, and change your vests.'

'Yes, yes.' He'd looked round as though searching for something, and his eye on Gershom had lit up a little. 'You'll look after her, eh?'

'I'll look after her, sir.'

But that night of the great Gulf geyser: Shaw hummed and hawed when Caldon had gone, for the rains were close, they'd moved back from their tent into Casa No. 2 to be ready for its coming. There was barely room for the three, Ester couldn't come as well, she mightn't mind the crowding but there wouldn't be room—not though she slept in Shaw's lap, said Mellison. Ester had laughed, she'd like that, but she weighed such a lot it would be very unkind to Mr. Shaw. And, as Gershom records, George Shaw grinned up at her pertness, the great moon-face relaxing, "he liked her as well, they both liked her too much, 'Damn them, they're old,' I thought."

George Shaw sat still and smoked his pipe, Latakia, he'd old-fashioned tastes, the three others lounged around in the Casa doorway and watched him. It was evening then, an evening on the verge of the rains, the barred colours of the sunset were sadder than they'd been, deeper and more dun, the sky at night trembled and was troubled, the monkeys had all gone south. The blue smoke ceased from wreathing and betook a cloud-shape.

'Caldon really left Ester in the care of the boy, hey, Mellison? Right, she needn't move from the palace, Gershom can sleep there, out in the corridor. What do you say?'

Mellison raised up his brows at that. ' Maybe all right. Still——'

He knocked out his pipe and filled it again, very carefully, " and Ester looked down at the ground, she'd such long lashes, I saw then, that they swept her cheek like the wings of a bird, raven wings. Uncle grunted and stood up and he scowled at Mellison. ' Ugh, you're still adolescent. These two aren't.' I didn't look at Mellison, I could guess how he looked, and then my uncle glowered down at me suddenly, half-doubtful himself. ' Mind you look after the lady,' and his thumb jerked to Ester.

" So I knew what they meant, they thought I'd want to sleep with her, my ears went red, but they couldn't see that, it had grown half-dark by then. I said ' I'll look after her,' cool as though I didn't understand, the little-boy-indifference-for-girls in my voice. That cheated them, but Ester lifted her head, she smiled at me secretly, it was like a ghost that smiled in the doorway of the ruined temple—that secret smile that she sometimes gave me, that would come into my memory when she wasn't there, come vexingly between me and the pages of Cæsar."

That night Shaw and Mellison took them up to the palace and then went back to their beds in Casa No. 2. Ester and Gershom stood and looked after them, and then turned from that, watching and waiting as the stars came clearer and clearer above the ruins, every night one would watch for that, for a *something* to happen. Ester swung herself up on a fallen pilaster.

' Mellison was afraid you'd want to sleep with me.'

Gershom was watching the coming of Aldebaran, a kindling and a glow of fire out there in the wastes of space,

the sentinel of the Galaxy's rim. He nodded at the glimmer of a face that was Ester's.

'Yes, so I would. . . . But he needn't be afraid. We've got too much sense.'

'Much too much,' she agreed, an elf in the dimness; and was silent a moment. 'Though maybe it would be fun. But I don't know. I think men and women compel themselves to believe the fun it would be! And they dream about it and plan for it and tell stories about it. Till they get all excited. And it's nothing much when it comes.'

'How do you know?'

'Well, I don't, but I've that idea. Nothing to the fun in other things: Sketching, or taking a boat on the Nile, or finding the secret of the Mayas, why Xibalba collapsed, or——'

'Or writing real poetry. Like Lucretius.'

'Poetry? But I can't ever read it. It's just words going squiggly on the page. What kind of poetry?'

'Lucretius——'

'But I don't know Latin.'

'Oh, like this, then:

> 'Dreamer of dreams, born out of my due time,
> Why should I strive to set the crooked straight?
> Let it suffice me that my wandering rhyme
> Beats with light wings against the ivory gate,
> Telling a tale not too importunate
> For those who in the sleepy region stay,
> Lulled by the singer of an empty day.'

Venus had come out by then. The boy saw nearly the whole of the Galaxy filled and wheeling, it was time they were gone to their beds. But Ester hadn't moved when he stopped from reciting.

She said, ' Is that yours ? '

' Lord, no, it's Morris.'

' But you write poetry yourself, don't you ? '

' I try, sometimes. But it isn't much good—yet. Love and stuff like that.'

' Gerry, not *punk* like love ? '

He said that it had to be, it was the kind of thing adolescents did, easy stuff to handle, you just imagined your people like lunatics or dogs in heat. Then he stopped from that explaining, sulkily, because Ester was laughing, she laughed and laughed while he glared at her, her elbow leant soft on his shoulder.

' What a boy you are, Gerry ! Never grow old and dull and don't-tell. . . . And now I'm off to bed. 'Night.'

" So I'd lived in the palace from then on, I'd no dreams like Ester had, so she said, of those folk who had lived in these rooms in the days of Xibalba. It was queerer in the palace than the temple, though, your mind went back to those folk more freshly here, you tried to reach back through the spirals of time to their minds and thoughts and the things they'd liked, had they ever watched for the wheel of the Galaxy as you did now ? And you came, sleeping in the front corridor, to an awareness more acute, it came to you how hard and how hard you'd to think before you could penetrate to awareness of how near after all were those Maya, the dead folk of Palenque. That lintel and that doorway side—they were fourteen centuries old, said Mellison ; and you lay thinking of that and the years of it, the sweep of the rains and the coming of the summers, the trees rising and dying slow through those centuries, the forest moving and changing, the Gulf moving and changing, while the earth swept round the sun for fourteen hundred

times. . . . And that stone had stood there, it had dripped the rains of fourteen hundred years, scorched with fourteen hundred years of sun ; and it was a stone *they* had touched, you could touch, I could reach out my hand from my bed to that stone, as may be those others had done from their beds—brown, dead hands fourteen hundred years before, quick then and moving and with never a thought of my barbarian curiosities in the times to be. Remote—and so close !

" And I remember that first night I lay wakeful long, thinking of that—adolescence again, and its sadness, I supposed !—of times far off in millenia to be. Would this palace still stand and folk come then and touch the place that my dead fingers touched ? Or Palenque, Chatham, America, endure at all, man's little writings on the face of earth ? Perhaps he'd be dead as the dinosaur, man, beasts prowling his palaces far and wide as a manless world swung into the coming of the world's last Ice Age. . . ."

And that night brought the rains, they came at midnight, his hammock swung and creaked in the blow of the wind. He woke up and looked out, the stars were veiled and then blinded, and he heard the swish of the rain. The trecs below the pyramid, out in the dark, were crying and moaning in the beat of the tide ; far off, up the track to Palenque village, a beast howled long that night as the waters came. Ester didn't wake up, or she made no sound, Gershom himself wasn't wakeful for long. But he thought it fun, it was good to hear and see it in the dark, its silvery pelting, good that the time for men to pass like a dream from the world had not yet come !

Next day was wet from dawn till dusk, steady, a sheeting, opalescent flow, like a rainbow in cascade. George Shaw

and Mellison came running through the downpour in shorts, nothing else, they gasped and laughed in the shelter, Mellison drying his head in a towel that Ester April had brought. Gershom liked him less than ever, standing so and drying his head, laughing, his chest a mat and a furze with its blue-black hair. The sight of that made you sick —adolescence again, you supposed. But it didn't sicken Ester, she stood looking at Mellison secretly, curiously, her eyes met Mellison's and he ceased to laugh, his face went quite like a stone a moment, a gleaming stone, he forgot where he was, all else but Ester. And then he laughed and shrugged and he dropped the towel and was crying down the slope for the cook, he came drenched in his poncho, grinning as usual, out from Palenque village.

They'd a fortnight of the rains before that night of the great Gulf geyser : Gershom was in Cæsar, that cold, vile adventurer, he'd got to Vercingetorix and the Gauls' last surrender—how Cæsar had the captives lined up by an anvil and pushed forward by the Roman soldiers ; and another soldier stood near with an axe ; and the hand of each Gaul was pressed on the block and the axe swung down and the hand fell off. . . . It made you go white, you closed tight your eyes, but again you'd go back, read on, nobody had ever felt it as you, Cæsar wrote of it cool and quiet, and his English editors penned calm notes, it was right, it was just, it was nothing. Nobody had ever seen it as you, the blood, how it spouted in a red-black stream, spouting from a dozen pipettes, from the axe-sliced arteries, as the hand of the Gaul fell limp from the block and the stump was thrust spouting in the bubbling pitch. Nobody but you had heard the gruntings of agony, the screams of the weak, or thought of the horror and fear on the faces of the

men who waited by the block for their turn, and the cold, dense faces of the Romans themselves, the axes growing blunter and blunter at each stroke till at last they'd to hack and rehack ere a hand came off. . . . And it was remote, far off, nothing you could do to help them now, nothing in their torture and pain. Long ago and far off, it didn't happen now. . . .

And then you remembered the face of your father and the whip, you remembered Maquene whom the bandits took, you felt sick as you thought, sick to be human and sick to be living—oh, 'twould be a clean earth and decent when we'd passed and were ended, this scum on the earth that did such things.

Shaw and Mellison had left them, they'd gone back to the Casa, their reports and their cataloguings, and the palace was quiet. Ester in her room was working at her sketches till she heard Gershom call, she leant over his table and he read her the passage, the torture of the Gauls, translating the Latin.

She nodded, ' There were worse things than that. The Assyrians 'n' Egyptians often tortured their prisoners. 'N' the Maya——'

She went then and fetched out a book by Augustus le Plongeon, *Queen Moo* was the book, it showed at one page a man ground under the weight of a rock, it was a sketch of a sculpture on a wall in Yucatan. The man was still living, his entrails hung out from a slit in his stomach, his eyes rolled in agony in the pain-drawn face. ' They were cruel like that, all of them, the people long ago. They didn't think anything about it.'

' It makes me sick to be alive and have a body. Didn't they think of their own bodies, those swine, while they

tortured, couldn't they feel the pain that the others were feeling. . . . Oh, damn, I shan't sleep to-night——'

'But that's only adolescence again. . . . Don't glare at me, Gerry, I'm not to blame. I didn't live then, else I wouldn't have let them. It was long ago, it can't happen to us, only savages you know are like that.'

'Only savages? Rot, these people weren't savage.'

'Well, *you* look savage enough, anyhow, 'n' bad-tempered. So I'm off.'

"She was remoter from me then than ever she had been, I hated her as well, sitting sick at heart and lonely, something was missing from myself, I supposed. Else, like others, I'd think nothing of the cruelty and the pain of past years, I'd not waken in the night with the Image behind me, mouthing in the dark with its Gorgon head, with its head of a jaguar, slavering and drooling, with its head of a Cæsar, like a vulture or jackal. . . . Vercingetorix, ugh! I could never write poetry again, I then thought, I could never love anything in their histories again."

But he put aside Cæsar and turned to the poets, to Morris and a beauty that was kind and uncruel, to the Tennyson they were soon to decry; but he loved him and read him and looked out at the rains. The green earth had wilted at their coming at first, but now, in a night, so it seemed, it woke with the beat of new blood in its veins, it surged and swept skyward with a forest of tendrils to suck a hungry nourishment out of the sky. Vultures in the evening planed down by the ruins, there were little dead beasts that the rains had killed and the vultures had sighted from the heights. And once they saw a great puma, Ester and Gershom, the last day of the rains, near noon. It came loping up the ledges of the palace pyramid, soaked and

hang-dog and it looked like a dog. When it saw them stand watching it wuffed like a cur, and turned round in one bound and looked over its shoulder.

" I picked up a jagged stone and sent it smashing in its rump, it snarled and fled. And I looked at Ester, she laughed with her throat thrown back, her clear brown throat, in that light it seemed almost opaque."

For he'd turned to the writing of poetry again, spite Cæsar's brutalities, he'd turned to them, words and their beauty,—their movingness and their twistability, as he calls them in a sudden descent to pedestrian half-literacy. Again he was writing love-verse, it was easiest, he'd look closer at Ester than ever before, she was there to study, her throat, and the line of her chin, that was a strophe, and her mouth, it was long and full, and that curve in her nose—Guinevere had had that, you thought, in the poem of Morris. But there wasn't much more you could do, you couldn't write poetry like Swinburne unless you'd seen a girl without clothes, you supposed, and it was a nuisance, you could hardly ask her to let you see her so. It was all very well and fine to write about breasts, how they curved, upwards a little, beauty in that, and the slimness of waists and the navel there like the pistils in the white flower petals of a woman's belly, and thighs that were music, knees that were dimpled, long feet that trod in the grass at evening. . . . You knew all of it, not a thing but you'd known—except through your own two eyes.

And that couldn't be, so the lines came stilted, if you'd never lived but in a coal-mine could you write of a sunset, though the other miners came down with their tales ? And Ester said that last night, when the rains had ceased, the two were alone together at the corridor door, ' What's wrong

now, Gerry ? You keep scowling at me like—like anything these days.'

He explained and she sat and listened, her chin in her hands, not laughing, the elf face was grave as she shook her head.

'It's a shame—but I can't very well help. Funny, but just somehow I couldn't.'

'I knew that you couldn't. So I'll have to get somebody else, I suppose. Go into the village. There's sure to be an Indio girl there who won't mind if I give her a peso or so.'

'Sure to be,' she agreed. And then: 'Let's sing. Remember that night we got drunk and were singing and startled dad and your uncle and Mellison ?'

So they sang a long time ere they went to bed, her voice was contralto, true, and very deep for a girl of her years. They sang 'Roll a man down,' and 'There is a lady sweet and kind,' and then Ester wandered away from him in the singing, he couldn't follow and he knew she'd forgotten him, songs of the negroes in the Southern States, round, dark and melodious, sad and tuneful, sung in the quiet of the ruins. He remembered best one from that very first night, it caught at his throat as before it had done, and he couldn't speak when she'd finished with the singing of it:

'Nobody knows the trouble I've known,
Nobody knows my sorrow,
Nobody knows the trouble I've known,
Glory hallelujah !'

And when he'd looked up, throat better at last, she had gone, he heard a scratch of movement in the inner room, the swinging of the hammock that was there. She called out

at last, deep-voiced and clear, ' Good night now, Gerry. Sleep well.'

He called back good night and went out to the door to take a last look at the sky. The stars, fresh-bathed, were kindling and brightening, and the earth, in the dark, sent forth a dry scent. But at midnight he awoke with upon him a conviction of a happening impending, tremendous, immediate. About him was a silence so tangible he might almost touch it, not a sound, no movement of the trees, nothing but a ghostly sigh that was Ester's sleep-breath in the room next door. He coughed, with that silence in his throat.

And then suddenly the silence was not, far off towards the Gulf rose a sound like cannon-shot, the clap of a thunderous weight flung in a reeling receptacle. He sat up and listened, the quiet as before ; but was it ? All around was a prickling stir as though the trees and bushes also raised their heads and listened. And then, with deafening impact, the waterspout from the Gulf struck on the hill of Palenque.

The palace rocked, the pounding tons of water warped brightly across the hill, he saw them in the darkness, great sheets, the pyramid rocked as the geyser wheeled and returned again. The water swashed through the curtainings of Caldon and tore Gershom out of his hammock, he rolled and clawed and was clawed away from the rags at which he had caught. And then he heard the buffet of the wind that followed in the feet of the water, stones fell somewhere with a clinkle and clatter, lightning didn't come yet, but the thunder growled. Through it he heard Ester cry ' Gershom ! '

He cried ' Coming ! ' and pulled himself up to his feet. At once he slipped and went down, something caught at his throat, a snake—no, only the hammock. Then the lightning flashed, he was seen by Ester though not her by

him. As he scrambled up again he found her beside him, moving, a pallor in the dark, he caught a warm wrist and shouted in her ear.

'Let's get out of the palace. It may fall any time.'

He heard her cry 'Yes!' her wrist firm in his fingers, he himself cried 'Now!' as a lull came down, next instant they were out in the open. Then the water was upon them and the noises, undiminished, of the night. The trees were whistling and cracking, a diapason of storm, in blow after blow from the geyser's wheel. But the water itself was both warm and saline they found as they staggered downhill. Then a thing towered up from the dark, a monolith resurrected in Caldon's researches, and they crouched in the shelter of that, and Ester laughed, she cried 'Isn't this fun?'

He felt her arm come bare on his own, they couldn't see the palace though they looked them back, the dark and the water were between. Then the rain seemed to die, it was more than a seeming, Gershom crawled erect and pulled Ester up to her feet, and shouted in the wind, 'We'll try and make the Casa.'

She cried something to that that he didn't understand, then the lightning came lit, sheet lightning in a great wide glow flowed sudden on the quietude of the sky. It was then he saw Ester, the first time since the storm, a long second he saw her, her face turned away, she was nude, white-golden and terrible against that blackness where the lightning played. And suddenly she turned her face, and covered that face with her hands, and said nothing. And Gershom said nothing, then fumbled for her hand as the blackness came down.

'Let's go back to the palace. Safe now.'

§ 3

'Growing pains,' said George Shaw one night when Gershom suddenly swore at Mellison. The latter ceased from his teasing and stared his surprise. Shaw's eyebrows twitched on the great moon-face. 'So, soft on leg-pulling, Mellison.'

That was spring of next year. The sun was in full blaze again and Mellison and Shaw and their gang had cleared and had mapped and had photographed the greater half of the ruins, never so thoroughly was it done till their coming. From the States and from Europe belated copies of archæological journals came drifting to Palenque, they were filled with articles on the Shaw Expedition. Other articles as well began to crop up, set out in the quiet, careful English of Ester's father, a rumble and a rumour rose round them in the worlds of exploration, excavation. For Caldon's researches in the ruins of antique America had confirmed his belief that the ancient culture was nothing fresh-reared, but transported from Asia, a flotsam and jetsam hither borne on Pacific tides. He'd returned from his absence on the previous year and stayed two months, had Caldon, and then vanished away to Chichen and Uxmal, leaving Ester again in the care of Shaw. Shaw said she was the only sane half of the Caldon menage, but he said that with doubt, as if even so early the heresies of Caldon were leavening his lifelong beliefs.

" But not so Mellison. If I'd been interested enough to pay him the heed I was afterwards to wish I had paid, I'd have seen in him, surely, the acutest example of the human mind frozen up in a science and a faith. He was even then a good archæologist, he is now one of the greatest of Ameri-

canists. But his essential conservatism blinked at Caldon and the followers of Caldon, blinked and gulped and stared a blank minute at the chaos that would come did he ever admit an iota of interest in that heresy. Perhaps he glimpsed its implications even better than did Caldon himself, its unfolding picture of civilization entire as a monstrous, unchancy growth, alien to men, unnatural to man, an accident, a happening, a thing not inevitable. . . . It meant scrapping his Huxley, his Tylor, and most of his Darwin, it meant excursion from the safe, quiet places of theory into the uncharted jungles of thought."

Then Caldon came back, late April he came, and announced he was off to Copan, down in Guat, and this time Ester April went with him. She danced.

'Cheers, then I'll see a bit of Centralia at last. My caravan's rested here far too long—'n' I've nearly taken root!'

'Especially in the heart of Gershom,' said Mellison with his teasing grin, and Gershom at that turned vividly red. Caldon glanced at him remotely, as if hardly hearing.

'We'll be back again some time, I think. But I may go straight to the States when I finish with Copan. I can almost add the coping stone now to the researches for which I left Egypt.' He smiled at George Shaw. 'Researches in lunacy, eh, you would say?'

'I'm damned if I know. Moon-struck at first I quite thought you. But now——'

But Ester April called then, Gershom didn't hear more, he went up to the palace to help Ester pack. The heat was intense, windless, unstirred, he worked clad in shorts and a mist of sweat, Ester clad in like manner with a thin vest added. They strained and heaved at the straps for a

while, heat-swollen, and thumped bulging packs into seemly shape, and wrapped fragile casts into layers of grass, sweat blinding their eyes, Palenque's worst day that Gershom could remember, presently they desisted and went out to the steps where the shadows crouched jet as ink-nut juice. But there seemed as little comfort in shadow as in sun-blaze, Ester loosed another button at her vest-neck front and tugged distastefully at the short, soaked sleeves.

'Oh, to be a boy 'n' go about like you!'

'Then do.'

'Don't be silly. Young women mustn't show their busts—especially if they're as nice as mine is.'

'It's nice enough. But I shan't look. I've seen it already.'

'So you have—that night of the lightning. When I heard you yell 'n' ran out 'n' you played Peeping Tom to my little Godiva.'

He said angrily that that was a lie, and looked away from her, and a minute went by. Then he heard a sound of struggling with heat-wet fabric, and her hand came on his.

'Of course it was a lie.' She'd repented—violently, whole-heartedly, as so often she did. 'A damn little girly-girly lie. You can look at me now if you like.'

'*I* tell you I don't need to.'

Suddenly she giggled. 'I never asked—but *did* you write those poems that you wanted—after that night when you saw me in the lightning-flash?! . . . So you did! Why didn't you show them to me?'

"And I remembered why, and kicked at a stone, and picked up the loosened stone and flung it at a lizard that scuttered away in front of our feet. . . . If Ester had read

those poems, had known of those nights when there were other beasts than pumas that prowled around the palace of Palenque ! If she'd known how I'd ceased of a night from that cool self-scrutiny of which we both were so proud, adolescents mocking their own adolescence, and found myself swept away in the torrent whose existence I'd known and derided ! If——"

'Gershom.' She had ceased from laughing. Her voice had a wondering compassion in it. 'Was it bad as all *that* ? '

'As what ? ' he asked, intentionally dense, but something of his own torment abated in wonder, wonder that she should know, should have guessed ; he forgot to feel ashamed. He turned and looked into her eyes, and didn't look anywhere else than her eyes, they were clear and kind, yet far-away in look, her hair in the shadow had gone almost blue.

They held moist fingers for a minute, then she said, 'What a day to make love ! Dissolve away, I should think.' And brooded, 'Because really I suppose that's what we're now doing. . . . Oh, Gerry, it's a shame, but I don't believe women have ever understood—men, what they want, 'n' how damnable it is ! Not that we can know, we're not old enough yet. . . . Something I guessed, 'n' Oh, I'm so sorry, because I've never felt the same myself—about you, about anyone. Just haven't. Perhaps I'm not like other girls.' She was wistful over that.

He said, 'You're better than any girl that ever lived, I should think. They'd—they'd have been shocked if they'd known, or giggled and grinned, or——'

'Infernal things, girls,' she agreed. 'But what are you to do about it all, Gerry ? You're only sixteen now, aren't

you? I'm seventeen. We can't marry for years 'n' for years. Really, I suppose I ought to be your mistress.'

'No, not if you don't want to—really want to, not just because you're sorry for me now.' Somehow at her words all his shameful desirings and his secret angers had quite wilted away. 'That would be all wrong. I'll wait. There are still—other things. . . . And you'd better get into that vest of yours again. I hear somebody coming.'

§ 4

So that was his last talk with Ester before she went west and south over the wild ranges with Caldon on the road to Copan. Shaw and he rode with them as far as the village, they started early in the cool of the morning, the smoke rose straight as they climbed through the forest, past the Micol, Ester in front as they rode. She looked over her shoulder as they passed by the spot where they'd fished and the jaguar had come smelling Gershom's blood. He grinned back a reassurance that he did not feel. Then the village was near, and they all shook hands, George Shaw with Ester and with Caldon, Gershom with Caldon. And then Ester put her hand in his, and they looked at each other, young and queer in their years, deep-troubled, he saw the fine line of her brows tremble, and her lips as well. She glanced from her father to Shaw, they sat watching, and suddenly a banner of blood waved revolt in the pallor of her cheeks, she leant over from her saddle, Gershom towards her at that movement. So they kissed, kissing on the lips, the first kiss they had ever exchanged, her lips were prim and straight as they came to his, no more than a kiss of friendship they came with. But they changed. For a

moment, for a sccond, they opened like a rose, like a flower that was perfumed, wild, strange, and sweet to the kiss of the boy.

And then she swung round her mule, they went riding away, Ester, Caldon, the bearers, and their Indios with them, one carried a silla for Ester on the ridges. Gershom and Shaw sat their mules and stared after till the little expedition was a ranging of dots on the mountains that climbed to the sunset's places.

§ 5

Mellison tried to enliven things with a joke.

'For women must work and men must weep. We all miss our hostess. Wonder if we'll ever see her again?'

'Oh, I should think so,' George Shaw said, but already they knew he had grown indifferent. No human relationship might vex him for long, his silences were never the silence of oppression or remembrance, but thought on his work that was still to be done. He began discussing that with Mellison, and Gershom went back to Thucydides.

And he slept well that night, and the next day came, and the next, and things moved and changed, and you moved with them, you found there was never blank emptiness in life, it made its own measures and seasons whatever the aches of a love-sick boy. But the heat was a flame such as they had never known. In a week one could hardly move amid the scorch of the burning bush, one's eyes went aching as though also afire, and Gershom, for the first time since his coming to Palenque, regretted Chatham.

One evening as they sat at supper Shaw said, 'Like to see the Laguna de Terminos, Gerry?'

Gershom thought that meant they should climb up the hill of Astronomer's Tower and look over the forest. 'Too hot for the exercise, uncle, unless you want to especially.'

'I don't mean that. It's too hot here for work and is likely to be for a fortnight or so. We might leave Davila in charge, take Euriquito and his woman, and go camping across to the Gulf. Hey?'

'That would be splendid.'

'All right then, we'll go. Start early to-morrow.'

Gershom was never to be sure how much that holiday was planned for himself, how much, and sheerly, a necessity of the heat. They went down into forests that were dark and quiet, so high the trees that no sunlight came in those lonely aisles, nor any beasts either, though grey birds croaked and went scuttering high in the dome. Sometimes the aisles drew close, or they turned into bush-choked culs-de-sac, the Indios went then and hacked through the tangle with strokes of their great machetes. Three Indios went with them, Euriquito as well, he brought his new woman, she made the tortillas and pampered Gershom.

The first evening they climbed a slow slope from the lowland, forested country, the land rose secretly, darkly, into spaces more open as seen in the twilight. The Indios said there was game to be had in this country, peccary and turkey and deer, and they told the truth, next day it was Gershom himself shot a turkey, the shot disturbed a jaguar in a tree, it rose up and spat, and went slithering, silent, through the woven tree-boughs.

They halted at noon and lay eating the tortillas that the woman had baked, George Shaw relaxed and talked of the jaguar, how at night it followed you, journeying alone,

waiting the time when you slept. Then it came on you secretly and struck at your face, with a stroke of its claws it would gouge out your eyes, they liked eating eyes, did jaguars. Gershom hardly heard, he was nearly asleep, looking up from the grass at the etched tree-tops. And then he sat up abruptly and touched Shaw's knee.

'There's a storm coming. Listen!'

It sounded like that, like the coming of the storms at the beginning of the rains, a strange, remote rumbling and pounding of waters, the bellowing of the bullocks of storm as they wheeled in black droves on the waiting land. But Shaw shook his head.

'It's the Gulf, the tides surging into Laguna. We'll reach it to-morrow.'

So they did, and Gershom remembered nothing more of their journeying except that as they came through the fringing trees on the long rush-stretches that lay in the sun, suddenly, almost on a line you'd have said, as though slashed apart one from the other with a knife, the forest stretch ended and the shore began. They were out in the trees, in the smell of the Gulf, not fresh, but a smell of hot waters and long, surf-backed nights, seas creaming with combers, shores coated with salt. The Terminos went rambling for miles, men said, long desolate stretches where the sea-birds cried.

They spent nearly all that day riding by those meres, till the surf of the Gulf itself was in sight, and nothing else at all. It was somewhere in Terminos, Shaw started to tell, where the Great Descent of the Maya had gathered, with their salvage of culture from Xibalba's collapse. From here, some city long lost in the marsh, that hijra had set out that founded the degenerate New Empire. So

tradition told, no trace of a site had ever been found in the Lagunas.

'But you can try your hand, Mellison, now you've the chance.'

Mellison said 'Me? I'm to lie flat on my back and read Flaubert, or paddle in the shallows while Gershom shoos at the sharks.'

'Sharks? Are there any?' Gershom asked Shaw. He nodded. 'Yes, a lot. You'll have to bathe always in the shadow of a canoe.'

That night they slept in the thunderous beat of the hot Gulf tide, glistening up through the dark a soft foam on the edge of sleep, the ground shook and trembled in its coming, shook endlessly, it rocked you to sleep. In the morning one of the Indios went off to seek a village, canoes and fresh milk if such were known in that region, which seemed more than doubtful. Gershom slept the day away, tired out with the riding from the ruins, and awoke just as the Indio returned at sunset.

His canoe came out of the east red-ochred in the hues of the sunset, the Indio as lonely a figure as Neptune, his paddle a flashing trident. And then they on the shore saw that he came not alone, the canoe had another occupant. She had lain astern, now she crawled erect and looked shoreward. Shaw saw her and scowled and then swore at the Indio.

'Who the hell told you to bring back a woman?'

The Indio dropped his paddle, the canoe sagged in its stride, so to speak, Mellison grinned, and Gershom stared. It was no work of his, the Indio insisted, he hadn't wanted the muchacha, she'd insisted on coming.

Maruja herself leapt nimbly out of the canoe like some-

thing that Gershom had seen before, he remembered in a flash, that was how a jaguar would leap. Then she smiled at Shaw.

'And why should I not come? My father, like yourself, was a señor Americano.'

§ 6

Her American father had been a chicle-bleeder, an American strayed from Nantucket. So much she knew, and but little more, except that he'd taken her mother as his woman in a season when the chicle-bleeders prospected the forests surrounding the Terminos villages. Then he'd gone, and her mother had borne her and told her the legend, grown to a myth, of the god who came from Nantucket. . . .

"She was a mixture of childish cunning and charm, vivid and wayward and naive. She was that child of nature of whom Rousseau wrote, and by fifteen on the brink of deeper ventures than ever childhood had held. Then the Indio from our camp had arrived at her village with the tale, for the first time in years, of white campers again by Laguna. To Maruja that tale was a plain-sent call. The village jefe had sought to restrain (there was no padre to heed to their ethos). But she had smacked the face of the jefe for him, angrily, but not very hard, I imagine, his resistance had crumpled in a shame-faced grin, and here now she was, waiting friendlily for us to befriend her."

'So long as you don't expect to be fêted,' George Shaw said doubtfully, 'well, you're welcome. We've a woman in the camp already, that makes it all right.'

'Ah, a woman? And whose woman is she?' Maruja asked then, and Gershom understood and Mellison under-

stood, and they grinned. But Shaw's thoughts were already turned away from the surprise of his visitor's arrival, he said 'Whose? Why, for all three, of course.'

And at that Maruja did indeed for a moment look blank, she said 'Dios!' and stared at George Shaw with large, rounded eyes. Andrew Mellison choked, and switched that off, and regarded the Laguna with swimming gaze. Gershom, red-eared, spoke then:

'She bakes tortillas for us, that's all.'

It is doubtful if Maruja had seen him before. Now she did, and they liked each other at once. Sunlight, sunset nigh though it was, kindled a candelabrum of torches in the naive, deep eyes as she turned to look. 'Ah, the joven! What is your name?'

'Gershom.'

'Kh'ershom?' The Spanish of her speech found difficulty in that, the underlying Indio little or none. She said it again, making sure. 'It is good. I'm Maruja. I will show you how to swim, to fish, to climb trees, to catch the little alligators and put a cane in them and blow them up—so!'

'By God, young Gerry,' Mellison said, 'your education's beginning at last. And what will you show *me*?' he asked Maruja.

She laughed at him then with her eyes, without coquetry. 'The señor, like the other old man, must know all things already.'

Mellison stared. 'Well, God!' and said no more. Shaw hadn't noticed, but Gershom had and he and Maruja smiled one at the other, secretly; and so she came into their camp.

At supper a difficulty arose. Maruja had gone help

the Indio woman make it. Mellison said 'And where's she to feed—the half-caste, I mean?'

'Eh? The girl?' Shaw hadn't thought on the matter. 'Oh, with us, I suppose.'

'Think it's advisable?'

'Why not? At least it'll give us a good name in Laguna country.'

'Bit bad for prestige, I'd have thought.'

Shaw yawned. 'I never had any.'

Mellison looked at him queerly, he often did that, and Gershom thought again, as he'd often thought of late, that he wouldn't stay long with them, Shaw's assistant, he'd gotten out of Shaw by now all that he wanted—though maybe it was unfair to put it in those words. "They had nothing in common, these two, I thought, except the most important thing in their lives. And that counted for little! . . . They lacked any common essential approach, Mellison had selected an aspect of culture and specialized in that aspect as he might in bimetallism, my uncle, as I now realize, followed a life-passion in his digging and research, followed the feet of a lovely witness with a lovely devotion, he sought to rape truth, and somewhere, sometime, he believed, at last and triumphantly he'd succeed. . . ."

He lay on the ground that evening, thinking these things, hands under his head, and waited for the coming of supper and the evening star. And he thought of a sudden how funny it was that men put always that thought in an imagery with woman for the set piece, they sought out a new star, they sought out a new truth—and they might never tell of it so vividly to either their peers or themselves than by comparing the achievement to sleeping with a woman!

But he rolled away from that thought, bored after a little,

rolling over on the grass to watch night coming darkling down on the waters, the Gulf was a thunder out on the point, flinging up a foam of suds on the point, you saw them play in the gloaming. Then the supper came, a lantern with it, Maruja as well, and swarmings of mosquitoes to companion all three. They sat and ate and fought off the mosquitoes, George Shaw as absent-mindedly as ever fighting off both mosquitoes and Maruja. She sat by his side and rained on him a torrent of question and information, but as though she in some measure were herself absent-minded. It was then that she told them of her father, the myth of Nantucket, and how that word had stayed in her mother's memory. Mellison laughed.

'Probably a relation of the old man who kept all his cash in a bucket.'

'And who was he?' Maruja asked.

'It's a ballad in English, señorita. Gershom will recite it you.'

Maruja turned round to Gershom. The latter lay flat on his back, as before, watching the stars, they'd come thick by then, and fighting off the pests that were even thicker. He looked up at Mellison's remark.

'I can't put it in Spanish, so I shan't bother being clever—at Maruja's expense. Very sorry. . . . Listen to the Gulf!'

He couldn't see Maruja, outside as she was the spray of the lantern's radiance, she said in a drifting wisp of a voice, like a wisp from the foam-suds out on the point: 'It is said that they cry there still, the people of the cities who long and long ago were left behind when the Great Host sailed into the sunrise.'

George Shaw sat up. 'What host?'

'I don't know. Nobody knows. But it was long ago. And the Leader said they would march to a better place, and the people of Laguna said Yes. All but the evil ones; and they feared. And the Great Host marched away, and then a plague and a famine fell on the people who stayed behind, and the sea came in and drowned them. It was long ago, but they still cry there, under the mud and the sand. My mother told me.'

'By God, that's interesting. I must go and see your mother.'

Maruja also was interested. 'Perhaps she will have another baby then, as when the man from Nantucket came.'

Mellison's guffaw smote the night. Shaw rose to his feet.

'I'm off to bed. Time you all turned in, if you're to get any good out of the day before it grows red-hot.'

§ 7

"It was three days later, in siesta-time, when Maruja Avales and I came wonderingly to that point of existence which hovers as end and culmination to every romaunt of the Western mind. And neither of us came to it inadvertently, we planned it, I think, from the moment we met. It was delight that wakened me up the next morning, and I think it was that I saw also behind the green veils of Maruja's eyes when she brought us our breakfast. Suddenly the apathies of adolescence were gone, I saw all the world sharp and so clear, I wished I might run like the wind, write poetry for ever, dance and spin in the sun forever like the wheeling waters out in the Gulf. . . . I finished a hasty

breakfast and went off and packed away the books I'd brought, no need for them now, and came back and found my uncle stretched asleep in the shade, Mellison gone off to shoot alligator down in a creek; and Maruja awaiting my coming. And we touched hands and we laughed, she was in chalece and kirtle, bare-headed, her hair was un-Indian and fair. I glanced at her secretly, she as secretly at me, and I spoke without hesitatings, though I had not planned it:

" ' I am glad you came.' "

' I came because you were here,' she said slowly, earnestly, and they laughed again, their eyes very bright. And then Gershom went into the tent and got into his bathing-shorts, and Maruja went with him out in the canoe. They paddled far off then into the Lagoon, into the sunrise, into the dazzle of the sun on the creeks, the water under the keel as Maruja paddled was a bubble and a broken placidity, so clear one could see far down to the lagoon's floor. Perhaps if you went far enough in this country unexplored you'd see the roofs of the sunken cities where the peoples of old-time were whelmed. He told Maruja of that, she looked back and laughed and shook a fair head.

' No one has ever seen anything of them. They are far down, buried in the sands, years of it lie above them.'

" I think now she'd the soul of a poet as well as of a child of nature, I think there were wells deep and clear, secret and secure, far within that mind and body that burgeoned their spring in those Laguna days. But I cared nothing for them then, I cared only and desired with the passion of a hungry boy, she was perfect and she knew I would yet be her lover, I knew and she knew that I knew. . . . And for three whole days, childlike and happy, we

played with the knowledge, they played like that, I suppose, in the Edens of the early world. My uncle slept and read and slept again on the sands, and the Gulf came combering on the white sand points, and far and away by some lone creek we heard in our play, ever and anon, the crack of Mellison's rifle as he hunted the elusive croc. . . .

" That first morning we did not go far, but somehow beyond sight of the camp before I slipped overboard from the canoe, into water so warm and so saline it kissed and went seeping in through your skin, grown hungry and dried in the heats of Palenque. I swam round and about the canoe, and Maruja stood up and looked round for sharks, and looked at me with the sun in her eyes, and laughed as I splashed the canoe with water, and threatened to abandon me there. And suddenly it came on me I was selfish, I asked if she also would swim, she nodded, and we beached the canoe by the mere of marsh while she stripped. She'd forgotten a bathing-dress, I was glad, in the dazzle of the sun I looked at a picture fair as a dream of old Rome. She was plumper and rounder, maturer far than the spare Greek lines of Ester, beautiful with a wild, naive morning bloom. . . . She wound her fair hair up in great plaits and we swam together out in the sea, not far from shore because of the sharks, and floated on our backs, and talked in whispers, it was as though I floated near to the touch of a water-lily sleeping in the sun. And then we paddled ashore and lay in the lee of a bush to dry, not touching each other, not talking, content and content, I don't think I was ever again to attain to that gracious content, that splendour of simplicity that must once have been the daily delight of the men and women of the world before civilization came on it and poisoned the world and them. . . . And then

far away across the Laguna we heard them calling us at the camp, calling us back to lunch, that was all."

But late that evening Mellison drew him aside at the door of the tent as he made to enter. 'Come a walk and see the combers at night.'

'All right,' said Gershom, and yawned, going with him to please him. So they came on the unhurrying scurry of the white foam there, and stood still a while as they looked at it. Then Mellison spoke, abruptly.

'About this mulatto—Maruja. I suppose you know what's liable to happen—if it hasn't already?'

'Eh?'

'Oh, I imagine you know what I'm talking about. Well, Indians are Indians, and you can do as you like—your uncle seems blind as a bat. But wasn't there a girl, Ester Caldon?'

Gershom began to laugh at that, and, laughing, heard Mellison breathe angrily. "It was funnier and funnier, I laughed and I could not stop, pitying him and yet finding it ludicrous. In spite of his boasted virility, he was really no more, I saw then, in the clearest flash of understanding, than a small boy out of a story-book—a greedy little boy, a jealous little boy—and oh Lord, in spite of his boasted descent, how very bourgeois at heart!"

Mellison wheeled away in the darkness. 'All right, I suppose it's the kind of conduct proper to the gutter.'

Gershom sat down and wiped his eyes, he found that last remark funnier still. When he stopped from laughing he found that Mellison had gone; in his place Maruja had come slipping up out of the night.

'Did you quarrel—the señor and you?'

'He warned me about you, Maruja,' he told her. 'He thinks that we may become lovers.'

She laughed as he'd done, they stood laughing together. 'But of course,' she said, 'what else *could* the fool think?'

Next day went by as the previous one had, next night came a moon, sailing great and resplendent, a golden Maya shield on the lost lagoons. Maruja and Gershom wandered far from the camp and lost themselves deep in a cane-brake. Tree cats followed and mewed about them, and still they did not touch one the other, except once for a firm hand-grip as they slithered in a patch of bog and mud. They attained at last to the camp-site and the low, quiet flare of the fires on the shore. The mosquitoes, great hordes, came pinging through the moonlight to assail them as they gained the beach, Gershom bade Maruja a hasty good night, and they ran for their tents. And then a new thought came to him, he turned as he ran, and caught her hands, and drew her up close.

'To-morrow?'

'¿Mañana, joven?' And she did not understand, and then laughed with wide, wondering eyes. 'The time will come. . . . And yes, perhaps——'

He held her hands still, they were panting with running, suddenly they kissed, and still he was urgent. 'Say "Yes!"'

'I think it will come to-morrow!'

§ 8

"And when it was over, and I a boy no longer, a man now I supposed, and we held hands and smiled at each other drowsily in that place we had made, in the bush far out on the Laguna point, and I saw Maruja's lips slacken

sweetly, tired from their pleasure, there came on me not a scrap of that sadness or shame that I'd read of as the necessary end to the thing. There was delight and satiety commingling one in a glow of remembrance; tenderness and a queer desire to laugh; and a long, slow conviction that I could sleep now again; and turn to the Greeks and the mountains my uncle thought better than women, all the wonder of the world that burgeoned to-morrow for my plucking."

He put a hand out on Maruja's heart, its wild beating had slackened a little, he said 'But I didn't know——'

She laughed, half-asleep. 'I knew you were. And I—I am glad for us both.'

And he said that he also was glad, they thanked each other kindly, absurdly, and fell asleep, both of them, and woke, and went back to the camp as the evening came, sun-tired, love-tired. Nor, children of a chance encounter, were they ever to know their moment tarnished, Mellison was to see to that. For he looked up at them as they came to the camp, and knew of the happening at once, Gershom saw the knowledge kindle in his eyes; and he did not care!

But next day George Shaw and the sun rose scowling together, Maruja was dismissed to her village, out of Gershom's life, and the camp broke up.

SECTION THE FIFTH

SECTION THE FIFTH

§ 1

SO back to Palenque again they went, back through the winding stretches of the sun-splashed glades, down into those darker aisles, tenebrous, that pointed long fingers into the south. At a night-time camp they looked up and saw, crowned, Palenque, its pyramids dark in their trees. Shaw sighed at that sight, a long sigh of relief.

'Thank God we've got back to our work.'

'*And* mail,' added Mellison, his voice a little excited. They wondered what letter it might be he expected.

They came to the city next day, it drowsed in the sun-glare, Davila was there, he had slept in the palace, in Gershom's bed, without permission, the lice crawled in the seams of the blankets. He had brought from the village an Indio woman to cook his meals and to sleep with him, they had used no urinal but the palace, the stench was a horror. Shaw swore at the sight and called Davila a pig and a pagan, till Davila's face flushed up with dark blood, his hand went for his knife, but Mellison interposed.

'Drop it,' he said, his voice was a whip-lash, his hand had gone to his revolver-butt, swinging loose in the pocket of his jacket. Shaw never used a revolver, in threat or in earnest, and he stared at the two like a red moon, startled. Davila's flush died away, dirtily, he muttered apologies. Mellison's now was the face that was flushed.

'All right, all right. Now bring us the mail.'

There were letters for him and several for Shaw, none for Gershom, there never were any. But he felt as though back in his home again, the days and nights on the Gulf were already shutting and closing, closing up as a telescope closes, he looked back through a narrowing tunnel at the

points of light, vignettes from the days at Laguna, the high-flung spray of the Gulf for background, fading as he looked, and fading also, wistfully, the face of Maruja who had taught him manhood. Standing now in the shadows of a monolith he remembered her vividly a moment, with a wild regret, no ache of desire, the wild regret of a child that remembers Spring.

(So he was to remember her far in the future, in those mornings when the earth was a-vomit on the sky as a sick beast might, in anguish on the face of God, those nights that were blind with the flaming lights of an unquiet hell.)

But at supper that night, in the palace corridor, Mellison said suddenly, apropos of nothing, 'Mind reading this letter?'

He passed it to Shaw and Shaw took it and read it, and, read it again, and was still for a moment, and then glanced at Mellison, surprise and a louring contempt on his face.

'Curator of American Antiquities in London?—h'm, you've done well.'

'No better job than I can hold down. And it's time I stopped playing at explorers.'

'No doubt. And you want to leave here at once?'

'To-morrow, if possible.'

Shaw said 'I suppose you know you're a cheat, this is practically desertion in the middle of a season.' And then he said, still more quietly, 'And don't play little games with that damned revolver. Else I'll take it from you and poke it down your throat and twist it into what you call your guts.'

Mellison stood up, contempt on his face. 'All right, Shaw. It's not too good a thing for you to quarrel with me now.'

'You mean you'd cripple my exhibition when I bring the casts to London? Go ahead. I've had to deal with lice before this. Though you're not worth even an insect powder.'

"It was surprising, their quietness, both, and the crudity of their retorts. I couldn't understand, but my uncle began to tell me when Mellison had gone. Now he'd been left deserted, he could hardly carry on inside the scheme of work he'd planned. The business had practically wrecked his season. . . ."

But he had not yet opened all the mail for himself. Another letter awaited him and he opened it now. He read that for a while and toyed with it, and whistled through his teeth and looked down on Palenque. Then he passed the letter over to Gershom.

It was from Caldon in Guat and it read:

'Dear Shaw,

I've just left Copan and am going up-country—Ocosingo my bourne this time. You must almost have exhausted Palenque by now. Why not give a halt there and come down to Ocosingo? We can work together for a season, though not necessarily in partnership—the results would be interesting—at least I think so. I myself will be up in Ocosingo in May.

Let me know what you think.

There's another matter also. You remember that night when we talked and both regretted we hadn't taken to the land as a livelihood (both of us by now would have been dead of ennui!) and I told you of the two farms, Rainier's and Geijerstam's, I part-own in Minnesota? If you'd care to buy up the Geijerstam share you'd be welcome, I've

got very low in funds with all this trapesing, and would rather have yourself for a neighbour when and if we retire to simplicity and bucolic reminiscence. I shall not press you beyond my own purchase price—I remember you expressed a wish you had some such place.

Ester is with me and is coming to Ocosingo. In spite of her protests, I must soon take her home to the States and some educating—she is running over-wild. She hopes, as I do, that you'll come and bring Gershom with you in May.

Yours,

REGINALD CALDON.'

§ 2

They rode out early in May and Gershom never saw Palenque again. But he did not know of that at the time, he gave hardly a backward look to the place where a jaguar had hunted his blood, where, horrified, he'd met with Cæsar's cruelty, where he'd seen daylight and moonlight brighten and fade from the tenebrous sculpture of the Sacrificial Cross. The rain was close, the air was close, as they rode from Palenque, Gershom rode whistling, Shaw was in front, Mellison had gone three weeks before. He had said no good-bye till the very last moment he mounted his mule and the Indios with his kitbags were already jog-trotting away along the track to Palenque village. Then he'd turned in his saddle, his face was white, mottling a little red on either cheek-bone.

'Good-bye, Shaw, and thank you. Good-bye, then, Gerry.'

'Good-bye,' the boy cried, but Shaw hadn't seemed

either to hear or to see, this was to him the most grievous of treacheries conceivable, this desertion of days and nights ardent with toil for the comforts and ease and the padded security of a London curator's room. So Mellison had ridden off unblessed, and now, neither blessed nor blessing, the palacio watched, dead, Shaw and Gershom go. And Gershom rode whistling.

§ 3

Ocosingo lies at a distance of a hundred and half a hundred miles from the ruins that men call Palenque. In the days of the Maya Old Empire, long ago, while the Christ was young, the tale tells there was once a great tunnel that joined together the two cities. So Shaw told to Gershom as they rode up the beetling tracks by day, and by night fought off the mosquitoes and watched the forest sway and whisper and peer at the darkling brows of the nearing Cordilleras. . . . In ancient times this was a world of even wilder jungle and wilder paths than those they now traversed, but hither and yon, fair, shining and splendid, rose the strange stone cities of long lost Xibalba. The years had descended upon them and devoured them, in a night they were abandoned and deserted to the jaguar and the puma, like the men of the Bible those cities had awakened of a morning and found themselves dead. . . .

The Cordilleras towered above them, red-flowering in that white weather, you saw the peaks like the snarling teeth of a guarding monster high up the sierras, no man had climbed up those peaks since the dawn of time, Shaw told, none at least since the coming of the Spaniards to America. Only by immense labour of mountaineering and charting, with a little army at the explorer's disposal, might

the venture be attempted, and the day for that attempt was not yet.

Rain came on the last evening before they passed through Yaholan, the mountains flung down great pealings of thunder upon them as the barrage of great guns, and the night was a long, livid flash that scarcely moved for hours. But in the morning they awoke to find the earth pristine and green and the paths a dripping joyousness in the heat of the sun. Gershom rode humming and happy, vexed still though his mind might be by that strange challenge of the Cordilleras to the right, marching past and watching him pass with its myriad wild eyes.

Then suddenly a great sheet of water was before them, Shaw swore, seeing it in flood with the overnight rains. It was the Rio Grande, rolling in a broad placidity through the wilderness. The further bank waved a green jeer of trees in their faces, there seemed no place at which they could cross, it drew near to noon. And then Davila pointed to a party that waited on the far shore.

One of them on a horse rode down to the brink and gestured. Downwards and towards that gesturing Shaw's party drove their mules. Here they found a ridge of hard earth, it may have been once a causeway of the Empire of the forests, it held hard and true under the hooves of the mules as Shaw and Gershom crossed with the bearers plodding and splashing behind. The further bank the boy could not see, obscured in the bulk of George Shaw, but suddenly he heard his uncle hail the man on the horse.

'Morning, Caldon.'

And another voice also agreed it was morning, and that was a lie, it was near to noon, Gershom was glad for the water that splashed him, his mule was glad as well, they

loitered, the Indios behind them swearing. Then they scrambled up the bank and there found Shaw shaking the hands of Caldon and a young man in breeches. He dropped Shaw's hand, the young man, and swung round on Gershom, and caught *his* hands in a brown, dry grip. Gershom stared and gulped, he well might have known who it would be, but he couldn't speak, gulped instead like a stranded fish.

'Oh, Gerry, I'm glad you've come!'

"It was Ester April herself; it was as though I'd long mislaid some integral part of my own body, and found it again, we didn't shake hands, just held them, Caldon looked at us remotely, kindly, and scowled, the sun in his eyes. I saw Ester clearer then, she had grown, firmer and larger in bone, her red hair was a deep, still flame, torn out of the clouds of sunset, I thought, for I still wrote poetry, or tried to. Her grey eyes were deeper and stranger than of old, sprinkled with green, that terrible green that waved in the bush of the jungle. I cleared my throat and began to speak and tried again and croaked 'Ester!'"

So that was their meeting after nearly six months. Caldon and Ester led them up the mountain tracks to Ocosingo, the ruins, not the village, where now for a month they had been encamped. They came on it mantled in the noon-time shadows, a place of great pyramids and crumbling temples, over one hung the ruined sculpture of outspread wings and of mouldering globe that Caldon thought had been brought there across the Pacific, from the coronal insignia of Ancient Egypt. Amid the terraces the jungle whispered and triumphed, great trees uprooted the walls of the temples, desolation abode there or had there abided before the Caldons' coming.

But smoke rose from the camp, a hut was made ready,

and when Shaw and Gershom had washed their hands and faces and changed their clothes from the grimy enfingering of the Rio Grande, Ester called them to lunch out under a ceiba. It was deer-flesh and turkey, and a pudding of rice made with milk from a can, and a very good pudding, Ester the cook. She also had changed her clothes from her ride, Gershom stood in the doorway of the hut and stared, she spread out the skirt and smiled at him.

'Well, like me in this?'

'I don't know,' he said.

And neither he did, she was in red and gold, in a frock, the first frock he had ever seen her wear, it came on him in that moment of appraisal that despite all their days at Palenque together he had never yet thought of her as a woman, despite the angry, unclean little poetry he'd made, despite the wonder and strangeness of that night of storm when he'd seen her ungarbed altogether. And now she was a woman verily and truly, dark in her beauty despite her fair colouring, young, not yet at maturity, a flower on the verge of its budding-time, he felt heavy and uncouth, clumsy and a fool, before her solemn stare. And then he saw the solemnity a mask, the laughter behind it, he said relievedly, sitting down, 'Silly ass!'

'But you *were* scared, weren't you—just a minute, Gerry?'

'Maybe.'

'Disappointed if you weren't. I bought it in Mex—the city, you know—we went up there two months ago, father 'n' I, oh, a gorgeous time! I went to *dances* there, Gerry! Do you know that people still dance 'n' hold hands and men wear black clothes 'n' white shirts 'n' look solemn when they flirt, solemn as though it counted—and never trouble about

Cæsar or the Mayas or Vercingetorix' hands—or say they'd like to see you go naked so they'd write a poem? Well, it's true, it was fun, but I was glad to see the Cordilleras again. Here's father 'n' George, let's sit and be solemn. . . . What? I don't know, we're not lovers at all, are we, really?'

'I don't know either,' he said, 'only——'

She laughed then and they kissed each other in haste, her lips were quick and hurrying on his, the lips of a girl on a boy, they sat down and looked at the ceiling of the hut as Caldon and Shaw came wandering in abstractedly, they were deep in discussion of the ruins.

There was no work possible in the ruins that day, but Shaw, having purchased over lunch the Geijerstam farm and become a farmer by proxy in far Minnesota, retired then with Caldon to his hut and computations and comparisons of digging and sculpture. They didn't even halt for siesta, these two, but Gershom lay down and was dozing with Lucretius in his hand when Ester April came knocking at the door-jamb and looked in and said 'Tired?'

He said he was a bit, and she said he must have been born it, and then he saw she was again in the clothes of Palenque, the gay frock had vanished. He sat up at that sight. 'Goodness, that's better!'

'I think so, too. Listen, Gerry, are you very busy these days?'

'Busy? . . . I don't dig. Only lessons. They could wait.'

'Then come out. I want to show you a thing.'

So they went out together and beyond the ruins she took hold of his hand and they climbed a choked path up a great terraced slope; and Ester April halted and pointed. So he

looked, and saw nothing but the Cordilleras' escarpments, the sun low upon them, they rose black and gigantic, far off there were tarns that winked a blue glister in lost gulleys of the slopes.

'Well, what is it?' he asked.

'Something with a thrill. I've kept it 'n' planned it all out till you came. You know the country back of these mountains has never been explored?'

'My uncle told me that yesterday.'

'And—did he tell you about Lorillard City?'

Gershom shook his head, the first time he had heard the roll of the syllables of that strange name. 'Lorillard? Where's that?'

She sighed and sat down. The glow in her eyes was no glow of either girl or woman, something greater and stranger that made him catch breath. 'Sit by me. I'll tell you.'

§ 4

The mountains had long gathered and devoured their tracks before the coming of that third nightfall. They had thought to attain to the jungle below the eastern foothills by the second night, even, but in cracks and crevices the trackless trail set traps for their feet that might neither be braved nor evaded long, and for hours on end. In that second sunset they'd gone lower and lower, once Ester April had caught Gershom's arm and pointed up and backwards to the jungle-fringed peaks they had passed that day. A shape of stone lay far in the west, the sunset behind it, an Image overhanging the dark, wild lands lying shadowed below. 'It looks *carved*,' Ester April had whispered.

They took to whispering in that voiceless land—voiceless

but on the lower slopes with the shrill of hidden streams and the shrill of cicadas. While the second night came Gershom searched for wood and lighted a fire; and Ester brought out the maps and pored above them and set the compass afresh. As they boiled water for tea they bent over the maps, and then peered forwards and downwards into that jumbled desolation, it looked as though Titans had sported there with mountains for balls in the youth of the world. But somewhere, southwards and east, across the jungles and the wild ravines, the lost city of Lorillard had once been glimpsed.

It had been long ago, as Ester had told. Somewhere in the fastnesses of that wild land a great living city of the Mayas was hidden, a city of the Mayas, alive, no ruin, it flung its white challenge into evening skies, glimpsed far leagues off by the startled hunter on the upper heights of the Cordilleras. There, still as in days before America was named, were palaces still trod by the ancient Real Men, priests who still wrote in the ghostly script, astronomers who charted the skies with strange, antique rites. . . .

None had ever attempted it, that guarded city, the tale of it had grown to a legend, to a wistful myth, but a known reality as well. Not more than sixty or so miles it could be, once the Cordilleras had been passed, said Ester that afternoon while they sat on the terraces above Ocosingo. With six days' trek of ten miles a day, a dash through the bush, they two together might do what had never yet been done, they might enter the city and return with the proofs, or spy it out close at hand and come back for Caldon and Shaw and a strong expedition to come to it again. . . .

Gershom had kindled to the story as he listened, though a qualm of doubt had come on him as well. 'But even if

we reach it and manage to come back, what does it prove ? . . . It's just story-book stuff.'

'Oh Lord, but you're dense. It would prove—it would prove things so important that father 'n' your uncle would both give their ears to know if they're so. Though they'd never try to find out themselves. You've to be young 'n' take risks like us to do that. . . . Nobody knows what happened to the Mayas, why their civilization collapsed 'n' their Empire, how they tried to save it, why they didn't succeed. *Lorillard would tell us !*'

'Eh ? Yes . . . so it might.'

She brooded, lightedly, on the challenge of the mountains above them. 'It would tell us more than just that. Father says the same thing will happen to our world as happened to the Mayas—unless we find out a way to prevent it——'

'I'll come. When will we start ?' said Gershom.

That they'd waited three days to do, preparing. Then, with a letter left behind, some cans of provisions, their water-bottles, lint, brandy in a flask, knives, no revolvers or rifles, two sticks with curved handles, a rope, they'd crept out from the ruins at night and climbed up the mountains. Dawn found them so high the ruins below had looked like ant-heaps in the coming of the sun. Then they had turned their faces to the crests.

And by the third night the mountains were behind.

But they'd made a bare five miles that day, the pedometer told. Gershom had eaten green fruit from a wild lemon-tree and ached in consequence, Ester was wearied as well when they camped. That was under a great ahuehuete tree ; below it a long ravine climbed down to the edge of the jungle bush. They lay under the tree for a while, taking breath, a vulture came wheeling from the bush and passed

into the west, Gershom stirred up at last and shook Ester's shoulder.

'We mustn't sleep. We must light a fire and get supper.'

'I know.' She stirred also. 'But I *am* dead tired. So are you. Let's rest just a minute.'

So they did. It was quiet, as though the bush listened. Ester reached for and read the pedometer.

'We're nearly twenty miles behind schedule.'

'Two days behind?'

'Yes.' She lay thinking of that. 'Turn back?'

"'I'm going on as long as the provisions last,' I said and I meant it, but later that evening, she had gone away to bathe in a rill that circled the scraggy forest fringe, my decision grew modified. I saw her come over from the rill to the fire, the darkness came with her, she stooped and threw back her hair from her forehead and I saw with a queer, strange pain the lines of the breasts on her body, realized her a girl and tireder than I, I was responsible——"

She came whistling to his side.

'Lovely bath over there. You should go 'n' have one.'

'Yes. . . . I say, I've been thinking. Better plan than that we go on together. Scientific, like the real explorers.'

'We're real enough. Well?' She was drying her hair.

'You'll stay here,' he said, 'three days. I'll leave you the half of the food and push on—I shan't bother to make camps. I'll turn on the fourth day from now and come back if I haven't reached Lorillard. It'll be quicker altogether, you can wait for me here.'

She said: ''N' suppose that you don't come back?'

'Rot. I'll take good care of myself.'

She pondered that and then shook her head. 'It won't do. You'd go no quicker than if I were with you. Besides—'

she ceased speaking and looked round about her, the night very close now, eerie the forest.

He said ' Besides—— ? '

' I'd hate to be alone in this land.'

And suddenly he knew also that he would hate that, either for her or himself, it was as though that knowledge had prowled the verge of his conscious mind like a puma prowling, seeking an opening, if it entered it might rend and riot in there, and its name was Fear. And he shot it out hastily, getting up and taking off his shirt and his breeches, puttees and boots, to go bathe in the stream. And then he remembered, stripping himself, he half-stopped and their eyes met, Ester's and his, it was as though but hardly they'd looked at each other before, her brows came together over her eyes, her eyes grown wide and most strange.

' Gerry ! '

' What is it ? ' he said, and half went to her, startled by that startled cry. But she sighed, she flung back her throat in relief, and gave a little laugh.

' How you stood just now—so still 'n'en rigid—you looked like a silhouette statue, not yourself. It's this country on my nerves, I s'pose.'

He'd forgotten shyness then, but paused towel in hand. ' You'll be all right ? '

' Course. And do hurry, there's barely ten minutes left before the dark comes.'

It came before that, he before it. He came back and squatted under the ahuehuete tree, rubbing himself dry, in the air was the drone of mosquitoes, Ester had made tea. They sat side by side while they drank. And then far away across the stillness they heard the first sound they had

seemed to hear since the night they crossed the Cordilleras —a cry bleak and terrible, a cruel, harsh cry hunting outside in the darkness.

Gershom felt Ester's body beside him grow rigid. They peered at each other and then sat with strained bodies while they listened. And again, with that note of ferocity in it, the cry echoed down through the night.

It was the hunting call of a jaguar.

§ 5

"On the fifth day at noon we came on the Indians, not intimately, we were never nearer than two hundred yards. I saw the wave and brush of the jungle undergrowth on the dry plateau we had crossed and pulled down Ester April. Then I pointed and we saw them pass.

"It was a hunting party, I think. Tall and naked, but for breech-clout and sandals, in single file, they might have come from the pages of those boys' books I had read long before in Chatham. Their heads were the heads of the men on the panels of Palenque, browless and chinless, over the shoulder of three were spears that glistened a dull, spiralled grey. And I knew that glister, Ester did too, we both drew a long breath, they were stone spears they carried."

So they saw that company of the Indios of the waste file into view and out again, they never saw them again, it was impossible to move and follow them, so fast did they go. These were people of the land that for four hundred years had resisted conquest, exploration—but there was upon them no sign that they came from any Lost City, they seemed but the savages of a savage land. And yet——

They toiled and climbed and ploughed that day through great cane brakes that tore at their flesh, through a swamp that sucked hungrily at their feet with wet, emerald lips. At evening they came to the verge of a lone, vast hill, open and unbushed, it climbed with a ringing clamour of little raining stone-storms to a jagged crest far in the sky. It was then that Ester dropped the compass and broke it, and as they stared at each other, anger with Gershom, dismay with her, they heard the howl of the hunting jaguar ring out high and clear up those ringing, razor-edged slopes. That and no more. And suddenly in the sunset silence Ester laughed.

'It's only a dirty little cat.'

He laughed as well, there was some tonic quality in the air of those slopes, the porous, granulous land up which they climbed as the evening came down. It tore at your lungs and made the breath come singing in your throat. Halfway up the crest Ester halted to breathe, and cried out, startled, and pointed back.

'Look!'

So he looked, and there, far down and behind them in the evening's glimmer, was the glow and the smoke of a fire.

§ 6

Dysentry had come on him, perhaps from the wild lemons he had eaten, and sometimes dizziness racked his head as they plodded forward. Ester's face he saw wearied and white by his shoulder. He stopped once, and, denying his own illness to himself, looked down at her, breathing.

'You all right?'

'Oh, goodness yes. But do let's get on.' And looked back again. 'If that's a search-party we can yet force them on to find Lorillard!'

That had been their plan since the night when they saw the fire, to draw those fire-tenders so far in the wilderness that willy, nilly, they'd be forced to seek the lost city. "I wondered who it could be who followed, my uncle or Caldon or both, I saw their faces at odd moments of my stumbling, the worn lines deep-graved in their faces, and their tired, close eyes, we were no more to them than a nuisance and a bother—oh hell, what a row there would be! And I did not care, I cared as little as did Ester care, it came on me as we stumbled and tramped through the waste of jungle, with a sudden lightheartedness in my pain and weariness, that here at last I was out on a road and a quest that was real, no reading of the dim, sad phantoms of the past, or unbelieving acceptance of dull things that moved only others to enthusiasm—archæology and books and money and lust, wealth and power—all the loadings of rubbish they loved. . . ."

He tried to tell Ester of that that day, they rested late in the afternoon under the lee of a bush, Ester lay flat and looked at her shoes, one had almost mislaid its sole. She looked up at him and listened and then looked away and nodded as he spoke.

'Yes, I know. I've felt that as well. Real. Real for the first time since I was born.' She still looked away across the sunlighted peace and uninvitation. 'I wonder—Gerry, perhaps we're both mad, there's something abnormal about us.'

'When it's *real?*'

'Oh, I know. It *is* now: we're so young! But I wonder when we grow up——'

At her doubt he also began to wonder about that. 'When we grow up——' They would look back on this and laugh, feel ashamed, you did that after twenty, they'd be intent and respectable and make money and marry, never hear the ringing sunrises climb from the forests at dawn. They'd put that away, a memory of unease, to turn from with a smile and red-tinted ears—when they grew up, when they grew up!

And then Ester spoke again, slowly. 'You know, we can't go any further now.'

Gershom said nothing; but he knew. They were beaten, her tiredness, that shoe-sole, his dysentry. The night waited near while they came to that decision, new hills rose into it, they waved in the wind of the evening their challenge as the Cordilleras had done, no nearer they might be even now to Lost Lorillard and its golden streets. Behind: the lighted west that lit the sane feet of the sane world following their tracks; in front: nothing but waste and the cry of a wild bird. Yes, they had failed.

Yet somehow he did not believe it was failure. Only a halt. Then his mind wandered off into abysses of pain, he dozed and came to, to find a fire lighted by his feet, Ester had boiled the last of the water left in their flasks, they had met no water for two days now and their coffee was finished. She had her arm below his head and the cup of warm water at his lips. She said nothing, he nothing, the cup at his lips; he drank. And then she set aside the cup but left her arm still, and so for a little they both lay unspeaking till he said, 'Your arm is soft and . . . kind.'

She said in the darkness: 'We've never thought of

kindness to each other, Gerry! Funny. Kind?' The arm moved a little below him, growing softer. 'That better?'

'Ester. I say—you remember that night at Palenque when I saw you . . . my poetry——'

The arm did not stiffen. 'I remember.'

'We went away when you and Caldon had gone to Copan. George took us a holiday down to the Laguna, and there was a girl there, an Indio half-breed, Maruja. . . .'

'Was it fun?'

'It was.' He sought drowsily in his weakness to clear up the tangle. 'But that doesn't matter. I wanted to tell you it had nothing to do—with what I've always felt about you.'

She was silent for so long then, her arm grown slack, half he thought she had fallen asleep kneeling there. And then she said in that husky voice he'd heard once or twice:

'Oh, Gerry, I know. *That* doesn't matter.' Her hand touched his cheek. 'I am glad you had fun, that the girl was nice. Perhaps I could have been. Only——'

She drew her arm away then. He heard her prowl softly the confines of the camp. Then she came in silhouette up against the fire glow. 'Look at the sky.'

It was a glow and a splendour, a dusting of stars and a pringling of planets, a magnificence that hung low, near and clear in the stillness of the air, a challenge and a breath-taking wonder about it. She said: 'Something to do with that, just why—why I couldn't. But that night of the storm when you saw me: I went out intending you should see me.'

It was his turn to say: 'I know. I knew it long ago. . . . You should lie down and sleep.'

'Not sleepy.'

'Sing something, Ester.'

The darkness of the wild country came close :

> ' Nobody knows the trouble I've known,
> Nobody knows my sorrow,
> Nobody knows the trouble I've known,
> Glory hallelujah ! '

She paused then. ' Silly to sing. There may be Indians all about us. . . . Oh ! *Listen !* '

He rose up on his elbow. She stood by his side. He whispered ' It's the echo,' and he knew that he lied.

No echo : far off, leagues away it seemed then, though later they were to question that distance : Beyond the next hill, the next gully only, over the mountains, clear they heard it. It was a chorusing out in the night, voices from a chorus in antique times, singing there on the road to Lorillard. Ester knelt by the side of Gershom, the two gripped hands, crouched listening, frightened and alone ; and suddenly the howl of a hunting jaguar rent the air and the night grew silent again.

And in the morning George Shaw and Caldon overtook them.

SECTION THE SIXTH

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§ 1

THE train wound in days and nights up from theborders of Mexico, up from Laredo, up through the rich, varied lands with a name that still could thrill you : the United States with its history of inter-State conflict as dead as the conflicts of the English Heptarchy. And it came on Gershom one morning, they had stopped at Montgomery, he sat up in his bunk and drank chocolate, ate rolls, that he himself was no more than an anachronist savage !

He was on his way to Europe, it was 1914 ; he was a Texan on the war-path against Minnesota, a Georgian hating Virginia, out-dated, out-moded !

He left his coffee to grow cold in the chill of the morning as he faced up to that wry thought out of the morning. In the woods of Quirigua he'd thought himself remote from the callowness that went with his years, but now—— He was a Heptarchian running hot-foot to fight in a ludicrous scrimmage of the draggle-tailed tribes !

' Oh hell ! ' he exclaimed with great vehemence at that point, and the man who lay opposite, a thin, lank man, white, with dyspeptic look and a mid-West drawl, poked out his head and regarded him sternly.

' It's early in the morning to curse,' he said, and Gershom saw he was a preacher of sorts, a bedraggled black coat and a shovel hat lay over his head among other impedimenta. But he felt in no temper to bandy the amenities of sceptical apology.

' Cursed early.'

The preacher grunted and pulled up his blanket. Gershom looked out on Montgomery and remembered Shaw's face, almost again swore, he'd mislaid now both the reasons for

those insults to his uncle and the philosophy that should have sustained him, realizing his own folly. He who'd read in the last months so much of philosophy!

And he thought of that also, all his readings since the Caldons went home to the States, he thought of them hurriedly, as though searching for sustenance, while the train drawled out a long, southern hoot and the Alabama landscape droned past. Kant, lean, kindly and thin, argued up the bleak knolls of Ocosingo; Schelling and Fichte devoured the long hours, mosquito-haunted, at Quirigua itself, the place of the great stone stelæ and the Beast of the Earth that fed on itself; Copan was Hegel and Berkeley and Hume, grown friends, he had loved them, laughed at them, George Shaw would come tired at night or noon from his work and smile on him greyly, remotely.

'Deep in the Absolute?'

'Monadology,' he would mutter, a brief while with Fichte, the hot days and the rains marched their ways unheeded over his head with the monads for company. And George Shaw would grin. 'It's as good training as dominoes, nearly, and just as important.'

And he remembered then, steaming up to Atlanta, that definition that had made him laugh: 'A philosopher is a blind man seeking in a dark room for a black cat that isn't there.'

He laughed, and crawled up erect, and sought for his trousers, and dressed. And then for some reason he remembered Heinrich Heine and his arguing with Hegel for a future compensation in Heaven for this ill life of ours. And the caustic Hegel: 'So you expect a gift for nursing your mother ill—and for failing to poison your brother!'

And *he* expected a gift of consolation from philosophy to

salve up his wounded sentimentalities! Because he had told Shaw in Mexico City that he was pro-German, he and his Villa, and that Gershom at least was going home to England, he was nineteen now nearly, he was going home to England to fight for his country!

He went and took a shower on the train, his mind crawling with distaste for that infantile boast. But the shower righted things. The phrase was damnable, unforgivable, awful, but the thing he was going to fight for *was* real, shining, splendid and necessary, freedom and progress, liberality—these, or the clownish bestiality of antique cruelty which still wore a crown and bore power in Central Europe as once in the Central Americas. He was going home to fight that dead bestiality which struck off the hands of Vercingetorix' men, which ground the man of Uxmal between the stones till his entrails dripped out——

He watched the landscape wheel past and the day wheeled to noon, to sunset, to starset, he slept, woke and ate, read a book he had bought, a new book by a man he'd not heard of before, *Our Mr. Wrenn* was the book. He liked it and was sorry the page against the title had nothing to say of this writer's other books. So his train drowsed up through the lands that Lewis was to photograph and dissect with a shouting of laughter, they swerved amid the lands of Elmer Gantry's preaching. . . . And then he fell asleep and at late evening awoke, New York in sight, Manhattan on her island "and nearly fell from the window to watch that sight, I'd not fall now, it came up and blinded the sky of a sudden; and then I turned to an orgy of packing and found the train gathered to a stop in Grand Central."

Shaw he knew had written Caldon, had a telegram from Caldon, he'd said Gershom would be welcome to stop with

them till his boat went. He was sailing on the *Triassic* on the fifteenth: it was then the third. So he kept a look about him, there were taximen innumerable, strange crowdings, in a momentary shock of agoraphobia he realized how unused he was to white faces, how *beastly* they were! Then he got out to the main halls at last and stood there and so was standing lost and badgered in the hurrying throngs when Ester April Caldon came at last and found him. For a minute he didn't believe it her. And then he said, queerly:

'Miss Caldon?'

'Don't be silly, Gerry, it's just me,' she was grave. She dropped his hand hurriedly, and didn't look at him. 'I've an auto out by. Call that boy and we'll get in your bags. Hi, boy!'

Gershom felt frozen and a fool, following her to the Stutz, he stared at her frock, at her feet, her hat; it was impossible to believe this the Ester Caldon of that last night before the pursuers overtook them in the Cordilleras country. She was in green, some kind of green, he didn't know the shade, her cream skin was strange in that depth of green, her bronzed hair nestled by her ears in thick plaits....

He sat down beside her, the chauffeur banged the door. They were off.

'How's George?'

'Oh, fine,' he said. 'Is that the Woolworth building?' and stared at the monster. Ester peered by his shoulder.

'So they say. . . . We've a house on Long Island now, you know. Hope you'll enjoy yourself with us. You've a fortnight, haven't you?'

'That's right. Yes, a fortnight.'

"We sat and said nothing for a long time then, I did not sit with her, with the corpse of an illusion, a memory

that had cooled me and comforted me all those months down in Mexico, all the journey up from the mezquite borders. I had expected the Ester I had known . . . and here was a distant young woman, with glass behind the grey of her eyes, pointing out to me the sights of New York. I looked at her sideways and secretly, that body that had once been a dream's revelation against the sunset of the lost, lone land, was firm and young and very beautiful still, but no part with any dream that I had ever dreamt, she was friendly and cool and no part of me."

So he said nothing at all and her talking tailed off as they sped through Brooklyn and down Manhattan, they came to Long Island and the noise of the Atlantic, the Caldon house was out by Southampton. Behind them, the night coming down, Gershom glanced back and saw New York like a second Sodom.

'Cold, Gerry?'

'Yes, a bit,' he lied, and was suddenly resolute. He took her face in his hands and kissed her, she gasped and was still. So still that he dropped his hands awkwardly, chilled and polite.

'I'm sorry.'

'Oh. . . . We're almost home now.'

§ 2

He was long to remember that last night in Long Island before the *Triassic* sailed. He didn't sleep till near five in the morning, aprowl by the window of his bedroom. There was no moon that night, no star; only the noise of the sea. "And I couldn't sleep, prowling not only these hours, but back through the hours of the days I'd lived in

the company of Ester and Caldon, they came in long stretches like a swift-run film that sometimes went blurred and sometimes was bright, and once it crackled and broke on the screen of my memory. And at that I found myself halted, biting my pipe-stem, *willing* to forget the horror of that picture——"

He had met with a Caldon grown older, remoter, deeper than ever in his theory-obsession—at work on a book that was finally to synthesise the spread of knowledge all about the Old World. Coming down to dinner the first night he was there, Gershom had seen himself in a mirror on the stairs, the first full-length mirror he had seen for years, and had stopped on those stairs to stare at himself. He was five feet nine inches in height, as he tells, and slim, he supposed that they called it that, and his face was quite Indio-dark with its tan, deep layer on layer, healthy enough—a matter of constipation or no constipation, Shaw said, and his stomach was as good as a mule's. (Perhaps that was why he could laugh at Schopenhauer.) His eyes were too light for that dark face, his hair was as well, there was something that was faintly negroid in the ensemble——

Then he heard the sound of low breathing above him, and looked up and saw Ester in evening dress, it was low-cut at breast and upon her white shoulders, sweeping baggily to the ankles in the fashion of that time. She was staring at him almost startled, he thought.

She said slowly: 'You've grown good-looking, you know, Gerry. More than that, too, when you stood looking in the mirror. Queerest notion I had!'

'What?' he asked.

She wrinkled her brows. 'I hardly know now. Something silly—that you weren't just Gershom, but any boy,

white, black, or brown, and that something that was terrible was going to happen——' she looked away quickly. 'I suppose it's my liver! . . . Yes, you're quite good-looking—if it wasn't for your nose!' And suddenly smiled like an elf, the Lorillard smile. 'Like me?'

They came down to Caldon, there was another man there to whom the latter turned when he'd spoken to Gershom, a tall, thin man. 'Gerry, this is Eustace, my brother. Eustace, this is Gerry Shaw, George Shaw's young nephew.'

'Jezreel, not Shaw,' Ester's cool, amused voice struck in.

Eustace Caldon said 'Eh?' and looked hard at Gershom, his hands and his eyes and so plainly believed what he saw without putting that belief into words that Gershom was moved to denial.

'No, I believe I'm Nord—quite a hundred per cent. The tan comes from four years in Mex.'

He said 'Really?' with an English drawl. Anglophile though he was, he'd at once disliked Gershom. Nor did he thaw in the least when he heard that the latter was on his way home to enlist as a private. He was tall and thin and Virginian, a Virginian transplanted to Kentucky, more vinegarian even than Virginian, said Gershom's mind with a chuckle.

Gershom cheered up at dinner, sensing that antagonism, Vinegar or Virgin, he was merely comic opera, and beside the hurt of Ester changed was a comic relief. . . . Ester, clean and sweet as a maiden out of Malory—oh, cleaner, no doubt! Her shift was quite probably clean—uninfested like the shift of a Malory maid!

He grinned at that thought, and Eustace Caldon, who'd

been deep in War strategy, paused and asked coldly: 'You're amused, Mr. Jezreel?'

'Very,' said Gershom, and met the glance of distaste with an impudent contempt. ("I knew his type well enough, too antique to frighten, they'd carved that long, agressive head a thousand years before on the murals of Chichen.") 'But neither at you nor the War. I was thinking about shifts.'

He said 'Uh. Suppose it's a considerable change,' and then Ester struck in, she was eating a peach, her teeth even and ivory biting in the fruit.

'Probably not that kind of shift at all, Uncle Eustace—if I know anything of Gerry. And I don't know much.'

He said 'Eh? What shift, then?'

'Probably mine.'

Gershom said 'It was.' Eustace Caldon looked from him to Ester with an acid distaste, and turned to Ester's father. 'Extraordinary the manners of the young these days.'

Caldon blossomed a dry humour.

'They always were extraordinary. Read the Egyptian codices on the young and their impiety. . . . Though I don't see anything impious in Gershom thinking about Ester's shift. He's seen her without one before this time. Eh, Gershom?'

'Once, sir.'

'Ah ha. On the road to Lorillard, I suppose? But he's quite a decent boy, Eustace, Lorillard was what he was in search of. Shift or no shift I can hardly suppose he ever noticed Ester.'

Ester and Gershom said nothing to that, Gershom eating

with a new twist to his thoughts. Had he ? Busied with the Road to Lorillard when he might have——

And somehow, as he remembered padding the dark hours of the last night in Long Island, he had shivered away from that thought. When Ester rose from the table he went with her, they went up and sat in a cool, blue room that looked over the waters of the Sound and its dipping lights, the noise of the Atlantic came up to them, the cream of the shoom of the sound.

Sitting next to her, he saw her then as never before, in the radiance of light other than candle or sun or moon, lying back, a symphony of long, smooth curves, chin to shoulder, shoulder to breast, and breast to thigh, thigh to knee, in pale green, that fair corona of her hair gone jetty black as of old. He lighted a cigarette she refused, and they sat in an awkward speechlessness a while.

'Gerry, what have you been thinking about me ever since we met at Grand Central ? Truth.'

'That you've changed.'

'I know. But *truth*.'

'All right. That you're lovelier than ever ; that I was a fool to waste those days on the road to Lorillard ; that you once said you'd be my mistress when I wanted you. All that. . . . And that somehow you aren't that Ester at all, you've lost all that made you her, you're a stranger, I can feel it even now, speaking the truth to you about it as you asked.'

She was leaning her chin in the fingers of her long right hand, he was to remember the pose that last night, she leant there and said in a still, dead voice : 'It's true. All true. And I'll tell you why. Have you ever yet seen a man killed ? '

He was startled. 'No.'

'Well, I have, since—since we came back. That's what's made the difference. . . . Only, it wasn't a man. It was a woman. Would you like to hear about it?'

'Why, no.'

'Why, yes. I've never told anyone about it. Father even doesn't know that I saw it; Uncle doesn't. . . . And that's what's made the difference, all the difference, why I'm not the same person as climbed the Cordilleras with you. I don't know why I'm not mad, I go from room to room and into the streets and out to parties and every time I look in the face of a man I feel—sick, oh, sick and sick! I've been near to suicide sometimes, Gerry.'

It was almost as if the sea had soothed its sound as he stared at her, she put up her hand against her face. And 'Don't look at me, else I'll never be able to tell you. Oh, turn out the light! Yes, there. It was this:'

And that last night, padding to and fro the bedroom with the carpet soft as Usamacinta moss, he tried not to remember the horror of that story she had told him, of the visit she and Caldon had made to her uncle's, his place in Kentucky. There had been a lynching there a week before they arrived, a negro had been drenched in gasoline and burned, he was suspected of raping the usual white woman. So that had blown by as quickly as usual, the police traced nobody, also as usual. Ester and her father heard remotely of the thing, a rag-tag of the tale, and had shuddered, and put it from their thoughts.

But the wife of the negro had been heard to curse the crowd of white men who had murdered her husband, she was with child and lived in a shack a half-mile from the Caldon house. And the crowd had not forgotten that cursing,

though Ester knew nothing of that fact the night when she could not sleep. Too hot it was, she'd picked up a blanket and cushion in the easy, free fashion of Mexico, and gone out of doors into the garden to sleep in the shelter of a tree. It was a Sunday night, very still, with no drone of insects, the trees in the Caldon garden were velvet-soft in the darkness; and as Ester spread out her blanket she raised her eyes and saw those trees lighter tinted. She looked further, walking to the end of the garden.

And then she saw the flare of the fire that burned in the heart of a wood, not three hundred yards distant. And it called to her to see what it was, she felt light-hearted and eager and curious, and got out of the garden and went through the trees. . . .

So they had the negress there, had the crowd, they were pulling her up to the tree when Ester looked, she felt her eyes grow blind for a minute, but her throat was too dry to scream. And then she saw that the noose was so adjusted that the woman was not dead, was not being hanged except slowly, she was mouthing and mowing, her black body swaying as the rope rose higher above the tree-bole, her black body bloated with pregnancy, the rags almost stripped from its sweat. And then a man ran forward with a torch, an acetylene lamp, its flame flowed up, the black body jerked and a slaver of words came from it, and the flame from the acetylene lamp ran up and caught on the rags of the negress's clothing, they flared and burned, smouldered, there rose around a low chorus of laughings and gruntings like swine that were feeding on dead men's flesh.

Half-charred her back, still the negress lived. But that was only the beginning. A man rose directly in front of the bush behind which Ester had crouched, he ran forward to

the dangling body of the negress, it was a neighbour of Eustace Caldon's, a bluff, kind man, Ester had met him at dinner. Now something flashed in his hand as he ran, and then he cut into the bloated body on the rope, cutting into the womb, it split redly and black and something tumbled out—something that wriggled and gave a queer scream, a scream like nothing ever heard, but not long, the bluff man stamped on the thing with his boots. . . .[1]

It squashed up and Ester heard a man being sick, and then she couldn't bear more, she tried herself to be sick and couldn't, and choked, and then later supposed she fainted. For when next she woke the dawn was in the sky, coming sailing over the rich, wooded lands, the dawn on the bluegrass, the clouds of the morning like gilded galleons, they shook out their sails in amber and purple, birds were about them in long morning flights. And a wind had come, it was smooth and quiet, almost warm already from the places of the sunrise.

And Ester lay and looked at the dawn and knew she had dreamt, horribly, dreadfully, in her uncle's garden. And then she raised herself up on her hands, the grass crackled and moved with a queer sound of laughter, and she looked through the trees and amid their shadows saw something mutilated, with hanging bowels, hanging and swaying and turning then in the moving passage of the morning air. And, raised on her hands, she had looked and looked at the thing, filling her eyes with it, impressing it deep in her mind that never again might she believe with a full and glad heart in truth or beauty or the crying loveliness of dawns on the bluegrass, or poetry or painting or peace, or the love of God or the fellowship of men. So she had

[1] This lynching belongs to fact, not fiction.—J. L. M.

looked, long and long, and then got to her feet and turned about and made the house of her uncle, no one was stirring, she made it unseen, though twice she fainted on the way through the garden. . . .

And Gershom, tramping his hours of remembrance, switched away his thoughts from that horror. The telling finished, they had sat together and stared out to sea in the darkness, the plangent plash of the tide of the Sound came up through the night—the sea that cared nothing, that was neither cruel nor uncruel, insensate, remote, mother of men and mother of life, unknowing, uncaring the horror of this Thing that had crawled to being from the moving slimes of the ancient shores. Then a queer memory came on him.

'Remember Vercingetorix' men?'

'I know. And I said that kind of thing didn't happen now.' She laughed, a dreadful laugh for a girl. 'It happens everywhere, all over the world. We're beasts, cruel beasts, worse than any other beast, and that's all that the War is, you know. Sadism and cruelty, beasts tearing and stabbing in slime and blood. . . . Oh Gerry, and you once wrote poetry!'

'I'm tired, Ester. I think I'll go up to bed.'

'Why, sure.' Her voice was suddenly calm. 'After all that journey you must be dead-beat. Put on the light now, will you?'

So he put it on and they glanced at each other, then away, she was neither paler nor more flushed than before she had told him of that horror in the bluegrass. But he saw in her eyes his own face still livid, he knew he would never rid his memory of that ghastly figure swinging dark and torn in the morning colours amid the trees he had never seen.

Nor had he, he remembered, all the fortnight that followed. Ester took him to see the sights of New York, skyscraper-appraising, he cricked his neck, they shopped and talked and bought a new camp-bed and sent it to Shaw, down to Belize, he was outfitting a new expedition there to search in the ruins around Bacalar. And Ester and Gershom lunched and talked and danced, and forgot in their ways, he at least for a while; and drank cocktails and heard of the War. The sound of it filled the air of rumour, a deep boom over there in the east, the unease of it gave ease and zest to America's security. Friday came and Gershom's last day but one, they passed it as they had the others, till Ester drove him out by the Palisades and they sat long there, looking and looking, she turned to him at last, her hand on the wheel.

'Gerry, have you thought—if you're going to soldier—what may happen to you?'

'That I'll maybe be killed?' he asked.

'Yes.'

'Well, it won't matter. I won't be the only one.'

'Will that help?'

And he knew that it wouldn't. Killed? Finished and put by, riven flesh grown black and then shrinking into bones and dust and manure this thing that was himself, that sat here alive, this thing that was "I," hungry for food and air and light and ease and the wonder of dead men's thoughts, books and books and long treks in bush and the sound of the sea. . . . Killed, he might well be killed, never again make love to women as once he had done, with Maruja that day by Laguna de Terminos, never again lie with a woman in kindness and delight. Never at least with Ester, chance and not only the War had seen to that. And

he looked at Ester and found her look at him, suddenly she put out her hand, it touched his, for a moment the glass went from behind the grey eyes.

'Gerry, I didn't mean to depress you.'

'I'm not depressed. Only, I was thinking: No, it won't help me to die better that others are dying. There's so much I want to do! . . . But I wasn't being morbid, much, I was merely being sensual—wondering who you'd marry in the end and go to bed with some time.'

'Did you want it to be you?'

'Yes, once.'

She didn't speak then, and then suddenly leant her face in her hands, she took them from the wheel, and was weeping and weeping, quietly, dreadfully, he stared at her aghast. He put up his hands on her shoulders.

'Ester, I'm so sorry—damnably, oh, I'm a fool! Don't think I was trying to hurt you.'

'Go away. Oh, go away. And take your hands from me else I'll go mad.'

She shivered. And then: 'That's better. Ugh! Don't look at me, please.'

She dried her eyes. 'All that's finished, Gershom. . . . Oh, it's so long since we went—'n' I'll never go again—on the Road to Lorillard! . . .'

§ 3

'The night has a thousand eyes,' he whispered to himself, and stood still and looked.

It had never been true in the hot flare of the Mexican nights as here on Salisbury Plain, almost he'd forgotten the feel and the look of an English night, and that cold splendour of the English stars, great eyes from the Beast

that laired in the sky. He stamped his feet and clicked his heels, bringing his rifle painstakingly to his shoulder in the motions taught him by Sergeant Sebright.

" Like a monkey ascending a stick, I manipulated my arms, wheeled, clicked my heels together again, and resumed the pacing of my sentry-beat. It was March on Salisbury Plain, in Bulford the huts stood shivering and cowering in the blow of the night-time wind ; it was March of nineteen hundred and fifteen and scores like myself tramped sentry-go. Overhead came the stars, bright, cold, and impersonal as the eyes of an army doctor inspecting a naked squad in search of venereal disease."

He found that funny, and grinned in the darkness, wheeling away from the drive of the wind up a lane of black huts, with fast-closed windows like glazed dead eyes. It was the saddest hour, this, of sentry-go, the hours between twelve and two, he was to know those hours more intimately still, how close, when men lay sleeping, death came then in the silence and weariness, a blowing-out to the dead wastes of space, one walked the world the last man left alive till you heard the tramp of relief. But sometimes one tried in that very hour, the only time one might think alone and at peace, out of the squalor and smell and filth into the silence with oneself, to stand amazed at one's self, to ask ' Is this true ? Is this I ? '

And you said to yourself in those dark, quiet hours, ' It's a lie. Or at least it's a thing that passes, it cannot endure, only for a little while, and then—and then——' And you took them to pieces and squirming fragments, the patterns of the days, the brutality and filth, the squirming indignity of this act and that, and looked at them calmly, forgetting anger and rage and fear.

You thought of a barrack-hut at morning when you awoke under the shivering scrape of the blankets, thin and envermined, there was a smell in the hut like an ancient offal-pit, it came from the breaths and bodies of the men who lay packed about you, most slept in the grey hideousness of their underwear, most suffered from appalling food that enstenched their stomachs and throats, it was like swamp miasma, but sour. And you'd lie and you'd come to awareness of that, your mouth begrimed, your eyes begrimed, against the window the driving sleet of Salisbury Plain. So you huddled close up, your greatcoat still wrapped about your feet, still and silent the hut on the edge of reveille. You saw that in a glance at the watch still strapped on your wrist, strapped there overnight lest it might be stolen. And you'd remember other things that were stealable as well and search back under the bolster for the few spare shillings hidden there in a sock. Safe, still safe.

And then reveille. A trumpeter slept in your hut: He'd be shaken awake by a messenger from the guard-room, he'd yawn and curse, blink blearily, and then scramble wildly and in haste from his blankets to the nearest window, a thin youth, hairy and unfleshed; and he'd raise up the swinging half of the window and project his trumpet therefrom and blow reveille and bang down the window and seek his blankets for the blessing of ten minutes more.

You rarely got out of your blankets before you were forced. The orderly corporal came on that mission, he banged portentously on doors and trestles, and pulled off blankets and men awoke and swore and stood in the litter, and got into trousers and got into boots, nothing else discarded, and then ran at the sound of a whistle.

That was the morning-time physical-training whistle. You stood in long rows and shivered and then leapt like dart-pricked frogs with up-flapping arms, and bent and unbent your posteriors, wriggling your stomachs, posturing pathetically in the *danse de ventre* the while Sergeant Sebright walked the ranks and inevitably stopped at your back, and you knew him there even when you couldn't see him, cold, with eyes like a pig and a face to match. You'd falter and fail from the rhythm of the group and then his snarl would come through his teeth :

' Now then, Jezreel ! Waken up there, Jesus ! '

For Sergeant Sebright had disliked you from the moment he saw you in that hasty squad that came up from London ; and dislike had increased in the cold, pig eyes as he read your name from the nominal roll.

' Gershom Jez—Jesus ! Jezreel. Who the hell's he ? '

' I am, sergeant.'

' Stand to attention then, when I speak to you ! D'you hear ? '

' Yes, sergeant.'

' Jezreel ! '

' Sergeant ! '

' " Sawjint " ! None of your bloody la-de-da airs here. Yell. You've to let your voice be heard in the Army. Now then ! '

' Sergeant.'

' Right, my cock, I'll keep an eye on you. What are you, anyway ? Half-caste ? Mother a wazza-bint ? '

' I beg your pardon, sergeant ? '

' Oh, you begs my pardon, does you ? Some missionary's bastard, I'll bet. Right. Fatigues : Brown, Mollison—cookhouse. Kemp, Crawley—litter-picking. Wrench—

guardroom fire. Jesus—latrines. . . . What the hell are you standing still for ? Double to it, man ! '

' My name is Jezreel, sergeant.'

' None of your bloody lip, or you'll be for the guardroom so quick your feet'll never touch the ground. DOUBLE ! '

He was convinced from the first of an ancestry half-negroid, and you made no attempt to explain away your name, either to him or the strange admixture of humanity crowding the barrack-hut—that strange, heart-breaking mixture you found so obsessed and so dominated by one obsession, one thought, one idea.

And that was Fear. You feared. Inexplicably, by the strangest paradox, you had volunteered to have your body clad in garments ludicrous and of hideous discomfort, to live like a beast and be fed as no beast would ever be fed, to be taught the technique of killing, to go out to France and kill or be killed : This you had done and it was a thing put by and a thing forgotten. You'd forgotten it in the shadow of the Fear that dominated the camp, that dominated the Army, that men called Discipline, Fine Spirit, and many another fine name, that was a crawling dread of the dark cells, of the filth and heartbreaking weariness of the punishment drills, that in its utmost resolve was a Fear of no definite thing, a shrinking from thought and revolt and responsibility. . . .

And then the whistle blew again, P.T. was done, thank Christ, race, into the hut again, the fug a little thinned, an outbreak of jesting and reminiscent thumping and ' Christ, ain't it cold ! ' You polished buttons and you polished boots and you scrambled around with a tin of cold water and you sought to shave in front of a mirror with a dozen

others, there was a great scraping and scratching, the frozen discomfort of steel on your face, you swore to yourself By God, you'd grow a beard when you were 'out.' And then 'cookhouse' blew, there rose a rush and a clatter of tins and mugs, and a race to the hut where the three uncleanly cooks yawned, and wiped the moisture of the cookhouse from their faces, and ladled out the strange, curdled mess of bad porridge and thin treacle, incurious bacon and discouraged potato. With this mess went a thin, stale wash of tea, and on this you fed and prepared for the day, the marching and drilling and the hours of Sergeant Scbright's 'Instruction.'

Dummies of men, sacks filled with straw, were hung from low gibbets in the training-field. At those dummies you ran with your bayonets fixed, and plunged those bayonets into squirming stomachs and chests that caved in with a crackle of bones, the filth came spurting up on your hands, you saw the face of the man whose flesh you so tore and dug—you saw it contract in a passion of pain, then blood come up in his eyes. You saw all that had you the making of pictures apt in your mind, and stopped, half-sick, Sergeant Sebright behind you. 'What, scrounging again, eh Jesus? Jump to it!'

You lay flat on your stomachs and fired at concentric circles of colour, you knelt down to fire, you stood upright, you fired with rapidity, you fired with deliberation, and markers hidden in the butts behind signalled your abilities or failures. And you were again a curse and a disappointment to Sergeant Sebright, a first-class shot from the first you were, he had thought you would fail at this also. Piglike, his eyes protruded their wonder that a half-caste could shoot as but few of the Real English. He'd find

nothing to say to you then, wait later, till the drills of the afternoon it would be, when your feet were clumsy and your mind astray, it was then he came into his own.

'Pick them up, there! You, Jezreel, up! . . . Halt. Private Jezreel, one step forward, march! Mark time. Left right left right. Forward march. Double! DOUBLE! leftrightleftrightaboutturnleftrightleftright! Halt. About turn. One step forward march. Halt. About turn. . . . See if that'll warm you a bit.'

And, panting from your racing round the mud of the 'square,' with your rifle on your shoulder, you'd look at him with eyes of hate that he couldn't mistake, his face would grow mottled with anger.

'None of your damn dumb insolence, either. Hear?'

'Oh, I hear you, sergeant.'

'That'll do. Private Jezreel—under open arrest. Office in the morning. Insolence on parade——'

§ 4

He secured one week-end a pass that took him to London. In a little hotel in Bloomsbury he'd left most of his civilian clothes when he joined the Army. He went there again, and booked himself a room, and dressed once more in an unaccustomed comfort. It was strangest of all, the walking, almost he fell for lack of the clump and drag of the heavy Army boots on his feet. Then he went out to discover London, London hysterical and darkened, War-time London with its shoddy crowds and its thronging soldiers, its pimps for the women deserted, its prostitutes for the men who so soon might well be deserted of even the flesh. He drank in a little pub in Piccadilly, there was a girl there

who looked at him invitingly, hot-eyed, he bought her a drink and she nodded and took it.

'Here's what. Why aren't you in uniform?'

'I'm on leave,' he said, and she nodded.

'I thought that you were. . . . Your hands.'

He said 'Eh?' and she pointed to his palms.

'Plain, you know. White hands with new blisters fading from them. Lots of the boys have that who've never had hard work before.'

'Let's forget it,' he said. 'Have a drink?'

She nodded. 'Don't mind another. . . . My father was killed in France four days ago.'

He was a little taken aback; he said he was sorry. The girl nodded. 'You can't be, you never knew him. But I did—a lot. Mother and my brothers don't mind, you know, he died like a hero, they think. But I don't. Most likely he died like a cow in a slaughter-shed—father! He'd hair half-grey, he was quiet and kind, and his eyes twinkled, joking and kind, lovely eyes, you know. I can't forget them. . . . I'm trying this, they say that it helps.'

'Nothing helps,' he told her. 'Except to be like your mother and brothers and the rest.' He was a little drunk and paused to clear the coming haze from his mind. 'Be like them, hero-worship like them, there's no safety at all but by going with the mob.'

'Have *you* found safety that way?'

'I've found I was once a fool. . . . Drink the only way you're trying to forget? Ever been seduced?'

Her face was drink-flushed, she shook her head, a deeper flush came. He drank up his whisky and laughed at her. 'Then you haven't begun to know how to forget.'

She said: 'Is that an offer?' and he said: 'For what

it's worth,' and they looked at each other in the sweating little room with hot, restless eyes. Gershom stood up.

'Come on. We'll go somewhere else.'

Near midnight he brought her to the Bloomsbury hotel, they avoided the porter with a drunken caution and climbed the stairs to his room. And there she was suddenly frightened, and refused, and he found himself frightened as well, and consoled her and unlocked the door. Thereat she broke down, weeping, kneeling in a chair, and then a blaze came white in his brain, he had closed and locked up the door again, his hands were upon her, she ceased to struggle after a little in the dark, ceased to weep, they held each other in a kind of fear, London wheeling in its darkness into the East, London silent, a mad city on the verge of a world gone mad.

Towards dawn he awoke and found she had gone, she left no message or token, she had asked him for nothing, he was never to see her again.

§ 5

That day he took a train out of London, from King's Cross northward, he got out at a station called Welwyn and walked and walked till late in the day in the rich wooded lands round the heights of Herts. And he saw it was Spring, the teams out in the fields, the sun was a bright Spring shining, you could hear in the rustle of the paths, hidden in the woods, the streams trilling their ways newborn from the overnight rains. Larks were out, shrilling over the labour of the plodding teams, in green and ochre lay the fields about him, walking slow, without thought, with the feeling upon him of a prisoner escaped.

And all that day until late afternoon he avoided the faces and greetings of men, he slept a long hour in a park, Brockett's Park, the young pheasants came twittering and pecking around him, there was a great cackling of geese by a river that flowed and foamed amid the pilasters of a wide and deserted bridge. Towards evening he awoke and did not for a while know himself or the place where he lay. And then he lay thinking, unmoving, and watching the evening close in. He moved aside from himself, so long since he'd done that, and asked as of old 'Who am I?'

And he saw the Gershom of Chatham, of Mexico, of Salisbury Plain. Gershoms in a blur and a shimmer of vignettings that brightened and faded into the quiet of the Hertfordshire evening. Which of these 'I?' Which, if any, the reality? What reality was there in or behind those shapes so changelessly changing?

'Man that is of woman born . . . hath but a little while. . . . As a flower he passeth. . . .'

> 'The burden of much gladness. Life and lust
> Forsake thee, and the face of thy delight;
> And underfoot the heavy hour strews dust,
> And overhead strange weathers burn and bite;
> And where the red was, lo the bloodless white,
> And where truth was, the likeness of a liar,
> And where day was, the likeness of the night;
> This is the end of every man's desire.'

Reality? What reality might the universe ever hold that was a stay and a guiding star for man, for himself, for the slavering hordes of the barrack-hut, the men who lived and dreamt and died like rats in that sweating rat-run beyond the horizons of the south? Up from the beast we

had come, beasts ourselves and no more we were, cruelty and lust were our heritage, in our bones delight in torture and tears, civilization had shaped and slowed and restrained the brute that was our essential self; except when war and promiscuity released him floundering, slime-dripping, from his chains. And even that brute was no being everlasting!

Life was no flower, it was mindless, the crawling of a mindless fecundity, changing and passing, changing and passing. Man was a beast who walked the earth, snarling his needs and lowing his fears, and with other beasts he would perish and pass, a ripple on the cosmic mind that itself was mindless. . . .

And a great amazement came on him there that evening in the Hertfordshire woods, that so few of his fellow-men should ever stand agaze on this horror of the Wastes he beheld so plain. If they should, if they should——!

It would mean world-madness, world-suicide, to look in the freezing abyss either side of the path that men climbed, poor, blinded beasts. An end altogether of surely the strangest, most grotesque of adventures Life had ever attempted throughout the universe. . . .

And it came on him that this indeed was what he witnessed, this was the evening of the world, the sunset of mankind that he sat and watched. Some other life-form might yet arise and essay the adventure, some beast or bird or insect, life in a form unguessable, but one with a steadfast beacon of surety in mind and in heart, not a torn, tormented thing, dragging clanking the chains of its ancestry, blind in the glimpse of a possible morning its bestiality might never essay.

SECTION THE SEVENTH

SECTION THE SEVENTH

§ 1

THE guns were a lullaby on the horizon that first night as the long columns straggled up to the Somme. The battalion had halted near Amier, it slept in a barn, but he found the weather too hot for sleeping and went out, he'd taken off nothing but his boots. Dead tired though he was he could not sleep because of that heat. In the sky, it was near to morning, there flickered a line of light, pallid and strange, and, muted in distance, the thudding thunder of the guns rattled the window-panes of the dawn. To the right, he could see them but dimly across the huddle of the brown farm-buildings, unending, with hooded lights, the transport and the guns crept up to the front.

He went back to the hut and sat on his pack, he was near to the door, and lighted a cigarette and looked round at the huddled shapes of the sleeping men. The air was foul with their breaths and the smell of their bodies, some moved in dreams and unease, yet a strange, quiet sleeping it was that held most, as though drugged to indifference, awaiting their sacrifice under the pits of a Punic Baal. In one corner was a huddle of men, their rifles were piled, and that piling over-draped with packs, it looked in the dimness of the light like a drooping figure, an obscene crucifixion caricatured. . . . Very near to morning, very near, and he was wasting it staring and listening when he had been better asleep.

But he went to the door again, looking east. Now amid the dunness was a lightening pallor, momentarily it grew and it spread, then abruptly a thing great, like an open hand, spread and unclenched there also, he watched it with sombre eyes, sure and aware of his own anthropomorphism,

yet stricken to quietude as others had been who looked on the Angel of Mons. A Hand ?—and why might it not ? Might not the Gods descend to the battles as of old, the innumerable Gods of the Christian world ?

Jehovah, the Christ, the Quetzal, the lesser gods and attendant saints—perhaps they were more than dreams, they had life indeed, the waste and spume of the thoughts of men, they moved and they drifted far in the sky, great clouds of thought, strange, blossomless flowers without root or stem, blood on their petals, awake, as hungry polyps awake, pullulating, smelling the incense of blood as below their creators fought and bellowed in the slime of the little planet. . . .

And suddenly, sharp and clear in the hot, waiting morning, the notes of reveille came shrilling in the air.

§ 2

He was upon the barbed wire, held in five strands. He had ceased to scream, buoyed up on a surge and a shoom of pain that was merely a pedestal, merely foundation and base for those waves of agony that smothered him every two minutes or so. Waiting the coming of the next, he found time and wit to wonder at that, had it something to do with the blood's circulation, was he losing blood as he hung ? He knew he was whispering and mouthing in delirium, yet kept clear his mind and determined still, rocked on that combering play of pain against the shore of his flesh. He must not scream, *he must not scream.*

For they would shoot him, some Jerry sniper, or the machine-gunners back in the batt. He had seen them do it before to the men who were caught in the wire in the

futile attacks. You heard them screaming till they wearied you and then you fired when no officer looked and they ceased to jerk, they were better dead. But he did not wish to die, hanging though he did, one strand was between his legs, the spikes of it updriven deep and turned there, two bound his chest and one his shoulders and one had tangled and twined, living, like a snake that scoriated, about his legs. And he would not scream, *he must not scream.*

He had been swung away up from the ground when the strands eased themselves from the weight of others, he hung three feet or so now from the ground, like a rat, half-naked from his first wild strugglings, he could see his chest, it was black, caked, like a lava-slate, with veinings that were blue and veinings faint red, these where the blood-sheet had cracked. He could see the Jerry line, his head forced back, he could see it when the haze cleared a moment from his eyes, when he strove to clear them to fight the return of that breaker of pain with its hissing of spume ; even the flat caps of the Saxons he saw now and then in the dull, quiet light of the afternoon. . . .

And then the rain came, that was close on sunset. It drenched the ground and himself and suddenly, through it and the coming of the darkness, a machine-gun began to bay like a jackal from the German parados, suspicious of sunset raids. He saw the red flashings and then disregarded them, fighting, tormented, in the breaking spray of the white-hot wave. And he screamed at last, wildly, oh God ! oh God !

And perhaps they would think it was someone else.

They were firing measuredly from our line in return, he heard the easy sing of the bullets go by, he wriggled and

shrank and at that Agony itself sent searching fingers, long-nailed, far up in his body, they scraped his pelvis and tore at his entrails. " I think that I fainted then. It was quite night when I woke again, hearing my own moans."

The pain was vivid as ever, in chest and in back and in legs. But between his legs it had ceased, a dead region suddenly there. He was sick for a moment at the smell of excrement and the smell of caked blood on his chest. And then thirst came on him, suddenly, overpoweringly, he tore his arms seeking to reach to his water-bottle, he could not. " And then I managed to lower my head and suck at my tunic, it was wet where the rain had drenched me. But the rain was salt, I drank it and spat, it was salt and thick, my own blood I drank. . . . *And I must not scream.*"

Then presently the star-shells began to rise, far up the line, they rose and fell without ceasing, shedding a corpse-glow on the land below. Far in the north some bombardment rose in a farmyard cackle and then changed from that, it turned to the leaping of elephants, the ground listened and trembled as the thudding drew near. High up, he was flung to and fro on the rocking wires. Quite close at hand a stanchion fell and the wire caved forward, half-flinging him clear but tangling his legs. But his arms were free, were free ! And as he kissed them and slobbered upon them he fainted again.

" Late in the night I had freed my legs and began to crawl. There were raiders out in no-man's-land, a party went past me, crawling, once, and I tried to call, and a hand reached out, and a bayonet came thudding in my body, but my haversck caught and jarred it. I crumpled and lay still and the raiders, I think they were English, went on.

" I found a dead man in a little pit and felt over his body and up to his face, but his face had gone, my hands at his neck fell into a cavity, a pitfull of cold, chill slime, he had been dead for many days and the rats had taken away his head. I laughed and mumbled over that, I remember, I was very hungry, I lay and laughed and laughed, my hand in the dead man's neck. I would be unable to eat *him*, anyhow ! "

He had begun to bleed again, he knew, and set out crawling once more. Somewhere then in his meanderings it was that he came on Sergeant Sebright. He did not see him, he was never to see him all the time that followed, the man lay groaning and whispering unendingly, ' Water, water. Oh Christ, some water.' Gershom crawled and came on him and squatted and listened.

' Sebright ! '

' Water, Oh Christ, some water ! '

' I haven't any water. I'm only Jesus, Sebright, Gershom Jesus Jezreel. No water. . . . I bring not peace, but a sword.'

' Oh Christ, some water ! '

' No water, no Christ, either, Sebright. I'm only Jesus. Remember him, you've learnt your Swinburne :

> ' Between us and the sunlight swings
> The phantom of a Christ-less cross,
> Shadowing the sheltered heads of kings,
> And making with its moving shade,
> The souls of harmless men afraid——

' That's the Christ you're wanting, Sebright, but I'm only Jesus.'

' Water, water.'

And after a little, startled to awareness by a burst of insane laughter in his ears, and realizing that laughter came from himself, Gershom made search for Sebright's water-bottle and found it lying a little beyond the latter's reach. He wanted to drink of the water himself, but he could not with that moaning so close at hand, he thrust the thing into the sergeant's hands and crawled off, he heard the soft gurgle of water falling from the bottle-neck in the darkness, but he did not know if Sebright ever drank or not, he never knew what happened to him after that.

The next thing he remembered was the dead Saxon crucified up against the breaking of the morning.

He was crucified on the wire, in the tangle by two great stanchions. A shell must have lifted him and flung him up there, in the nest of wire, and there Gershom saw him, like Saint Peter of legend, crucified upside down and with head to earth. He was close to the figure before he saw it, busied as he was with discovery that all night long he had crawled in a circle, and was near again to the place from which he had started. And then he raised his head and, the morning behind it, looked on the crucified German.

It was the Image, dead and uncrowned and quiet, snarling, a beast no longer, murdered by God and the cosmos, pitiful, fearful, and purposeless. "There was hardly a twitter of life in the lines that morning I squatted and looked up at the thing from my childhood, the Image itself, superscribed with murder, foolish and dead against the dawn. And at the sight I remember I fell in delirium again, I was found by an early search-party, I was whispering and mowing and pointing to the Image against the morning."

§ 3

Trains and their shoom and rattle, unending days of them, the flash and flow of broken images out of their winking windows. Sometimes they loitered by leafy banks, the spare green banks of the lean French land, once they hid and quivered hour-long in a tunnel, and far at its entrance an explosion roared, and you dozed and you did not care. Then hands were on Gershom, torturing him, he was crying in the deeps of pain, crying and crying, and voices and hands were about him, and again the sway and quiver and flow of the train. He knew in a moment of clarity that the man in the rack above him had a stomach-wound, bandaged, the blood oozed from it and through it, dripping on Gershom's face. He lay and awaited those drops of blood, unceasing, continual, he was neither frightened nor angered in that slow dripping, it was his own blood, the blood of the Image, if he moved and cried on the horror of the thing his own blood would flow——

They came to the Channel, he supposed. There was a moment when he saw the water, darkened, harbour-dark, and heard the lap of it. And then pain, excruciating, was upon him again, again the world commenced expanding, outward and out, his hands grew, his nose, his arm, the universe expanded and again exploded. . . . He saw and knew no more of the Channel passage nor the journey that followed, he awoke in a stretcher in Aberdeen station, being carried from the train to an ambulance.

And the thing that had wakened him was the hand of a ' volunteer ' male thrusting into his hand a cigarette.

§ 4

The ' volunteers ' were everywhere, knock-knee'd, in khaki, perspiring with amity, patriotically beaming. On each stretcher that passed a cigarette was thrust, so Gershom saw as he stared about, and then stared down at his own awakening gift. An ambulance nurse stood near, that he knew only later, and she saw what he did. He flung away the cigarette, feebly, yet with fury, and cried after the volunteer, shrilly, an obscene phrase of the barrack-hut.

The nurse was beside him in an instant.

' Now, now, Tommy, you mustn't go on like that. You'll be better and in bed in ten minutes.'

He looked up in a plump, pretty face, it was honest and fair, and he looked as a man coming back from the dead.

' God, a girl ! . . . My name's not Tommy, and I know what I'm doing. Do you let skunks like that wait about and insult the fools who come back half-murdered to your damned town ? '

' Now, now. All right, then, what *is* your name ? Jez-Jezreel. Corporal Jezreel, you'll be fine in a minute. . . . Careful with that stretcher, there ! '

' But what is this place ? ' he called after her.

' This is Aberdeen, Corporal,' she said.

He said ' Good God ! ' and then went to sleep. He slept from then until the moment that he was undressed. His awakening came with the bandages' unwinding, he clung to Nurse Simpson's hand the while they unwound, biting in the pillow while she patted his hand, and the cool, bored hands of the doctor cut and shaved and applied a

thing that stung up through his body like the bite of a snake.

'You'll need no operation with some care, No. 8. Are you married?'

He twisted his head to answer 'No,' and the doctor laughed with a thin salacity.

'Well, well, when you are you'll not be incapacitated from performing your conjugal duties—if that's been a worry.'

Gershom lay thinking of that. It had never occurred to him. And suddenly he was afraid, dreadfully afraid, he lay and shivered, and when next Nurse Simpson came to take his temperature that temperature was up and the nurse very grave.

'Hello, hello, what's this you've been doing to yourself now, Corporal?'

He whispered, 'For God's sake tell me, nurse. Tell me the truth, not a medical lie. Was that true what the M.O. said about—about me being all right?'

She patted his hand, she was cool and collected. 'Of course it was. I know—I helped to dress you. You've nothing to fear.'

"But I think I looked still my terrified unbelief, and suddenly she did the thing that made her strange and beautiful to me, bent close above me, her eyes warm and kind.

"'True as I'm a woman what I say.'"

§ 5

But later that night he awoke and remembered and laughed and laughed till he wept, and the patient next cot

was alarmed, and called the night-nurse. And Gershom buried his head in the pillow and wept with laughter over that fear that had been his—fear he might never be able to father his kind in the world that waited to murder them—

§ 6

It was the convalescents' dance, and the last of the dances, and the night so warm he remembered Mexico. Tired and yet eager to dance, he had danced five times already, he was searching the place for Nurse Simpson.

He found her at last at the foot of the gardens, she was seated there by the side of the guardsman who would neither walk again nor see, his chair a strange, black chariot in the flow of light from the room where they danced. It was September, hot as the Scotch nights are in that month, the trees about Mill Hill stood tall and black, their foliage still bright green. Coming down to Nurse Simpson, Gershom heard unendingly about him the whispering of those trees, whispering in a wind too high to cool the levels by the grass. He called out 'Nurse!'

'Hello. Oh, it's you, is it, Corporal?'

'This dance was promised me, Nurse.'

'So it was. Just a minute.' She bent over the shapeless bundle in the chair and murmured to it, soothingly, then rose to her feet. 'Dance? Goodness, it's almost too hot to sit. But then you don't feel it much, do you?'

'I've known it warmer. But it's almost Mexican to-night.'

She sighed. 'Mexico! My, I wish I could see it sometime. You'll take me there after the War, won't you, Corporal?'

'Anywhere you like.'

'That's fine. Well, what about this dance?'

There were two deck-chairs under a tree. He pointed to them. 'Let's sit it out instead.'

'Well—Matron will have a fit if she sees me. Still——'

'A fit would do her good.'

'Lots of good. Two fits, in fact. And what are we going to do now? Gossip?'

'I thought of making love to you instead.'

'I shouldn't mind—but for the Regulations. "Paragraph XXX: Corporal patients shall not—yes, kiss V.A.D.'s."' She considered that, somewhat hampered, and breathing a little more quickly. 'Well, since it's under compulsion, just once.'

They sat in content and quiet after that, holding hands, listening to the music of the new dance in progress, down and beyond the hospital grounds a tramcar sprayed the quiet of the air with a frost-flight of sparks, the lights and the lighted clock-towers of Aberdeen were a shimmer down to the left. Nurse Simpson stirred.

'You'll be going soon, Corporal?'

'Day after to-morrow, the M.O. said.'

'Passed A 1 are you?'

'I think so.'

'I wish you weren't. And that's not patriotic, is it? But sometimes I'm not so patriotic.' She sighed. 'Especially when I see boys brought in the mess that you were that morning. Keep away from wire in the future.'

'Anyhow, it led me to knowing you.'

'I think I should blush here, Corporal. Just a minute. . . . It really *is* too hot.'

'I meant it.'

She said nothing then for a little, and then spoke very quietly, without her usual banter.

'Yes, I s'pose you did. But there's nothing more than that, is there? Just a boy grateful for a nurse who's helped him, and finds her in the dark almost human, a woman he can cuddle——'

'That's not true.'

'I *thought* I was cuddlable. . . . Well, what is?'

'That you saved my sanity here in this hospital. I was sick—sick long before I was caught on the wire—sick with the world, myself, and humanity. I saw it a collection of beasts and I thought I must sink to the beast myself, or else go mad. Now I know I needn't do either, I can stand aside and not care—except stand aside and keep a look-out for the few others left who are neither moron nor mad. Sane, like Nurse Simpson.'

'Me? Oh, I'm nothing special, you know. And men aren't beasts—or woman either. Just muddled and muzzy.'

'I don't take that. But once or twice there have been exceptions. Pitiful little dreams that mankind has dreamt in the lair of the beast. Christ and Bruno and Shelley and Nurse Simpson—freaks and sports of the species.'

'Goodness, now I'm a freak.'

'You're a dear.'

'You mustn't.'

'Why? You'd like me to.'

'Yes. That's the worst of it. But I really can't——' her voice was troubled. 'My dear boy, I like you too much for you to be a patient of mine. I'm glad you're going. Oh, damn!'

He saw her dabbing at her eyes. And then she stopped

from that because he was kissing her, her skin was soft and cool, yet kind, like her soul. He kissed reassurance and sanity on that cheek, a kissing that strayed to the waiting surrender of her mouth.

'We mustn't. Not here. Let's be cool and think.'

"So we were cool, and thought, and she laughed; but a little wistfully.

"'Look, you can come and stay with me to-morrow night. I've a cottage out by Bridge of Dunn. You can get out on a pass—if you like—and chance getting back in the morning. And that'll be that, and you'll feel better.'

"'And——'

"'Eh?'

"'So will you.'

"She sighed, and then suddenly kissed me again. 'So will I.'"

§ 7

Early in the Spring of 1917 he was loaned to the French Foreign Legion as interpreter and went to Sidi-bel-Abbés to spend two months of boredom in unfamiliar uniform and foul-smelling bazaars. The men he found mostly Alsatians in his company, loyal enough to Germany, but escapees from Germany's peace-time conscription, according to that peculiar code of lunatic freedom that appeared to obsess Alsatians. Now, freemen, they were brutally trained to fight an unfree brutality.

October of that year took them over to Marseilles, through the fears of a Mediterranean haunted by U-boats, English destroyers convoyed them across, Marseilles was a city of shabby crowding and shady rumours. The further up country they went, so those rumours grew, out of the

East blew a breath of something strange and new in that world on the verge of destruction. " It came like a thing blowing up like the pipes of Spring, the rumour of it blew all over the earth, even up to the front lines it blew, where the long, grey armies lay in the mud and rains of that stagnant autumn. In Russia Revolution had come, the officers done down, the fighting finished, peace, rest, and ease from the fear of death had come there for all men. In Russia: Why not in France ? "

But Gershom never reached the French regions of tentative revolt. He heard of the mutiny of the Russian Brigade, wearied and desperate they refused their officers' commands, the French army brought up its artillery and shelled them into submission. Then revolt among Scots, Australians, days when the little towns of Northern France travailled in the birth of stillborn sovyets. " And presently the rumours died down, apathy came and indifference again, one hoped that many military policemen had been shot; and turned to other things; I to the stories Ekman, my sergeant, had to tell of the district where we lodged."

It was the Champagne district. Here the fighting had ebbed and flowed on the near horizons, yet never too near, and underfoot, in miles on miles of long hidden tunnellings, were the cellars of the Champagne companies. Ekman it was who told of these, a Swede from Hernösand, once he had worked in them, he swore there were men sealed down in those catacombs, food for two years went with them, and every fortnight they passed by a given place in the tunnel, turning the bins on the racks. All entrances were sealed up and hidden, but one he knew near at hand, an entrance from the back of a farm-house.

So one night he and Gershom and two others, two Alsatians, broke in the doors of that deserted house and found their way down to the cellars. Great hungry rats they found there, watching with a green, macabre flicker in light-caught eyes while the four men worked; and the work proved arduous enough. They found at the cellar's far end the wooden door Ekman had told of; and that they broke down with ease. But ten feet beyond it the passage was blocked, sealed up with concrete, they left two bombs with a time-fuse and ran. Presently the farm rocked, a cup fell from the dusty dresser in the kitchen and smashed near Gershom, and a rush of bad air and worse rats came pouring up from the cellar.

So they waited a while before they went down, Ekman said it would take half an hour yet to clear, and they searched through the house for loot. In an upstairs room Ekman came on a woman's photograph hid in a rotting chest—a tall woman, red-haired or yellow, the photograph was crudely tinted. But spite of the tintings she was handsome, she lived, Ekman said 'God! to sleep with a tart like that!' Then Gershom looked, and flung the thing back in the chest, and sat down on that chest and looked sick.

Ekman stood staring. 'What's wrong?'

'Nothing,' said Gershom, and was presently better. Together they went down to the champagne cellar. The air had cleared, the sealing of concrete had gone, beyond, half-wrecked, was another wooden door. They pulled that down and they stood and listened.

Below, it seemed deep, a sheer drop from their feet, was the tunnel in darkness. And that darkness was unquiet, visually and orally. Far off was a flicker of light

and there neared them the sound of slow footsteps. Ekman swore and extinguished his torch.

'It is one of the watchers on his rounds; or he's heard the explosion.'

'Not him,' said Gershom. 'He'd run.'

'Lie down!'

So they did and the man came pacing below them, and paused, and they held their breaths. But he did not look up, he did no more than adjust the flame in his lantern and then went on; and presently they heard a swinging and a creaking of turning frameworks, Ekman whispered the watchman had turned a framework of bottles almost under their feet.

The two Alsatians and Ekman climbed down while Gershom stayed on guard in the cellar. When they came up each brought with him three bottles, scientifically pilfered by Ekman from the racks. Then they closed up the wooden doors with much care, and retreated into the farm-house again, and drank far into the night and far into the morning.

And while the others lay drunken and asleep that morning Gershom crept up the stairs to that dusty room and stared again at the photograph Ekman had found. . . .

§ 8

Nor, a curious interlude in his saga, did the matter end there.

For, a week afterwards, he marched a party over to a wood three miles from the hutments to bury some dead of whom the peasants complained; their complaint was not conduct, but odour. The place was a wood of poplars,

slim and serene, grave in their grace against the smoky colourings of the autumn sky. And presently, following a path, they came to the place where the dead men lay.

They had been dead for long, they sprawled, more vegetal than animal in the passing of the years, half-hidden in the undergrowth, some twenty in all. A French and a German party had met here and mutually exterminated one the other, and now Gershom set his men to collecting and burying the bodies. The men swore and jested and were sometimes sick. Then one of them called out to Gershom and he went and looked at those mouldering rags on two mouldering cadavers.

"And how they came to be there that day I do not know unto this, those two Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, in kilts they had been, not the tartan apron of later times, they lay athwart and upon each other, as though one had flung forward his body as a shield for the other, I thought. But perhaps that was no more than fancy, the attitude accidental, I went through their pockets and found there nothing, robbers had been there before me, even the metal identity tags were gone. Somewhere in Argyll or Glasgow there were still perhaps folk who believed that behind those notices of Missing these two lived unknown in some German prison, these two who had escaped even the prison of flesh. So we buried them, and the wet night came crawling down over the scene, and I fell-in the men and we marched back through the ruins of the village—Le Fére, I think it was, but of that I'm uncertain.

"And it was then we came on the woman chased by the negro. She emerged of a sudden from the ruins of a house directly in front of our line of march, she was naked, she ran and screamed, a white woman with red-yellow hair;

and behind her, naked equally, sinewy and black, ran the negro. They ran, they were real, yet strangely unreal, the negro silent, the woman's screams the staccato screams of a marionette startled. And as she ran the woman looked over her shoulder, and I knew her instantly before she vanished, for in that gathering dark we could not follow, we never knew what happened at the end of that chase.

"But it had been the woman of the champagne farm-house. *And it had been my mother.*"

§ 9

Even after the lifting of the frost-mist that February morning the frost held fast, rimed and webbed, like a spraying of fine steel wires across the churned chaos of the roads. The morning was a symphony in winter. Through it and about it rose staccato the thuddings of that barrage that all the past week had crept nearer and nearer. Now, the reverberations of the guns were curiously sharp-limned, like the pinging of hail on a frozen roof, all the air clear and bright, each sound smote your ears with a needle-point sharpness. Gershom sat in the ration-hut he controlled, and yawned, and stared out at the morning. Next room the clerks were busied at their ledgers; beyond, bells tinkled unceasing in the telephone-exchange.

Up and down the road a few yards away, churning the hard earth into chocolate, wound the transport, camions loaded with infantry, ambulances wheeling and bucking in the mud, occasionally a limber, trailing east with staccato jerkings on its caterpillar wheels. Here the front was doomed as everyone knew, the week before the Algerians had revolted and come swarming down that road, looting, and

murderous, they'd attempted to burn the store and exchange and might well have succeeded but that Gershom succeeded in finding and turning a machine-gun upon them. He remembered this morning, with a yawn of distaste, the surprised dismay on a face that had ceased to be a face at the first whirring crackle of the gun, the front ranks had crumpled with spouting bodies, the remainder had broken and ran. . . . And the line was failing, the end very near.

About noon the snow came on and Gershom returned to the window to watch that unending up and down flow of the traffic. It had thinned a little, the snow had thickened, and it was as he stood and looked out that the American Red Cross ambulance going up to the line came into view, its driver an evident novice. He had switched to the right, seeking surer ground than the churned-up quagmires of the roadway proper; and in the doing so was driving unaware the snow-covered shell-holes that pitted the fields outside the road's radius. Gershom lighted a cigarette and smoked and watched, and watching, saw the catastrophe.

The front wheels of the ambulance abruptly vanished, a spout of black water and thin ice-cakes rose geysering in the air, the ambulance stood solemnly up on its head, its rear wheels spinning; the driver was certainly drowned.

And then Gershom saw that as certainly the driver was not. He scrambled out of the seat and the pit, mud-plastered, limping, and gained his feet and turned and stared, first at the wreck of the ambulance and then at the passing camions. But none of them halted, none of them heeded, the soldiers sat fast therein with their heads drooped forward against the wind, you could see them like dummies inside the camions through the whirl of the snow. It was no concern of theirs that an ambulance had overturned or

its driver almost died. They went east to their own sure certainties.

Nor did Gershom think it a concern of his, he watched the scene, smoking, and then crossed to the brazier and warmed his hands. And it was as he warmed his hands that Ester April Caldon came knocking at the door.

Or rather, it was a kicking, not a knocking. He went to the hut-door and opened it and there she stood, dripping and desperate, furious as well.

'Why didn't some of you come out to help? You must have seen the accident, damn you, damn all you French——' in her anger and excitement she mislaid the French and used English instead, beating against the door-jamb with a muddy hand. Gershom opened the door wider.

'Come in, Ester. Change from Palenque, isn't it?'

§ 10

She stared, she put up her hand to her forehead and wiped aside her hair escaping her cap. Her face was pale, paler than ever he remembered it, altered too, the lips painted, the cheek-pallor leprous. And she did not know him, she said, puzzled, 'Palenque?' And thought, staring at him now from head to foot.

And then: 'Oh, but it can't be! Gerry!'

He had her hand in his own, unhurried. 'Yes, you're damned. So am I. But it is. Come in. What the devil are you doing in France?'

'My bit, mister—wrecking autos 'n' sich.' She sniffed: her hand was frozen. She stood soggily in the midst of the hut-floor, water rivuleted from her. 'Ugh!' she said, and shivered like a cat from a pool.

It was no time for recognitions and remembrances.

'Stay here.'

He went through to the clerks' room and through beyond that to the store, and found a wearable uniform there, a poilu's, and with it a shirt. Then he came back and found Ester April crouching over the brazier, it was spitting and smoking with the water that fell from her on it.

'Get up and get out of those clothes. Don't heed the brazier. Hurry up.'

'But I can't. I'll have to get back and report.'

'I'll try and do that through the telephone exchange. It's next door to here. Here, sit down.'

So in a minute she was undressing, he loaned a hand to pull off the mud-caked puttees and boots; and then at the more intimate moments went and looked out of the window, and heard Ester stamp, still more like a cat, as she crept from the wetness of her nearer attire. It was snowing still, indeed, it had thickened, he could see nothing of the hole and the half-drowned ambulance, the sky seemed to have caved in on itself. Once a great flame and a flump arose, a dose of H.E. dropped near to the store by some optimistic Bavarian.

Ester called to him.

'Well, I'm respectable now. 'N' you're a dear.'

He said, not turning, 'All right. Wait till I get you some coffee.'

He went and told a clerk to make that, and came back, and the poilu by the window turned to him, twisting up her hair on her head. They looked at each other a very long moment, " I've told of such changes as I noted in her, and now there are others to tell, though hardly in that moment I was aware of them all. Eyes and mouth were

the things most changed, I think, the eyes with that grey glass quite lost now, warm, lax, and unaustere eyes, the mouth with a droop at one corner, an upward tilt at the other. And she smiled at me, the smile of a woman who had smiled on many, the smile of a woman who had long forgotten that other woman hanging murdered against the dawn on the bluegrass."

'Still Gerry—even in a Frenchy uniform. 'N' however did you get in it, or wangle this soft job here?'

'That's a long story. How did *you* get to France?'

She sat down by the brazier, her shoulders curved forward, in the absurd red trousers, even, that fine line of old was unguised. 'By boat. Haven't you heard? We've come over from America to win the War.'

'Good luck.'

'Well, I'd been training before—in spite of father. He's turned pacifist, very sensibly, 'n' thought that I shouldn't. . . . So I came with the first contingent 'n' was loaned out a month ago to a French hospital back at Le Fére. This morning Lower Base rang up for an extra, I volunteered 'n' took up the ambulance. 'N' here I am—and there is the ambulance. . . . Glad to see me?'

'Ave post secula. . . . *If* it's you.'

A slow wave of crimson came over her face. But she laughed. 'Not certain? What's wrong with me then?' And thought for a little. Suddenly: 'Of course, poor romantic Gerry! But not such a bad psychologist either, I suppose. You've remembered me still as that girl who told you the story of the woman in the bluegrass clump——'

He said 'I've remembered you as Ester April. I didn't realize she'd evolve into smart Miss Caldon of the American Red Cross, having *such* a lark out at the front. So sorry.'

'Oh yes? Well, if it's consoling, I'm also appalled. I've remembered you as that boy in Mexico, a poet 'n' kind 'n' lovely you were then. I didn't know you'd evolve into a smart under-officer with *beastly* eyes 'n' a frozen face. . . . As though something was dead in your head. So sorry!'

They were looking at each other in a flare of enmity when a clerk from the store brought in the coffee. He caught sight of Ester, exclaimed, 'Sacré cochon!' and coloured; grinned. Ester smiled back, a smile that made the middle-aged clerk preen himself absurdly, as a quetzal preens. Gershom stared his cold disgust and the man wilted a little in that stare, and went out of the room and closed the door.

Ester's voice:

'He's brought in two cups. Aren't you going to drink?'

They drank, not looking at each other now. Again the hut shook as again a shell landed over to the north. They were finding the range. . . . And then Gershom's cup rattled on the brazier as he set it down.

Ester April was humming, humming a tune he had heard before, and still, not looking at him, she slipped her hand into his:

> 'Oh—nobody knows the trouble I've known,
> Nobody knows my sorrow,
> Nobody knows the trouble I've known:
> Glory hallelujah!'

§ 11

"I think we built after that, calmly, deliberately, our plans for possession of each other. We were not in love, if love were anything apart from desire, from resolve like

a bright keen blade, that somehow, out of the wreckage of the months that thundered their guns about us, we'd salvage to hours of our own, in security and delight, that vanished spring that had once been ours. . . . So we planned it and so we secured it; suddenly the War fell away from my consciousness almost entirely, I was aware as one half-heeding a distant rumour that the front had straightened and that it still held, no catastrophic spate was anticipated in this sector, and I set about granting leave to myself."

It was a complicated matter, he being on loan. But the complications gave to it ultimate simplicity. A fortnight from that day when Ester had overturned her ambulance in front of his hut, he was down on the way to Paris for a full week's leave—a special leave granted for 'family reasons—urgent.'

St. Lazaire came greyly out of the evening, he found himself a little hotel near the Mich', and spent that evening in bed with a bottle of whisky and a book for company. Meanwhile the hotel rushed his uniform to a dry cleaner, had it cleaned, and rushed it back and draped it over chairs in his bedroom; and knocked at his door in the morning and shook him awake as he had directed. It presented itself, the hotel, in the person of a pretty girl with a pretty smile.

'Sunshine this morning, M. l'officier. And your uniform —see!'

It was speckless and seemly, blue and gold-braided, the hat also cleansed and stiff and upstanding. He admired it from the pillows and sat erect to drink coffee and eat miraculous brioches—miraculous in war-time—while the pretty face watched him and the pretty hands displayed unnecessarily the beauties of his uniform and tall boots with their fasteners—'le zip.'

'And the big bedroom will be ready by noon. Madame comes at noon?'

'Yes,' he told her, 'my wife will be here by noon.'

At eleven he himself was again at St. Lazaire, the train he found late, but at last it was signalled. And to herald its coming the sun came as well, a saffron flow over the pale Paris roofs, he hung by the barrier till he caught sight of Ester, and then waved to her, she saw him and waved back. And then she was through the barrier and coming to him, she was in civilians, the fur of her coat-collar cradled her face, the painted lips and the gay grey eyes.

'Hello, been waiting me long?'

'I've waited you years.'

She laughed and flung her arms round his neck and kissed him, and he kissed her in return. They held each other and kissed, and pushed each other away and laughed, "and I think we hoped we would shock the onlookers." But they did no such thing. An entraining squad had seen them, they cheered, they laughed, and a woman near at hand dabbed at her eyes and looked at them kindly. Paris liked them, thought them seemly and proper to kiss and to love, the young *sous-officier* and the girl so chic, his wife it might be, better his mistress. So he explained to Ester when they ceased from kissing, and she raised mocking brows in reply.

''N' I'm neither.'

'I'll remedy that before another morning.'

She laughed and took his arm, still gay and herself. 'Will you? 'N' where are we to lunch?'

He'd arranged for that—out on the Boul' Mich' itself, no quiet place, one gay-crammed with soldiers on leave and the women they had with them. Gershom saw an

Australian he knew and waved to him, the Australian waved back, too drunk by good fortune to attempt to do more. And Ester sat down and took off her hat, her hair flowed free and was dark in the shadow, she buried her face in the flowers on the table, orchids that Gershom had ordered; and then leaned back and drooped her long lashes over her eyes.

'N' now keep it going. If the lunch is anything like the flowers——'

And it was, generous tipping in advance had made certain of that. It was served slowly, efficiently, they had even caviare, in those years an impossible luxury; the chicken was a dream, the coffee was excellent, that drink that no Frenchman can make. They went into the lounge for the coffee and liqueur, and Ester in a large chair curled herself up, and nodded to Gershom a mocking approval.

'Fine, Gerry. I'm too full of good things to think of any to say. But you're doing very well—for an amateur.'

'Amateur in what?'

'Seduction, of course.'

'Why presume my amateur status?'

'Intuition. Your eyes 'n' your hands. . . . 'N' what do we do after lunch?'

'We go to a matinée of——'

'Yes?'

'Brieux's *Damaged Goods*.'

She widened her eyes a little at that. 'Now, that's very good! Damned good, in fact. Perhaps not so amateurish after all, Gerry.'

'No,' he said. 'We've both had experience, haven't we?'

She blew smoke through her nostrils, lazily. 'The

virgin's confession is an overdone part. But I like your hair, Gerry, 'n' those cheek-bones of yours, they've a fascinating jut; 'n' that tunic of yours is fine on your shoulders, I remember you had a good chest——'

'So I remember about you,' he said. 'And your throat, it is still as long, and has still that dimple to the left. There was another dimple, on your right knee, I remember last time I saw you in shorts. And perhaps still others——'

They had lost something of their coolness, both of them, by then, they played the pose, an apertif, but their eyes were bright.

'Perhaps. . . . Isn't it time for that matinée?'

They laughed very much at Brieux, and so did the audience, all of it which was not French and affected, which was nearly the whole. After the second act the proceedings, as the journalists would have said, grew riotous, and ended with two Americans dancing upon the stage while their compatriots and a dozen Australians pelted them with indiscriminate litter, and yelled war-songs of doubtful authenticity and lugubrious pessimism. Something of the riot spread to even the staider sections of the audience at last, and when Ester and Gershom got out they were slightly less immaculate than when they got in, Ester pale with excitement and delight.

'That *was* good, Gerry, damn good! Did you see me hit the fat actor with that bunched-up programme—the one that was moaning over his ruined che-ild? . . . Quite as damnable in French as in English. 'N' now——'

'Now we'll have a drink. I'll try for a taxi.'

He found one, with some effort, and they drove to Montparnasse, Ester knew a place there and they sat and drank absinthe, he had never tasted the thin, vicious stuff

until then. Ester pushed back the straying tendrils of her hair and he stared at her ears, transparent and tinted, he had read the poets on women's ears, he remembered, poets wrote on those things in English in the days when they hardly dared write of women in possession of anatomy at all from the neck-bones down.

Ester picked up an Anatole France he had bought, and sniffed at it, he was out of date and of fashion, she said; and told him an absurd story that he had not known, of the doddering greybeard who tried to enlist as a poilu when the War broke out. They laughed very loudly over that, " the laughter of people who fling mud in the face of a god shown up for a crumbling image. Anatole France! And I thought of the pity and beauty in his pages, *Les Dieux ont Soif*, the shy dreamer Sylvestre Bonnard, the trumpeter of the *Angels' Revolt*. France a slimy, shivery patriot!"

'No worse than they are in America now. Oh Gerry, you should see them—'n' smell. All blah, blah, blah, boom, boom, boom. Every half-wit 'n' half-moron on top 'n' rampant, 'n' the people below like wasps round a honey-pot. Buzzing little brutes. . . . 'N' the honey's blood, 'n' they know it.'

'Let them. What's it to do with us?'

'Nothing at all. But it's interesting to see civilization cutting its throat like this. Remember long ago at Palenque, Gerry, those talks that father used to have with George and with Mellison? About the Old Empire of the Mayas, the lost civilization of the forests, how it rose 'n' climbed, then fell to bits in a night, no one knew why? But we can guess why—now. The same thing's happening all over the world—soon be like Copan and Quirigua, all of it. *Our* civilization's falling to bits.'

'Let it.'

'Yes, I know it's a joke. Only, sometimes it's as tragic as though it was my own arm rotting from the armpit. Men! Oh, the fools that they've been throughout their history!'

'Fools? They're merely beasts who are naturally beastly, tigers and apes.'

'But are they?' She leant forward. 'I think that's just a fool lie. We've been reared up on lies like that, you 'n' I. Darwin began it, Haeckel—all those folk with Man the raving primordial beast 'n' his slow climb up to—*this! This*, Gerry! No beast was ever so beastly. . . . 'N' I've always known it a lie. Men were decent, women decent, until civilization got them. Even now. . . . Even the worst you have met have had streaks of that primal decency left. Think—have they not?'

He stared at her, fuddled, and he thought. . . . And yes, maybe some of them had. Some? . . . Queerly, like light from a window tight-shuttered, there had fallen grace and good-fellowship now and again from even the lips of dead Sebright, from the actions of a multitude of those he had loathed. Queerly, as he thought of it now, he remembered the women he had had—how little of the vile in that girl in London, in that nurse. . . . What indeed if it was no more than a lie, belief in Man's innate foulness that modern science proclaimed?

He laughed.

'Rousseauism and a rotten romanticism. What else are men but beasts? All history, anthropology proves it.'

'Beasts, yes—but once kindly beasts. Remember the Golden Age of the poets? Supposing that wasn't a lie, but just the plain truth?'

'If it was true I wouldn't be sitting here half-drunk. I'd—I'd be telling the world! If it was true in the past, it could be true again. *If!*'

She had forgotten Montparnasse, War, her own weariness. 'But it's more than just "if"! Remember those researches of father's that proved civilization an accident, it rose of a sudden and spread over the world from the Nile 'n' it's cities? An accident that started the gods 'n' the kings, the wars 'n' the cruelties—well, *what before that?*'

'Rape, lawlessness, murder, the savage in his slime.'

'Just rot. Listen: there are other people than father, Englishmen like Elliot Smith 'n' like Perry, researching along the same line. 'N' they've gone even further. There are still primitives who survive, lost tribes here and there in the wastes of the earth—Eskimo, pygmies, little folk like that, like our own ancestors were once long ago. Without law—the better without it; decent and jolly, hunters and heroes, communistic 'n' godless 'n' kingless 'n' free. *'N' all men were once as they are—Man's a hero, not a beast by nature 'n' intention.* . . . Read up the explorers 'n' those Englishmen I've mentioned. Father's terribly excited about them. . . . Did you know he's gone back to Mexico, father?'

'No.'

''N' you don't much care? Well, he has 'n' he told me in his last letter he met with George Shaw, they fell in with each other, both with boats, out at Cozumel Island, he said. George said he hadn't heard from you for over a year, he was worried about you. . . . Not very decent not to write to him now 'n' then.'

'I've stopped being decent. Decent? What the hell do you know about it, what does any woman know about

it—War, the things we've seen and done and endured? Women—hell, I'd be ashamed to wear a woman's body! Women—they've been the curse in this civilization that's tumbling down now—and a damn good job that it's tumbling. Down in the pit and back to barbarism, the whip and the hoe and children for women—no Golden Age for them, let's hope. They've egged on men to half the bestialities ever committed—committed to aid their conceit that they've *given* their husbands, *given* their lovers, *given* their sons For the Country! God, can't you hear the brave-brave, mealy mouths that are moaning that at the moment—in France, in England, America? So brave—that they gave their men to be hung on the barb wire alive, with their guts out trailing in the mud—oh, brave!'

'All true, if muddled. You've had too much absinthe.'

'Drunk, eh? Why, I'm a Brave Man and my Brave Woman is about to go to bed with me. That's all.'

'Poor Gerry.'

"It struck me like a blow, that compassion in her eyes. I caught sight of my face then in a long mirror, saw myself unaccustomedly, flushed of face above the high-collared tunic, surely the face of some one who was other than I. And suddenly, staring at myself, I grew shadowed, face, shoulders grew black in a silhouette shadow. So, for a minute, I saw myself the Image—that Image inexplicable that haunted my life."

And then he was wiping his face and Ester on her feet.

'Quite a good band. Let's dance.'

When they left the place the rain had come on, a fine drizzle in the evening dullness. And it was then, as Gershom stood swaying uncertainly, and Ester April was buttoning the fur at her throat, that the maroons went. They sounded

quite close, a dreadful bellow as a sick calf bellows, and Ester caught Gershom's arm.

'That was an explosion next street. Look—I say !—the airplane with crosses on its wings ! '

He said 'Air-raid,' thickly, and they blundered back into the restaurant entrance. But already it was crowded and a seething jam. He caught Ester's hand, she held firm, and they ran. Two Frenchmen were running in front, the hooters still screamed. They came to an abutment of wall, scrambled round, and found themselves in a struggling crowd. They jostled and called. Suddenly it was quite dark and Ester's hand wrenched from his——

Suddenly the air about Gershom expanded, it was visible, and frothed and flamed. He fell and was picked up and fell again and ran. The street seemed to cave in, he saw a house topple above him, it paused till he passed, almost he laughed, then he heard it crumble. In the dark he blundered into another man running, they struggled with each other, above them the sky broke flaming again ; and he saw a doorway. There was a crowd in there, he added himself to it, stood panting.

Under his arm the Anatole France was still clasped, but something else was missing, he wiped sweat and dust from his face, and was dazed. And then he remembered. Ester.

§ 12

Declaves, the captain, decent, he'd been almost human. . . . and now you saw his face, bending over him with the sergeant who'd summoned you. A bullet had driven through his nose, his face was splayed out like a pool of black mud with a stone dropped in it, but he still was alive

in spite of that wild flutter of eyes that reminded you of the fluttering wings of a strangled chicken. Gershom knelt beside him.

'Mon capitaine.'

He mouthed and spoke, blood came welling from his face, he whispered '. . . sous-officier. This is a bad ending to our debates, not? And I shall not know for certain of your Golden Age after all—Sous-officier!'

'Mon capitaine——'

The little sergeant pulled at Gershom's sleeve. 'He is dead, that one.' He was bearded, round-shouldered, the sergeant. 'There is a nest of them on that ridge—the captain looked out from the passe and—pif!'

It was close on the hour of stand-to, on the verge of the coming of the morning, and one Brandenburger, keener than his fellows, keen yet in the hours of aching retreat, had sighted the white of Declaves' face while the dark had barely lifted. Now, with more caution peering himself from the trench, Gershom levered himself up on an impromptu foothold and saw the space between him and the German sandbags littered with rubbish, like hell's back-door, no wire, French or German, no time for that now. But the enemy position was better than the Legion's, occupying the old Brandenburg trench. Here the dug-outs now faced the wrong way, and unnecessary casualties numerous in consequence. November and retreat——

Gershom bowed his head, he was only in time, it rang on his helmet, the force of it flung him back into the trench, the little sergeant swore and caught him as he fell.

'Hit?'

'No. Near enough, though. Find Lieutenant Morceau and call the stand-to.'

The little sergeant shrugged. ' The lieutenant is drunk—or was so half an hour ago. He had brandy sent up last night.'

' Well. Call stand-to without him. There may be counter-attack this morning, misty enough for it here.'

But no counter-attack came while they stood and waited, instead the morning cleared with great swiftness and was very still but for the raving of a Lewis gun down to the south, and then a series of legato wumpfs ! that told there were still minnenwerfers in the enemy's hands. In the stand-easy Gershom went down to the dug-out he had shared with Morceau and Declaves for the past three nights. Morceau was drunk but asleep, a single candle guttering in the bottle on the table. Gershom found his cigarettes and went up from the dug-out. The little sergeant, the senior, came and saluted.

' I will relieve you, sous-officier, for your coffee.'

' Thanks, I can have it here.'

So he did, the morning still quiet. A flying scud of clouds went over the sun and passed. The poilus squatted round their fires and made coffee, eating the stale ration bread and staring, sullen and bearded, at the ground at their feet. Their equipment and leather and rifles were grimy, they did not bother with these things and the insanities of bright polishing as—Gershom remembered it, far back, when he was young !—he had been forced to do with the English in the long ago. . . . A batman, a young soldier, brought him a second cup, and he took it from the boy and saw his slim shoulders. Ester had had shoulders like that.

Ester.

He had spent three days searching in Paris for her ;

and perhaps she had spent them in searching for him. She was not among the killed, he'd made sure of that; but her leave was unauthorized, and he didn't dare tackle the American Red Cross. She hadn't known the hotel where he'd booked their room, he hadn't known where she was likely to go. And at the end of his three days' leave he'd left Paris, and found himself transferred to the front line at last, and waited for a letter to come from Ester April; and none came. Retreat came instead, the spring horrors of those months, retreat and retreat; slow advance. And Ester and her memory had ebbed from his mind, something that was past, something that was finished. But she'd given him more than perhaps she'd ever know, something that yet he would test to the hilt if this War ever ended and he should escape.

"I remember that I sat and thought long of that, my coffee grown cold. Men lived by Faith, my father had proclaimed, my father and his crazy Tower and belief. And I, hating the belief and the Tower, all it stood for, yet knew his kinship to myself at last. Jezreel I was as well as Gershom. . . . Far more than ever I was Shaw!"

And he goes on to tell how in those wild months, chance-born from a casual debate in a café, there had returned to him his old eager questionings—and more. Sanity, and something that was near to Faith. Fantastic is the reading of how, up and down the squalid roads of the spring-time retreat, in this and that dug-out and hut and sodden shelter, he immersed himself long stretches in the books he had sent for, books and journals filled with the writings of Perry, of Jackson, of Elliot Smith, this new school of students and historians who proclaimed that men were once sane, once kin and uncruel—who proclaimed these things and

backed them with proofs in battalions, proclaimed them, seeming unaware they proclaimed the greatest tidings to Mankind since the Buddha in Benares !

Man—once he was so. *He might be yet again !* And Gershom's hate for his fellow-men had withered and shrivelled while hate raged about him in the clamour of the guns. All children bedevilled—his father, himself, Sebright, Mellison, the brute farmers who tortured the negress that night—Images of darkness whom Nature had planned for Images of light, uninate their cruelty were the Cause removed.

Civilization—that was War, Religion and Kings, Classes and Envies. None of them necessary, none of them inevitable, cancers on Mankind infecting him from the sprouting spores of an accident not more than six thousand years old !

And somehow, were that cancer to be cured ?—Somehow, another Road followed through the wastes to another Lorillard. . . .

He awoke with someone shaking at his shoulder. The little senior sergeant was gesticulating, weeping. Some one else laughing on a high, cracked note. Not the sound of a gun.

The little sergeant thrust on him a paper from the signallers' booth.

' Armistice signed at eleven o'clock. Await orders. Vive la victoire ! Vive la France ! '

SECTION THE EIGHTH

§ 1

HE had not seen June come in England for so long that he might not remember the last time. He leant from the carriage window like a tourist to stare at the wonder of Kent in its apple-blossom, white orchards littered as with fleecy clouds and a trailing of clouds in the sky. And in green and cobalt marched the woods, unending, on either horizon, gulls came wheeling against the sky the last few minutes, they were nearing the sea.

And at last there was Chatham, hill-guarded, gleaming, the train wound downwards and wheeled and the harbour was in sight, choked with its shipping and its smudges of smoke. Far out lay an anchored flotilla of stark, bright shapes, so many in number that the further off were blended and lost in the bright June haze.

He asked a man who sat opposite what the ships were.

'Eh? Them? Destroyers.'

'But——'

'Eh?'

'Oh, nothing. Many thanks.'

Destroyers. And they were signing the peace-terms now in Versailles. . . .

He took his bag and went out through the station, and got to the entrance and stood there undecided. Then a cabman had his hand on the bag.

'Where to, sir?'

'I don't know. Oh, drive to the "Marine"—if there's still a "Marine"?'

'God, yes. Been away a long time?'

'Ten years.'

'Oh. Over there, eh, sir?'

'Over there.'

'Same here. And blimey, for all you get when you come back, I sometimes wish that I'd stayed. No offence, sir.'

'None taken. But you're better in the sun than under the dirt—over there, now, aren't you?'

'And my blasted wife nagging every night like a blasted cat on a blasted ash-can? And the kids squealing and the prices going up and the wages coming down? Sun? To hell with the sun! . . . And now I suppose you'll want to get out?'

'At the "Marine," yes.'

So he drove to the "Marine," a new twist to his thoughts, and hired a room there, and came down to lunch. There were early strawberries on the menu, and he ordered fish and those strawberries, and he drank a Burgundy, and tried to read the flare of headlines in a news-sheet. But presently he tired of that, he tired very readily of everything these days, and just sat and looked out from the window on the froth and flow of pedestrians and traffic in the hot, old streets, out to where the destroyers still squatted in the sea, their sharp snouts bared in the sun.

He fell asleep then and slept till a waiter came wakening him; and went up to his room and continued the sleep there, taking off his clothes and getting in the bed, not waking till late in the evening. Waking, he did not remember for a moment the place he was in, and then did so, slowly, staring at the room and his clothes draped over a chair—the civilian suit he had purchased in London. Full memory came back as he stared at these things. Back. He was back from it all. . . .

He got up and dressed and went down and out into the

streets, and turned and climbed through the evening throngs, so changed and different from his last time in Chatham they might have been throngs from another millennium. Never before had the changes so impinged on his imagination, or were ever again so to do. Short skirts and reliant looks had displaced the draggle and giggle of the women of old, men had found shoulders, some even chests, it was like looking on a community surviving from a biting winter after the drowse and the smell and the ebb of a flea-bitten autumn.

But *had* they survived ? *Was* the winter past ?

So he came at last, after ten years' absence, to Magpie Hill Road, and stood confused and could not remember the house number. But after a little, number or no number, he knew the house and stared at the door and saw a thing depending from the letter-slit, a string, a white string with a spooling of red through the texture, he stood staring and staring at that. It was the string he himself had fixed there ten years before !

But an old woman whom he did not know came to the door when he knocked. For a moment he wondered if he'd made a mistake, her rheumy eyes and the tight-drawn hair above the still face had no clue at all to his memory of ' Ma.' And then he knew her, he held out his hand and he waited, and she peered at him, her hand on her stick.

' Now then, what is it, young man ? I've nothing to give you, you're the fourth ex-Serviceman come begging to-day. And I draws the line at the fourth.'

' I'm sorry to hear that, Ma. I wanted a cup of tea—with three lumps, though it *is* so bad for my juices. And those rock-cakes—do you still make rock-cakes like those ? '

' Gerry ! Oh, lorngoblimey, Gerry Jezreel ! '

They stopped from hugging each other at last, the wind blew-to the door behind him. In a kind of sick wonder he held that shrivelled and yet gnarled body in his arms. Jane Anderson—this the Jane Anderson he'd known!

'Come in and show yourself, Bill's in. Damn it, I'm crying.' She wiped her eyes with his handkerchief, helping herself to the thing as it jutted from his sleeve. She sniffed deeply, and then flung the door open. 'Bill! Here's a young chap to see you. Says he once knew you and you owe him money.'

And she chuckled deeply and stumped inside, into the parlour, and Gershom followed, and looked, and couldn't see anything a moment in that half-dark room. There was a smell of lavender, blindingly powerful in the seep of sun from a vase in the window. At the far end of the room he saw something stir, and went forward, and looked.

And it was Bill Anderson.

He was seated in some kind of basket bathchair, and as he raised his head it reminded Gershom of a Mexican lizard, that slow raising up of the hairless head, it was hairless as a Mexican dog, and shrivelled and red—the red of one scalded intolerably, with no inch-space spared, his eyes were hidden back of blue spectacles, you could guess they were lashless and horrible, those eyes. But his voice sounded almost as ever, he was turning and peering.

'Ay then, who'll it be? Some young chap, you said?'

''Course he's young—*and* impatient about that money, like. Here you are!'

Gershom went forward and reached out and lifted Bill Anderson's right hand. The scalded face moved upwards in that lizard-like glance, the hand was horny as a lizard's

foot. And then the hand tightened, he said, very slowly, ' Ay, but who is't ? '

' It's I—Gerry—Bill.'

' Gerry ? Oh, ay. Gerry ? And who's he ? '

Gershom heard something like a sniffle behind him.

' Who's he ? Well, lorngoblimey, I'm danged ! That I am. . . . Damned I'd be too, if I'd been born a bit later. Don't half swear, real and good, the girls nowadays, and I'll say it *must* be a real relief.' This aside to Gershom. Then : ' It's Gerry Jezreel, Bill, don't you mind him now ? Oh Lord, them Scotchies are all danged slow ! '

' Gerry Jezreel ? Oh, ay. But he was killed, you ken, I didn't like to tell you he was killed. He was killed when the *Osprey* went down and the boilers burst up. I tried to get at the bit lad but he hadn't a dog's chance down there. Ay, I tried, tried as though our own Will he'd been——'

' Lorngoblimey, you ain't half a heathen ! Here's Gerry, and you won't believe that it's him. He got clear away from the *Osprey*—didn't you ? '

' Right clear,' said Gershom, hardly understanding at all ; and thought quickly. ' Jumped and I swam. Picked up by a Danish boat and interned. And I've just got back.'

' Well, well, man, that's fine, that's fine. Make some tea, Jane lass, and we'll all hear the story o't. . . . Ay, Gerry, it's fine to see you, lad, and to ken that you're well.'

' Give him a chance, then, dad. He's all asweat with trains and with muck. Here, come and give your hands a wipe in the kitchen first. All right, dad, he'll be through with you less'n a minute.'

Gershom touched her arm when they'd come in the

kitchen. His hands were clean enough. She turned her rheumy face, a finger at her lips.

'I'll have to tell you—quick. Dad was in the *Osprey* when it was mine-sweeping. Boilers burst up and Will was there. Will never seen again. But *he* doesn't know. He went kind of crack. Always swore it was you that was killed, thinks Will's still alive and out on a voyage——'

And suddenly her face crinkled up, she wept dreadful, slow tears, facing him, he took her in his arms again and patted her shoulder and sought her his handkerchief. And then in a moment she had pulled herself away from him.

'Lorngoblimey, I'm as bad! It's all over now and I'm glad you're back safe, Gerry boy. Go into him and play up about the *Osprey*, do; I'll bring in the tea in a minute. Only don't give away all the real news till I come. He's crackers only on the *Osprey* and Will.'

So Gershom went through to the parlour again, and the lizard-like head rose up at the sound of his coming.

'That you, Gerry lad? Well, well, shut the door. You mustn't come home and sit down in a draught! . . . Draw up your chair nearby.'

'We've had worse than draughts, you and I, Bill. Cold enough out in Denmark there since the *Osprey* sank——'

His hand came wavering out and found Gershom's. His voice was a whisper. 'You're a fine lad. Aye was. And you played up fine. Gerry, I ken fine that Will was drowned in the *Osprey*, I aye kenned it, but I've made out that I didn't, so's Ma would think me half-daft and keep her mind off it. She fair worshipped Will. . . . And it's worked, as I kenned that it would.'

'Then you know?'

'Aye, I've kenned all along. But this was the play that

I played for her, and it's worked fine. I kenned if I didn't pretend, there would be no pretending with her.' For a moment the spectacled, ruined face sank in his hands.

'Mind Will?—how bonny he was, his black hair, and young and fine. Oh, laddie——'

He raised his head again after a minute. 'She mustn't see me at that. Tell me where you've been yourself then, Gerry. Quick, before she comes and you've to spout off the Danish stite and the *Osprey* business for me.'

So Gershom told him till he heard the shuffling outside, and went and pulled open the door, and helped Ma in with her laden tray.

'Here you are, if you'd ever tea like this among your Danes, you didn't do bad for a prisoner in war. And how's your uncle, Mr. George? . . . Lorngoblimey, sit down and be quiet. I can still give a man his tea without help.'

'She's aye got an awful gab, Gerry lad. Well, well, and how is your uncle, then?'

'He died six months ago in Mexico.'

'Poor chap.'

'God be here! Well, well, it wasn't in the War?'

'Oh no. Fever at some ruins. I only heard of it a month ago when—when I came to London from Denmark.'

He wondered if ever two people had tried to live a stranger lie than these two. And the weariness at the back of his mind stirred to wonder while he drank Ma's tea of such excellent brew and listened to her volley of questions.

'And what are you doing now, then, Gerry? Coming back to Chatham? You can easily have the spare room till Will comes home.'

'I'm leaving Southampton to-morrow. George Shaw left me all that he had—not much, but it included half

shares in a farm out in Minnesota—that's in the U.S., you know. I'm going out to try my hand on a farm.'

They talked of that for a while, till Gershom saw Bill nodding in his chair, Jane saw him also, she said nothing till the nodding turned to a drowse.

'Help me wheel him through, will you, Gerry? He sleeps in that chair in the kitchen—the back lowers down and the foot comes up, fair a treat the contraption, ain't it? Good as a circus, I say. And he makes a fine clown. . . . Gently, and I'll hold the door open.'

He wheeled the chair through, the window was opposite, that window through which he'd so often climbed in after a midnight adventure in the streets of Gillingham. Then he stood back and watched Jane, quick enough and able in spite of her rheumatism; and presently Bill was asleep, a lizard-man with a face that you knew you would meet with in your own sleep that night. . . . Jane whispered to Gershom.

'Come back to the parlour. Let's hear all you've done and how you won the War.'

Children were playing outside as they talked, whooping down the steep inclines of Magpie Hill Road where once Gershom had visioned the rhinoceros astray in the jungles of antique time. And Jane sat and told him, when he'd finished with *his* telling, of that sinking of the *Osprey* and how they'd brought Bill into Chatham Hospital, him and his obsession he started to mumble the first time she sat by his bed.

'Funny that that came on him, wasn't it? And that Will should be in his ship, almost the same job they were on, and Will stood a better chance than his father did. I looked out one of the other men who was there, he told me he saw Will right at the last, there was a fire broke out,

and Will was back of it and he waved his hand to that chap and cried something about his father, his face was all lighted in the flame, the chap said, and he couldn't hear, but something about Bill. And then the decks went up, they just blew them all up, and that was the end of the *Osprey*, and here was Bill, skinned and screaming, they'd to keep pouring oil upon him, months they did that, till that queer skin came. Him, Gerry, that's been mine, that's lain in my bed and fathered John and Will, and more'n them if the chance had been that way—and I—I was nearly sick every time that I looked at him, weeks after he came home. Still am when I touch him—sick !—I could sometimes scream. Him that's mine. . . . Funny that folk are.'

She stooped with groaning body to poke even the smoulder of the coals, and straightened with a flush in her face. And suddenly the humour and calmness dropped from her. ' And they didn't ought allow things like that, wars and killings like that, did they, Gerry ? Will—what harm had he ever done anyone ? Or Bill—Bill that would give away his own shirt to a beggar at the door—tormented and screaming, boiled and broken till his own wife feels sick to look at him. They didn't ought——'

§ 2

They didn't ought. No one had meant it, they said, no one planned or foreseen the butcherings and torturings of all the simple folk like these. No one : and over in France even now they were planning and plotting, in a blaze of uniforms, glory, and diplomacy, War and War again, that murder again might be done——

" I remember that I walked and walked up through the

Gillingham evening, for a time in a blind anger and fury, pitiful, helpless, remembering Jane and that whisper of hers. No one had meant it—the agony and travail through six long millennia, or that culminating horror of those last four years. No one had meant it, it was merely we were beasts trapped and lost, prisoned in state and religion and patriotism, the kindly human beast a tormented brute, a brute diseased, with a cancerous brain and the slime of six thousand years a dripping mask on his face. Unmeant, unplanned—and it still went on——'

He found himself at the head of the long hill then, it was quiet there in the evening light, a sailor went past him, whistling, two girls, they left a trail of cheap scent and a memory of long, slim legs, and they looked at him from kind and impertinent eyes, one laughed a little, he came out of his thoughts and looked over his shoulder and smiled in reply. And then he walked on, he took a little side street and went right, and then left, not raising his eyes from the level of the house-fronts. But at last he was come in a narrow lane, and looked up, and in front, upthrust of a sudden against the lowe of the evening, the quietude of the sky, was Jezreel's Tower.

Unchanged, immense and useless, it rose black against the waning light and the quietness of the evening. He could see on its façade, up there to the right, the carved scroll with the Flying Roll upon it, the centre-piece with the feathers, and the crumbled *Ich Dien*, even he could see the foundation-stone laid on behalf of that hundred and forty-four thousand of Revelation who were to survive the coming of the Christ. Unchanged and grim still, it stood builded with the blood and sweat of the man whom he had called father, with the hopes and the blind beliefs of all

those peasants and workers who given it their last shillings, who'd forgone their lives, loves, and delight in the sun that this Thing might be built. Useless and hideous, blotting out the wonder of the sky to this day. . . .

And suddenly he saw it not only Jezreel's Tower, it was Civilization and its superstitions, its blind follies itself, a dream dreamt by a beast captured and tormented in a by-pass of Space and Time.

A little wind came wandering up the hill as he stood, the trees about him quivered and rustled, a dog, a terrier, came sniffing up to him, and cocked bright ears, and received his pat, and whipped about and shot off on some errand of its own. He looked up again at the mass of the Tower, it had grown sharper and blacker against the deepening azure and the oriflamme splendour of the sun's still setting. . . . This Thing—and how might he help its overthrow?

He was going out to Geijerstam's farm in Minnesota to think over that. Somehow he would help; there was nothing else left that he wanted to do. In one way at least those Four Years were no waste; they had taught him what in other times he might not have known in forty. Lust of women—weariness and boredom, satiety; love of power, achievement, pride in himself—he'd left them with the rat-gnawed cadavers back in Le Fére. *How shall it profit a man though he gain his own soul and lose the whole world?*

He smiled at that heretical text and its truth, and looked up again at Jezreel's Tower. And then he noticed, he took other pictures from the memory of his childhood and compared them, that he had imagined wrongly. For changed it was. The upper stories had began to crumble,

he saw the ledges lower than once they had been, the whole thing older, the bondings deep-weathered, and there to the right a slow subsidence. Jezreel's Tower that was to outlast the Flood: the first wave of the Flood had come and passed and already it was shaken!

§ 3

Great Dipper lies some seventy miles or so north-west of Minneapolis, it lies where the geologic strata falter a moment and are uncertain in all that rolling immensity of plain, and there the land curves in a shallow cup, curves momentarily and then swoops to the level again. It is as though a great fire-column had once hung there, and flickered and moved and mown at the earth in the days when the great plains were making, in days when the Titans were still at experiment. So the early folk who drove their wagons that way, and fought the Crows, dispossessing those children of the earth and the crude agricultural method that had come from the Maya Empire long years before—perhaps those first pioneers had a poet with them, and he saw the Great Dip and called the halting-place Great Dipper, and linked it so with the stars.

But Gershom never could find the exact spot where that poet must have halted his horse or his wagon, and seen the wide, shallow depression, and said in his mind 'Great Dipper.' Certainly by no point on the present railroad did that halting happen, Gershom had watched all that afternoon as they neared, and no great dip had dipped as it should. When the train came clanging to a halt at Great Dipper, he saw about him merely the corrugated roofing and the weathered wood of the usual straggle of plains

frame houses. Then the coloured hierarch of the baggage-wagon was smiling on him, richly.

'Great Dipper, boss. Here you are.' And smiled with a richer appreciation. 'Thank *you*, sir.'

His bags in the dust, a bale of goods lowered down beside him, the train gone on, he looked round about and found himself the cynosure of two pairs of eyes, regardant below two hats that seemed couchant in exactly the same angle, exactly the same shape. He went towards the hats and the eyes, and the owners of the twin pairs nodded to each other. One of them came dawdling forward.

'You for Geijerstam's ?—Shaw's the name, ain't it ? '

'Yes. Is it far from here ? '

He was a tall, lank man. He might have come out of a film of the hayseed comedy variety, but he bore a dis-coloured badge on his shirt, which hinted he was either the local sheriff, or possibly a railroad official, or perhaps the organizer of the local Elks. Gershom felt sure that the man was an Elk ; sheer waste if he wasn't, with a face like one. . . . He pushed his hat back, scratched carefully on a spot so left exposed, dismissed the irritant, and ruminated with caution.

'Guess five-six miles. Yes, quite a way. Britisher, ain't you ? '

'More or less. Any place where I can hire a car ? '

'Car ? ' He was lost in survey of Gershom's feet ; and Gershom recollected that they possibly owned different vocabularies.

'Auto, I mean.'

'Well, maybe. But what d'you want an auto for ? Old Geijerstam's here with his buggy.'

'Is that Mr. Geijerstam ? '

'Sure is. Sprechen the Deutsch some?'

'Eh? . . . A bit.'

'Then you're all set up. He's still a bit weak on American. Boy was better, but he never came back. Well, say: Mr. Geijerstam, here's Mr. Shaw.'

They shook hands. Gershom said 'How are you?'

'Nicht sehr gut.' He was bearded and dirty. He might have been fifty or perhaps sixty years old, he regarded Gershom with a cold, grey eye, he had large grey eyes and a heavy face, with a nose that curved like the beak of a hawk. He might have been six feet in height. And his eyes were steady enough in spite of his mumble 'das Bergnugen sie zu sehen. When you come nach Hause—now?'

'Yes, nothing to keep me in Great Dipper, Mr. Geijerstam. I can see it later.'

'Mir ist Alles einerlei. Borckman: I will the cases now take.'

'Okay, Geige.'

They proceeded to load themselves with the baggage, Gershom did the same. They watched him expressionlessly, Geijerstam indeed with a hint of impatience, and then bore the bags through the railroad shed to the dust and the sun beyond. There a fat horse, well-groomed, was hitched to a staple, the buggy behind it already bristling with rough parcels. To these Gershom added his bags, then himself, the farmer climbed up, the horse shook its head. The phlegmatic Borckman stood watching, chewing.

''Dersehen.'

''Dersehen, Geige. See you again, Mr. Shaw.'

'Oh yes.'

'Oh yes.'

He was in America at last, he realized with a grin. He

had never been in America before, spite his years in Mex' and that trip through New York in the late months of 'fourteen. *This* was America, astounding and foreign, and only to be learnt slowly and with care. But he meant to learn it.

And, sitting beside the bearded German, he reflected how much easier was the process now than ever it would have been before. For he'd found a touchstone of reality he believed could apply to every living human being he might meet. So the brusque unwelcome of Great Dipper left him neither sulking nor resentful. He'd find out that reason, a reason there was, and deal with it, plain enough what to do. He'd come here to live, not to feud like a freak. And—this was his country.

It was alive and awave with its harvest. They drove slow down a long, wide stretch of road, and presently turned and were climbing the shoulder of the Dip to a spot where a signpost reared up, unpainted. One wing said 'Geijerstam's,' the other 'Rainier.' They took the track with the Geijerstam pointer, the farmer stroked his whip over the mare's plump haunches, and the mare paid him no heed at all, plodding steadily till they were on the level again. Then she broke into a clumping trot.

Acre on acre of yellow, green-shot, lay around the track, bright lucent the stalks, an enheartening jungle. Here and there long patches had drooped in the rain, Gershom thought that these patches would make hard harvesting. He voiced that opinion to the bearded Adolf.

He said 'Ja' in reply, he could scarce have said less.

'You've been long in America, Mr. Geijerstam?'

'Seventeen year.'

He turned away his face, yet not so quickly but that

Gershom, looking, saw a thing unexpected, tears were trickling down the coarse, bearded cheeks. For a moment the newcomer sat in that shocked silence with which men greet the tears of other men ; then curiously, in his fashion, debated the matter for and against a voiced comment. Then he looked away swiftly, shifting in his seat and reaching out a sly hand to topple from their piling the erection of parcels behind them. With an immense clatter that erection fell off the wagon, Geijerstam swore barbarously and halted the mare, he and Gershom climbed off to re-right the damage. . . . A counter-irritant effective enough.

The corn round about them seemed thick enough to Gershom to have moved even Ruth to unalien gladness. It was very still there, in the wave of the corn. And then once again a curious thing happened, they were swinging the last fallen package aboard, they slung the thing up on the footboard between them, Geijerstam's eyes came suddenly to Gershom's, he stood still, the big German, staring at the newcomer, staring in his face, in his eyes, at his hair. Then he muttered ' Sehr verbünden,' and climbed back aboard the buggy.

' Either,' Gershom thought as he too climbed up, ' he hates me like hell over some matter or another ; or he's drunk ; or——'

There seemed indeed to be a second ' or '—the truth—but it was outside immediate comprehension. Nor was Gershom greatly worried by that puzzle, he rode curiously light-hearted as the afternoon waned. The mare plodded on through the harvest-waiting wheat and presently Great Dipper vanished in its dip, the sun they faced into had the look and appearance of the mouth of a cave through which the light streamed, they trotted forward untiring into that

stream, Geijerstam with his hat pulled down on his eyes, there emanated from him the strangest of smells—a smell as of cattle and of the earth commingled. In an hour's driving he pointed with his whip across a stray straggle of junipers.

'That is sie Hause.'

It looked to Gershom like many another he had seen along the railroad track since they left Minneapolis—a straying of sheds and of corrugated roofs, with crazy lines of fencing and dyking commencing as definite thoughts once in their builder's mind, and then straggling to vagueness and indistinct purpose as though the thought had wearied and retired with a yawn. Smoke rose in the air in a still, straight line, a pencilling blue against the sun's setting, corn-crakes sounded in a dip, water gleamed. As the mare trudged up to the buildings the figure of a man, brown-haired, with a meditative straw in his mouth, unlimbered from a fence and stood waiting their coming. Geijerstam grunted.

'It is Betz, the hired man.'

'Have you only one?'

'I have the other dismissed.'

Gershom nodded: at a thought grinned down at his hands. Was he to take the dismissed one's place?

'Hello, folks. Pleased to meet you, Mr. Shaw.'

'Same here, Mr. Betz.'

'Take round the wagon, Pa?'

'Ja. Mister Shaw, you with me come.'

'Right.'

Geijerstam lowered himself from the wagon, went round to the rear, loaded in a single twist on his shoulder the trunk that George Shaw had bought Gershom in Mexico,

and went trudging away through the dust and litter. Gershom took up the two remaining bags and turned, Betz' eye was upon him, speculative, bright. The hired man nodded.

'See you later.'

'Fine.'

Gershom followed through a courtyard, a chirawk of chickens, and a multitudinous grouping of mud-begrimed implements. Then a door of the house opened and Anna Geijerstam stood looking at them.

A queer compassion, a queer pity came on him, he could hardly say why. . . . Only the usual farm-woman, grey, faded and stoutened as farm-women were, she had hair drawn back from a heavy peasant face, a wide mouth, indeterminate eyes. She stood awkwardly, still, and looked at them as they came, looking over past Geijerstam at Gershom as he came, hardly moving aside to let the farmer pass. Geijerstam muttered inaudibly, a gabble that Gershom took for introduction. He halted with the sun in his eyes, scowling gently on that still, unfriendly, frightened face.

'How are you, Mrs. Geijerstam?'

'You are tired with the journeying?'

'Oh no, and I like your country here.'

'It is good. I——' she stood still. Suddenly she faltered. Then, 'There is your room.'

She stood aside to let him pass by, but Gershom stood waiting for her to move. So she realized in a little, with a slow flush across her dull face, and went in in front of him up the bare stairs to a room where Geijerstam already had halted, lowering the trunk to the floor. He turned about, the farmer, having finished with that, and Gershom,

putting down the bags he had brought, glanced from one to the other, husband and wife.

They seemed to be waiting. Waiting for what ?

' This looks fine,' said Gershom, and chose his words carefully. ' I hope I'm not putting anyone out of a room ? '

' Nein. It was Helmut's.'

' Helmut ? '

Anna Geijerstam nodded, still with that stare. ' He our son was. The English him murdered.'

So that was that. A son killed in the War—but how killed by the English if his father and mother had been seventeen years in America ? Gershom scowled at them his questioning scowl.

' He was a soldier in the American army, your son ? '

The woman gave a choking sound, turned away, the farmer's red face flushed redder still. He also turned and went. They closed the door behind them and left Gershom staring. Then he shrugged aside the matter, looked out of the window and pulled aside the curtains of shabby cretonne, and surveyed the sweep of the Geijerstam land.

It lay listening below him in its peace and immensity. He grew at peace with himself as he looked, his first long look on corn at evening as it cloaked the pastures of the Middle West. It was as if you had lived your life in a cell, and were suddenly told a great room, cathedral-like, was your room and habitation in the times now come, you stood like a man at the edge of Space. Gershom was afterwards to remember how that evening he shot a glance upwards to make certain that still the sky was as before, not lifted and levanted to impossible heights !

But the rim of the great bow stretched unbroken, unaltered, in his arc of vision. Then he lowered his eyes at

a sound below. The exiguous Betz was riding out the mare to its pastures beyond the straggle of the fence, he was swinging lop-sided on the mare's broad haunch, hat still at a tilt on his eyes, the straw in his mouth. Cattle were lowing somewhere beyond though Geijerstam had only the rudiments of milch stock, Gershom was to find.

And then he felt hungry and peered down undecidedly, and decided against immediate descent of his body in the wake of his eyes. First unpacking to be done.

He turned about from the window and surveyed the room.

It ran lengthwise the house, twelve feet by eight, the narrow bed that had no doubt been Helmut's was against the far wall, away from the window, itself fast jammed. In one corner was a chest of red-painted deal, topped by a garish mirror much decorated with floral sprays and fading pictures of unlikely children engaged in the herding of improbable flocks in the lee of impossible mountains. A table, round and claw-legged, a good table of another culture, carted and dragged across the great spaces when the pioneers came, it might be, choked up the room's centre. There were two chairs as well, neither seemed apt to cry the busy to a slothful ease ; and that was the room's contents but for Gershom himself and the trunks and the bags that Geijerstam had brought in his buggy from the Great Dipper depot.

' We'll first proceed to make it half-livable.'

But he paused and stood looking at the room's only picture, he'd not seen it till then, it hung opposite his eyes, on the opposite wall, his shadow was upon it from the window.

' That was Helmut.'

He went over the floor and looked up at the photograph.

The young German gazed back his undying gaze. Gershom shook his head.

'Not my doing, and you know it. But they don't—down there. And why did they leave you up here, I wonder?' He listened. 'But I don't think they've left you for long.'

The toiling steps halted on the landing outside, the knock that followed was commingled of timidity and purpose, Gershom called out 'Come in.'

It was, as he'd known it was, the farmer's wife. She looked away from him swiftly, at the window, not at that which she'd come for; and after a second, still scowling abstractedly, he took down the photograph and held it out to her. For her part she saw perhaps merely his brownness and slimness, his sad Englander foreignness, that frown and quiet eyes, not the friendliness he felt. Her hands shook as they took the photograph from him.

'Ich danke Ihnen.'

The door closed behind her.

He set to work re-arranging the room. First he dragged the bed over so that it's place was directly under the new-opened window. It jammed and jarred and went out with a creak, and showered him with dust in its opening, that window, and he smiled at it thinking of those slow, dour Bavarians who had brought from their uplands far across the great plains their dread of the draughts and the colds of night. The claw-belegged table went into the second window-corner, the chest he dragged over against the far wall. So things were bettered. Then he set to unpacking.

He was half-way through that when they called him to supper, it was Geijerstam who called, in his English-German, and Gershom answered in his German-English. The kitchen was already dark as he came to it, Geijerstam

had his eyes and his hands in attention to the lighting of a small oil-lamp. The flame speared upwards and was crowned with a funnel, then the lamp hung up to a hook in the ceiling.

'You will here sit down, Mister Shaw.'

'I'm hungry. Supper smells good,' said Gershom. He discovered then the hired man, Betz, in a corner, regarding him over an over-chewed straw with a grin. Now, abandoning the grin, Betz also removed the straw from his mouth.

'Sure. Ain't a many in Great Dip can beat Ma Geijerstam as a cooker. Eh, Pa?'

The farmer made no answer, already seated at table. Gershom, at a gesture, had sat down opposite. Mrs. Geijerstam served them the food, stew with lentils, hot biscuits and butter, and excellent coffee. But first, the woman still standing, Geijerstam bowed down his head and broke into the drone of a long 'grace' in German. Gershom politely lowered his head with the others, and set to a cool dissection of the prayer, and after a moment found the clue.

The Geijerstams were Lutherans.

But, with the ending of the prayer, he had raised his eyes and met the gaze of the woman who stood so still. If the thing in her eyes were not hate, it was something worse. A curious, deep compassion came tugging at his heart. She was afraid—she was afraid of *him!*

§ 4

He went strolling by the edge of the picket-fence, coming off the bar where he'd sat to smoke; probably the fence

engirdled a corral—or were such impedimenta known only to the films and the Further West? In the sky was Jupiter, broad and embonpoint, a corpulent luminosity against the slim sentinels of sidereal space. Far off the southern shield of the arc reddened in a flying train of sparks.

The railroad.

Abruptly he became aware of companionship—companionship announced by a cigarette-glow. It was the hired man, Betz, still in his hat and possibly in his straw. Possibly he went to bed in both. . . . He also was seated on the fence.

'Well, been admiring your farm, Mr. Shaw——?'

'*My* farm?'

The cigarette returned to the silhouette's head, darkened its glow, and brightened again. 'Guess so.'

''Tisn't mine. I've half-shares in it, that's all.'

'Say, that'll relieve Pa Geijerstam a lot.'

'Why should it?'

'Oh, nothing to do with me. Ain't my look-see, now, is it?'

'No, I don't suppose that it is.'

'No.'

There was an unambitious silence on the part of Betz. Gershom scowled at him thoughtfully.

'Look here, you were going to tell me something—something I've not heard about the farm. I put you off. Well, I'm sorry.'

''S all right. Only the farm half-share don't belong to the Geijerstam herr any longer. He borrowed from your profits three times last year, the banker in at Great Dipper told me. When it comes to the clear up next week you'll find he's so much in your debt that

Geijerstam's'll belong to you, entire. . . . Going to keep me on ? '

' He borrowed off my profits ? '

Betz explained, languidly, between smoke-puffs. The half-shares business had worked in the compass of such complicated code as was beyond the understanding of Gershom. But questioning, he gradually excavated the fact that yearly, since George Shaw had taken over the share, the nett profits were banked, Shaw's share in a separate account. Adolf Geijerstam had the option to borrow from this account—to borrow up to twenty-five per cent of the total, for farm emergencies. And Geijerstam had borrowed, had borrowed three times, unwisely, and in the last year made no profits at all, was now so heavily in debt that Gershom could foreclose when he liked and take over the farm. Every soul in Great Dipper now knew about that ; and all imagined that the reason which had brought out Gershom on his trip to Great Dipper.

' And that is why Mr. and Mrs. Geijerstam seem upset ? '

' Well, it ain't likely they'd meet you with harp and psaltery. . . . And of course, there was the killing of young Helmut.'

' The son ? '

' Yes. He went off to the War in nineteen fifteen, got smuggled in a Norske boat somehow. Limeys boarded the boat when it was a good ways across and found him and two—three more of the square-heads, trying to get home to help their Kayser. Limeys took them all prisoner. Young Helmut tried to escape and was shot.'

' And they hold me responsible ? '

' Aw, 'tisn't that. They think you know the whole story and are dead against them. And when Ma Geijerstam

went up to your room this evening and you handed her Helmut's photo from the wall—well, that just clinched things. . . . Say, surely ain't going in yet, are you ? '

' I am.'

He found them sitting together at the table, the lamp between them, in crouched attitudes of tiredness, Geijerstam with a letter-block and ink-bottle in front of him. At the sound of his footsteps they both looked up, Geijerstam stared dully, then the woman looked away. And Gershom suddenly was angry.

' Can I speak to you both for a moment ? '

The woman raised her head, Gershom saw her lips tighten. The farmer continued to stare, unwinking. Gershom pulled forward a chair and sat down and faced them.

' Betz has been speaking to me.'

They took no heed a long moment, then the farmer nodded.

' He's told me all about this business of the half-shares, and your borrowings from my account, Mr. Geijerstam. And all the business about Helmut, Mrs. Geijerstam. And that you think I've come to claim the farm on these accounts. . . . Well, I haven't. I never heard of either of the things before, and now that I have they make no difference. Not a damn bit. Is that plain ? You're the farmer here, Mr. Geijerstam, and I'm the apprentice-partner. As for Helmut—'

And he wished he'd prepared more carefully the things he might say now of Helmut ; suddenly he was aware of the aching misery he was stirring to life even while he tried to console those two frightened souls. Suddenly he found himself out of his chair, standing at the side of the woman.

' It wasn't my fault, Mrs. Geijerstam. Nor Helmut's.

It was just part of the madness that came on the world, that is still on the world. But I at least have escaped the madness. . . . I never knew Helmut, but I wish I had; I think that he'd have been a friend of mine. Can't you be now?'

§ 5

And, quietly and evenly, after that first plunge into the darkness and unease the War had left their lives, he went into the Geijerstams' friendship. "I had never made friends very easily, I had been too busied with myself, I suppose, hating and approving and tormenting myself. But now there came into my life a thing of a beauty once perhaps common enough in that Golden Age that the poets remembered long after the night of civilization's savagery descended on earth. But I had never met it before, this thing woven of quietness, content, comprehension,—I suppose the thing that has kept mankind from a wholesale suicidal despair. Never, except perhaps in the case of one gone from my horizons, Ester April——"

And he turned from that memory swiftly, no ache at his heart, to the friendship and kindliness met in the Geijerstams. Their gratitude for imagined benefits at first angered him and then touched him with a passion of shame. They were too close to their time and their epoch, as they tried to tell him in their own slow words, to find it not strange for a man to claim the fruit of their work in the sun and rain—because he had loaned them money for that work! And he told them they were too modern, that was the trouble, it was he who was old-fashioned, he went back to a fashion six thousand years old, when men were still men and neither the victims nor the masters of usury.

And that the great, slow farmer understood well enough, with a nod of his head.

'Ja, the Golden Age it was—in sie Eden Garden. It is allim sie Bible. So?'

'Not quite,' and he'd be troubled about that, and amused too that it should be a matter so complicated, explaining the simplicities of the Golden Age's proof. . . .

Cured though he'd thought himself, the memory of the War came vivid at times, he'd those dreams of wild horror that many had brought from the thunder and unending flare of the guns. There came one night when he dreamt himself back on that ridge on the Somme, struggling in the torture of the wire, round his throat, the spikes drove deeper and deeper, and he struggled *and he must not scream.* A scream would awaken the snipers. . . . And he opened his eyes, he was lying in his bed, he had twisted a sheet round his throat; and Anna Geijerstam was kneeling beside him, an arm on his shoulders.

'Nein, nein, it is nothing, it is nothing. Do not fear, it is nothing!'

He clung to her, glad and terrified a minute, and then laughed and sat up and her arm dropped from him. She had lighted a candle to guide her in running to quieten his moaning.

'Often you it do but to-night to Adolf I say you die unless you shall wakened be. Nicht was, Adolf?'

Gershom saw the farmer himself in the door, and the tousled head of Betz over-topping his shoulder. His eyes went from one to the other in slow memory.

'I was on the wire,' he told them. 'The barbed wire in France. Or was that just a dream as well—*were* we ever mad enough to do that?'

'It was that, nicht was?'

He looked down at his chest then, where Adolf pointed, and saw it bared in his struggles, with the cicatrices across that the wire had left. Real, but long past. Ended. Escape. . . . He patted Ma Geijerstam's hand.

'Go back to bed. Oh, I'll be all right.'

So he was, and next morning was roused too early to help in harvest to have any chance to supplement his laggard thanks. "But after that night I think I grew closer still in Anna's regard, she in mine. And the days of work such as I'd never yet met, back-breaking, unending, went on and I with them, till there came a time, the winter was close, when I looked at myself in the gaudy mirror and saw a face browned deep as in Mexican days, the pallor of France quite gone, filled out, and I liked my eyes, I liked myself altogether. I was finding—I had found—salvation."

An old salvation he had found, he reflected, looking out on the harvested slopes and the rain coming over those slopes in a whirling wash. The land and its servitude, that—and the books and researches of those people whose writings still reached him, who were rousing up the sleeping archæological dovecots all over the world. Perry and Massingham, Elliot Smith, their names lined his bookshelves, they were brandishing a torch in the deeps of history and the must of museums, its light the only light Gershom saw for to-day, and a light to illumine the defiles of the future. Yet—how did he help? Wherein was his part?

Long weeks of vexed brooding he spent over that. Somehow, there was something he knew he could do: it waited his doing and was set for his hand. Somehow, he'd caught once the glimpse of a road, now he'd lost or mislaid its direction awhile. . . .

It came on him then how little he knew of himself, his own life, the things seen and done. And this offered a plan, and he set to with vigour, to write his own history, explicit, unashamed, to retell minutely all the hours he had lived. . . . Ma Geijerstam, astounded as the winter wore on, saw the scrawled sheets pile deeper on the claw-legged table.

'It is a story you write—a love-story?' she asked, one evening when she brought him his supper.

Gershom fell companionably into her German. 'Well, that and other things. Love and hate and despair, and comedy and clowning. I'm seeking to find out myself, and my future, Anna, in a story I'm writing of the past.'

Anna Geijerstam shook her head in dissent.

'Love-stories are best.'

§ 6

And once, very vividly, he met with the Image again, and knew neither terror nor hate.

He was riding back from Great Dipper on the second-hand motor cycle he had bought—he and Betz had both motor cycles. He'd gone in for Ma Geijerstam's weekly stores and he came on the figure of the farmer himself, silhouetted on the bluff that topped the buildings. And instantly: the old, miraculous change, though he struggled for a moment against it, the world re-focussing in and about him, the Image sky-towering and startling and dim, the air vexed with the rumour of a voice.

He halted and looked: then he *knew*.

"Geijerstam: Man—*That* was the Image. I remember how clearly it flashed on me then, even while the vision

endured. And then, in a spurt of light from the sunset, I saw that the cloaks and skins had fallen from It, It stood naked and tall and with head thrown back to breathe in the wind of the sunset, it was God, unchained and tremendous. And then, while I looked, It turned Its head, and smiled on me with a Face that I knew, with a Face I had known, or a Face I would know. . . . Then It was gone, Geijerstam only, bearded and shabby, hailing me as I came up the hill."

He supposed his own anthropomorphism was changing the Image, terrible, obsessive, implanted in childhood, form the likeness of Fear to the likeness of a Friend. That or—how might one know?—the Image was a dream and yet more than a dream, now tearing from its body the veils, the clotted rags, wherein men had bound and imprisoned It. . . .

And still, he reflected, riding up the slope, the words of that voice, superscription with image, escaped him. But: some day he'd hear them, some day. And then he knew that the Image would cease, he'd be full-grown at last, with a vision completed and clear.

SECTION THE NINTH

§ 1

THE rain had cleared that morning, it was Sunday, there was a wind as fresh as though newly ground, like Ma Geijerstam's coffee, thought Gershom. Coming down to breakfast he found Adolf, black-clad, looking over the rises to the swamp.

'Duck-shooting to-day?'

'Nein, nein, we to church go—himmel, no duck-shoot im Sunday.' He sighed. 'Nein, except for sie pagan.' And grinned at Gershom with a slow good-nature. Once Betz had been forbidden that sport on a Sunday, but it had been forced upon Gershom.

'Stay and shoot duck instead. Your God won't mind.'

But Anna Geijerstam had heard. 'That was just like Helmut. He said God would not mind though he never went to church.'

'And did he never go?'

'No, often. He came to please me and his father.'

'Would it please you if I came?'

'Ich verstehe nicht Alles.'

'Well, I'll come. Right to-day. *I will.* Ich werde es mit Bergnugen thun.'

'Ach Gershom, sie scherzen?'

But he had convinced her before they had finished with breakfast that he didn't joke, abruptly he'd lost interest in duck-shooting. He'd understand the Geijerstams from all angles, even their religion, if he could get at it. Betz the hired man came with his grin to question Gershom as he hitched up the buggy.

'Getting religious?'

'Heinie, push off and look for a straw.'

'Eh?'

'A straw. You haven't got one in your mouth and you look half-naked in consequence. You'd be arrested for indecent exposure by anyone who didn't know you.'

The grin widened. 'Indecent exposure, huh? Plenty of that in Rainier's.'

'Where?'

He waved vaguely, grinning, and Gershom shook his head, uninterested, and turned and helped Anna Geijerstam up, and Adolf beside her, and took the reins and drove plashing off down the ruts, Anna crying to Betz to milk only two of the cows—Berstehen sie?

Adolf grunted to her to have silence: was it not the Sabbath? Anna chuckled. 'Now you will hear us quarrel, as when we had a driver . . . long ago. Adolf has been too busy driving each Sunday until this.'

Gershom called 'Go ahead,' and drove on, and at eleven they passed through Great Dipper and out to the further side, two miles on the further side, to the little Lutheran church builded there nearly fifty years before. There was a sprawl of buggies, two or three Fords, a Teal bug from remote antiquity parked in the laired space without; and a slow throng of stolid Germanic folk on a drift to the door of the church. Anna behind Gershom breathed satisfaction. 'Now Gershom can meet the people.'

He didn't understand what she'd meant till the mare was hitched and she'd taken his arm, Adolf with a slow grin coming behind. And then she made plain her intentions, from the first acquaintance who hailed her.

They exchanged news of the weather, cattle, and Frau Liebe's stomach, she'd a large, bland face and the sleepy eyes of one addicted much to over-eating and the bearing

of children, Frau Liebe. Then Gershom was thrust to the fore.

'And this is our guest, the Freiherr Shaw.'

So, with half a dozen others, Gershom protesting in a whisper against the Freiherr, but unavailingly. It was a conviction of Anna's that he came of the English nobility, a conviction stressed by his frequently being addressed on envelopes by another name: the puzzling Jezreel. He found the Lutheran farmers and their heavy wives as unexpectedly interesting as he now was finding all people; but the service that ensued was a different matter. The pastor was a mean-faced little man, he'd a narrow, lank look and the steely eyes of the monomaniac, his rusty black had the look of integument rather than clothing, his voice rasped your skin like a file. . . . There were still, you concluded, people in the world beyond either liking or comprehension, and switched your thoughts off from the little pastor as you stood in the splendid bass of the German hymn-singing, a force and a beauty in the heavy, strong voices that was strangely stirring.

Then came the discourse.

It was an airless little church. Presently, in spite of the strident rap of the German that was almost Low German, Gershom saw Adolf's head begin to nod. In another quarter of an hour he saw a score more, nodding with the slow ubiquity of buoys on an incoming tide, the tide the herr pastor's voice. Anna sat and listened with a patient interest, " but my German was too faulty to do that without effort, and presently I found my own eyes closing. But that would not do at all, I decided, shaking myself and moving with a scratch and rustle that brought Anna's anxious eyes upon me at once. Sleeping was a privilege of members

only. If I went in a doze here and had such a dream as I once had at Geijerstam's—— ! I remembered a story by Joseph McCabe of a monk who was dismissed his Order for snoring during the half-hour of morning silent prayer—he disturbed the sleep of his superiors ! "

So he shook himself awake and listened again to the strange old ritual denunciations, the strange old terrors that the pastor threatened, he wondered how many of the farm-folk were affected. And it seemed to him with a glance around they indeed were few. They accepted the pastor and his weekly threatenings, this Sunday pilgrimage, as a fixed and enduring thing indeed. But it left their workaday lives untouched. He was listening to the fading end, here as elsewhere, of religion's long saga in human affairs. Here, in the seep of wintry sunlight that the window sprayed him, the pastor was preaching from a Gotterdammerung he did not suspect, from the shadows of Ragnarök, the Twilight of the Gods. Religion, its terrors, its hopes and its hates were too remote from everyday life ever again to affect it greatly. . . .

But I was wrong. Quite suddenly I was aware I was wrong, of a stir of interest throughout the gathering. The pastor had abandoned divine concerns for terrestrial. ' And those who profane the country-side so close at hand, shameless and naked, are mark of the time when the Scarlet Woman herself is in the land. Unless the citizens of Great Dipper stir to stamp on the foul head of this thing, it is yours—and yours—and *your* daughter's shame that will next be told——'

" I think he found the gasp that greeted this prophecy satisfying, he switched to other things and closed abruptly, leaving the warning unclouded and effective. I myself was

puzzled. 'Gymnosophists?' I had never heard of such chaps."

But he had full details the while he drove home with the Geijerstams. Five miles south of Geijerstam itself was a farm that a colony of artists had bought——

'Rainier?' Gershom remembered that word. Strange how he'd forgotten it all these years! 'Wasn't it once owned by a man called Caldon?'

'Ja. But now he is dead, so they tell.'

'I once knew him,' said Gershom, and rode a while, brooding. 'And these artists——'

They left Rainier to a drunken Frenchman, the artists, to care for throughout the winter months. But in spring and summer they came down, a colony, and lived there, and walked about *naked.*

'Sun-bathing,' Gershom suggested, and lost interest. But Adolf shook his head, combing his beard with his fingers.

'Nein, nein.' And went on in the German they both found it more fruitful to talk. 'It is not sun-bathing, the bathing with a costume. They walk naked, they sit at meals unclad—men and women. They walk together in weather without sun, and read books: they remain unclad, they call themselves gymnosophists, as the pastor said.'

'And is this farm on the roadside?'

'A mile or so from it?'

'But how then can it give offence to any?'

Anna struck in here. 'But they walk about *naked*, Gershom.'

Another taboo. . . . Gershom laughed and shook the mare's reins; they went on. Gymnosophy sounded good fun. Some time he'd look up the artists at Rainier. Perhaps

they had glimpsed, or were trying to glimpse, in their way, the same road as himself. . . .

§ 2

Spring was crying its first song across the Middle West, the days lengthened, grew burnished, and this Saturday noon had brought a wave of heat that ebbed like a liquid up from the hollow of Great Dipper. Gershom had gone to his room after lunch, and came down with a book, and heard the telephone. He went to the thing, picked up the receiver, waited for the cackle of ringing to cease, and then took a short message that a drawling voice gave him for the ear of the hired man, Betz.

Outside in the yard hung a clouding of insects, they parted like a curtain as Gershom went through, and closed in again in a waiting buzz. Over by the fence Anna Geijerstam was feeding the calves, Adolf himself had paused to look on, Betz was lounging astride the gate, hat on head, straw in mouth, as Gershom came up.

'A message on the phone for you, Heinie.'

'Huh?' He got off the gate, it seemed he'd expected the message.

'Yes. Somebody Rauskukle. "Okay for Rainier at four this afternoon," was the message. He seemed to think that you'd understand.'

'Oh yes.' The vacant grin grew deeper. Betz pulled out a watch and looked at it. 'Four? Guess I'll move, folks. See you all later.'

Geijerstam and Anna looked at him queerly, Anna paying no heed to her feeding of the calves, the beast nearest at hand was slobbering her hand, not the cog. Adolf

himself, sure sign of disturbance, was combing his black beard upwards. 'You—you are going to Rainier?' Anna asked at last, unnecessarily, but with peculiar intensity.

Betz grinned back over his shoulder. 'Sure. Me and the boys. Be okay. Just a little visit.'

Anna turned to her calf-feeding again, in silence; Geijerstam combed his beard more slowly; Gershom climbed up to Betz' place on the picket-fence and watched lazily the slobber of the young roan calf as it neared the end of the cog's contents. It was very peaceful, the sun a blanketing of warmth down over the peace of the country-side. Gershom drank in appreciation of the moment, lazily, with eyelids half-lowered. He was to remember that scene very vividly, always . . . because it was the last time he was ever to look out over the rolling plain to Great Dipper.

For presently the silence beyond the farm-house was broken by the sound of the starting of Betz' motor cycle. The group by the picket-fence looked up and saw Betz wobble past them along the yard track, and shoot down the rise to the road. He waved as he went, Gershom waved in response, though neither Anna nor Adolf moved.

'And what fête has Betz gone to?' Gershom asked, indifferently.

It was Adolf who answered.

'No feast. He and the others—the boys—they have gone to raid the artists at Rainier.'

'Raid the artists?' Gershom was very much at sea.

Adolf growled confirmation. Then Gershom remembered. 'Oh, the colony of what-was-it the pastor called them? Gymnosophists?—at the farm five miles from here?'

They nodded.

'And what is Betz doing there with the boys?'

'They have gone to raid the house. They will find the men and women and take them and beat them up,' Adolf explained unemotionally, but his eyelids twitched. 'Betz said they were to tar and feather them as well, and close down the farm.'

Gershom dropped his cigarette. 'Yes, but the police——'

Anna shook her head without looking up, Adolf grunted. And then slowly, unemotionally, he began to tell of a camp of Radicals—Reds—that had been at a place twenty miles south of Great Dipper. The radicals had made it a centre of summer outings and the like up to a year of Gershom's coming to Minnesota. Until the churches had preached against them——

One night a raid was made on the place by men who were masked, though everyone in the district guessed who the masks were worn by. Well, the radicals had tried to telephone the police and had found the wires cut. And one of them had managed to get through to Great Dipper, he got there on horseback, was arrested and locked up, and beaten up, folk said, when he tried to tell the story of the raid that was on at the radical's camp.

'And what happened to the radicals?'

'Two of them died from exposure,' Adolf told. 'And one—she was a woman—she went mad, and was found mad next day, wandering and singing.'

'But——'

They had nothing more to tell, disquiet and unease in their faces, they knew the things that might happen at Rainier—the *might*, and no more. Gershom got down from the picket-fence: something of the peace had gone from the day. Anna turned and watched, her face wrinkled up with a sudden anxiety.

'What are you to do, Gershom?'

'I am going up to Rainier.'

'But you must not! They would kill you—if you went to warn the artists.'

'I'll warn them if I get there in time. If I don't——'

'It is too late to warn them now,' Adolf said. 'It is nearly four o'clock now. And maybe they have been already warned.'

Gershom paused at that, unwilling enough to abandon the peace of the afternoon here and a lazy drowse on a picket fence. 'You think that they have?'

He did not answer, neither did Anna, and Gershom knew there had been no warning, it was merely their liking for himself that prompted that guess. He turned and ran for the house.

Upstairs he caught up a greatcoat and stared at his revolver and debated the matter, and dropped it in his pocket. When he came down and went over the yard to the shed where his motor cycle was stored, Anna came running at his heels.

'Gershom—Gershom, you *must* not go.'

'But, Anna, I must.'

She gave a little moan, her fingers at her mouth. And then lowered them and was practical and quick.

'Do not shoot unless they shoot at you first. And wait: I will bring you a scarf.'

She ran into the house and ran back. Adolf had also gone in, and now came, sandwiches and a hip-flask in his hands.

'It may be you will need them.'

Gershom nodded. Anna thrust the scarf in his pocket—

it was no more than a piece of coloured cloth, oddly twin-punctured with holes.

'But I shan't be cold, I don't need it, Ma.'

'It is not that—they wear that, the others, in the raids. As a mask.'

Gershom leant over the handle-bars and kissed her, shook hands with Adolf.

'I'll be back when I can. Don't worry for me. Auf wiedersehen.'

They called something after him, but that he couldn't hear clear, the noise of the engine drowned their words. At the incline's foot he looked back and saw them, they seemed suddenly old, watching him go. He waved to them, Anna fluttered a hand, he turned and sped east, and Geijerstam's was presently a dot behind him.

§ 3

Rainier is set on a hill and lies back from the road that runs south-east from Great Dipper to Gultz. You see it from that road as a leafy eruption of trees, the early settlers had made it distinctive in that treeless land by planting long groves of poplar and beech, beeches bronze-leaved that were brave in their plumage that spring afternoon that was wearing to evening.

Gershom rode up the track from the Great Dipper road.

Right in front, as his cycle chugged upwards, he saw the white gleam of a stone-built house through the trees, and back of that an orchard tangled to jungle, flowering with bushes, a mat on the hill. Then above the noise of the engine he heard a noise that caused his knuckles to go

white on the handles. A woman screamed—shrilly, high on a note of terror and pain.

The raid was in progress.

He wheeled through an avenue of beeches, braked suddenly, a sawn-off shot-gun levelled at his head. The holder of the gun lounged up by the gate-post, his head tied about by a scarf with eye-holes. He came sauntering forward.

'Visiting friends?'

Gershom took out the scarf Anna Geijerstam had forced on him. 'Am I hell. I'm from Geijerstam's. Heinie Betz told me there was a round-up here. But I started late. . . . Got the birds yet?'

The scarf ruffled up as a grin passed beneath it. The shot-gun was lowered.

'Straight in. You're late, all right all right. Round up nearly finished but for two that are hiding back there a somewheres in the bush.'

Gershom kicked his starter. 'Get 'em in the nude?'

'Every darned one.' The scarf rippled again. 'But they ain't nude now—or they won't be long. Hear the skirt give a scream? Hot tar, that, I guess. . . . Roll along.'

Gershom chugged away slowly down through the avenue, and a moment later came full on the scene near the house. The sunlight was strong there, he stared at the figures, the figures that were still, the figures that struggled, there was a cackling of comment from among the masked men, and every now and then a cry from the dozen or so men and women who so hideously were being maltreated. Gershom stared and stared, sickness upon him, and slowly chugged forward. One of the masks raised his hand and waved it to the orchard.

'Down there if you want to be in at the last run, stranger.'

'Okay.'

He switched to the right through the aisle of trees, for a stretch they bowered greenly the path in a dimness. The horror of the tortured nudists was behind, he found blood on his lips, and now, close to the shrubbery, dismounted from his cycle and listened. Nothing. Not a sound to be heard, though it seemed to him, listening, that the wood was filled with a waiting unease, somewhere in its depths two terrified creatures crept, listened, and hid with pursuers behind them lunging in a clumsy stealth. He wheeled the motor cycle round housewards, kicked up the rest below the back wheel, and went down a path.

Now it was near to sunset. In the hot, deepening blueness of the afternoon the paths seemed like a maze, they twined on themselves. He broke from them after a moment, there were quagmires and stretches of sward, and once to a little garden he came, blue with the blowing of chrysanthemums. He stood looking at that, a moment, dreaming, realizing something of the genius of whoever had planned it. Nothing he could hear even then, he sat down and lighted a cigarette, and wondered what best he had do—go back and create a diversion with a stray shot or so in the midst of the raiders or abandon the business entirely.

And then he heard an unmistakable sound, the crack of a whip quite close at hand, that, and the sound of that whip descending on something that yielded sharply, like flesh. He jumped up and listened and then, as he tells, whitely, a desperate coolness came on him. He parted the bushes and himself passed through, soundless, unheard on the grass, and so came on the verge of that open patch where Betz and another had run to earth the last of the Rainier refugees.

" For background, the trees with the night close on them, the sky was afloat with a wash of faint colourings, it poured that wash into the glade upon her, a moment her naked body was gold, a slip-painting in gold and in ochre. Then the green had betaken those colours to itself, it was as though I peered at her through the malachite waters, deep, of a pool, so still now she stood, marble in that pool she might well have been, frozen against the green of the bush. And then out of my memory blinding there leapt, terrible, tenebrous, THE IMAGE——"

Betz had her right hand gripped in his, Gershom knew him at once in spite of the mask. Over her, whip in hand, stood the other masked man, Gershom knew him as well, there was little disguise, it was the Lutheran pastor of Great Dipper, you saw the pallor under the mask. . . . And then Gershom's eyes passed to the upraised whip.

All three were breathing deeply, they had paused a minute, the woman had her head flung back, her body held tense. It was Betz who spoke.

' Okay. Then we'll lift your skin again, see ? Will you or won't you sell over Rainier's to the Vigilance Committee at the price we've said ? '

' I won't.'

' Try her again, then, mister.'

The whip poised in the pastor's hand was suddenly a snake that leapt in the sun and whistled and descended. Before Gershom's eyes the Image shivered and dissolved. Then It towered tremendous in a moan of pain.

' No, I won't even yet—EVEN YET ! '

". . . so I heard. I was never again to see the Image that had followed me far from Chatham. But I saw it then, I saw it ! I knew it ! And I saw it aureoled clear, in a

flame, that Superscription that was blurred so long. I knew it final and finished, I seemed to awaken and come from a trance remote in my soul. I heard and saw it, ringing and tremendous, that Superscription forged in pre-history's deeps : EVEN YET ! "

§ 4

And there, I suppose, his story ends. But Gershom gathered the final threads together, and tied them with neatness before he turned and went out to the world and an endless quest—out on that quest companioned.

He was to think it probable that Betz never knew the thing that struck him. He went down with the butt of Gershom's revolver raising a dark matting of red on his hair, he stumbled against the Lutheran pastor. The latter staggered and struck with his whip at Gershom, but the woman, no Image now, no woman even, hardly more than a girl, a slip-painting violently come alive, seized his right arm and while she held it Gershom kicked the pastor, quickly and vigorously, and heard and saw him double and fall, clawing at his belly. And then Gershom seized on the girl's hand.

' Come on—you know the way back to the house ? '

' But not there—they're still waiting.' She was panting and flushed. She gave a little gasp as she moved : a blue weal stood against her body's bronzed pallor. ' We can creep through the hedge 'n' get off.'

' They'd follow. . . . I've a bike. We can make a dash for it. Try ? '

' Of course.'

' Run, then ! '

They ran together, they ran hand in hand, the bushes about them, the rim of the sun just verging the orchard, suddenly Gershom saw the house quite close. Then they came to the motor cycle, up-propped. He got it in readiness, quiet as he could, sat himself down, and waited the girl. She was straining back her head to listen, one hand on his shoulder.

'Ready?'

'Thought I heard those two following us—'n'en I didn't!'

'I don't think they'll follow.'

She chuckled, swinging herself up behind him, her arm came white and naked and firm round his shoulder.

'No, they've proceeded.'

'Eh?'

'I think one of them's dead.'

He murmured 'Poor devil!' and indeed was wrung a moment with his old, passionate pity for the cruel and the foolish. Then these thoughts quite went. He felt light and young and clear and confident. He tested the light, it flooded the path down which they chugged, and then he remembered the danger of that, and off-switched it again. To the right rose the house: beyond it the avenue. So fast he was going by then that the sudden thought which came on him—his passenger's white nakedness so easy a mark—was no more than a footnote of care to the multitudinous writings in which he must read. The path was burring and singing below, the engine roared, and roaring the motor cycle cleared the path and shot by the side of the house. The two of them had an urgent impression of a group breaking and dispersing and running. Voices called after them, one called persistently, high and imperative:

'You there, stop!'

'Stop be damned!' the girl breathed close in Gershom's ear, but she also had realized the danger she *backed*, she crouched forward, tight against Gershom. The wind sang past, the front wheel collided with a hidden stone, they swerved and reeled from the road. That it was which probably saved them, for in that moment of swerve the air about them seemed alive with a singing drone, as of hornets. There followed the sharp, quick bark of Brownings. "I righted just as it seemed I couldn't, we were into the avenue of trees by then. Right in front the watcher of the threshold came running, minus his mask, his shot-gun half levelled. There was nothing else for it: I put the motor cycle straight at him, the right handle-bar and my hand caught his shoulder, he fell off the path and out of my life, explosively, with a jerk. Then the gates swung by."

They were out, they were clear of Rainier then, the cycle sang on down the hill, there was nothing they could do for those left behind, both knew they must ride far clear of the place ere the news of Betz and the pastor, dead or wounded, was bruited abroad the country-side.

§ 5

The fields were draped in their malachite cloaks, long garments that were hemmed with night. And now that night itself, forsaking black, came not as any night should, it came with a sky that glowed like the shell of a pearl, soft like an early rose it came that sky into which they fled. A wind had arisen, it blew in their faces, blowing the spring itself in their faces, the deserted road along which they sped. They met no one, mile on mile as they went, far

over to right and left a light here and there began to gleam as the day waned fast; once on a hill-side they saw the forms of men that were racing against the dusk. "I sat and held on and did no guiding at all for mile upon mile, Providence had forsaken the pastor, I suppose, in disgust, and loaned its protection to us. And then, we must have been a good ten miles from Rainier, south and south-east we had gone, I saw the coming of the stars."

He slowed down then. The engine coughed dryly and ran to a stop, he put down his right leg and braked on the road, and so, in a silence, they came to a standstill. The firm hand clasped on his shoulder remained there.

'I'll give you my driving coat,' he told her. 'There's a wind coming up.'

'But I like this, Gerry.' The hand on his shoulder moved a moment, it touched his cheek and went back. The passenger laughed a strange, choking laugh. 'Oh, 'n' I thought you were killed in Paris!'

'I wasn't. . . . And I knew you weren't. Ester!'

'Gerry.'

'Do you know what it is just now?'

'What—what is?'

'Why, April. It's your name this month, can't you smell it?'

'Good as all that?'

'God, yes. So good that I'm to smell it all my life long. I'll never call you Ester again, you know, April. . . . April always: you could never be anything but that.'

'I'll see to that—'n'en some!'

'That "'n'en"! Where'll we stop to-night?'

'Not here. Drive on for a long time yet.'

'I'll turn round my head if you'd like to kiss me.'

'My dear, amn't I just one kiss up against you?'

The Sower of the stars was walking the skies, a cobalt patch lingered where the sun had gone, the engine below them sang on and still on, Gershom with the naked arm on his shoulder. Then a sickle moon came and rode the night, night-birds were crying in a marsh they passed.

'Rainier was the farm your father left you. But I never thought I would find you there.'

'And how *did* you find me?—Why, Geijerstam, of course! I'd forgotten all about it, it was once George Shaw's. . . . Oh Gerry, if they saw us now!'

'They'd think you as lovely as I do, that's all.'

'I can't kiss you more than I'm doing, you know. 'N' oh, go on! While it lasts——'

He flooded a long stretch of the road with his headlight, and saw the cotton-tails go bobbing to the dark, and switched the light off and went on in the dark. He heard April singing a song by his shoulder, the low song that rises with peace and content, security near and a lonely road. And yes, it was that that he heard again!

'Nobody knows the trouble I've known,
Nobody knows my sorrow:
Nobody knows the trouble I've known,
Glory hallelujah!'

§ 6

A deeper darkness showed up in the night and Gershom slowed down and switched on his headlight. It was a great clump of trees that rose there, in the air was the smell of ploughed lands in the spring, the moon was now low in the sky. Gershom looked at his wrist-watch and found it

midnight. The air had grown cooler in the last hour or so, but not the hand on his shoulder.

That he found by putting up his own hand and touching, and so for a little they sat and were silent. And then Gershom said 'We'll rest here awhile, till it's closer to morning, I think. Then we'll make Minneapolis, stop and get clothes for you somewhere *en route*. You can wear my coat and my stockings while we rest, and I've a rug tied under the pillion.'

'Blessed boy.'

His passenger dismounted and yawned. Then he heard her gasp.

'Oh!'

And at that he remembered the weal from the whip, a ghost of the old, blind fury came on him, he spoke through his teeth, not turning as he spoke.

'By God, I'll go back and get even with those swine yet.'

'No, you won't. There's no going back for us—ever again. . . . 'N' it'll be all right to turn round, Gerry. You can't see me, anyhow.'

'I wouldn't object.'

'I know,' she said, whimsically, ''n' neither would I—if I weren't so tired 'n' so cramped.'

'Why didn't you tell me before?'

'Because I didn't notice. I didn't notice a thing for miles past but your head and your hair. I nibbled a bit of that, didn't you feel me? Good hair.' He heard again the sound of a yawn, saw his dim guest a white ghost stretching in the moonlight. Then: 'Can I help?'

He said, 'No. Just wait.'

So she did while he wheeled the cycle to the side of the

road. A hidden stream was singing away through the trees and Ester heard it the while he unpacked. She disappeared, he thought she had gone to drink, but in a little while he heard the sound of a splashing and when she came back he was waiting with a cloth.

'A towel? How on earth—but how on earth it *all*? How did you come to Rainier at last? 'N' where have you been since the War? 'N'—Gerry, is that really food?'

They sat side by side, Ester absent-mindedly draped in his coat, and heard out each other's sagas at length, in the shrill of the stream back through the trees, and watched the sickle of the moon sink over the plain. It all seemed very home-like, as though lived before, he remembered lines of a forgotten poe

> 'Deep in the gloom of a fireless cave
> As the night sank o'er the plain,
> And the moon hung red on the river's bed,
> We mumbled the bones of the slain——'

She said: 'I know. 'N' so we did—sometime. Long ago 'n' far away. Maybe on this very plain. The prospectors from Asia came far north as this, the folk that ended the Golden Age. Maybe we saw them 'n' hated them even then.'

'Maybe, and we trekked away when they came, and lived out the Golden Age though they came.'

'Oh Gershom! . . . But it's been so long since then!'

'I know, but we've found that time again. All the world will yet find that time again. . . . And this stuff that you've told me, your life in New York—it's got nothing whatever to do with us now.' He thought. 'Though I hope there were none ever called you April?'

'None did. I've kept you that—'n' other things. . . .'

'. . . April, I know! We'll do it again! No one to stop us now, poor George now he's dead and your father as well. No one. They would think us mad, but we'll do it.'

'I know. But you say it. Oh, damn it, 'n' don't say it wrong!'

'Do you think that I could? We'll get married and clear out, the first boat down to Guat, fit up an expedition and go up to the mountains, and go in through the bush and find Lorillard at last! It's still waiting there to be found.'

'And we'll find it. Hurry to-morrow!'

He looked up. 'And that's close.' He rose and took up the rug and switched on the light and found a dry place under the trees, away from the road, and spread the rug there. And then he came back.

The moon pointed a finger up to the zenith. The stars were reddening as that pallor went. Far away in the dimness a coyote yelped—no tiger as once had followed their tracks. They stood and looked up at the night, at each other.

'I've spread you a place to sleep over there.'

''N' where are you sleeping yourself?'

'Under this nearer tree.'

She rose up, a slim shape, vivid even in the dark, somehow.

'Good dreams.'

§ *The Last*

He dreamed from the moment he laid head to the ground, mixed dreaming that woke him an hour or so after. And, waking, he knew that he still was dreaming.

He saw the tree boughs wave over his head, soundless, in the soundless passing of the wind, there was no sound above or about him, the quietness of dreams. And in his arms, by the darkness hidden, was a warmth and a silent tenderness that was surely only his dreams still dreaming while he himself woke.

He whispered the word, scared, lest this dream might end.

'*April!*'

'Oh Gerry, did you think you'd escape me again? . . . Am I real? So real I'll be only too soon! But for now—are we to be it or dream it?'

He held her and kissed her, slowly, till she laughed, and they ceased with slowness and terribly, queerly, scared and with heed, their lips found each the other's in the darkness. And suddenly she drew her lips from his, and kissed him with her eyelids against his cheek, and laughed, a child still, and a woman again, and was tender with him, and loved him, and he her, and he woke to find her asleep and kissed her, and slept himself and awoke to her kisses, the light of the foredawn shining through the trees, in the air the smell of the dawn and all the sky waiting and watching for the coming of the sun.

THE END