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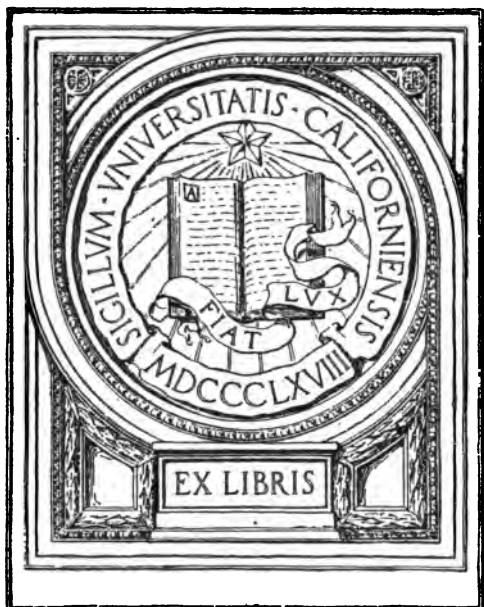
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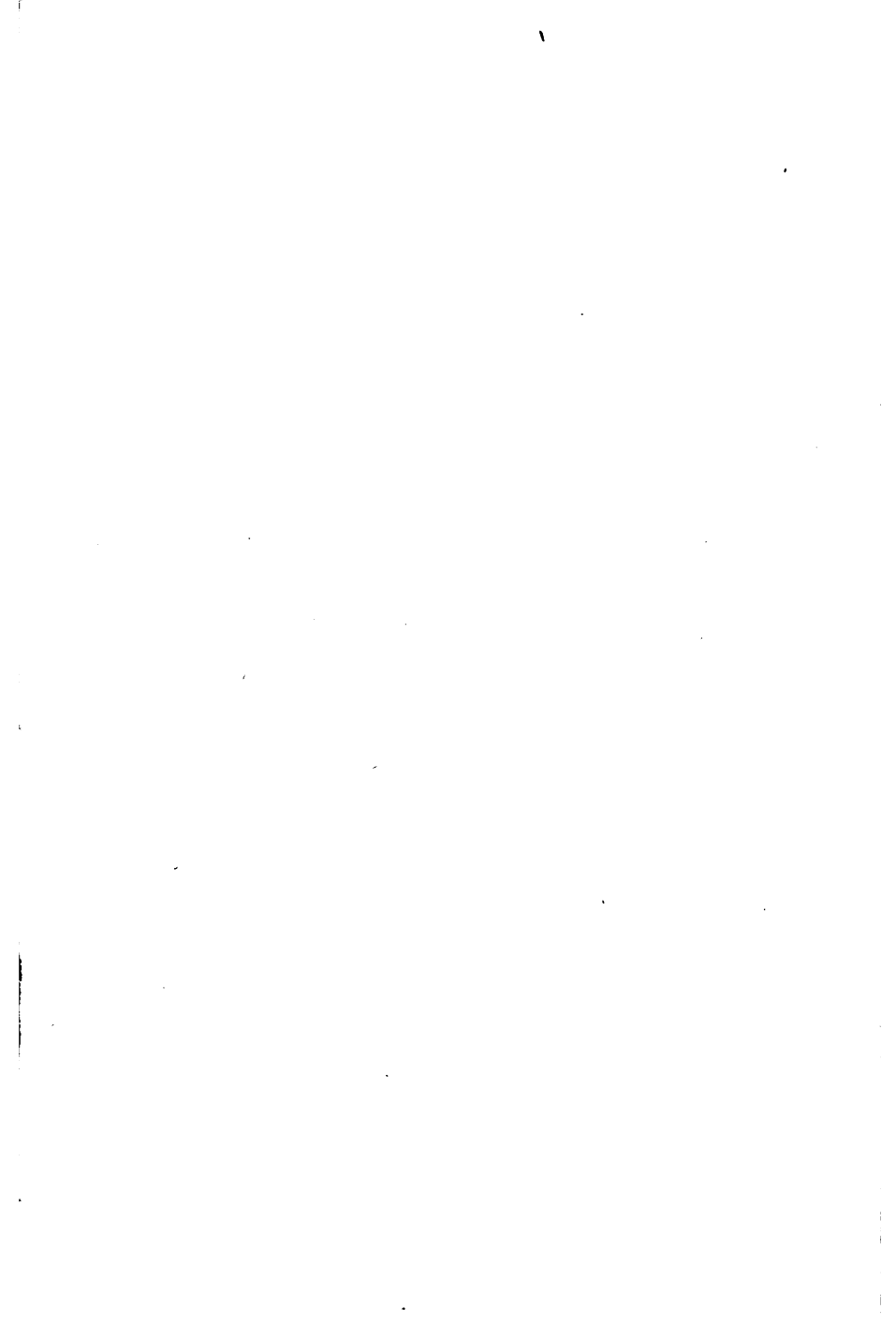
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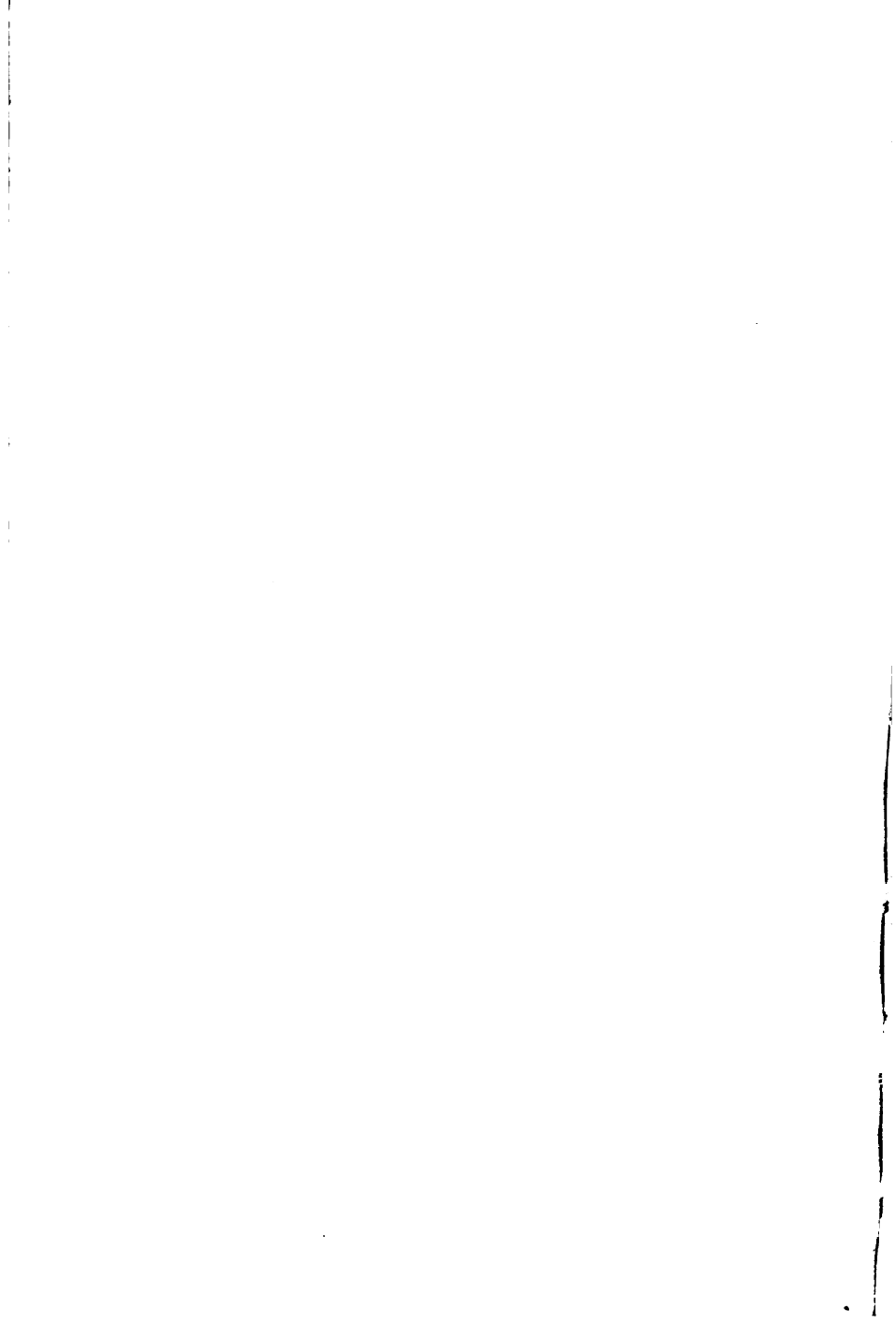


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Chapel



Chapel

The Story of a Welsh Family

By

Miles Lewis

THE
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BOOK II

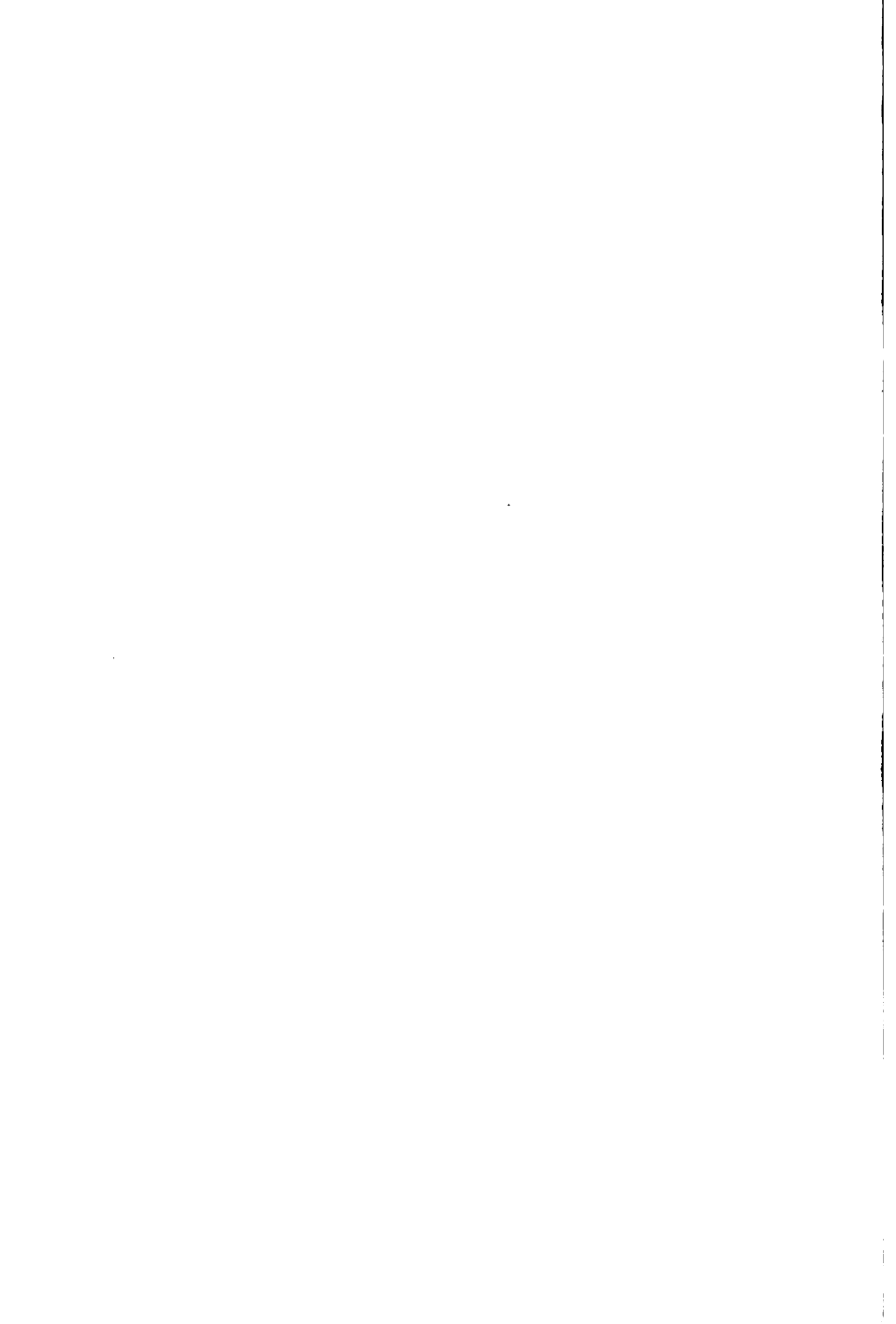
THE SON

	PAGE
I GRIFF	98
II BETSY	103
III A GREAT MAN OFF TO SCHOOL	107
IV ODD OLD STICK	115
V THE LAWYER	122
VI THE ARCHITECT	128
VII THE <i>GOURMET</i>	132
VIII ETERNAL YOUTH	140
IX A VISION	146
X MATHEMATICS	149
XI THE QUARREL	152
XII SYMPATHY	159
XIII A WINDFALL	164
XIV A GIRL	170
XV THE OLD FAMILY COMING BACK	175
XVI OPPORTUNITY	182
XVII BESS	189
XVIII THE ELIGIBLE PARTY	194
XIX A PUGNACIOUS DOCTRINE	199
XX ON THE COUNCIL	203
XXI IN PRIVATE LIFE	209
XXII IMPOSSIBILITY	213
XXIII ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN	221

BOOK III

FAMILY

	PAGE
I ANCESTORS	227
II ASTONISHMENT	233
III "A THOROUGH BLACKGUARD"	239
IV THE AGENT	248
V BUSINESS	251
VI CHANCE AND THE MAN	256
VII AT PORTHCAWL	264
VIII WOMAN	270
IX "SOMETHING ELSE"	277
X ACTUAL MIRACLES	282
XI JEALOUSY AND RESENTMENT	287
XII SENILITY	296
XIII FACING THE TRUTH	301
XIV THE BRUISER	306
XV TWO HOUSEKEEPERS	313
XVI A MEETING IN THE NIGHT	318
XVII A CHAPEL WOMAN	325
XVIII DREAD	330
XIX AT WERN	335
XX FATHER AND SON	340



BOOK I
THE FATHER

I

A WELSH HOME

A GIRL sat on a low stool before the fire in the roomy kitchen of the old Welsh farmhouse. It was twilight on a Sunday in the middle of December, and the silence and the dying light seemed to have affected Jane, for as she toasted the bread for tea she gazed dreamily over her shoulder and watched the furniture disappear so amazingly into the gloom of dusk.

Those black lines around the flagstones of the floor went first, then the old oak chest, black with age; and then the dresser got indistinct. Naturally, the white cloth on the table behind her was quite visible, as were the stand and the fender in front of her. The large black kettle sat on the top of the red coals like a king on his throne; and Jane considered it all so wonderful.

"W-f-f-f!" She sucked in the air between her teeth, and said aloud: "But this old fire *is* warm!"

Jane had a habit of speaking aloud to herself, and her mistress often described her by employing such a prodigiously long word as *anghyfrifol*, which is the Welsh for *irresponsible*.

The toasting-fork changed hands, and her disengaged fingers stole up cunningly to play with the deliciously unusual bunch on the nape of her neck. Of all days in the lengthy experience of fifteen years, this was the most remarkable, for she was a woman with her hair up for the first time. And this astonishing, sudden spring into

womanhood was due to her mistress, who had decreed that Jane's hair must go up on account of its incurable tendency towards untidiness.

Again the fork changed hands, and Jane once more searched for the chest and the dresser. They had gone. But the dinner service and the table-cloth persisted in being faithful, because they were pure white.

"Oh, law!"

Jane's young voice rang out clearly in annoyance. She leapt to her feet and stood, her slim figure erect; the stool tumbled on the coco-nut matting; her round face took on an expression of petulance. Her lips were in a pout, and her bright eyes scowled at the bread so dreadfully black and smoking.

"How could I help the old thing?" she asked of that woman within her. She blamed the perversity of the whole of Nature's arrangements, and at the same time condoned the irresponsibility of her kind most shamelessly.

But worse than all, her mistress's footsteps could be heard in the passage leading from the small parlour into this very room.

Mrs. Chapel came in, rather slowly, smelling the air.

"There's something burning, Jane," she said at once.

"It's this old bread," Jane answered, still frowning at the toast. "You know how it is——?" She appealed vaguely to her mistress's varied, grown-up experience of the vexatiousness of things. And now with bowed head she awaited the delivery of the short homily on *Carefulness* she felt sure was bound to follow.

"Never mind," was what Mrs. Chapel said, however, as she handed a knife from the table. "Scrape it with this."

They spoke to each other in Welsh.

Then Mrs. Chapel crossed to the window. The roller rattled somewhat as she pulled down the blind; and when the brass lamp had been carried to the table, she took off the white globe and the chimney in preparation for lighting.

Jane had completed the scraping, and was reseated on

the stool toasting as dreamily busy as ever. . . . Probably, as her mistress often remarked, girls of fifteen were a trial, whatever that might signify. Undoubtedly, Mrs. Chapel was a very commendable woman, or she would certainly have made quite a fuss over a piece of bread burning. And she had taught Jane quite a host of wrinkles during the past year: How to finish the dirty part of the housework in the morning so as to be clean in the afternoon: How to lace her boots so as not to go *slip-slapping* about the house in that ugly fashion: How to be pleasant and polite and good-mannered.

Mrs. Chapel's hair never got untidy; she was always neat; nothing about her person ever came loose. Quite young she was also, and exceedingly smart; except, now that Jane puckered her brows and considered the matter, she had not been as brisk as usual for these past few weeks; she had not got up quite as early in the mornings, and she did not remain up as late, nor had she done as much work, either. Perhaps Mrs. Chapel was not well; a large number of people got ill in the winter. But those were ancient people, and Mrs. Chapel was not ancient.

There *was* something the matter with her! Jane saw the globe almost drop from her hand, and now her face was screwed up as though she were in pain, and her hands were clutching at the edge of the table.

Jane turned on the stool in great sympathy. "Got the toothache, Mrs. Chapel?" she softly inquired.

Mrs. Chapel's face brightened immediately. "Of course I haven't," she mildly rebuked, as if toothache were a sin.

Jane went on toasting and wondering. It was when Mrs. Chapel smiled in that way Jane fell in love with her. There was something so cheerful and friendly about her smile; her teeth were so white; and her eyes looked as if the pair of them were winking.

"He ought to be here before long, now," Jane wisely remarked a moment later. She looked up at the mantel-shelf. "But this old clock's fast. . . . Wha's the right time, mistress?"

"I don't know," Mrs. Chapel answered on an equality

as she poured milk into the cups. "Go an' look at the big clock."

Jane put the round of bread on the plate on the stand, and took the fork with her as she skipped along the passage into the small parlour. There was a fire alight, and by standing on tiptoe and peering close she could just see the hands against the brass face of the old grandfather's clock. Also, she saw the little sailing-ship on the top rocking away the seconds, and she heard the slow, heavy, stolid *tick-tock, tick-tock* of the pendulum.

"Jane!"

She had taken such a time that Mrs. Chapel was calling from the kitchen. Jane had forgotten everything—everything except those tiny microscopic bits of linen and flannel placed to air around the fire of the small parlour. She had stopped to examine them while on her knees on the hearthrug.

"Jane!" Louder and more authoritative.

She ran back into the kitchen and stood in front of Mrs. Chapel. Her feet danced in excitement, her slender body was most pleurably agitated, and her hands rubbed together in exquisite delight.

"Oo, Mrs. Chapel," she cried, her eyes wide open. Then very seriously, very wisely, with that disconcerting innocence of her years, she asked, "You're not expecting a baby, are you?"

Mrs. Chapel was young enough to blush. "Don't-be-silly, Jane," she hurriedly reproached. "Don't-be-silly."

But Jane was irrepressible. "Those clothes round the fire are exac'ly the same as my mother's baby's got." She would have loved to skip and dance round the room and fling her arms about. "What you going to call him, Mrs. Chapel? How——?"

"Don't-be-silly, Jane," Mrs. Chapel helplessly repeated. She was quite unequal to the cross-questioning; but to balance matters as she went out she tried to scold: "You haven't finished the toast yet, remember."

There was a softness in her voice, however, which Jane's sensitive ears did not miss.

"You must start to church earlier to-night," said Mrs. Chapel when she returned. "I want you to go down to

the Windgap. But mind," she added; "don't say anything to Mr. Chapel."

Jane vigorously nodded her dark head, signifying an avidity to share in the conspiracy. The mystery enchanted her. She was quite certain now, for even at this age she had sensed the coming of another human.

II

THE MASTER

THE bread was toasted and buttered, and everything was ready except that the tea had not been made, and that was impossible while Mrs. Chapel and Jane awaited the arrival of the master.

He came at last.

The kitchen door opened; the cold air blew in, and with it entered Josiah Chapel, bending his head to escape the top of the low doorway. He was a man of thirty, large and powerful, and as he came forward one saw that his hands were deep in the capacious pockets of his brown tweed tail-coat, and that the light of the lamp played upon the shine of his black leather gaiters. He nodded pleasantly, smiled till he revealed long regular white teeth, and called a cheerful greeting to his wife. He walked to the hearth with long deliberate steps, and when his bulky frame was seated on the settle to the right of the fire he placed his foot on the fender and began unbuttoning his gaiters.

He was the youngest of a family known as the CHAPELS OF PORTH.

For centuries the Chapels as a family had been a deep-rooted institution in the neighbourhood. They were an essential, ineradicable part of the surrounding countryside, like the brook, or the church with its Norman tower, or the Ely River, or the Garth mountain. No-one could have pictured Porth without them; Porth, this village and parish on the eastern edge of the very fertile Vale of Glamorgan. So far back did the history of the family go, that some of it had passed into legend, and still may you hear tales of the doings of the old Chapels, as squires, as masters of hounds, as churchwardens, as chairmen of the vestry, as magistrates, or as leaders in the life of the

community which their hearty personalities dominated. Their names cropped up everywhere, generation after generation, in the history of the district.

But all that lies in the past.

No longer did the Chapels live in Wern, the old home of the family. Down the drive of Wern, under the overhanging branches of that avenue of chestnut trees, a Chapel had often come : a gun under his arm and a couple of spaniels at his heels : or redcoated, a huntsman on horseback : or more soberly attired as he drove his gig on his way to Llantrisant to sit on the Bench. But Josiah, the youngest of them, lived in Penlan, this small farmhouse in the bed of the valley half-a-mile away from Wern ; and he was not even a tenant farmer, but a *bailiff* in the employment of the very man who now owned and occupied Wern ; and the remnant of his family's fortunes consisted of the furniture, some of which Jane had watched disappearing into the gloom of falling night.

"Tea ready ?" Chapel called banteringly to Jane when his gaiters were unbuttoned. "Now hurry up or we'll be late for church."

Jane looked up from arranging the small plates on the table. "You'll want your other boots first, Mr. Chapel," she corrected him lightly, hurrying to get them for him.

"We'll have tea now," came the final order from the housewife seated at the table.

Chapel crossed the floor with his long steps.

"Must obey the mistress," he said teasingly to Jane.

The lamplight striking full upon his face as he fingered his cup revealed the benevolent countenance of an easy-going nature. His body would have seemed more compact had his great shoulders not stooped so much, and one read into the slow, leisurely movements of his large hands a meaning of purposelessness and stagnation. Still, he was a big, strongly built man, and when he spoke it was in a ringing bass voice. He was a part of the cheerful environment of this simple Welsh home.

"Going to church to-night, Jane ?" he asked across the table.

"Of course I am, Mr. Chapel. Where d'you think I'm going to ?"

"Ho, ho!" he cried suddenly. "Where's your hair gone to, Jane?"

"Put it up, to be sure," Jane's young voice answered, pertly enough. "Mistress told me to put it up. Di'n't you, mistress?" she appealed, blinking her dancing eyes in the lamplight as she turned her head and looked at Mrs. Chapel.

Mrs. Chapel smiled. "It looks a lot nicer like that." Her more sedate manner of speaking gave her a semblance of greater experience.

But for the most part Mrs. Chapel was silent, anxiously waiting to see the meal over. The sympathy existing between her and Josiah was perfect, but in her heart she felt there were circumstances—well, which men could never understand. Her chief desire was to get him safely off to church and have Betsy here ere long. When tea was over, and while Josiah sat on the settle clumsily lacing his boots, Mrs. Chapel accompanied Jane to the bailey outside the door.

"Tell Mrs. Michael I want to see her, Jane," she said, in her even voice.

"Want to see her particular, Mrs. Chapel?" Jane persisted in her tantalising youthful curiosity.

Mrs. Chapel felt gently amused at the girl's ingenuousness. "Go now, Jane," she said; "or you'll be late for church."

Returned to the kitchen, Mrs. Chapel drew up the armchair and sat watching Josiah quite as clumsily re-buttoning his gaiters. They were never demonstrative in their affection, but when he had finished, he raised his compact head to look at her, while his eyes rather than his lips asked the question which had been filling their minds for so many months.

"No," she hurriedly answered, vehemently shaking her head. She was terrified that he should guess. "Not yet." She again shook her head and smiled.

"Well, anyhow, Gwen," he said, with a stamp of his foot as soon as his gaiters were fastened; "I'm not going to church to-night."

At this Gwen grew alarmed, and slowly crossed to the settle and sat beside him. "D'you think I can't stay at

home without you?" she teased, resting her hand on his broad shoulder. "I won't be afraid; indeed I won't. One of the dogs shall come in. Go now, Josiah," she began to coax.

Chapel got up with a shrug; he had a feeling of being taken at a disadvantage; he always had that kind of feeling when she began to speak in this way. . . . When he was gone, Gwen returned to the armchair and sat gazing pensively into the fire. She was smiling softly, and yet half fearfully.

To-morrow—or perhaps even before Josiah came home!

The catch of the door clicked and Betsy Michael came in. Betsy was fifty, short, and very much inclined to be stout. Early in life she had met with an accident, the effect of which was still noticeable in her gait, for whenever she walked, she showed a slight lameness; her right thigh was implicated, and *gave* under her weight. For twenty-five years she had, before marrying, been a maid with Josiah's parents; she had grown up in the Chapel household, and still regarded herself as a part of the family. Her obsession was that the Chapels made up the most wonderful family God had ever created. Anyone not acquainted with Betsy Michael, and hearing her speak for the first time without seeing her, would readily have been pardoned for mistaking it for a man's voice. Indeed, there was a great deal of the man in her nature; her manners were of the masculine order, but her heart was entirely a woman's, and a very human woman at that.

Quietly closing the door, Betsy took off her shawl and her bonnet and hung them on the nail behind the door; and as she crossed the bare flagstones her strong face beamed and she waddled; her body rocked from side to side, and her steps were irregular both in sound and in action.

"You have packed Chapel off to church, then," she hinted as her broad figure filled the corner of the settle and her brown hands smoothed the dark flannel apron. Her coarse face beamed with a smile of approval. Betsy had a very high opinion of Mrs. Chapel; in fact, of anyone connected with the Chapel family. "A sweet

lickle woman," was the usual description for her present companion.

But soon Betsy perceived this not to be the time for idleness and talking. "Now then, my dear," she said, in her masculine voice full of sympathy; "much fitter for us to go off to bed." And as she limped from the settle across the coco-nut matting, her coarse, wrinkled face showed so plainly what a wholesome, capable, tolerant mass of human nature she was. . . .

When Josiah returned from church he was met by Betsy's pursed lips and upraised finger.

At ten o'clock, he was ordered off to bed, Betsy seeking to cheat him by saying nothing could possibly happen before the morning.

At midnight, Betsy stole down the cold stone staircase and found him still seated over the dying fire in the kitchen.

"Josiah," she called to him in an awful whisper. "Go an' fetch the doctor. Quick!"

Within a week, Gwen was dead.

III

REVOLT

JOSIAH CHAPEL came in through the low doorway of the kitchen followed by his cousin, one of the most prosperous members of the whole family—a successful barrister on the South Wales Circuit. Both were dressed in black. David Chapel was thirty-five, of medium build, keen—the embodiment of vitality, already owner of a reputation for ruthless ability to upset the calculations of the prosecution in cases of a criminal nature.

“I mustn’t stay very long,” he said briskly in Welsh.

He quickly placed his silk hat on the table and moved energetically to the open fireplace, where he stood a moment with his back to the fire. He looked around at the contents of the kitchen so very familiar to him; everything stood exactly as it had during his boyhood when he had spent so many of his school holidays here at Penlan. That old, flat-topped, black oak chest against the wall there on his right! He peered through the waning light and rediscovered the “M” carved on the middle panel: the initial of its first owner, some great-grandmother known by the name of Mary in all probability!

“It won’t do,” he kept thinking as he vigorously pulled off his overcoat, and wondering all the time at Josiah, who was still standing at the table, gazing reflectively at the silk hat.

This afternoon Gwen had been buried.

“Come and sit down, Jos,” David cried from the arm-chair in which he had seated himself.

Josiah made no reply to his spruce, smartly dressed cousin, but took up the silk hat and carried it with his own bowler hat to the old chest. As he came back he slowly raised his glance, and the look in his eyes was that

of a dazed and beaten man. His steps as he walked were long and slow; his shoulders crouched; barely did his feet rise from the floor.

David turned in his chair to watch him. "God!" he muttered. "What a state for a man to be thrown into!"

In the same listless manner Josiah crossed the hearth, and in a moment he was a huddled, huge heap reclining in the corner of the settle. He was a nobody. His standing in the world had been eloquently demonstrated this afternoon by the fewness of his relatives who had come to the funeral; and what few of them had come had already gone, well quit of a disturbing duty. It was success these other Chapels worshipped. He was a leper in the family; someone to be shunned. He stood for the declining branch of the Chapels, for the socially decaying side, and therein lay his unforgivable sin. . . . Life had always been beating him, ever since the beginning.

David watched him, desiring to cheer him, but every moment that passed grew more difficult. He had no conception it could be so difficult to speak. He inclined his head and listened a while to the December wind moaning around the house, like a creature in pain, and then as if to occupy his thoughts he looked over his shoulder for the contents of the room. To him, everything was old, sanctified by family association. Every single article had its tale—

But the pity of it!

With one of those sudden movements of his head he turned his attention back to the huddled figure on the settle. Here at the very heart of these associations of family was the chief of the Chapels—by descent—rapidly sinking into obscurity. It was no use shirking the truth, for Josiah was a failure just as his father and his grandfather before him had been failures.

"We'd better have something to eat," Josiah said dully at last. He moved his legs so that he might sit erect, and he would have got up had not David stretched out a hand to check him.

"Wait a minute, Jos," David said to him.

It pained him to see this submission, this terrible ineptitude in the face of one of life's blows. It was so

opposed to his own manner of attacking life. Josiah seemed as though he had never grasped the reality of existence, for he appeared to live in an enervating dream, trustfully and securely in the delusion that with sufficient patience all things would evolve towards their predetermined end. His posture on the settle exemplified his theories that if trouble must come it must, and further argument was futile.

"I can't tell you, Jos," David went on. "But you know how I feel—how I sympathise with you. But I do think you're taking it all in the wrong spirit. . . . Jos," he suddenly cried, for Josiah had remained completely unresponsive. His voice grew hard, for he had discovered the cause of the devitalising submission.

"Life is a fight, Jos," he began again. "Did you ever know that?"

Josiah slowly raised his head and looked heavily across the hearth.

"For God's sake, wake up, Jos!" The utter submission was demoralising. "Don't you see there's no hope unless you wake up? There's something working against you, that will keep on pushing you down unless you wake up."

Josiah answered despairingly: "There's always *been* something pushing me down." He made no movement on the settle.

"Yes, and it's yourself. Turn round and fight, Jos. Don't let things beat you."

David sprang to his feet, pulsatingly agitated, overcome by the vehemence of his feelings for Josiah.

"Think of the old family, Jos! There's no reason why we shouldn't all of us be on the old standing again."

He would have continued had not Betsy Michael come in and interrupted him.

"Come an' 'ave tea," she told them with an acerbity in her masculine voice. "I got it ready."

This shunning of Josiah was an affront in which Betsy shared; she had been in the family twenty-five years, and had nursed Josiah when he was a boy.

David and Josiah followed her, and a renewal of their intimate conversation became impossible, for Betsy was

tremendously eager for their comfort, and kept passing in and out attending to their wants. When the darkness came, she brought the lighted oil-lamp and placed it on the table after clearing a space among the dishes.

The time arrived at last for David to depart, and as he entered the passage to get his coat and hat he was at once intercepted by Betsy.

"Come up an' see 'im before you do go," she enticed in a loud whisper.

The white flame of the candle she carried fluttered in the draught and lighted up her strong wrinkled face; and weird magnified shadows of both lay against the walls and on the ceiling. Without waiting for an answer Betsy led the way up the cold, curved, stone staircase; she limped across the landing at the top and entered a large, low bedroom which had a black beam running across the ceiling. Betsy trod guardedly on tiptoe towards the capacious four-poster bed and, shielding the candle so that the rest of the room lay in dark shadow, she made the light fall full upon the pink little face of the child peacefully asleep, tucked in between the white sheets.

Betsy carefully arranged the flannel around the baby's head. "I'd jus' like for you to see him with his eyes open," she said with ridiculous pride. "He's so sharrp lookin', you wouldn' believe!" she explained over her shoulder to this prosperous man whom she had more than once chastised and to whom her heart was warm because he would never forsake a friend of boyhood.

Betsy had her desire. It might have been the disturbance of his slumbers, or that provoking thing called light; whatever the reason, the boy's brown eyes peeped out through slightly opened lids; they blinked resentfully at the candle; and then they closed themselves in admirable indifference.

"There!" Betsy was full of delight, and her eyes were softened in enjoyment. "Did you notice how sharrp he is?" Betsy's face was suffused with prodigious pride. "The little sugar!" she exclaimed.

David Chapel was amused. He had observed and had told himself that behind those small eyes that blinked was the beginning of another Chapel personality.

Back on the landing, Betsy Michael's humour again changed, and on the top of the stairs she stopped.

"An' not one of um did even ask how he's to be brought up," she said, in her bitterness against those standoffish Chapels. "All the lot of um—all the family—they're not a bit o' good. . . . But," she asserted with a pugnacious jerk of her head, "we'll see that he won't suffer."

Josiah spent the remainder of the evening in the same dispirited state, and only in a semi-conscious way was he aware of the movements of Betsy and Jane about the house.

Betsy came in before retiring, and finding him sitting on the settle she approached and put her firm hand on his shoulder.

"You ought to go to bed, Josiah," she advised considerably.

Josiah turned and looked up at her. "You haven't gone home yet, then?"

"Oh, no! I am stayin' for to-night." Some of the old nurse feeling had reawakened and she was treating him now as her charge.

In a while Josiah ponderously mounted the stairs, groping his way up, and mechanically, in the bedroom next to the one where Betsy and the baby slept, he began to undress.

There was something pathetic in his helplessness as his tall figure stooped to place the china candlestick on the chair at the head of the wide, wooden-framed bed. His face, although lean and healthy and strongly cast, suggested a rawness, a youthfulness, a pitiful inexperience of life, so oddly contradictory to his latent physical strength and powerfulness. Slowly he took off his black coat and listlessly threw it till it sprawled over the dark quilt of the bed. And then, as if forgetting this habit of undressing, he commenced to walk fitfully, backwards and forwards, over the rush mat beside the bed and over the linoleum of the floor. He was absorbed: wrapped in this terrible gloom. In a moment he raised his head as though it were weighted, and he glanced around him: at the old wardrobe, heavy and broad and substantial: at the

swinging mirror on the chest of drawers beside the small window with its lowered blind; and then he halted in perplexity.

The same fearful emptiness and hollowness were everywhere. The place had lost its soul.

This was the bedroom Gwen and he had occupied during that brief year of married life. Even the arrangement of the furniture was due to her, for she had had the wardrobe moved and the bed placed on this side of the window. She had had everything put exactly as it was now. There were memories of her personality throbbing through every inch of the room. It was here she had died.

He moved at last towards the old wardrobe, and he stood for a time looking at the knobs of the drawers and at the panels of the two square closed doors. It was dumb. He went back and got the candle, and after returning he opened one of the drawers and began aimlessly, as though driven, to examine the contents.

The white delicate things had been Gwen's.

He remembered those times when she had proudly, yet half shyly, shown them to him. And now his fingers dipped into the open drawer. Only a touch! These things were so soft and feminine; so sweet and clean. As he touched them he felt that his mannishness was brutal in comparison to such delicateness. He opened another drawer, hypnotised by this fascination of handling what had once belonged to his dead wife. A scarf lay on the top of the first drawer; some underlinen in the other.

And then, suddenly he stood still. The whole of his large body stiffened. His eyes were wide in awful wonder. An uncanny, creepy feeling seemed to be climbing over his senses like an intoxication. Gradually, or so it seemed to him, these bits of clothing revived the occasions when she had stood at his side exhibiting them. And so vivid was his imagination under this spell, that he seemed to feel her at his side again, just as she had stood when she had lived. He seemed actually to experience the warmth of her proximity. It was as though Gwen were here! Every nerve was vibrant, every sense painfully alive under the thrill of this hallucination of her presence.

So strong was the effect that in agony he breathed—

“Why did you go?”

He felt as though he were speaking to her.

He closed the drawers and carried the candle back to the chair.

Some of his neighbours had tried to comfort him by saying: “Perhaps it was her destiny. Perhaps Fate has ordained things should be so. Perhaps it has all happened for the best.” Some even considered they offered sympathy by saying: “God moves in a mysterious way.”

But Gwen was gone; and she would never return. That afternoon he had watched her coffin lowered into the grave. Gwen was gone.

He sat on the bed with these things in his mind.

And then came another thought: “Fate; Destiny; Circumstance!” He had been brought up religiously to accept events as they happened; his life had taught him this fatalistic submission. As some of his neighbours had recalled: “God moves in a mysterious way.” Again his huge body stiffened. A daring, rebellious thought had entered Josiah’s mind—the most daring his benevolent nature had ever conceived. If all he had been taught was right, then it was *God* had robbed him of his wife.

He leapt to his feet; his hands were clenched and his eyes were flashing. Savagely and defiantly, his powerful voice asked the question—

“Why did You take her?”

IV

FAMILY

ON an afternoon a week or so later, Jane was in the little outhouse at the back of Penlan busily washing some of the ornaments she had brought from the small parlour. She was singing gaily snatches of some improvised song when sounds of familiar steps rang on the pavement. She came out at once with surprise written very plainly on her healthy face.

"Oo, Mr. Chapel," she cried, her bright eyes open. "And I haven't got the tea ready." Then her expression changed to one of resigned reproach at the vagaries of his ways. "I didn't expect you back for another half-an-hour. You never do come back from Wern as quick as this."

To show her displeasure more markedly, she snatched at the towel across the top of the door, and with it she viciously dried her hands as she followed him into the kitchen.

"You men are always doing something silly," she said to herself, her mind still on the ornaments, "and upsetting things."

"Now don't be long with the tea, there's a good girl," Chapel said from the settle. "I want to be off again."

Jane began to bustle, moving her pleasingly plump little figure about briskly, and Josiah watched her pick up the poker to shake out the bottom of the fire. The sleeves of her blue cotton bodice were rolled up above the elbows, showing her round arms, and when she went to the table drawer for the white cloth she looked extremely business-like. But somehow there was something so unreal in the way she did things; she seemed only to be pretending at being a housewife, so like a child playing at being mother. This domestic seriousness sat very oddly upon her, making

her so ridiculously matronly, and annoying, rather, in certain moods.

She laid the table, and afterwards took down a jug from the dresser to get milk from the dairy. He had been in a very bad temper before going out, but he was much better now.

"W-f-f-f!" She made a noise when she returned from the dairy. "Isn't it cold to-day?"

Chapel offered no reply, and Jane returned to the table to cut bread-and-butter. "It's starting to sing," she remarked about the kettle. "It won't be long, now." She went on cutting in silence, spreading the butter with a small table-knife, and using the big carver for cutting the slices. "Your tea will soon be ready." She again tried to start a conversation, wondering at that dull old man in the corner. Why didn't he say something? And this old butter was hard! It would be just the same trying to spread bees'-wax on sand. "It's boiling," she remarked pleasantly, glad that something was happening at last.

But Jane made the mistake of forgetting all about the kettle, for the stubborn butter and that dumb creature were taking up all her attention.

"Oo, Mr. Chapel," she screamed out a second afterwards. She had dropped both the knife and the loaf and was pressing her hands on her bosom. "How you did frighten me!"

Chapel had leapt to his feet, knocking over a chair in his rush to take off the tilted kettle from whose spout water was spluttering and hissing as it fell on the hot bars. He turned his head and looked blackly at her over his shoulder. "Why didn' you look after the dam' thing?" he asked. Her tittle-tattle had got on his nerves. Queer how some people's minds for ever ran on little things!

Jane bobbed her head in complete disgust. "As if I could help the old thing!"

Chapel had silenced her for a time, and now and again she regarded him with a half-shocked expression as she moved energetically brewing the tea. "You're improving," she informed his back. "And you're getting very touchy, my lord!" But it was impossible for her tongue to remain silent long. And what was a tongue for,

anyhow, if not to speak? And light spirits, if not to show themselves?

"Come on, Mr. Chapel," she soon invited lightly, "or you'll be complaining in a minute that the tea's cold. Tea's ready," she bawled, seeing him not moving. "And I'm sure you'll enjoy it. I've cut the slices nice and thin. And look at that cake! Mrs. Michael sent it up this morning. Baked beautiful it is, and tastes beautiful, too. I had a little bit, just a tiny little bit, myself. It's so rich. Melt in your mouth, indeed it do."

"You'd better go'n finish those ornaments," Chapel told her grimly, as he got up. Confound the girl. Why couldn't she stop her infernal noise sometimes? She was such a chatterbox.

"After I've poured out some tea for you," she corrected grandly; and when that was done she asked: "Are you quite sure you can manage now?" In her heart of hearts she felt he could not, for already, even at this age, she had adopted that preposterous notion of the domestic helplessness of these male creatures.

"Yes, yes," Chapel answered her impatiently, motioning her away with his hand, "Go now." He sat down at the table. "No, come back," he called after her when she was near the door.

Jane turned her head in absolute disgust. "Now, did you ever?" But she came back and stood obediently at the corner of the table. He was in a better humour again, she observed. "Like them old swinging boats," she compared, remembering the pleasure fair of the previous summer at Llantrisant; "up this way one minute, up that way the next." But from the look on his face there was something out of the usual the matter, and with unaccustomed seriousness she waited for him to speak.

Chapel would have liked to adopt a gentler tone, but somehow he could not unbend. After all, she was only a child, and it was wrong to damp her youthful spirits. He surprised himself in that thought; it was rather odd, for he was no more than thirty himself. He felt in view of what he was going to say that he would like to be more gentle with her. But his thoughts were not sufficiently pliable.

"You'll have to finish here at the end of this month," was what he said, and rather gruffly into the bargain.

Jane was regarding him stupidly. "Eh? What did you say, Mr. Chapel?"

"Well, you see," Chapel said quickly; "I'm going to move from here in a month."

"D'you mean——?" Jane was beginning to understand.

"That's it. It's a pity"—it came at last—"because you've always been a good girl."

"Aren't you going to work for Mr. Hughes, the agent, any more, Mr. Chapel?"

"No."

"And I'll have to look for another place?"

"Exactly."

"Then you'll have to write a character for me, Mr. Chapel." It was nothing very terrible, after all. The idea of change entered her young mind; the future became alluring; there would be new things to see.

"That's how it is," Chapel was muttering to himself. "Exactly how it is." His teeth were showing—hardly a smile.

"What did you say, Mr. Chapel?"

"That's right," he answered absently. "You go an' wash the ornaments now."

Jane went out. "Beginning to get queer," she said to herself.

Very soon afterwards, Chapel got up to go, but he could not find his hat when he began to search for it, and he had no idea where he had put his overcoat. "Jane," he called. Then a little louder: "Jane!" He walked to the back door. "Jane," he called again.

"Here I am, Mr. Chapel," from the door of the outhouse. "What do you want?"

"Have you seen my coat an' hat?"

"No, indeed, I haven't. Where did you put them?"

Her lack of responsibility annoyed him. "Come and look for them," he brusquely ordered, turning into the kitchen.

Jane tossed her head and made a face behind his back. "These old men. They never know where to find anything."

"Here they are," she said, bringing the hat and coat. "They were hanging behind the door where you put them yourself."—"You old silly," she would have dearly loved to add. "You might have said *Thank you*," was another of her criticisms. "Yes." She spoke to herself again as she brushed her master's hat. "You could have said *Thank you!*"

"Draw the brush over my coat, Jane," Chapel ordered.

"M'm!" She was half sorry for him. "Not even a *Please*."

Jane followed him a little way outside the door, half hiding herself lest she should be seen, and watched him cross the yard, through the gate, and into the narrow lane.

"Yes!" She was bobbing her head in sudden little jerks. "He does look—— Now wha's the word? Neat. That's it. I'm glad I brushed his hat." She walked back into the house. "It's cold though," she said, sucking in the air between her teeth, and shivering and rubbing her hands together. "He's an old bear, too!" But Jane laughed. She really believed she thought more of him because he was developing those rough qualities. She turned again at the door; she could just see his bowler hat moving over the top of the low hedge of the lane. But Jane's moods, also, were like those swinging boats sometimes, because now as she watched her master go, she took up the corner of her apron and dabbed her eyes with it.

She didn't want to leave Penlan. She didn't want to go and live with old strangers.

Chapel was hurrying into the village. The air was cold; it was still freezing, and he quickened his pace to keep warm.

Earlier in the afternoon he had visited Wern, the old home of his family—the present home of his employer.

Previously the place had only affected him in a remote way; but to-day, as he had approached it, everything was so different. He felt as though the old place were in his blood, pumping through his body. The spirit of the house was within him. All the fallen greatness of his family had risen before him, marching before his mind, like an unending human phantasmagoria; only it had all

been so real. He had found this afternoon that he loved the old house. He loved every angle of it, every wall of it, every stone of it. As he had looked at it he had felt a tremor in his blood, swelling the muscles of his throat, and almost choking him.

Family! Family!

It had stirred him, and had strengthened those newly born ambitions. Fate was ruthless, he had learnt, and only ruthlessness stood a chance against it. Life was a nasty, dirty fight, and he had been a soft, huge baby.

He had thought of all this, and had lain awake for nights, but the sight of the old house had strengthened it all. For three generations Fate had been playing its crushing game; his grandfather had been a failure, and his father after that. And on the top of it all had come this last insult; the stealing away of Gwen. Fate was laughing at him, trying to rob him of all delight in life, crushing and horribly mutilating him. And he had revolted. Fate could not crush him. Destiny could not mutilate him. God could not conquer him.

There had been one brief moment this afternoon which he would never forget—that moment when Wern no longer appeared to be a pile of stone and wood and mortar. It had taken to itself a spirit and had breathed. The spirit in it was family traditions; its breath the memories of an old stock; and the words it had uttered were half a call, and half reminiscent.

“I belong to you,” it seemed to say; “and you to me.”

But more important than all, it had seemed to whisper, softly, insinuatingly—

“*Aren't you ever going to come back?*”

V

THE AUCTIONEER

CHAPEL was knocking at the door of one of the houses in the village, and as a tired-looking, slight woman came to open it he would have liked to tell her to put more life into her thin body and more animation into her dull eyes.

"Is your husband in?" he asked her aggressively. "I want to see him."

He followed her into the parlour of the house, where a table untidily littered with papers stood in the centre of the room, and scarcely had he time to sit down before the tired-looking woman's husband came in, rubbing his hands together in that insufferably smooth way he had.

"Ah, Mr. Chapel," he commenced. "Let me tell you how sorry——"

"I've come on business," Chapel interrupted him.

"Very good—very good."

His ears had pricked up at the sound of the word *business*, but he looked up quite superciliously at Chapel. A fat lot of business could come from him! But he was the mighty Hughes's bailiff, and perhaps, after all, there might be something doing. Chapel himself was negligible for all his six feet.

"I'm very busy indeed, jus' now," Graig was saying, waving an expressive hand at the untidy table. "Returns got to go in to-morrow. Orders comin' in like a bloomin' river. Got anything in the shape of an order?"

"No," Chapel answered savagely. For some reason a strange resentment was rising within him. "It's business of my own."

"I was on my way to my new house," Graig was saying, "before the men finish for the day. Got to keep yer eye on a British workman, ye know!" He tittered a little

at what he considered his joke. "Mind comin' up?" he suggested. "We can talk business on the way."

Chapel consented, and as they were going together through the village his mind kept running over Graig's history as he knew it.

Ten years ago the man had come to Porth a complete stranger. Previous to that, he had been a builder's clerk, which position he had forsaken in favour of a dubious career as an agent to an Insurance Company. By push he had become a representative of several firms supplying foods for cattle, artificial manures and agricultural implements. The acquaintances and the connections among farmers gained in this way had encouraged him to open up another side line, and now once a month, at various farms, sales were held, to which the farmers brought their cattle to be sold. These sales Graig himself, after taking out an auctioneer's licence, had introduced. They filled a gap in the commercial side of the farmers' lives, and Graig was regarded as a pushing, enterprising fellow, getting on in the world. He dressed quite as well as anyone in the neighbourhood, and a great deal better than most. But just now, in Chapel's opinion, his get-up was much too gaudy; that gold band around his tie; that red fancy waistcoat.

Graig was thirty-six, or thereabouts; a medium-sized man; quick and fussy in his movements and speech; plausible to an extreme, with manners closely confidential and hail-fellow-well-met to those with whom there was any chance of doing business, but loftily tolerant to the remainder of humanity. Chapel, as it happened, had come to see him on business, and for the time being Graig was taking him into his confidence. For the present, Chapel was Graig's best friend.

"Seen my new house lately?" he was asking as they went along.

They had now reached the centre of the village where three roads met. On their left was the open space in front of the "Farmer's Arms." Immediately in front of them stood the lych-gate, and behind that, stalwartly against the sky, reared the Norman tower of the church. A short distance along the road running to the right the village

school was to be seen, and up from one of its corners peeped the bell, now idle, but still fearfully menacing to all youthful eyes that chanced to look up. Farther along the same road the roof of the Nonconformist place of worship showed itself.

Chapel and Graig turned to the left, walking on the road between the pine-end of the "Farmer's" and the wall of the churchyard. As they went, Chapel could not help contrasting his companion to the silent, inscrutable majesty of the Norman tower.

"Quieter up this way," Graig said. "Away from the mob." That bit would appeal to Chapel, whose family, by all account, had been rather big. Poor devil!

It was a house much larger than any of those of the village; a double-fronted house, and quite substantial, according to the standards of Porth; a house which would trumpet forth Graig's position and success as a business man.

"Plant some shrubs on this here slope," said Graig as they mounted the steps to the front door. "Hide us a bit from the crowd," he explained with his low titter. "Nothin' like havin' a good-size passage," he enlarged when they were inside. "Plenty o' room, d'you see! Nothin' like plenty o' room. That little show I'm living in now! Pooh! Couldn' swing a bloomin' cat there. Let's get," he continued, leading the way up the staircase.

Chapel followed him around the new house, observing Graig's spirits expanding under this feeling of ownership.

"These bay windows, now," cried Graig in one of the rooms upstairs, "make a house look a different thing. Put a couple of hundred on to the value any day." He nudged Chapel with his elbow in a confidential way, and tittered at the suggestion of his own smartness. "An' look at the view from here. All the village; all the valley; the wood—an' there's the slope of the Garth mountain! Big things, Chapel! Big things! Nothin' in the whole bloomin' world like Big Things!"

He gave a sweep of his right hand towards the mountain, as though he would have shifted it further back so as to increase the extent of his view. He moved his hand as though everything were so tiny; everything but himself,

that is. He wished one to believe that his way of living and understanding was of the most comprehensive possible; that he thought in continents, colossally, and that these narrow confines of Porth and its surroundings gave scope quite inadequate to his stupendous powers.

"And I've done it all myself," said he. "Every scrap of it."

"D'you mean——?"

"Everything. Every bloomin' thing. I done it myself. What d'you think of that?"

"But you've been in the building line?"

"And it's a paying game. Now I've got this job off all right, I'm going in for it serious. Fact is——" he was again confidential—"I've got a little contract on already. The people at the chapel here are putting up a schoolroom, so they're giving one of themselves first chance."

Graig was one of the "big men" with the Nonconformists of the village.

"But here's this range I was telling you about," he said when they got to the kitchen; "I want you to see this range. Let's light the lamp. A bit more light on the subject," he hinted, and then tittered.

Chapel began shuffling his feet; that feeling of resentment was again rising. "Never mind that dam' lamp," he cried suddenly. "I've come to talk business, and I'm wasting my time." The idea that Graig imagined he could bounce this poor devil Chapel got more than he could endure.

"Here we are!" Graig had the lamp ready, and to all appearances he had not heard Chapel's outburst. Inwardly he was thinking of those rumours floating about the village just now.

"Now look at this oven," he began, tactlessly.

"Blast your oven," retorted Chapel, scowling. "Where's your next sale to be?" he asked.

"Next sale?" Graig looked at him and winked one eye to help his memory.

"I want you to have your next sale at Penlan."

Graig was curious. "What's on?"

"Let me know. Can you hold your next sale there?"

"Well——"

"Yes or no, man! Let's have it. Yes or no."

Graig now felt certain. The old complaint of the family was breaking out, for nothing else could have made the mild Chapel so sure of himself. "It all depends whether it's worth having it there," Graig explained indulgently with his silly titter.

"I want to sell that furniture I've got."

Graig's eyes opened. "Want to sell your furniture?"

At the back of his mind was another question; Chapel was selling his home. But why? The poor devil's manner to-night suggested drink. Well, if he were on the track of his father and grandfather, he would not last very long. But such a speculation was beside the point; it was not business.

Now Graig had heard about this furniture; old women were apt to grow enthusiastic over those lovely black oak things and the blue china on the dressers and in the cupboards; he had heard a great deal too much about them. His opinion was that the whole job-lot consisted of a few sticks of value to no-one outside the family; things with a sentimental and not any intrinsic value. Graig had no sympathy with folk whose minds wallowed in dead by-gones; modernity was the cry that set his blood astir; but this little property meant business, however insignificant, and since it was by business he lived, he must enter into the scheme with all his heart.

"We'll make a Big Thing of this, Chapel," he was saying, his confidence fully awake; that overwhelming confidence which carried him through all his multifarious enterprises. "This sale 'll be in Penlan, right enough. We'll have the people of the county there. You listen to me," he said again, coming nearer, and tapping Chapel impressively on the chest. "We'll make a Big Thing of this."

And he was smart. Chapel had always known he was smart. His career bore witness to his unfailing smartness.

As he walked homeward, Chapel seemed to have in his ears the ring of a boasting voice: "We'll make a Big Thing of this, Chapel."

Chapel thought his best estimate of Graig had been made when comparing him to the silent majesty of the Norman tower; he had not been able to get nearer than that. There was something too volatile about the man altogether:

his rather slight figure, his clothes, his quickly moving eyes, his titter—ah, yes! and his moustache. Chapel had specially noticed his moustache, and his fingers went up to his own when he thought of it. His was thick enough, however short he wished to keep it; but Graig's was a thing of black scanty hairs.

"Jane," he called before he had been long at home. "Where's my razor?"

"Going to shave this time o' day, Mr. Chapel?" Then, in her characteristic way, she asked, "What'll you be doing next?"

"And bring the looking-glass and the shaving-pot and brush."

Jane brought them, and when she returned in a quarter-of-an-hour, her master was sitting at the table studying his features in the small mirror propped against the lamp.

"Oo, Mr. Chapel," she cried out. "Whatever have you been doing? You've shaved off your moustache."

She came nearer and screwed her head, now to this side, now to that, contemplatingly. "I like you with it off," was her verdict.

Chapel was still studying his features. People usually said that hair upon a man's face made him look older. What a mistake! He was thinking: "No fear of looking like the auctioneer, now." He had suddenly begotten a horror of looking like Graig.

"We'll keep an eye on Mr. Graig," he muttered to himself.

"Just as I was saying," thought Jane. "Getting a bit queer, he is, right enough."

VI

THE CURSE

BETSY MICHAEL attended the service at Hermon, the Nonconformist place of worship, on the following Sunday night as was her habit.

The meeting was over at last, and with that limping, waddling gait, Betsy's broad figure moved leisurely down the aisle. She had reached the lobby when a voice sounded in her ears.

"What's this about young Chapel, Betsy Michael?"

Instantly, Betsy was on the defensive, with pugnacious resentment on the alert. She had recognised the thin, penetrating voice, and when she turned there was Enoch Matthews's face, deeply furrowed and clean shaven except for the fringe of white hair under his chin, close to her own. Betsy knew Enoch Matthews; knew him of old. He was the keeper of the miscellaneous shop of the village, and was reputed to have gathered together quite a lot of money. In his religious life he was one of those conscious of being "saved," and held a position in the vanguard of the army of the Lord; while in his private life he was the biggest purveyor of scandal in the district. Oh, yes! Betsy knew him, and she seldom thought of him without her lips making ugly shapes unknown to her.

"Well, what about Chapel?" Betsy asked, still moving.

"Why! This sale," cried Enoch, coming up behind.

"What?" Betsy stopped abruptly. She was completely puzzled. A sale! Something shot through her heart, piercing it. "What did you say?"

"Why! This sale! A sale! He's selling all his furniture. Didn't you know?"

"Oh, s-s-sale," Betsy repeated after him, having had time to gather together her wits. "I couldn't make out

what you was talkin' about. Why don' you open your mouth like a Christian so that a body can understand what you do say? Yes, the sale," she resumed. "As you do say, he's sellin' everything." She looked Enoch straight in the eyes. "That's all I'm free to tell you about it, Enoch Matthews."

But Enoch was following her. "He's not following after his father an' gran'father, is he? It was jus' the same with them, if you do remember. A sale!"

Betsy was now sure she had covered her ignorance. Her mind was full of this horrible fear for Josiah, but she would not show her fear. She pulled her lips tighter. She would stand up and fight for Josiah, though a hundred such hypocrites tried to say evil things about him.

She went down the two steps at the gate, with that fear tugging at her heart. On the middle of the road she stopped, and Enoch Matthews was at her side.

"It would be much fitter, Enoch Matthews," Betsy suggested, "if you was to look after your own business, an' not keep poking your old long nose into the things of people like Josiah Chapel. He's always bin a good man—always. And you wait—you wait," she cried, raising her fist to his face, "he'll show you what he's made of."

"Following after his father an' gran'father, indeed," Enoch heard her mutter as he left her standing alone in the middle of the roadway.

But Betsy's head slowly began to shake, until gradually it sank, and her chin dropped on her bosom. She was thinking of Josiah: her little lad, Josiah. This sale business. She was afraid. A sale in the family was a black, ugly omen. Betsy was afraid.

"There 'ave bin a sale after every fun'ral," she told herself as she passed through the village.

So strong was the suggestive power of her fear that soon she was picturing Josiah in the raving madneses of *delirium tremens*. She had heard old men describe how his grand-father had been, and she had seen his father for herself. She shuddered at the reality of the horror.

And she would see Josiah like that!

Chapel was seated on the settle when the catch of the door clicked and someone came in. He did not trouble

to look, for he thought that perhaps it might be Jane. If so, the girl was certainly developing a stronger sense of responsibility. But he was not left long in doubt; the door was closed, and he heard the ambling irregular steps of Betsy.

She had not knocked; she never did. You only knocked at the doors of people who were snobbish and fond of talking English; people in whose houses, after you entered, you were sure to be most uncomfortable. You sat on the edge of the chair in a place where you'd knocked; you felt like a stranger to yourself; not a bit natural.

"Oh, you are by there," Betsy said, espying first Josiah's feet and then his knees around the corner of the settle.

After taking off her shawl and bonnet and hanging them behind the door she came forward towards the fire. She pulled up her frock around her so as not to crumple it in sitting, and the bright red flannel petticoat was exposed to the view. When these preliminaries were over she drew up the armchair, making its legs scrape along the floor, and sat down, her ample body completely filling the chair. She rested her great hands on her lap, and by turning ever so slightly she could see Josiah.

"It's cold," ventured Chapel from the settle. Betsy's tone puzzled him rather. That she meant to stay some little time was plain, or she would not have hung up her shawl.

Betsy pulled off her elastic-sided boots and dropped them beside the fender, and after drawing her chair some inches farther forward she put her grey-stockinged feet on the stand, so that their soles stared into the fire. Then it was that she turned to scrutinise Josiah; turned her head stiffly as though it revolved on a pivot, without the slightest stir of her body. Her eyes were narrowed and her glance pierced him like needles. Her mouth was screwed up till it was very small. Her mind was digging into the mind of this man—this stranger who had taken to the drink.

"You haven' bin to church to-night, Josiah."

"No." Chapel felt himself curling under the sting of her rebuke. For some reason he experienced a sinking back into the period of his boyhood, when he had been somewhat

afraid of Betsy. "I've finished with that sort of thing," he added, getting sullen and defiantly more assertive.

Betsy shuffled uneasily in her chair. "I am right," she was thinking. It was as she had feared—as the people were whispering in those clusters she had seen on the way from the meeting. Betsy sighed deeply. She knew he had "took to the drink." Something had been telling her all the week that he would follow after his father.

"Have you bin considering what you are doing, Josiah?" she asked tremulously. Of course, he would not want to go near God's house when he was living in the midst of sin. "Some day you will have to face your Maker. Remember that, Josiah."

A gleam of anger flashed in Chapel's eyes. "You leave Him and me alone," he said resentfully.

Betsy withdrew her feet from the stand. It was worse than she had imagined.

"An' this sale—this sale I'm hearin' about," she restarted, raising her voice and watching him. She waved her hand around. "D'you mean to say you're going to sell these things?"

"All the lot."

"And aren't you ashamed of yourself?"

"Every stick," Chapel confirmed quietly. Then he raised his glance. "Look here, Betsy. These things belong to me, and to nobody else."

Now Betsy was roused. "An' haven' I got anything to do with um?"

Her feet were moving restlessly on the brown matting, and her fingers rubbed against one another itchy. She would stand up and fight for Josiah outside the family, but here alone with him she was going to speak her mind. Her fist struck violently the arm of her chair.

"Don' you think you're going to frighten me, Josiah Chapel," she cried rebelliously. "You ought to be filled with shame to talk to me like that. I was in your family for twenty-five years; I was in this house before you was born; these things are in my bones. And a slip of a boy like you goin' to say they belong to you, an' that a woman like me have got nothing to do with um!"

"I'm selling the lot," returned Chapel, still trying to be

calm. "Every dam' stick," he emphasised, beginning to be annoyed.

Then Betsy's manner changed. You could never hope to alter a man by driving him into a temper. Besides, for the first time in her life she was afraid of him. She could tell by the way he shut his teeth and screwed his jaw. There had always been a touch of some nasty devil in the Chapels if you pushed them too far. It was like the spitting of a cat that had taken to the woods, when you got her into a corner. But all the time Betsy's heart was aching because once she had nursed him, and because she felt convinced he was damning his eternal soul. And a lost soul Betsy pictured as tossing in everlasting torment; so, if she could help it, Josiah should not burn in those brimstone flames of Hell.

The tears were already in Betsy's eyes.

She got up from the chair and walked in her stockinged feet towards him. "You won't sell um, Josiah?" she pleaded, attempting to put her hand on his shoulder.

"I'm going to sell the lot," Chapel answered, brushing away her hand.

Betsy returned to the chair. "What the people are saying is quite right," she said.

"People! People! What are the people saying?"

"What are they saying? That you are following after your father an' your gran'father, to be sure!"

She saw the nasty smile on his lips.

"So that's what they're saying, is it?" He shrugged his great shoulders and chuckled as though the thing grimly amused him. Then a new thought struck him, suggesting to him at last the possible cause of Betsy's queer behaviour.

"And you are thinking the same?" he asked.

"Yes," Betsy admitted quite frankly.

And yet, when Betsy reseated herself, there was a germ of a doubt in her mind. A moment ago she had seen that Chapel demon in his eyes, and she had considered him half a madman already, beginning to battle with the horrors; but now, when she could see things more plainly, there seemed to have been remarkable sanity in the clearness of his eyes all the time.

"But what are you going to do *after* the sale, Josiah?"

Controversial matters were best shunned. "Where are you going to live?"

"I don't know."

"Lodgings?"

Chapel nodded.

"Josiah," Betsy breathed very coaxingly. "There's a spare room in our house. I know all your ways. Wouldn't you like to come——"

"And live at the Windgap?"

"Yes, Josiah."

Betsy's face was covered with the broadest smile; she saw the notion pleased him. New dreams leapt suddenly into being, rushing as a torrent through her brain. Think of it! If only Josiah would come and live with them, she would always have Josiah's boy to bring him up!

Her mind was in a whirl as she walked home towards the Windgap; Josiah had taken to the drink, and yet sometimes she thought he had not. Well, whether he had, or whether he had not, he was coming to live with them, and she would be able to keep an eye on him.

And—her heart leapt and thumped in a frenzy against her breast—she would always have the boy. Her steps quickened; her body swayed and lurched more than ever as she hurried.

Had meek old Francis, her husband, carried out all her orders? Had he remembered about the time for the boy's milk?

When yet a quarter of a mile from home, she fancied hearing the shrieks of an unfed, starving child—the cries of *her* baby being misused by a helpless male. It was nothing but the slight wind whistling through the trees above her head, but nevertheless, Betsy gathered up her skirts and immediately began to run.

VII

THE SALE

SNOW fell on the day previous to the sale. The gentle wind blew the fine flakes, causing them to drift into thin white lines around the leaded panes of the windows of Penlan; they hung gossamer-like on the twigs of the gooseberry and currant bushes in the large garden, and lay as silky garments on the leaves of the evergreens in front of the house.

The place was all astir to-day; Graig the auctioneer was present, and wherever Graig went, there also went bustle. All the floors of the bedrooms had been stripped bare early in the morning; the carpet from the large parlour had been beaten and rolled; sheets and blankets and quilts had been put away. Betsy and Jane had been busy ever since five o'clock, and now two of the farm hands, under Mr. Graig's supervision, were completing the upset. Their feet on the naked boards sounded as if horses had got into the house, and when they moved the heavy furniture the noise was like miniature thunder.

The physical side of Betsy was uppermost to-day; there was work to be done; hard work, and she slaved. Betsy had accepted the inevitable. Since the furniture had to be sold, she was determined to do her full share.

At last the noise and the stir had ceased; quiet was supreme again; the two labourers had gone; Mr. Graig was going around the house with a pencil and a notebook; and Betsy and Jane were together in the kitchen.

"Oh, dear! But I *am* tired, Mrs. Michael." Jane had sunk on to the settle. "I've never worked so hard in my life."

"Do you good, my gel," consoled Betsy unfeelingly.

"I'm goin' to have a cup of tea, whatever. Go 'n' fetch the kettle full of water."

While the kettle was boiling, they went in search of Graig. They did not immediately find him, but they very soon struck his trail.

"What's this little piece of paper, Jane?" Betsy was standing in front of the clock in the small parlour, gazing at an oblong label on its face. "It do look as if it's going off by train. What do it say, Jane? What do it say, gel?"

Jane read for her, for one of Betsy's charms was her illiteracy.

"That says, 'Lot 1,'"—pointing to the clock; and then reading the label on the corner cupboard: "This is 'Lot 2.' He'll sell one of these lots at a time, see, Mrs. Michael!"

They found Graig in the largest bedroom, and they watched him from the doorway. First of all, he took one of those small oblong pieces of paper from a bundle he held in his hand; after wetting the back of it on his tongue he dabbed it expertly on the bed-frame propped against the wall, and then he wrote something about it in the big black notebook. He went through the same process with the wardrobe, the chest and the cluster of chairs. This section of the business seemed particular and important, judging from the way the auctioneer carried on, because he winked his left eye a great deal and chewed the end of his pencil a lot, as though in deep thought and perturbation, before he wrote anything in his big black notebook.

Chapel came in, grim and silent, while Betsy and Jane stood watching Graig.

"Very near finished, Mr. Chapel," Graig cried on seeing him. It paid to be polite when doing business with a man. "System, ye know," he went on, nodding at the big black notebook. "Nothing like system."

Here was another of his favourite words, for his tongue lingered lovingly over it; he whistled the sibilants between his teeth, and squeezed on each of the syllables.

"Nothing in the world like s-sys-tem, Mr. Chapel. See it?" He was pointing to the notebook in his hand. "Four columns—ruled. Lot Number. Description of

Article. Highest Bid. Name of Buyer. . . . What d'you think of that? Must have system, you know. . . . But the third column's the most important.—Eh? What do you say, Mr. Chapel?" He nudged Chapel with his elbow, and tittered. That was a remarkably fine joke.

"You have got everything in the best way, I suppose?"

Graig jerked his head. Chapel was a bit thick in the "top-notch." "Can't recognise a joke from a bloomin' tin whistle when he hears one."

"Trust me," Graig answered with a knowing wink. "What they call a catalogue," he said about the notebook. "You can't go wrong on a system." Then he went on with his inventory.

"I should like to have a look at it," said Chapel.

"The catalogue? I leave it with you, Mr. Chapel. Leave it with you when I've finished."

In a while Graig departed; the others had tea; and afterwards, Jane elected to go to the Windgap to see the baby.

It was approaching nine o'clock when Jane returned that night, and when she entered the kitchen there was her master seated at the table. The brass inkstand stood in front of him under the lamp; Mr. Graig's notebook was near him to his left; and he was writing in another notebook very similar in size and shape to the first.

Chapel was being systematic, like the auctioneer, and was making a copy of the catalogue in four columns: Lot Number; Description of Article; Highest Bid; Name of Buyer.

By two o'clock on the following day the kitchen had begun to fill rapidly, and the room became alive, chattering alive, with the dancing voices of women and the more subdued murmur of the men. Enoch Matthews came in after a while, bending over his walking-stick, and tugging fretfully at the fringe of white beard under his chin. Naturally, the top hat and the dilapidated frock coat were not being aired to-day; instead, the occasion saw him wearing a short overcoat, green with age, frayed at the wrists, and on the back of his head rested a flat-topped felt hat. Unfortunately, Enoch was not given time for

his much-cherished gossip, for almost on his heels came the auctioneer.

The groups of women now broke up, most of them joining their husbands; and thus, husband and wife together, the woman and her man, every pair stood pitted against the rest of the world; every pair to make the best bargain they could.

Graig was more subdued than usual, and less bluff and boisterous, for there were women present, and he must show that he could act the polished gentleman, too, when occasion required.

He looked around the kitchen, a pleased smile under his scanty moustache. Visions of a goodly commission sprang before his little eyes, for nearly all the money of the neighbourhood was here. He rubbed his hands together, and then took out his watch. Half-past two—time to begin. "Punctuality in business," he thought, reminding himself of one of his many empiric maxims.

The tap of his hammer on the table put a stop to the chatter, and in the ensuing silence, with the maximum of effect, he took the black notebook from the pocket of his overcoat, and with studied deliberation he turned the pages.

"Lot Number One," Graig read aloud in his high-pitched tenor voice. "Grandfather's clock," he deciphered impressively from the Second Column. "Bring it in here, boys," he said to his two assistants of yesterday. "An' be careful. Carry it in as if it was a little gold-mine."

The men laughed, and Graig tittered. Graig was a wag.

"Now, ladies! Look at it." He patted the old clock affectionately as it stood near the passage door. He opened the front and set the pendulum in motion until the little sailing ship on the top rocked to and fro in joyful sprightliness. "Look at it. Must have been with Noah in the Ark." Again he tittered. "Age adds to value," he epigrammatised. "Oak case—brass face. And the little ship! Gaze at it. The little ship's worth a sovereign by itself, any day of the week."

The bidding commenced, and it was while Graig was hesitating, and crying, "Any advance on fifteen pounds?—

Come now, ladies! Any advance on fifteen pounds?"—it was then the surprise of the sale happened.

"Any advance on fifteen pounds?" Graig was repeating with his hammer in the air. "For the last time, any——"

"Guineas," came a clear voice from the door.

"Gone," cried Graig like a shot, tapping his hammer on the side of the clock, and hurrying to fill Columns Three and Four in his big black notebook.

Everyone had quickly turned—so quickly that many had a *crick* in their necks—and there were Hughes, the agent, and his wife, prosperous and superior. A wave of excitement passed through the kitchen; the tone of the whole business was immediately heightened, and a way was made for the superior new-comers to come forward.

"You've got a bargain, sir," Graig said obsequiously to Mr. Hughes.

Lot Number Two was the corner cupboard, and this again was bought by the agent.

In the best bedroom it soon became plain that Hughes and his wife had come to the sale determined to purchase the pick of the furniture of the old Chapel family, because for every desired article Mr. Hughes resolutely bid until he became its owner.

Chapel, always behind the auctioneer, watched everything with a mixture of strange emotions. Graig's mountebank methods left him unmoved; hardly was he cognisant of the faces in front of him. What filled his thoughts for a while was that the pieces of furniture were being bartered and transferred to the one who offered the most gold. As some article, crammed full of intimate memories, was knocked down, the tap of the hammer seemed to be breaking a link that joined him to the past of his family. Tap after tap cut him adrift from beloved associations, until he seemed to stand alone. He could have cried out; there were people around, but he was alone.

And then came another thought, begotten of the bitter irony of Fate, tormenting him, and causing him to suffer agony. He, too, soon understood that his treasures were passing into Hughes's possession. Fate was laughing mockingly at him to-day. Already was Wern, the old home, in the hands of this man; and now at last the

furniture was returning to the old surroundings. He cursed Fate. During these moments he saw Hughes as the Nemesis of the Chapels, and he hated him.

Yet, for all these conflicting emotions, for all the bitterness and the agony, he did not once forget to fill up the Third and Fourth Columns of his copy of the catalogue. The old inefficiency had been left behind, and although he wrapped himself in black silence, and although his face was grim and set, the new man in Chapel was wideawake, enabling him to keep account of what was passing, and stirring him to banish sentiment in order to look forward to the risks and fights and conquests of the future.

Fate must be beaten.

VIII

THE FIRST LESSON

THROUGH the cutting wind of the winter night a week later Chapel walked from the Windgap into the village, on his way to get the money which was to enable him to start living a man's life.

Chapel's knock was answered by Graig himself.

"I'm here on my lonesome," Graig explained, standing aside for Chapel to enter. "The missis and the kids have gone to the week-night meeting."

The table in the parlour was as untidy as on Chapel's previous visit, and when he took the proffered chair beside the fire in the tiny grate he studied his surroundings.

Graig's description, "Couldn't swing a blooming cat there," hit off the room to perfection. There was no space for much furniture; the table, two small chairs and the narrow armchair in which he sat included everything. No—there was a kind of chiffonier in the gloom behind him.

But the table! It was like a mining village seething with its population, for every square-inch was utilised, and only from seeing it hanging down at the sides did one become aware of the existence of the faded maroon table-cloth.

The sole ornaments of the strikingly papered walls were pictorial almanacs of the Insurance Company and of the firms of agricultural implements, foods and manures.

"Chock-full of work as usual, as you see, Mr. Chapel." Graig waved around his hand as he brought forward one of the small chairs. "And how are things going with you?" he asked when he was seated opposite with his knees crossed.

"We'd better have the business finished," Chapel suggested briefly from the armchair.

"'Pon my soul," laughed Graig in praise; "I never came across a man for getting so quick to the heart of things. You get there every time, Mr. Chapel." Graig moved quickly to the chiffonier. "Right you are," he cried as he went. "We'll get into things straight away. Have a look at this," he said, handing over a sheet of paper, "while I fetch the coin."

Chapel drew up his armchair to the table, cleared a space, and after smoothing out the paper began to read. The document was executed in Graig's best quasi-legal manner; its phraseology and the flourishes of the calligraphy were typical of the whole man. Chapel began to read, slowly, and with an ironic smile on his lips—

SALE

Conducted on the Tenth day of February in the Year of Our Lord One Thousand Eight Hundred and Eighty Two

OF THE GOODS AND EFFECTS OF JOSIAH CHAPEL, ESQUIRE,

*of Penlan in the Parish of Porth in the County
of Glamorgan*

	£	s.	d.
<i>Gross Proceeds of Sale</i>	531	15	0
<i>Auctioneer's Comm. at 2½ per centum</i>	13	0	0
	<hr/>		
<i>Net Proceeds of Sale</i>	£518	15	0
	<hr/>		

As he read, Chapel's eyes slowly began to open wider. He re-read, to be sure he was making no mistake. No! There it was, written plainly enough for any one to see: Five Hundred and Thirty-one Pounds. The actual discovery came as a shock, though all along he had been half prepared.

Graig was robbing him: cheating him of twenty pounds, for the amount should have been Five Hundred and *Fifty*-one, and not Five Hundred and *Thirty*-one.

It roused demons of iniquity in Chapel to be thus estimated. Excited anger began to boil within him, and his

fingers itched to do bodily harm to this scoundrel who considered he could be so easily cheated. Then a completely strange side of his nature awoke. His hands clawed at the edge of the table in the effort to control his temper; and then his teeth showed in a snarl because he was able so well to hold himself in check. But that demon Betsy had seen some nights ago had leapt into his eyes, and he kept them glued to the paper lest Graig should catch sight of the expression in them.

Graig was placing six yellow bags of money on the table. "And here's the coin," he was saying. "Changed all the cheques for you yesterday. Count it up, Mr. Chapel! Count it up to see if it's all right."

Chapel now had himself under control, and, when he looked at Graig across the table, there was an ingenuous smile on his lips. "Read it over, Graig," he begged in a very simple way. Carelessly, he handed the statement to the auctioneer.

"Didn' expect to find it so much—eh?" questioned Graig, tittering.

"Well, no," Chapel agreed, his smile broadening. "The total did startle me a bit. But you've got so many flourishes in your handwriting, Graig," he jestingly objected.

"Simpleton," murmured Graig. Aloud he said: "As I told you before, the mighty Hughes came as a bloomin' godsend. If you'd 'a' told me that we were going to make over Five Hundred golden sovereigns—well, I'd 'a' thought it, even if I hadn' called you—a bloomin' liar." He tittered again and turned his body and the paper towards the lamp.

"Well, here we are." He read aloud in his tenor voice: "Gross Proceeds of Sale—Five Thirty-one, Fifteen, O!"

"O?" Chapel interrupted. "What does the O mean?"

"Figure *Oh*," enlightened Graig, for he pronounced it in that way. "Ah, that's it; no headpiece."

"All right. Go on."

"We'll start from the beginning again, Mr. Chapel; so as you can understand it all. Gross Proceeds of Sale—Five Thirty-one, Fifteen, O!"

Chapel propped his chin on his hands and exclaimed in a kind of unbelieving ecstasy: "Five Hundred and Thirty!"

"Plus One Fifteen," corrected Graig delightfully.

"Of course. One Fifteen Oh! Better still," appreciated Chapel, chuckling ever so softly.

"Auctioneer's Comm. at two an' a half per centum comes to Thirteen Pounds—O—O. To be exact, Mr. Chapel, it comes to three ha'pence more. But that's nothing, Mr. Chapel. Nothing. So we'll cross it off."

"Not much one way or the other," agreed Chapel good-humouredly.

"So we're now left with the net proceeds: Five Hundred and Eighteen Pounds—Fifteen—O. A very tidy little lot of money, Mr. Chapel," he said pleasantly, handing back the paper. "Everything quite plain now?"

"Everything," answered Chapel. "Quite," he added, with emphasis. Then he counted the money: Five Hundred and Eighteen Pounds, Fifteen Shillings.

"Wouldn't mind if a little lot like that was to come my way," said Graig pleasantly across the table.

"Not a bad sum," Chapel readily admitted, arranging the six bags in a row on the table. Then he shifted his chair back to the hearth and took out his pipe. He must be wary with Graig. The man had six years' more experience of life than he, and thirty-six more of duplicity. He must go slowly, temporising awhile, because he must assimilate this first lesson of a man's life and, as well, get those twenty pounds before he left the house.

"Might as well give us a receipt," Graig was saying, coming around with another sheet of paper. "Then that will finish the business."

"Got a stamp ready, too, I can see," Chapel remarked lightly as he examined the sheet. "Leave it alone a minute," he suggested playfully.

"Right-o! Any time so long as I do get it."

"As simple as an infant. Doing young Chapel's as easy as winking. No headpiece; no business ability; none." Graig walked around and brought a bottle from the bottom of the chiffonier. "Could have made it fifty right enough. Pity it wasn't fifty."

"Have a drink, Mr. Chapel."

The two glasses and the bottle were on the table and Graig was once more settled, and he was again sitting

opposite, comfortably smoking. He took the pipe from between his lips and blew a cloud of smoke into the air of the little room.

"Seen my new house lately, Mr. Chapel?"

"No," was the answer, given rather absently. "I haven't been up that way since."

"Painters in this week. Startin' on the schoolroom next week. Told you about it, didn't I? Got the plan *here*," he said, jerking his thumb at the other end of the table.

"You seem to be doing all right," Chapel suggested as he knocked the ashes out of his pipe against the bars.

"Goin' in for buildin' serious, now," came the reply, as Graig began to swell under the laudation. "I've made up my mind to. Speculative building, d'ye see? Houses'll go up like mushrooms where this coal's jus' been found—like bloomin' mushrooms they will. An' there's money in it; oceans of money—oceans; for the man who can do it," he added after a pause and a pitying glance at the gullible—poor devil!—Chapel. "And I'm the man; the very man," he boasted.

But the unnatural duplicity of his own behaviour was beginning to tell upon Chapel; playing a double-faced rôle was utterly strange and repugnant to him. Suddenly, he sprang up and, after pulling his chair to the table, took up the paper which required but his signature to change it into a legal receipt.

"That's it. Put yer name across that stamp there," Graig hinted.

Chapel returned to the table. "Bring your chair round here, Graig." His voice was under excellent control. He would show this whipper-snapper how much business ability he possessed. "Where's your black notebook, Graig?" he demanded when the auctioneer was seated at his side.

"Well——" Graig was on his dignity. "It's hard for anyone not a professional man to understand," he explained indulgently; "but a professional man keeps his private system—well—*private*."

Chapel slowly turned his head. "I'd like to see that black notebook, Graig," he said, more firmly.

"It's very unusual, Mr. Chapel. Very——"

"Don't make so much of your dam' noise, Graig."

Chapel had at last found a way. "Let's have a look at that black notebook; an'don' be long about it. I'm thinking of going into business myself, and I like your idea of system."

Graig brought the black notebook, and Chapel opened it.

"Looks as if you've been rubbing something out, Graig," he said, pointing with a finger after turning some of the pages.

"Rubbed out?" Graig was superb. He had made up his mind that Chapel was drunk. "Have another drop of whisky," he invited.

Chapel seemed not to have heard. The last page was reached; several erasures had been observed; and now Chapel was running a finger along the total at the bottom.

"Five Thirty-one, Fifteen," he read aloud.

"Everything tallying," buoyantly proclaimed Graig at his side, handing over the receipt form.

It was all very well for Chapel to maintain a control over his temper, and to draw Graig into deeper entanglement, but watching the scoundrel *bouncing* him and crediting him with the simplicity of an infant got more than he could bear. He thrust his hand into his overcoat pocket and clapped his own black notebook on the table.

"Have a look at that," he savagely cried. "Have a dam' good look at it," he repeated. "Look at those figures there!" He struck a rigid finger on the total, and turned with a jerk of his head to Graig. "Twenty pounds missing, Mr. Auctioneer," he chuckled viciously.

Graig's face lost some of its colour; but, instantly, his confidence returned. "What d'you mean?" he asked, visibly working himself into a passion.

"You're not the only one can follow a system," remarked Chapel coolly.

"What is it you mean?" Graig repeated. "What the devil d'you mean to—to——"

"Twenty pounds missing." Chapel calmly placed the proposition for his consideration.

"D'you mean to say——" As though his finest feelings were outraged.

"Twenty pounds missing," came the parrot-like repetition.

Graig leapt challengingly to his feet. "Let's have it

straight. It's not a trifling thing to accuse a man of business with fraud."

"There!" provoked Chapel meaningly. "*Fraud.*"

Graig saw his error, but putting up his finger to point at Chapel, he made the whole meaning of his veiled threat plain. "Slander is something inside the law," he said very grandly. "Now let's have it. Do you say I've cheated you? Because if you do, come an' say it agen before witnesses. A game of that sort don't go down here, young Chapel."

Chapel pulled himself erect and calmly took up his hat. "We won't *hum an' haw* about it," he said. His self-possession pleased him, and he glanced through Graig's notebook again. "Put your coat on," he remarked, "and come as far as Wern. I daresay Hughes the agent 'll be able to say how much he's paid you."

Graig had the sense to understand that the game was up; but he still clung to his honesty, remaining brazenly bold, and prepared to bluster his way through even at this stage.

"We're old friends, Mr. Chapel," he commenced soothingly. "If there's any mistake, it's not wilful, as you know. We're all liable to make mistakes, as we all know."

Chapel began to bristle again at this renewed attack upon his gullibility, but he was quite sure of himself, and his treatment of Graig was already defined.

"This," he said slowly, tapping his own notebook, "has got Five Hundred and Fifty-one Pounds, Fifteen Shillings, and that's how much I want to see on this table."

"But," Graig was innocently expostulating, "there's the commission."

The man's lack of susceptibility of any kind enraged Chapel and he moved threateningly towards him, thumping the table rapidly as though his patience were on the point of exhaustion.

Graig recognised the sign. There was danger in the young fool's eyes; perhaps murder if he were trifled with any further. Graig went docilely, completely cowed, to the chiffonier, and brought Thirty-three Pounds from the cashbox and put them on the table.

Chapel counted them, transferred them to his waistcoat pocket; he picked up the six bags of money and dropped

them into his overcoat pockets; he took up the unsigned receipt form, tore it in two and threw the pieces on the fire; and then he left the house without another word.

Graig stood listening to the bang of the front door; he was cursing his own helplessness. He had not received any commission—not even the receipt. And he had not dared to ask for either.

IX

A MAN'S LIFE

WITH the sale over and the money in his pocket, Chapel commenced upon his new life. His hopes flew high; his determination to succeed was fixed; the future was a battle-ground; he was eager to be fighting and the week spent waiting for the money had seen him impatient, like a bloodhound on a leash tugging at the delay.

He was now completely cut adrift from the old life; nothing linked him to the past except memory, which he was learning to stifle. Lack of purpose had completely vanished and he was alone, face to face with Fate, and he was going to win. Always before him as a magnet, drawing him, would be a vision of the old stability of his family. Between him and the attainment, obstacles lay, and these obstacles had to be demolished; that was the battle.

The last link with the past had been snapped on the day following the sale, when Jane, the chatterbox of a maid, had come to the Windgap to wish them all good-bye. She seemed, however, suddenly to have lost all her talkativeness, for she spoke very little as she sat in Betsy's kitchen; and when the actual parting with Chapel took place she burst into tears, quite unable to express herself intelligibly. But she pleaded with Chapel, and made him promise, that whenever he set up a household he would send for her and let her come back and work for him again.

"I don't want to leave you," Jane had sobbed. "I don't want to go to any old strangers." And then, brightening at Chapel's promise, she had said: "I'll come the very minute you send for me." The incident touched Chapel. Her loyalty impressed him.

Cattle-dealing was to be his new work, for there was

some risk about such a life, some uncertainty; and it appealed to him. With care he might develop such a business to an extent that would make possible the realisation of his dreams. He knew men who had gained considerable wealth in this way.

To-day, now that he had the money, he meant starting his new life by attending the fair at Llantrisant.

After three miles he had begun climbing the hill, and that high wall running along the roadway on his left reminded him of the occasions he had come this way in his boyhood. Yes, there they were—the trees overhanging the wall. But there were no apples on them to-day, for the branches were bare, and from them fell drops of water, thawed by the slowly increasing heat of the sun. How tempting, and how provoking those apples had been when he was a boy! What luxurious pictures his imagination had drawn of the rich garden behind these walls!

Still climbing, he came to the site of the old turnpike gate, and he never could pass this spot without half-expecting someone to rush out and demand his toll.

Rounding the bend, climbing all the time, he reached the hilly High Street. But that was the character of every street in Llantrisant; the little town on the hill it was.

And here was the Bull Ring—a sloping, irregular-shaped, elongated “square,” surrounded by houses, mostly shops. When he entered the Bull Ring that feeling of wonder still possessed him, and he was the imaginative boy again, with all the intervening years slipped away.

There they were—the few stalls and standings at the lower end of the Bull Ring. The same old, white-haired, stooping man—Humphreys the Flannel; and there, below him, squat on her stool, with a box for standing, sat old Marrie the Mill selling ginger-bread. Chapel wondered whether the bonnet and the black-and-red shawl were the same as she had worn twenty years ago.

Here on his left was the branch of a great English banking firm, the ground floor of one of the houses changed into a repository of gold. It was not open yet, but very soon men would keep walking in, handing bags of money over the counter, or getting golden coins in return for bits of paper called cheques. A marvellous place.

And here was the cobbled road, narrow as it went up the gradient leading out from the Bull Ring and rising away from the noise and the stamping of the fair; leading away into seclusion. It was music to hear one's own footfalls on these old-fashioned cobbles, especially after the din of the fair. A Roman road he used to call this when a boy. How old could it be?

At the top was the Angel. Queer name for a tavern, that. Profane, rather. And round the corner on the left stood the Town Hall where the Police Courts were held. He had been inside once, listening to a poaching case.

Then on to the Castle. Not much of a castle now! A few upright walls and the ruins of others crumbling at their feet. He was in touch with the past here. Welsh princes with their hordes of wild warriors whose yells had pierced the air around the very spot on which he stood! With swords and spears and small round shields they had fought, fanatically, bloodily, pitilessly. Even now he could see their hair flying in the wind. What tales these old walls could have told! Remarkable! Everything was remarkable. And these hollows in the ground down below, which once must have been dungeons, for this had been the jail of the manor! The cries, the agonies and the groans of imprisoned and tortured men! Wonderful! Everything was wonderful.

And there, away across the corner of the fertile vale beneath his feet, lay his home——

God!

He awoke.

With the thought of his home rushed back the realities of a man's life. His head fell, and his mouth began to quiver. His eyes grew moist because of his own helplessness.

All he could do was to dream and see visions and let his imagination carry him away. He was totally incapable of anything else. This is what he had been fearing all the time since he had determined to conquer Fate. Of what use was a dreamer when face to face with the stern realities of a nasty, dirty fight? It was all so hopeless. He had come to the fair to transact business and bargain with hard-headed men, and in the very midst of the scene of

fighting the old weakness had mastered him. There was nothing practical in his constitution; he was a simple, weak dreamer.

But gradually, his lips steadied and tightened; his teeth clenched; his head went up; once, his long white teeth showed as though they snarled; and, turning, he walked back to the fair, past the Fives Court, the Town Hall, and down the cobbled roadway.

"We'll see," he kept muttering. "We'll dam' well see."

Chapel, as he moved about the fair, soon discerned that he was the object of some interest and curiosity. As indeed he was.

The rumours of the recurrence of the curse they all had heard; the sale at Penlan had made them more inquisitive; and to-day, when they saw him buying, added to their curiosity. But he had always been of interest on his own account, for there was about him the halo of an old family; and there is something in the romance and superiority of an old stock that appeals very warmly to the heart of a Welsh farmer. His reserve and slight aloofness aggravated them until they remembered who he was; but Chapel's family had always lived on a level very much above their neighbours, and also there was some characteristic in the present Chapel himself that demanded and received their respect. One thing was certain, in spite of the decline of the family: the farmers still submitted to this undefined superiority, and Josiah still exercised the vague advantage. There was just a shade of condescension in his manner as he greeted them, and just a shade of submission in their attitudes as they replied to him.

Chapel busied himself throughout the morning, and by early afternoon he was congratulating himself. The drover he had hired had in his charge two milking cows, seven heifers and a young pony. Besides those, Chapel had bought and sold five other heifers, making an average profit of a pound apiece.

Not bad for a novice!

But business had slackened by one o'clock, and the Bull Ring was emptying. Old Humphreys the Flannel was pulling down his stall, but Marrie the Mill still sat at the

side of her ginger-bread. The farmers were gathering together their cattle and beginning to depart, and Chapel determined to go home. He entered the High Street, which was filled chiefly with horses during a fair, and here again were the same signs of departure. There was nothing here that suited him.

But what was this ?

Approaching him from the lower end of the street was what looked like a very fine sample of a cart-horse. The man leading the horse was exceptionally quick in noticing Chapel's interest, and he stopped.

"'Ere ye arre, guv'ner!" he cried. "Th' virry thing ye're after."

Very successfully, the short-necked little fellow was hiding a brogue which had travelled from Erin—successfully enough, at all events, to avoid Chapel's detection.

Chapel stood stroking his chin as he contemplated the horse. His coat was pleasingly glossy; he appeared to be sound in wind and limb; his eyes were bright; his breathing was gentle; and his pose eloquent of strength.

"Trot 'im up," said Chapel. "Let's have a look at him."

The little Irishman who had lost half his brogue was particularly quiet; he had an inkling that horse-dealers of his nationality were in rather bad odour at Llantrisant just now.

"From where do 'e come?" Chapel was speaking English, for him a very difficult task at this period.

"Gloucester. Ree-arred in Gloucester."

"I see." Chapel was admiring the horse. "What's the figure?"

"Fifty."

"Wh-e-w! . . . Give you thirrtly!"

The higgling and the haggling went on until the price fell to thirty-five, and Chapel bought the horse. He was thinking: "Not bad for a beginner!"

He was all right: quite all right. It was only foolish fancy to imagine he was not fit to meet any man, however hard-headed. See how he had settled Graig, the auctioneer. And look at the way he had been bargaining with these men at the fair! He was ready to meet the best of them;

he was not a dreamer, but a sane, practical business man.

Five pounds on those heifers he had already sold! Those animals the drover was driving home for him! And this splendid horse he had bought! Not at all bad for a novice!

He started homeward, and he had not gone a mile before he met a farmer interested in milking-cows. They caught up the drover, and Chapel made four pounds on the two cows.

On reaching the Windgap, Chapel got Francis to tie up the horse in the stable, and before going to bed that night, he went himself and gave it a feed. He was proud of this horse.

It was at breakfast next morning he received the suggestion that something was amiss. Francis, who had been out for several hours feeding and milking the cows, awoke the terror.

In his slow, ponderous fashion Francis, while eating, said: "Seen that 'orrse this mornin', Mr. Chapel?"

Chapel started; something had pierced him. "What's the matter with him?" he asked resentfully.

"Don' like the look of 'im," Francis answered and went on eating his porridge.

Without a word Chapel sprang up, viciously kicking away his chair. Outside the door he began to run, a devilish foreboding tugging at him; and with every second the fear leapt into a terrible reality. He untied the halter, and dragged the horse into the daylight.

"He's tired after yesterday," he muttered, seeking to cheat himself. But in his heart he knew.

Francis came out with Betsy following. Francis gave his verdict at once. "Doctored," he said in his heavy voice; and Chapel knew that he was right. He might as well have said: "Thirty-five pounds lost."

Betsy had her eyes on Chapel. His head had dropped in despair. Slowly, he led the horse back into the stable and tied it to the manger.

Trying to succeed was only knocking his head against the same blind, unreasoning rock. Courage oozed out of him and he felt himself as a helpless, incapable scrap of

humanity tossed and thrown and buffeted and battered by relentless Fate.

Of what use to try ?

He leant his arm against the stable wall and on to it sank his head. In black despair he sobbed racking dry sobs that violently shook his body.

Why struggle ? Why pit himself against those merciless forces when he knew he must be beaten ?

Suddenly he raised his head and listened. His mind was so disturbed that he seemed to have heard the sound of a low, biting, sarcastic chuckle.

Like a prodded animal, he gnashed his long teeth.

X

AT THE WINDGAP

THE oblong clock on the wall opposite the window in the kitchen of the Windgap showed six-thirty. To anyone in the secret it made known another fact: that it was bathing time.

Had the season been summer, the ticking of the clock might have said, "Wait another hour or two," but outside, the air had a sharp nip, the wind was rising, trees were bare and the cows in their shed munched stolidly with their monotonous *crunch—crunch*; all of which proclaimed the season to be winter and that half-past six was the time for bathing to-night. The window had been fastened and the blind drawn long ago; soon the two doors leading out of the kitchen would be closed and latched, for no draughts must enter during the performance of this sacred rite.

On the hearth a large sheet of clean brown canvas had been spread, and on its centre a zinc bath stood, with the saucer holding the soap looking like a tiny dwarf by the side of a great grey giant. The black kettle sat majestically athrone on the red fire, and inside it was beginning to whistle that eternal old enemy of childhood.

Crawling towards the bath on all-fours, with a light of mischief in his wicked eyes, hastened a young rascal in whom you would scarcely recognise the innocent morsel of pink and rosiness of a year ago. His pinafore was shockingly dirty. Two clean pinafores a day!—you never saw such a boy. If you took your eyes off him only for a second, there he was, before you had time to turn round, on the floor, crawling about and getting himself into "no end of a pickle."

Such was the character given to Master Griffith Chapel by his ridiculously proud old foster-mother.

He was by this time quite able to walk properly between the armchair by the fire and the sofa by the window; he did it often, boastfully, and after it was done would be sure to look around for your applause.

Such a *knowing* child.

Then the task of bathing began, amid much screaming for the most part, especially when the soap got into Griff's eyes.

Betsy's attitude towards Chapel's child showed what a mass of human nature she was. At certain times she regarded the boy with a queer, romantic feeling; there was something almost unreal about him. Because he was one of the Chapels he was of superior flesh, and her affection for him would change into a mad adoration, to a kind of perfervid worship. She was bringing up one of the Chapels. When attacked by thoughts of this nature she would even go so far as to seek analogies between herself and the Virgin with the God-Son; but the simple woman regarded that as blasphemy, as though blasphemy could in any way mix itself with the miraculous purity of the mother-feeling, whatever the conditions.

With the child washed and dressed, Betsy pressed and hugged him, kissing him and making strange, incoherent noises.

And then Francis came in.

The Windgap was a small farm—too small for the complete support of the childless family, and during the appropriate seasons Francis Michael worked for the neighbouring farmers; his specialities being sheep-shearing and hedging.

Francis hung his coat behind the door, and as he walked awkwardly across the room his nailed boots clattered on the bare stones. Without a word he drew up the Windsor armchair and sat beside the fire. His wheezy breathing was plainly to be heard, and now and again his shoulders shook as he coughed; but he might have been dumb for all he spoke, for he looked into the fire and sat quite still, except when a fit of coughing disturbed him.

Francis continued gazing into the fire, unaware, it

would appear, of what went on around him. He was inclined to be serious in matters of religion; not ostentatiously so, but pondering much within himself, heavily and gloomily, wondering whether his soul was saved. It was a constant puzzle with the man. For weeks he would regard himself as being secure for eternal glory, and then all at once one of his sudden bursts of uncontrollable temper would demolish the whole structure of hope, reminding him of his damnation, throwing him back into moody uncertainty and causing him to start over again this inward searching and this recurrent puzzling out of his salvation.

On the other side of the hearth now sat Betsy his wife, rocking the child to sleep and trying to sing in her masculine voice snatches of old Cymric war-songs. She never had been able to sing much of anything, and in particular had lullabies been odious to her. But she sang to-night without any thought of the words or of their meaning; her mind was bridging the space between herself and Francis, and the garb her mind assumed was the old resentment.

"Yes!" Her eyes got hard as she looked at her husband's not unpleasant face, and as she kept transmitting the rebuke to him. "Look at this 'ere boy I got on my lap. An' we 'aven' got one single child of our own!" And that reproof contained the wormwood of dead hopes.

But Francis, completely innocent of any belief in telepathy, sat blissfully ignorant of the turmoil in the poor woman's embittered fancy.

At length footsteps sounded on the bailey outside the door, and Betsy stirred herself and raised the boy to his feet on her lap. "Here's your father comin'," she told him with a smile, as though he were quite able to understand.

The door swung back sharply, closed with a slight bang, and Chapel came in, a massive figure in his thick overcoat. With brisk steps he crossed the floor and placed his bowler hat on the table. At its side went his overcoat.

Considerable change had taken place in him during this last year, Betsy had got accustomed to his clean-shaven

face and now saw nothing strange about it. His features were leaner if anything, and certainly there was a great deal more smartness about his appearance. Gone were the breeches and the leather gaiters and the brown coat. His clothes were better fitting, with a tone about them, and the suit he wore to-night was of thick grey tweed.

Drawing his hand back over his closely cropped fair hair, he moved agilely towards the hearth with just that tendency to push forward his tall body.

"Got the supper ready, Betsy?" he inquired sharply as he stooped and rubbed his hands before the fire. . . .

"How's the cough, Francis?"

"Better to-night, Mr. Chapel," Francis slowly answered. "Better to-night," he repeated, in order to make things plain. The odd feature about Francis's cough was that it always seemed to be better without making any appreciable progress towards improvement.

Chapel's arrival had broken up the previous tranquillity. His query whether Betsy had the supper ready was an oblique command that she should bestir herself, and as such she understood it, for she immediately began to hurry.

"Catch hold of him," she said to Francis. "I'll have it ready in ten minutes," she told Chapel.

Then she saw Chapel take a copy of *The Western Mail* from his pocket, turn his back to the light, and begin to read. But the signs were not to be mistaken. He was hungry; she knew it from his questioning look at the table; and Josiah Chapel was not to be counted among the pleasantest of mortals when he was hungry. That fact, also, Betsy knew; so without further waste of time she took down the bellows and blew up the fire to make the kettle boil.

And the boy grew, and the years passed on; but these years of cattle-dealing were chaos for Chapel.

Gradually, the iron entered into his soul, and in painful disillusion he slowly discovered that life was not the easy thing he had imagined.

It had not taken him long to discard the breeches and the leather gaiters and the brown coat, for they were too

reminiscent of servitude. He visited a tailor at Cardiff and ordered suits of grey tweed; and to this material he adhered throughout his life. The change made him look more prosperous, and afterwards he took greater pride in his dress. The alteration in his appearance gave that impression which the people of Porth and others soon imbibed—

“Chapel is prospering. Chapel is getting on.”

The clothes seemed to affect the whole man, for he was now a well-dressed, substantial, neat figure, and as he went about he was recognised as a man of energy, a man of virility and of pushfulness. But it was virility of body and not of mind. The impression he gave to others was deceptive; sometimes it deceived even himself.

The balance-sheet of his first year's trading showed a loss. But he still kept repeating, “I am going to succeed.” He was new to the life, he told himself, and must expect to have to pay for experience. By the end of the fourth year, however, his outlook had assumed a hue much less rosy. He was now in the thick of it; his business had been greatly extended, and often he attended the horse fairs at Carmarthen, made journeys into Breconshire and Monmouth and Hereford; and sometimes he sold fat cattle to the butchers at Cardiff.

But very little profit seemed to come from it all.

Several times had come the suggestion that he was much too scrupulous in his dealings, that other dealers were not so nice in their standards of honesty; but with disdain was everything of that kind brushed aside.

The vision of his family's stability became a mockery.

But through all his doubts and losses he made a point of conveying to others that impression of his prosperity. His pride of kin forbade him to allow anyone, including the folk at the Windgap, to see that he was anything but a splendid success.

He grew more reserved and more reticent.

XI

BIG THINGS

DURING these seven years of cattle-dealing and of terribly chaotic dissatisfaction, Chapel saw himself as the only one that failed. To his distorted vision everybody else seemed to be prospering, while it was he alone who was being battered and tossed by Circumstance. And what filled him with the bitterest discontent of all was the meteoric, headlong, whirring advance of Graig—Graig the Builder now. The contrast in their positions rankled in his mind. Graig the favourite of fortune; Chapel grovelling in failure. There was never any envy in his thoughts as he considered Graig, only rampant dissatisfaction. Graig could do nothing wrong; Chapel could do nothing right. Everything favoured Graig; Chapel all things mocked.

Their first meeting after that settling of the sale accounts had been a strange one, for Graig had wiped the incident of the twenty pounds out of existence; it was forgotten; it might well have never taken place. Chapel, almost in the nature of an inspiration, had seen the grim humour of it all. Graig in a predicament? The idea was fantastic; the man was unique. As the years passed, an odd sort of acquaintanceship sprang up between them; a very close friendship in Graig's opinion.

And Graig had hurled himself into the throbbing heart of Big Things. The Nonconformist schoolroom proved a mere dot, just as he once irritably complained. Row upon row of monotonous looking houses soon began to stand to his credit as a speculative builder. Year succeeding year, their number grew, some of them drab, red-brick things, some evenly ugly in their coats of grey cement.

"Oceans of coin to lift—by the man who knows how to do it." And he had considered himself the man.

No matter how he shoved them up, up the houses had to go. No use stopping to think what quality of material to put into them; round the corner lay another piece of land waiting hungrily to have another street shoved up. And always there had been people to buy: thrifty miners and others, meek folk who invested their savings thus because house property was safe.

"Plenty of go! Shovin' up houses like wild-fire."

His life was seething action. He defaced acres of green fields, covering them in fearful haste with streets of what he termed, "Workmen's Cottages."

"Big Things, sir! Big Things."

Chapel went in search of him one day.

Nearly seven years had passed since the sale, and at this time Chapel had considerable dealings with the proprietors of those collieries on the southern edge of the Rhondda Valley; and it was after one of these interviews that he sought out Graig.

"Houses Mr. Graig is building, sir? First turning on the right, and straight up."

Everyone seemed to know Graig.

In a new street along the breast of the mountain Chapel found him—in one of the row of forty houses nearing completion. He was in the front room on the ground floor instructing a carpenter how he wanted the skirting fixed.

"Mr. Chapel! Mr. Chapel! Glad to see you. How are you?" Graig rubbed his hands together; he was all gush immediately.

"Thought I'd like to see how you're getting on," explained Chapel as he backed into the roadway. "Goin' on with these, I can see," he complimented as he looked along the row.

"Finish um in another month," said Graig, smiling with pleasure. "But come round. Come round an' have a squint at us."

Then Graig, admirable showman that he was, led Chapel around. Some of the houses of this row were already completed. On others tilers were at work, for pieces of slate occasionally dropped over the eaves and split as

they reached the ground, so that Graig led Chapel into the greater safety of the middle of the uneven road. On others of the houses the roofs looked like skeletons on which the carpenters were sawing and nailing and patching together the parts.

"Busy" was the note of the whole scene.

"You're making things buzz, here," Chapel remarked.

Graig smiled at him, and winked understandingly.

"The only way of doin' it, Mr. Chapel," he said, in his thin voice full of confidence. "The only way. . . . British workmen! Got to keep yer eye on um, as I daresay you know. . . . Keep um goin'; that's the secret." He tittered, considering that a very fine joke.

They had now got to the top of the row, and had stopped on the border of the adjacent, open field. They stood, looking down along the frontage of this masterpiece of jerry-building. In unbroken perspective ran the lines of the eaves, of the windows and of the doorways—dead, monotonous sameness.

Graig was standing astride, cocking his little eye in admiration at his handiwork. He had done the lot; had shoved the bloomin' lot up in no time. His thumbs had hooked themselves in the armholes of his green fancy waistcoat, and across the bulging front of the waistcoat, like a swing, lay his gold watch-chain shining in the sunlight.

"How long have you bin at this lot?"

"Six mon's, Mr. Chapel," he answered with pride. He pushed his bowler hat to the back of his head, and then winked at Chapel. "What d'you think of that?" With his elbow he nudged Chapel in his confidential way. "That's shovin' um up—what?"

There was a touch of the buck about him, as Chapel eyed him. He had actually begun putting on flesh; his cheeks were getting rounder and the small eyes were alight, as if success had put a spark of the devil into him, Chapel thought.

"Marvellous," Chapel commended, glancing again at the houses.

"Not thinkin' of speculatin' a bit in this line?" Graig raised his eyebrows, and winked again as he waggishly put the question.

"No," snapped Chapel, looking at Graig and then the houses. "Wouldn' 'ave um at any price," he said.

Graig laughed outright. "Perhaps you are right, Mr. Chapel. . . . But come roun' the corner," he invited. "I'm shovin' up another little lot down here."

They walked together across the field and, turning abruptly to the left, they came upon the other little lot, which was not by any means as far advanced as the other. Fifteen houses on either side of the road they were. The ones on the left were up to the joists and the open rectangular window spaces could be seen; those on the right stood about four feet from the ground. If possible, there was a busier hum of work than before.

"Come in," Graig invited when they reached the office. "Don' want to excite myself over this job. I got a tip-top general foreman. Save me a lot of trouble, I can tell you."

The *office* was one of those movable constructions on tiny wheels, resembling a hen-house, with floor and sides of timber and roof of corrugated iron. The inside was in disorder. A box of tools rested askew against the wall in front of the door and a number of pickaxes leant in the far corner. Under the window was a sloping hinged board, acting as desk, and just now it was covered by a block plan of the new street. Right in front of the desk stood a high-legged stool, and on this Chapel was prompted to sit, while Graig, closing the lid, took the chest of tools.

Then Chapel began to wonder how best to approach the business which had brought him in quest of Graig.

"Who's doing the hauling for you?" he asked at last.

"Pugh. Know him?"

"Save a tremendous lot if you did your own hauling," Chapel suggested.

Graig winked his left eye and curled up one end of his waxed moustache as he contemplated the idea. He waxed his moustache now.

"Ah!" He winked again and looked calculatingly at Chapel. "Now I see the point, Mr. Chapel. Want to sell me some horses—eh? . . . Good idea—good idea. Well," he sprang up from the box of tools; "I'm full up, now. . . . Tell you what! Come roun' in a couple o' mon's. Say three mon's. And we'll 'ave a chat about it."

"All right," agreed Chapel. "I'll come an' see you then."

"Expect the old stockin's gettin' pretty full," Graig said with a nudge outside the office. "Eh? . . . Always thought you was a smart young devil."

"Oh, can't complain."

Graig, standing in the doorway of the office, watched the tall figure in the grey suit step alertly down the street.

"Doin' all right, I bet," he said to himself as he curled his moustache.

And Chapel, striding smartly down the street, was thinking: "How is it that a man like Graig can be making money—and here am I—well—here I am!"

He had examined his accounts last night, and counting all moneys due to him as well as the stock on hand he possessed a matter of six hundred and fifty pounds. Roughly, a hundred pounds to the good after nearly seven years.

Why was it? . . . Why? . . . Why?

This was one of those moments when he felt very small. Graig a glorious success; Chapel an inglorious failure.

Why was it? . . . Why? . . . Why?

Dismounting from the train at Cross Inn, Chapel, while giving up his ticket at the gate, was hailed: "Going home, Mr. Chapel?" Turning, he saw a young farmer who lived a mile along the way to Porth, and for company they started off together.

"Leavin' us, aren't you?" Chapel asked.

"Off to Canada! . . . Like to buy a couple o' ricks, Mr. Chapel?"

"N-o-o. Not in my line o' business."

"Come an' 'ave a look at um. Sell um you cheap."

They were three haystacks close together in a hollow in the corner of a field. It was outside Chapel's province to have anything to do with hay, but the spectacle of Graig's success was still rankling, and he felt he was bound to do something, to strike out and risk more than had been his custom.

Chapel bought the three haystacks for two hundred pounds.

XII

FAILURE

ABOUT four o'clock, just as the sun was rising over the Garth Mountain two months later, a loud, persistent, vigorous knocking sounded at the kitchen door and through every room of the Windgap.

The noise reached Chapel and awoke him. Quickly, he sat up, puzzling over and trying to make out the clatter. The knocking continued and he located it. He was on the point of getting up when the hum of voices sounded through the wall from the next room. A thump on the floor as of someone getting out of bed in a hurry! A window shot up, and then Francis's surly voice was demanding—

"Who's there?"

"Mr. Chapel at 'ome?"

Then up came more sounds, from among which Chapel made out something about "ricks on fire."

That was enough. His spirits sank. He rushed to the landing and shouted through the door to Francis: "Tell him to catch that horse in the little meadow."

Then he ran back into his bedroom to dress. His head had dropped. His courage had left him. He knew it; knew it as well as if someone were yelling it in his ears.

Failure! Failure! Failure!

But very suddenly his teeth clenched, controlling that flood of depression overwhelming him. He began to hasten, taking up his socks, and hustling into his clothes.

"Do something," he kept urging himself. "For the love of God—do something."

His coat was over his arm as he rushed downstairs; his braces were being fastened and his unlaced boots *slip-slapped* as he ran in his double to the gate across the yard.

"Blast the man!"

The farm servant who had brought the news was trying to catch the horse, and the horse was racing around the field. The fool would never catch him. . . . Still running, Chapel got back to the stable; inside was a hunter, a big, valuable, spirited creature bought for a Cardiff doctor. Snatching up a bridle from a peg on the wall, he thrust it over the head of the restless animal, and impatiently he forced the bit between the reluctant teeth.

He must not think; he must keep doing something.

"Stand quiet," he shouted at the chestnut thoroughbred.

After some trouble he got the horse out into the yard, where, exceedingly fresh, it pawed and jumped, tugging at the rein in Chapel's hand. Shutting his fist, he struck the horse a violent blow between the nostrils.

"Stand quiet, you devil," he yelled.

Then Francis appeared, half dressed, shuffling his way from the kitchen door; and behind him, with a shawl thrown over her capacious figure to hide all deficiencies, waddled Betsy.

Chapel turned to them. "Reach that knife," he said curtly to Betsy. "Give me a leg," he ordered Francis.

"Better for you to put a curbin' bit on him," Francis advised.

"I'll currb the devil without that. . . . Now give me that knife," he called to Betsy.

"'Tisn' safe to carry a knife on a horse like that," argued Betsy.

"Dam' you," Chapel replied to her. "How much longer have I got to stay here?"

"Here, Francis," Betsy said to her husband; and Francis very carefully approached and handed up the hayknife.

"Now go 'n' open that gate," ordered Chapel, setting the knife across the crook of his arm. But before Francis could go five yards, Chapel had dug his heels into the horse's side; and the chestnut, given his head at last, shot forward like an arrow.

Betsy threw up her arms and cried out. In horrified fascination she watched the creature rush straight at the five-bar gate, spring, clear it, land safely on the other side, and settle down into a tearing gallop across the field to

the main road. That was a second which Betsy would never forget: when the sunlight had played on the four tips tucked under the horse's belly as it cleared the gate, and on the broad steel blade of the hayknife under Chapel's arm.

"There's somethin' goin' to happen to him," she said to Francis in terror. "'E's mad."

She had seen that hard, sparkling glint in Chapel's eyes. Anything might happen.

The horse tore along as though a legion of devils possessed him. He cut the wind with that lusty onrush of a strong thoroughbred in excellent condition. Both he and his rider might have been coursing determinedly to destruction. Both were maddened, both were without reason, both were frantic. Both seemed alike in their desires: to rush madly forward; such were their humours; their tempers were in complete agreement.

Frightened, conquered and frenzied, but now allowed to go, the horse went as a tornado, and Chapel, sure-seated on the bare back, had the vision of three ricks burning in his mind, had a cold feeling of depression as a weight on his diaphragm; and he cared not at all in what manner they went. He wanted to reach those burning ricks.

The bright, smiling brilliance of the morning sun athwart a cloudless sky was a ghoulish mockery.

"Get on, you brute," he yelled at the horse.

Failure! Failure! Failure!

That was the tune played by the horse's hoofs on the hard road.

"Get on, you devil!"

Failure! Failure! Failure!

The horse's hoofs were mocking him.

But what did it matter? What did anything matter? What if he did get his neck broken? All the struggle would be at an end then. Failure would have finished tossing him about.

It did not matter a damn if he did get his neck broken. He began to laugh mirthlessly. Failure would have finished tossing him about. Fate would be cheated. Ha! ha! Fate would be cheated.

The value of life had gone from his reckoning. The worst thing that could happen to him was to be killed. He laughed in mockery. To lose his life, and die! *To die!*

And what was this mighty, awe-inspiring death? This wonderful death—what was it? This soul religious people made such a fuss about—what was it? What was it worth? What was life itself worth?

“Get on,” he shouted, cursing.

Nature didn't care, so why should *he*? Was anything important enough for him to care?

Up another hill they rushed, roaring along at topmost speed.

He was being crushed and bruised; failure was consuming him; Fate was mutilating him. What if he did get his neck broken? Did anything really matter?

The scene broke upon him suddenly. From the brow of a hill he saw it. Two hundred yards below, in the hollow in the angle of two hedges, the ricks were afire. But no hay was visible. Volumes of dense smoke, caught by the wind and rolled and driven along the ground, were all that he could see. As they galloped nearer, at intervals of a few seconds tongues of white flames leapt up and then disappeared to hide themselves in the thick black smoke.

A pitiless, discouragingly vivid summary of his life! He could not help but think of it: Failure consuming everything.

But he was getting nearer now, and he shifted the hay-knife so that it balanced better across the crook of his arm, and then he shook himself into readiness for the leap over the next gate. Slowly slackening the rein, he urged the horse forward; his knees were closing and tightening over its shoulders.

Horse and rider had sprung; they were in the air, when——

The horse's hoof struck the unyielding timber. An instant's sensation of shooting violently through space! A sickening crunching in his head! And that was all Chapel remembered.

Weird sounds in the distance—approaching out of the darkness as Chapel returned to consciousness.

"Feelin' all right now?" Someone was supporting him in a sitting posture.

"Where——?" He was glancing around in a stupid manner. "The ricks!" he said, in a dazed way, trying to stand. "Help me up a minute." He was churlish, for physical pain was new to him, and there was an excruciating pain on the left side of his head.

"Seen it all, 'zactly 'ow it 'appened." The same voice was speaking, and when he looked he saw a man dressed as a farm labourer with an arm about him. "Standin' by the ricks, I was. Lucky you didn' 'ave your brains knocked out. See that stone? Yer head was only a yard off it. . . . Nothin' broke?" he asked encouragingly.

"Shoulder a bit stiff," Chapel answered morosely. "And my head's bad." He began to move. "Let's have a look at that horse. I'm all right now," he added, shaking himself free from the arm that helped him.

They went back the few yards between them and the gate, where the horse lay. Its head rested flat on the ground; its sides rose and fell, inflated and contracted with hurried timid breathing; its chestnut coat was dank and the foam was drying around its mouth. At their approach it raised its head a little and looked at them with a touchingly mute appeal in those large eyes which had such a short time ago flashed and flamed so spiritedly.

"The right un," Chapel's companion cried, pointing to the stream of blood flowing from a gash above the hoof. Chapel stooped, and when he raised the leg, the hoof dangled helplessly. He turned his head and asked in a shaking voice: "Got a gun at your place?"

"Not goin' to shoot him, are yer? A valuable animal like that!"

"Go 'n' fetch it, you dam' fool. Ever seen a horse with a bone broken by there, any good after?"

Then Chapel picked up the hayknife and walked wearily towards the ricks. He flung off his coat, rolled up his shirt-sleeves and plunged forward with the knife. Surely, some of the hay could be saved! Surely, he was not to lose it all! The farthest rick, the one right in the corner, was not burning quite so fiercely as the others. But there

was this pain in his head, blinding him, devitalising him. Only in a muddled way was he able even to walk.

He tore down some of the fence, improvising a kind of ladder to take him to the sloping roof. And there, on his knees, the handle of the knife in his hands, he commenced to cut. But he could not use the knife. It was too heavy for him. That fall had sapped out all his strength.

He must get down and stand by and watch the cruel burning of the hay.

“Might as well give in! . . . What’s the use to fight? What’s the good to hope?”

He got down from the rick, clinging to the poles lest he should fall; and then, dragging himself beyond the pale of the heat, he sat down on the grass, his elbows on his thighs, his head between his hands. He was crying like a child; the tears were streaming down his face. He felt old, and weak, and timid, like an aged man at the end of his journey, beaten by life.

“This is the end of it all; the very end.”

Life was so awfully hard, so remorseless, so unpitying, so bitter. It did not seem to matter how much he tried, or how hard he worked, because everywhere and always a Fate seemed to follow him, destroying what little success he gained.

Seven long, dull years—and hardly a joy!

Seven pitiless years, devoid of all gladness!

And on the top of them this last blow: three ricks and a horse lost in one day!

It was not fair; it was not right.

Suddenly, he raised his head to look at the fierce flames and the belching smoke. . . . Long ago he had rebelled because Gwen had been taken away from him—

And he would rebel again.

Was there any Fate strong enough to subdue him? It might bruise him; might even crush him—but subdue? Never.

He urged himself to be calm. “Not yet. Not now!” His head was aching too much; he was too dazed to think properly. “But wait a bit. Wait till the old strength comes back!” He must take things quietly until this pain went: until he had things clear in his head.

XIII

THE TOP DOG

AT six o'clock Chapel was back at the Windgap, and, after washing his hands and face, he went into the kitchen and ate the breakfast Betsy had ready. Betsy sat eyeing him as he sat at the table, for she had noticed he had returned without the horse. She wanted to question him about the ricks, but from experience she knew she daren't. The scowl on his face told her she had better not speak to him. When breakfast was over, she watched him rise unsteadily from the chair and press his hand to his head.

Immediately, she was at his side. "Anything the matter, Chapel?" she asked coaxingly, a hand on his arm.

"No." He rebuffed her. "I'm going to bed. Where's that bottle of brandy?"

Betsy still watched. He was taking the bottle and the glass upstairs and she did not like the look of things. Still, she was helpless unless he chose to speak to her.

"Don't call me," he said from the door.

Upstairs, he quickly undressed and got into bed. "Sleep, sleep," he told himself. "Ought to do me good," he thought when a lot of the brandy had been drunk.

It was nearing twelve o'clock when he awoke and took his watch from under the pillow. Almost the first things to catch his eye were the bottle and the glass on the little table at the head of the bed. He felt better; much better. There was but a very slight ache in his head, perhaps partly due to the brandy. His shoulder was still painful, but that did not matter, for a shoulder could not stop his thinking.

"It's done me good," he thought about the brandy.

He gazed at the wooden bedpost between him and the

open window. Outside, the sun was shining, and the notes of a blackbird reached him. A slight breeze was blowing, fluttering the small blind. The room was spotless according to Betsy's custom, and the white sheets of the bed had a pleasing smell of wholesomeness.

Now for those ideas at the back of his head!

Fate never fought on the square, so why should a man? Nature did not care. Why should a man?

All this was so inordinately simple, and yet he had taken seven years to learn. Only this morning had he really got hold of the idea of the unscrupulousness of life. While riding to the ricks he had also discovered how worthless life was. Everything was now so simple. To succeed, he must risk, and the bigger the risk he was prepared to take the greater would be his success. Death was nothing; he was no longer afraid of it. For the success he desired he was prepared, if needs be, to throw his very life into the gamble.

He sprang out of bed and dressed. It was surprising how the world had changed now that he had nothing in it to fear.

Down in the kitchen Betsy greeted him. "Mr. Graig was here lookin' forr you this mornin'."

"Who?"

"Graig the builder."

"Graig?" Chapel asked in astonishment. "What did he want?"

"I don' know. I told him you wasn' at home. You said not to call you."

What could Graig want with him? Perhaps about those horses. It would be queer if the luck was beginning to turn already! But in three months Graig had said, and only two had passed. *Perhaps the luck was turning!*

Before Chapel left the house, Betsy got the clothes-brush and brushed his bowler hat and then the grey tweed suit he was wearing. He winced when she touched his left shoulder, but he tightened his mouth and said nothing.

"There's somethin' the matter with your shoulder, Josiah," Betsy cried, quick to observe.

He turned, snapping at her. "Who told you there's anything the matter with it?"

"But there is," Betsy insisted.

He almost shouted at her. "There's not, you interfering woman."

He caught the one o'clock train at Cross Inn.

His mood was an ugly one, and his view of life also was ugly. The determination to win, whatever the cost, had gripped every one of his senses; it obsessed him and made him impervious to all other influences. He narrowed down life until it meant nothing more than the hidden, continual struggle of Man and Nature. Certainly there were beautiful things in the world; none knew them better than he. But if a man was to succeed, beauty must be uprooted and cast away as a thing that sapped and weakened. Beauty could not live side by side with a determination to succeed, whatever the cost.

To succeed in this hard world a man needed nerves of unfeeling iron; an organism too sensitive and responding to the slightest rebuff made him useless.

He must change himself into the Bruiser.

No more dreams; no more weakening, romantic beauties that made a fool of him.

Glorious man the Bruiser!

"I'm one of the top dogs," he growled to himself in consuming pleasure, mastering and assimilating this new philosophy as he stood at the bottom of the new street of thirty houses. "I've got the secret."

He abruptly stopped, taken by weird surprise.

What struck him was the stillness, the weighty silence everywhere; the deathlike silence.

Two months ago this street had been filled with a noisy, vigorous hum of work. Lines of masons had stood along the walls; labourers unending had hurried with bricks and mortar in the *monkeys* on their backs; carts had passed up and down; and here to his left the mortar-pan had thundered. The blows of hammers, the tinkle of trowels, the noise of the springless carts, the jingle of harness, the shouts of human voices—all these had created a ceaseless buzzing.

And to-day all was silent; there was no single sound, no sign of a living thing anywhere.

"There's something infernally wrong about the place," he told himself, as he observed that very little had been done to the thirty houses since he had been here two months ago.

But he had made a mistake in thinking the street forsaken, for half-way up the smell of strong tobacco-smoke filled his nostrils, and, looking round, he saw through the window-opening of one of the houses two men with their elbows resting on the sill.

"Mr. Graig about?" he called to them.

There was no reply for a moment; then one of them took his pipe from his mouth and pointed it to the direction of the office.

Chapel went on; but the door of the office was locked; Graig was not there. The window was shuttered.

"It can't be!" Chapel cast off the suggestion. Such a thing was impossible.

Turning, he walked swiftly down the road to the house in which he had seen the two men, and, without seeming to notice them, he strode through the passage into the kitchen.

"'Ere, gov'ner! What you up to?" One of the men was in the doorway behind him, but Chapel stooped and picked up an iron window-weight.

"I want one of these," he said.

"Then yer carn't 'ave it."

Chapel looked across in surprise and saw that the second fellow had come along. A fine pair they were, one with *cauliflower* ears and the other with a broken nose.

"Mr. Graig is a friend of mine," Chapel suggested.

"Don' make no diff'rance."

"Put it down an' go away quiet," advised the second man, being of a gentler disposition.

Chapel saw the wisdom of such counsel and dropped the weight.

It was incredible. Graig in financial difficulties. Graig was a bankrupt or very soon would be. It was incredible. And yet, anyone could see these two men were bum-bailiff's men.

Still, it was impossible to believe. In the face of the

success of two months ago, Graig could never have smashed?

At any rate, it was better not to nurture too many hopes of selling horses to Graig.

Chapel tossed his head in disgust. And he had thought that perhaps the luck had turned! What a simpleton he was! What a childish fool he had always been!

He had thought that perhaps the luck had turned!

XIV

PARTNERSHIP

THAT same evening Chapel set out from the Windgap to search for Graig at his home.

The knocker in his hand struck the door a great deal louder than it need have done.

"He's here somewhere," said the maid, who opened the door.

Chapel went inside and noticed the tiled pattern of the floor of the hall, the broad staircase and the passage running away to the back; and after being shown through a door on the left he found himself in one of the high-ceilinged front rooms, looking out through the lace curtains of the bay window on to the roadway.

Then he glanced around, most unsympathetically.

The room had too evangelical an appearance to suit his temper; the atmosphere of the place rubbed him the wrong way. There was a Bible on the centre of the elliptical mahogany table; against the wall opposite the fireplace stood an American organ with a hymn-book open upon it; here and there on the red paper of the walls hung prints of photographs of divines; and there was another print—

Graig the jerry-builder's house! Graig who scamped houses! And all for the glory of God, it would appear.

Chapel sat in the armchair on the hearth and looked around.

But what could Graig want with him? That was more important than the gospelly atmosphere of this room. What could Graig want with him?

Then Graig came in, quickly and fussily opening and closing the door. Chapel smartly turned in the chair and closely studied him before he had time to speak.

The result gave him a slight shock, for it was so different from what he had expected. Chapel could see no change in him. His small eyes moved about as quickly as ever, and the shifty movements of his slight body had always been his peculiarity. Graig seemed to be as composed as ever he had been.

"How's tricks, Mr. Chapel?" He was boisterous as he came energetically around the table.

Chapel made straight for business. "Betsy said you were down there this morning, looking for me."

"So I was; so I was."

"Hope you've made up your mind to go in for those horses!"

"Well—no. Have something to drink," he hurriedly invited.

When Graig returned there followed him the maid carrying a tray, and after her master had shifted the family Bible a little out of the way, she placed the tray on the table.

"Move round a bit, Chapel," said Graig.

Then, with the bottle, glasses and jug between them, they sat facing each other across the elliptical mahogany table.

"How's bizz?" Graig asked, pouring some water.

A vision of flames and smoke and a crippled horse danced before Chapel's eyes for a moment. "Fine," he answered. "How things with you?"

"That's what I wanted to talk to you about."

"Oh!" Chapel exclaimed.

"No," Graig went on. "I can't say things 'ave bin goin' so bright as I should like to see um. . . . As you know, Chapel," he explained, making a flattering appeal to the other's worldliness, "these bad times will come along, do what you will."

"Of course," agreed Chapel. "Things going wrong with you, then?"

"Wrong?" echoed Graig. "I should jus' think they are. I can't do anything right. I'd like to go an' sleep an' not wake up for a whole bloomin' year. . . . That's what I want to talk about," he added, more seriously. He leant further forward over the table, and by now his

tone had become very confidential indeed. "You are a man of the world, Chapel. You 'ave got the head for a difficulty. An' since we've bin such friends—bosom friends, I was goin' to say—well, I want to ask your advice about things. . . . As I said: You've got jus' the sort of head to puzzle out things."

"Never mind my head," Chapel retorted crossly. All he knew about his head was that it had started aching most abominably again. But he spoke more gently: "What advice d'you want? Nothin' the matter with your business, is there?"

"You've hit the nail on the very head, Chapel."

Then commenced Graig's recital.

For the last two years he had been losing money hand over fist; in what manner or for what reason was not explained very clearly, or so it seemed to Chapel. The row of forty houses had been a bold attempt, almost a gamble, to ease matters; and they had proved insufficient.

"A white elephant, Chapel. A bloomin' fiasco!"

He lost money on them; he lost oceans of money on them. In fact, he had not the money to pay for the material used on them. That was the reason creditors were pressing; they were pressing so hard that they would not supply him with any more *stuff*.

"An' you know what them builders' merchants are, Chapel! If you owe one of the rotten tribe anything, all the bloomin' lot of um seem to know about it."

"Well, what d'you want me to do?" asked Chapel across the mahogany table. "What d'you want to see me for?"

"Look here, Chapel! It's like this—" Graig raised his hand for his companion's attention—"I'm approaching you as a friend—a friend, remember, Mr. Chapel. I'm giving you the first chance," he said magnanimously.

"First chance?" Chapel was staring at him. "First chance for what?"

Graig regarded him with a pitying look. "To come in, Mr. Chapel," he explained, pleasantly. "To put some of your money in these houses, and take a share of the profits, don't you see?"

As he glanced at him, Chapel thought: "We're a

smart pair." Two months ago he had regarded Graig as a terrific success, while all the time he had been in difficulties. And now Graig was regarding *him* as a terrific success! And Graig, after all that had passed between them, expected him to extricate him out of his difficulties.

Nevertheless, Chapel asked: "How much would you want?"

"We'd want three thousand pounds," said Graig, trying his best to make the amount sound very small.

"Three thousand pounds!" cried Chapel in consternation.

And the next instant his mind seemed to change into a seething, bubbling mass, wherein four things were a ferment. He glanced over Graig's shoulder and saw the four lines of music on the open hymn-book on the American organ, and those four lines seemed to stand for the four sensations racing across his brain——

There was the pain, which was agonising: Three thousand pounds were wanted: Graig was an unscrupulous rogue: And that bottom line of the music stood for a mad, presumptuous idea.

The pain had got worse, and was blinding him and making him vicious. Savagely, he screwed his chair around. With all his strength he pressed his clenched fists into the sides of his head; and there, doubled up, he rocked his huge body, smothering the tormenting pain.

Graig sprang to his feet and stood helplessly watching Chapel.

At the end of five minutes the pain had subsided, and slowly Chapel raised his head and addressed Graig apologetically: "I had a throw off a horse this morning. I hit my head and it's pretty bad. Let's have another glass of whisky. It'll be all right then."

Graig took up the bottle, looking very much relieved. "I couldn't make you out," he said. "Tell you the truth—thought you was goin' off yer head. . . . I'd go'n' see a doctor if I was you," he advised.

Chapel drank the whisky and got up. "No good talking to me to-night, Graig," he said. "My head's too bad.

I couldn' follow you." But within himself he knew that it was time, and nothing more, he wanted to think over this mad, presumptuous idea. "I've got to go to Cardiff to-morrow," he explained, bending for his hat on the table. "Come down to the Windgap the night after, and then we'll talk about things."

XV

DISILLUSION

GRAIG ran jauntily down the steps in front of his house. It was a week later and the sun had just gone out of sight over the Milog. He was on his way to the Windgap to keep his second appointment with Chapel. The first had taken place five days ago, when all the clouds had been dispersed and when young Chapel had promised to find the three thousand pounds and come into partnership. It would be an excellent arrangement, for Chapel would supply the money, and Graig his vast experience and knowledge as a builder. . . . So what was the use of worrying? Chapel was finding the coin, and the building of that new street would go on like anything.

GRAIG AND CHAPEL—BUILDERS. . . . That would make an uncommonly fine sign if nicely designed. "Graig and Chapel. That's it!"

Lord! What a partnership it would be! Chapel had a thundering good head for business, or he would never have been able to save that three thousand. . . . Chapel's organising power and Graig's initiative!

Nothing in the world to touch such a combination! It would have in it the very elements to demand success. In a few years they would have made their fortunes.

Graig rubbed his hands together, chuckled and hurried through the village towards the Windgap.

"Sit down, Graig."

Chapel was already in the parlour awaiting him, and as they had done before, they sat facing each other across the table. Betsy's parlour was a very ordinary little room with china ornaments, antimacassars on the chairs and oilcloth on the floor.

"I was jus' thinkin', comin' along," remarked Graig

as he sat down and placed his hat on the table, "what a rattling good pair we'll make together in business."

"Oh, you were, were you?" asked Chapel strangely.

Graig had not troubled to study Chapel very closely, for he always had been rather deficient in his ability to estimate human nature; but had he looked to-night, he would have seen a face set unusually firm as though in some odd way resenting the whole idea of existence. The whole man appeared more than usually clean, if that were possible. What Betsy had once termed the "greyhoundish leanness" of his face was more than ever apparent. Chapel had about him that compact neatness of strength; the dark grey suit, the white collar and the black tie, the white front and wrist-bands of his shirt, the fair hair closely cropped.

"I was jus' thinkin'," Graig ran on from the other side of the table, "there's a fortune in houses up the valley. A bloomin' fortune." His little eyes were alight as he contemplated it. "An' now we're goin' in double harness—did you hear that, Chapel? Double harness!" He tittered and curled his scanty moustache. "There's no knowing where we'll stop."

Chapel eyed him. "No," he agreed sardonically.

Graig sprang to his feet in his enthusiasm. "It makes my blood jump to think of it, Chapel." He paced to and fro across the hearth for a while, muttering to himself, and then he came to rest and leant against the mantelshelf, his thumbs stuck in the armholes of his brown fancy waistcoat.

"You'd better come an' sit down agen," Chapel suggested, "for us to have this business over." As he spoke, he picked up one of the account books from the pile on the table, and from the inside took out a sheet of paper on which he had previously written.

Graig came and sat down. "Had a look over um?" he asked, referring to the account books.

Chapel nodded. "An' what I can make of it all, I've got it on this paper."

"Three thousand's the right figure, ain't it?"

"Yes."

"And you've got the coin?"

"Yes."

"Then everything's all right." Graig rubbed his hands together, leant over the table and smiled in complete satisfaction.

"Now listen," Chapel continued in his bass voice, and consulting the paper in his hand. "That row of forty houses, first! . . . You want two thousand pounds to clear 'em off your hands. . . . That right?"

"Quite right, Mr. Chapel," smiled Graig.

"Now for the new houses. . . . You had a loan of four hundred pounds, and paid it for labour. . . . That right?"

"Quite. Quite right, Mr. Chapel."

"So that if I give you two thousand four hundred——"

"There'll only be the money owing to them dam' sharks, them Cardiff merchants, for the stuff I've had for the new street. Never knew you had such a head for figures, Chapel!"

"Now then!" Chapel placed the sheet on the table and contemplated Graig. "How is all this potch goin' to be straightened out?"

"Why!" Graig tucked down his chin to show his amusement, and then his thin voice revealed the simplicity of the problem. "You've got the gilt, and we're goin' to be partners, of course!"

Chapel was very deliberate when he proceeded. "We'd better have a look at that forty houses agen. You want two thousand pounds to be clear. Well, then, I'll lend you the money on this house you've got down here."

"Len' me? . . . On my 'ouse?" Graig was staring at Chapel stupidly.

"And I'll take the new street off yer hands altogether and pay the four hundred you had a loan of. But that's only—— You listening? That's only if you come and work on the job as a foreman for three pounds a week."

Graig was glaring, dumbfounded. "W-what are you? he stammered. "W-what the hell are you talkin' about?"

Chapel repeated his offer, holding Graig's glance across the table. "Mortgage on your house for two thousand pounds, and I'll take everything off your hands and give you a job worth three pounds a week."

Graig snatched at his hat. "I'll be damned if I will," he cried, in a screaming rage.

Chapel slowly rose to his feet and pushed the account books to their owner. "Then you can go and *be* damned," he answered grimly.

XVI

THE BUILDER

THE day was one in early spring; just the kind of day to arouse confidence in one's own abilities, and hope for the future.

At the bottom of the new street stood Chapel, surveying it all in one long, comprehensive glance, as though he wished to fix in his mind an indelible photograph. The place was a hive again, throbbing and pulsating with life—with a noisy, vigorous, glorious buzz of work. After that previous quiet of the grave the street seemed like a thing electrified, like a dead body reanimated, like a railway station—asleep overnight, and now snorting with the birth of the morning.

Here, quite near to Chapel, the mortar-pan revolved, its rollers clattering and clanging, in a hurry to crush lime and ashes into that liquidly solid which labourers wheeled in their barrows to the busy masons at the top. Here, also, a few of the houses were tenanted, for white curtains and blinds covered the windows, and, providing play for a sportive breeze, smoke curled up from the chimneys.

Things were moving, absolutely moving, as Graig would once have said.

A crooked smile crossed Chapel's lips at this thought, and, as he commenced walking up the street, he knew that here, at last, he had found his element: in the management of men. Those years of cattle-dealing were already in the background as parts of a nasty nightmare. Here in this street of thirty houses, alive with men, there was something tangible to do, something his mind could grapple with, something that gave scope to his instinctive masterfulness.

On that night of Graig's admission of his insolvency, he had pleaded an aching head as an excuse. "No good talking to me to-night," he had said; "I couldn't follow you; my head's too bad." And all the while he had known that what he had wanted just then was time to look around and study that mad idea. "I've got to go to Cardiff to-morrow," was another thing he had said. Of his visit to Cardiff he had taken full advantage. Primarily, his intention had been to transact certain business in connection with selling fat cattle to one of his butcher customers, but the mad idea had changed all that, and most of his time had been spent with his cousin, David Chapel the barrister.

"I'll lend you the money, right enough," David had said, turning his head in that swift, jerky way peculiar to him. "Don't you think, though, it's a bit risky having anything to do with a fellow like this Graig?"

For answer, Josiah had expounded his new religion: "The man who risks most, succeeds most." And David had smiled, thinking that at last the decaying side of the family had been reanimated.

"But come round," he had suggested, "and I'll introduce you to a firm of good solicitors. You'll want them," he explained meaningly as they went together into St. Mary Street. Beside the broad doorway he pointed to the brass plate. "Llewellyn and Macdonald. Not a bad mixture for a firm of lawyers," he hinted by way of a joke.

Really, there had been nothing else for Graig to do but accept Chapel's offer. Certainly, he had gone off in a terrible rage. The crash to his dreams had been so sudden. He was hurled from sublimity into hell unprepared. "I'm damned if I will," he had screamed. And the only consolation he had got was an impartial "Then you can go and be damned."

But with the grey light of the next dawn, that sober period that reduces everything to the common denominator of disillusioned reality, Graig knew quite well that unless he did accept he *would* be damned. The Bankruptcy Court, the sale of everything, the destitution of his family;

these were the stages the grey light of dawn vividly pictured. And here was the obverse, the other picture, the alternative: the mortgaging of his house—not the selling, and the safe berth of three pounds a week. Better temporise, better compromise; better anything than extinction.

The firm of Llewellyn and Macdonald had attended to the rest.

And just as Graig had prophesied, Chapel had been the organising power and Graig the initiative. During these months Chapel had been to school; but all the while it had been Chapel the Master and Graig the General Foreman.

And that reminded him——

Chapel went smartly up to the office where Graig was sitting on the high stool in front of the sloping desk. Immediately he entered, Graig got up and stood aside, waiting without a word. Considerable change had taken place in Graig of late, for a great deal of his lustre had fallen away from him, and his little eyes were not as impudent as they had been; the sprightliness of his appearance had vanished; his moustache, although he still waxed the ends, somehow did not have the same *dash*.

Chapel picked up a bundle of papers from the desk. "Finished them?" he asked.

Graig nodded his head, and murmured, "M'm."

Between them, they had been engaged for the last week in evolving a tender for a street of houses a local Building Club was erecting, and all this morning Graig had been occupied with plans, price lists and specifications.

"Well—what d'you make of it?" Chapel returned the papers to the desk and turned to look at Graig.

"Two hundred and twenty-five a house ought to be a good price," Graig opined.

"Bit high, isn' it? What d'you say to two hundred and twenty?"

"Ought to be a pretty good price."

"All right. Now go 'n' have a look at those tilers. They're not going on fast enough. I'll look after this lot. When d'you say it's got to be in?"

"Day after to-morrow," Graig replied, as he obediently hurried out.

XVII

LOYALTY

It must have been a week later, early morning while the men were hanging about waiting for the six o'clock whistle to blow. At the side of the mortar-pan two labourers stood discussing, among other things, the events of the previous evening.

“Tawk abaht——”

“Look out. Here's the boss a-comin'!”

And sure enough, rounding the corner in the trap which daily carried him from the Windgap to his work, Chapel appeared.

“Aye, an' by Gawd,” returned the other——“Look flamin' slick,” he warned in a whisper; “'e's lookin' as black as 'ell.”

And they did look *slick*; their coats flew off, and in a second their shovels were in their hands, busy at nothing.

“As black as the very devil 'is face is,”—when Chapel had passed. “We're in for a day of it, mate. 'E's got one of 'is *days* on, 'e 'ave. . . . 'Oly Moses! An' after a night like larst. . . . O Gawd!”

One of the boss's *days* was by this time quite familiar to his workmen. They often discussed it, and, sometimes among strangers, were apt to boast about it. They read of its arrival on his face in the morning. It meant a day, not of work, but of slavery. It meant that every one at his command, be he skilled or unskilled, would for that particular day have to increase his labour output or walk to the office and close his account. All day long the masons would have to build in a feverish hurry, the tilers would have to hammer like those legendary elves, and the labourers would have to keep moving continually on a trot; until,

at evening, when the five o'clock whistle blew, every one would be weary and limp and dog-tired. They had learnt to recognise the morning signs by now: the dark overclouded face, a danger-signal warning of that temper and universal enmity which lay but half concealed. Such were the outward signs, while in reality it was all due to the recurrence of those pains shooting through Chapel's head. He had days of that kind occasionally; repetitions they were of that day of the burning ricks when he had been thrown off the chestnut. During these days his energy seemed extra-human, prodigious; he tore around abusing everybody; he spared no-one, not even himself.

This particular *day* commenced in the office where Graig sat on the stool checking the time-book.

"Going to sit there all yer life, like a monkey on a stick?"

A score of times did he walk around the "job" that morning: around the masons inquiring of them the reason he paid them wages; on to the scaffolds demanding of the plasterers whether they would like him to engage a few more of their rotten kin to help them waste his time; on to the roof with the tantalising question as to whether the tilers were waiting for the next winter's rains to come and soak through the building. But he was most talented with the navvies excavating and laying drains in the back gardens, for he spoke to them in their own tongue, so expertly and proficiently that even the ganger listened in envy. Most of them that morning got threatened with what they mildly termed "the bloody sack"; only every one of them knew that the flicker of an eyelid in the wrong direction would bring into play that devil lurking behind those overhanging brows. And these rough fellows had got to respect this big muscular chap who treated them just as he liked. His *days* became something to boast about, something to wonder at and discuss; and very philosophically they agreed that considering all things in true proportion the boss's temper enlivened matters and saved life from getting too monotonous.

But at twelve o'clock the whole street seemed to heave a sigh of relief. Furtively, they watched one of the labourers harnessing the pony and putting him into the trap.

They watched Chapel drive away, and, as though in pre-concerted action, every man of them straightened his back and breathed more freely.

At dinner, over their bread-and-cheese and tea, or beer, they luridly discussed the most suitable destination for scarlet slave-drivers.

At two o'clock, however, the high tension suddenly returned. They did not watch him now; they only heard his trap drive tearingly up the uneven road. In front of the office he viciously pulled up the pony and sprang to the ground.

"Here," he bawled to a labourer. "Look after this horse. . . . And you," he shouted to another; "go 'n' fetch Graig. I want him."

Then he stamped into the office. A pickaxe, reclining against the wall, he picked up and hurled into the roadway; the lid of the tool box in front of the door he banged with his heel to keep it closed.

"I'll kill him," he was muttering; "I'll kill the little swine."

His eyes were flashing in temper and his teeth were tight in well-nigh uncontrollable passion. As he paced the confined floor of the office, the whole of his huge body seemed to be shaking. Coming back, he kicked the stool out of his way and banged his fist on the desk until the little shed rattled. Then he stamped to and fro again across the floor, like a caged animal, growling. His hands were clenched and his shoulders hunched.

"I'll smash the little swine. I'll smash him."

Then Graig came in, and Chapel tried hard to control himself. Graig stood a moment on the threshold with the light behind him.

"Shut that door," Chapel bellowed.

But before Graig could stir, Chapel had rushed at him, striking him in the mouth with his clenched fist, and the next instant he was after him, picking him up, and throwing him into the office. But the one blow had brought back Chapel's scattered senses and his self-control.

He put Graig to stand on the off side of the desk and then picked up the stool.

"I want to talk to you," he said, not trusting himself to look at him. "And if you say one single word—by God, I think I'll kill you!"

Graig was shaking with fright; his nerves had been unhinged all the morning and now he looked a sorry plight; for his clothes were covered with dust, and down over his chin from a cut on his lip a thin stream of blood trickled.

Chapel's face as he bent over the table for a moment was distorted; his hands gripped the sides of the sloping boards. He had been mad with anger before, and now he resented the self-control which forbade his dealing with the scamp as his trickery deserved. He spoke after a while, turning with scorn to the shrinking Graig.

"I've just been talking to the Secretary of that Building Club. They opened all the tenders last night."

"I—I—I——" Graig began to stammer in defence at once.

"What d'you call yerself?" Chapel's lips curled in scorn. "You knew I was sending in two hundred and twenty a house, and you, like the rotten little swine you are, go 'n' put in a price at two hundred and ten! Thought you'd have a last kick, I suppose?" Chapel was now the bruiser, the top dog, the holder of the great secret. "Well, you've had it," he said. "You've had your last kick. Now you'd better go," he suggested with a slight movement of his thumb towards the door. "I'll want you agen in about half-an-hour. I haven't made up my mind what to do with you yet."

Chapel remained seated on the stool, his elbows on the desk and his head pressed between his hands. He was calmer now, and his mood dropped into serener control. His mind was clear enough, in spite of the pain, for him to revive the past and draw a hurried sketch of it all so that he might see whither he was going.

The downfall of the last two generations of his family, the awakening and the challenge, the selling of his possessions, those disheartening cattle-dealing years of whose terrible hardships the doctored horse and the burning ricks formed only two examples. And all his fall had been

the fault of his own ignorance of the real facts of life. But ever since then—ever since the burning of the ricks, everything had changed. And all because he had taken life by the throat, because he had become the bruiser. Till the maiming of the chestnut, for a run of sixty years, it had been a monotonous, unvarying descent downhill; but now, since the discovery of life's unscrupulousness, he had been mounting, gloriously mounting. And now he had begun to mount, now that he had the secret, now that he had the compelling grip on success, there came this shuffling, spying little swine trying to stop the progress, trying to—

"Then crush him," something seemed to infuse into his being. "Finish him once for ever."

The determination came at last. "I'll smash him. I'll tread on him."

He had started to climb; he had defied God Almighty; and was anyone in the world going to—

"Mr. Chapel!"

The sound of a low, weak, pathetic voice fell on his ears—from the doorway of the office. It startled him and he jerked up his head and looked.

What he saw surprised him. A slight young woman, scarcely more than a girl, was leaning against the frame of the door. In her arms she carried a child wrapped Welsh fashion in a large shawl. Her face was exceedingly pale, her eyes red from much weeping. Her slim, diminutive body seemed to have reached the last point of endurance, for even as Chapel watched he saw her lean more heavily against the door-post.

"What d'you want?" he asked her resentfully.

She took a step over the threshold, wearily raising her foot, and she would have fallen had she not clutched at the door-frame.

"Don't you know me, Mr. Chapel?" Her voice was loaded with doubt and meekness, and her eyes, fast filling with tears, pleaded so pitifully. "Don't you remember me—in Penlan?"

Chapel regarded her again, more closely, more interestedly, and the next instant he had leapt from the

stool, and his tall figure was crossing the floor towards her.

"You—you're not Jane?" he cried unbelievably.

And at that second there flew across his mind a flash of memory, a streak, and yet so vivid. He was back in Penlan on a certain Sunday night; and that little scene brought back the surrounding atmosphere, just as a line will bring back the whole context of a poem. That brief scene revived the year of happiness; he remembered the light-heartedness; he saw Jane as the little chatterbox with her hair up for the first time.

She was still looking up at him, doubtful of the character of her reception. "I thought *you* would help me, Mr. Chapel," she said tremblingly. "That's why I've come."

There was no need for explanation here; the baby was sufficient. No need to repeat the old story of feminine trust and disillusion. She was looking up at him, as though she knew that here at last she had found someone to lean upon. The gruffness fell away from Chapel. He remembered her previous loyalty—that day at the Windgap when she had come to say good-bye. "I don't want to leave you," she had sobbed. The loyalty of the little thing! The loyalty! In her trouble, in her shame—she had come to *him*!

He had put his big hands on her thin arms and was leading her to a seat on the box in front of the door. Then her child began to cry, and Chapel went back to the stool and watched the pair of them. He saw the shawl being unwound, the mother opening her blouse; then a glimpse of a full breast, the nipple with its circle of beautiful deep red; the rosy greedy little mouth. And then he listened to the sucking of the healthy child. And the young mother's eyes—that light shining, in spite of everything, shining through her tears!

And this recalled another picture: a bedroom in Penlan; Gwen suckling *her* baby; and the baby's nose dug into the white yielding breast.

The story came at last; all except that part which God has written since the beginning of humanity. Shunned,

cast out—even at home. All the world against her. . . . And she had come to *him*! . . . The loyalty of the little thing!

All the world against her—the brutal world. Did not he understand that feeling? Crushed by Circumstance, tossed by Fate, mutilated by Destiny. Hadn't *he* experienced the bitterness? . . . That was how he had been. And she had come to *him*!

"I *knew* you would help me, Mr. Chapel."

Who else in the whole world would have thought that of him? The trust of the little thing!

"There, don't you cry!" He was bending over her and her child, comforting her. "Don't you cry. I'll look after you. *I'll* find a home for you." She was so young, so small, so helpless against the cruel world.

And with that his mood swiftly changed again. A solution to the last hour's questioning had been thrust upon him. But he was still gentle towards Jane, for he helped her put the large shawl about her baby; he even took out his handkerchief and wiped her eyes, into which a wan smile had already found its way. And then he led her outside and lifted her into the trap.

"Walk the pony down a bit," he said, as though he were tired. "And you!" His voice snapped as he turned to the second labourer. "Go 'n' look for Graig."

Graig came, casting timid eyes from the ground to Chapel, and from Chapel to the office door, and keeping at a distance in fear of another blow.

"I want that two thousand pounds I lent you on your house." Chapel's voice and face were hard; he was the bruiser now.

Graig stared up with dull eyes lightened with awe. "I—I—'aven' got it, Mr. Chapel. . . . I 'aven' got the money," he wildly expostulated.

"Then you'd better sell the place." Cold, merciless advice.

"It wouldn't fetch two thousand—an' I haven' got another farthing. . . . Give me another chance, Mr. Chapel! I——"

Chapel looked him up and down, as though remembering

the blustering mountebank in contrast to this shaking, drivelling wreck.

"Then you'd better clear out." He turned to go down the street after the trap. "I want the house."

He had made that crushed little thing a promise:

"*I'll* look after you. *I'll* find a home for you."

BOOK II

THE SON

I

GRIFF

FOR the first eight years of his life Chapel's son, Griff, lived at the Windgap under the easy and unexacting care of Betsy Michael.

The change from the Windgap to the new house was a large event in Griff's life, and, like all other events, it brought in its train certain disadvantages. Some of the rude boisterousness of his manners had to disappear, for Jane's domestic rule was sterner and more stringent than Betsy's. Jane had notions about wiping your boots and taking off your cap before going into the house; she was very particular about the proper way of holding a knife and fork, and she had quite a lot to say about the behaviour of gentlemen and about tidiness. But for all this more exacting private life, there still remained the fact that Griff now lived in the biggest house in the village—the biggest in the neighbourhood except Wern.

And so, as the following four years passed, Griff grew up somewhat of a heathen at heart, yet possessing the ability to behave very nicely were he that way disposed. Like the majority of healthy boys, he had two distinct sides to his nature. Times were when he could appear very demure and very innocent, as though "butter wouldn't melt in his mouth"; and this side was chiefly uppermost at home where he was always obedient, never giving much trouble, and where he was usually very well behaved.

The people of the village, however, possessed a better and a more intimate knowledge of what might be termed Griff's out-of-door manners; and the current opinion of him was: "If there is any mischief anywhere, you may depend that boy of Chapel's is in it—somewhere!"

When twelve years old Griff was sent away from home—to Llandovery College; and on the afternoon previous to his departure he was on the road to the Windgap to say good-bye to Betsy.

He was a strong boy without the least suggestion of heaviness, and as he went through the village he walked lightly with a spring in his heels which had probably been copied from his father. The blue jersey and the knickers he wore set off his sturdiness, while the crooked smile and the sparkle in his eyes suggested the mischief of which he was so often accused. Judging from present appearances, he would never grow as tall nor as broad as his father, but somehow, in the compactness of his build, in the alertness of his movements, in the shape of his jaw, you found traces of a grim, determined old stock. Of one fact you felt immediately sure: that this lad had in his possession something his father had never owned, and that was a very keen, active sense of humour. Just now, as he went through the village with a spring in his heels, Griff had a towel slung around his neck, like a great muffler, and the presence of the towel gave an example of his out-of-door manners, for to obtain it he had been obliged to sink to subterfuge in order to elude Jane and the maid. Hence the crooked smile and the sparkle as he rounded the corner by the Farmer's.

"Done um," he kept muttering to himself in glee.

Griff had been reduced to trickery to get the towel because of Jane's objection to swimming. He tossed his head as he went along, tossed his head at women's ideas of roughness. Griff was not supposed to play football because it was so rough; and he must not swim lest he should catch cold.

"Muck," he told himself as he thought of these objections. "Muck."

That was Griff's way of describing sentiment, or sloppiness, or—anything of that description.

"Done um," he whispered to himself again in pleasure, thinking how he had got the towel without Jane's or the maid's seeing him.

Just to express his delight, Griff threw his cap into the air, fished a step or two, and caught the cap as it fell. He ran his fingers through his hair; rather long, brown, curly hair. "Like a bally girl's," he was used to say. And that was another thing: Jane never wished him to have his hair cut short, because it looked so pretty as it was, she said. *Pretty!* But—here the crooked smile came back—it was better not to upset Jane too much or he might lose his good character at home. It paid to let her consider him incapable of anything very bad, for matters ran a great deal more smoothly as they were.

But to-morrow he was going away, and he would very soon have these "silly bally curls" off. Griff smiled softly and began to run. He ran at a tearing pace down the lane towards Penlan, and then along the bank of the brook towards the Windgap; but half-way down, at that sharp turn in the stream where the trees overshadowed the deep pool, he stopped.

It was a hot day, and the sun was shining and throwing a network of shadows on the still water. As Griff undressed under a tree, he watched the play of the quivering reflections of the leaves on the mirror-like surface of the brook; and a few minutes later as he stood naked on the bank waiting to cool and as his eyes followed the movements of a hungry trout down below, he wiped the perspiration from his forehead with his forearm.

And even as he stood on the bank, gazing down at the clear water, noting the brooding darkness of its depth, watching the reflections of the leaves shivering, one of his odds moods suddenly possessed him.

"I'm afraid to go in," he told himself. "I'm afraid of the water. I might get drowned. And it's cold. . . . I'm afraid." His body began to shiver, and in imagination he felt the water creeping through his flesh and freezing his bones; and as a result of this iciness his teeth began to chatter, and he told himself again: "I'm afraid to jump in." He pressed his elbows into his sides and made his whole body shake.

“'Fraid are you, young Griff?” he asked himself in the deepest sympathy.

For the instant he might have been two separate boys : the young innocent Griff who had first toddled to school some seven years ago, and the big, burly bully of twelve. He loved this pretence, loved it so dearly that almost could you see the terror on the younger Griff's face. He loved to imagine himself afraid ; but it was always the smaller Griff who was timid. And then he loved to awaken, to find himself in reality bold and fearless.

“Aye, I'm afraid,” the younger Griff was answering. “Don't jump in,” he whispered to the big bully. “Oo-o-o ! It'll be cold !”

The bigger Griff's lip, however, had begun to curl in dry, merciless amusement.

“Shut yer teeth, see, young Griff.” There was a great delight in thus torturing the younger boy. “Lift yer hands over yer head and put them together. Now then——”

Then a plunge from the bank and Griff was gambolling in ten feet of water like a young animal lost in physical pleasure. The other boys of the village said of him, “He can swim like a fish, aye !” And to watch him now was to imagine that he belonged to some amphibious species, and that the water, as much as the land, was his home. For he dived, pretending he was a young salmon ; he dipped down till he was out of sight, playing at being drowned ; he trod water, thinking himself a graceful swan ; he lay on his back and floated, imagining himself a plank ; he drew up his knees and revolved, like a giddy tub in a whirlpool ; he kicked his legs and splashed, until he made a noise like a paddle-steamer ; and then he struck out, breast-stroke and side-stroke, just as though he were swimming from Calais to Dover.

And soon he was on the bank again, rubbing himself with the towel until his flesh was pink, and when he sat under the tree and laced his boots he turned to the younger Griff within himself and asked with a wink : “What do you think of that, young Griff ?”

But the little toddling boy of five answered not a word ; he only smiled, and had he been of real flesh and

blood his eyes would have lit up with pride as though they were gazing in admiration at a wonderful miraculous elder brother.

Griff arrived at the Windgap with the towel round his neck and a smile on his lips; his face was ruddy, and his hair was gloriously dishevelled.

II

BETSY

BETSY was waiting for Griff, had been eagerly waiting all the afternoon, wondering at his tardiness; and now and again she ambled out of the kitchen, over the oil-cloth of the little parlour with the china ornaments and the antimacassars, through the front door and across the rough paving stones, until she stood on the edge of the brook shading her eyes and peering to see whether he was coming.

Betsy was excited to-day, excited in the sense that her nerves were all queerly a-flutter. Wherever was the boy? Nothing could have happened—no, no. Her aged eyes, with sight still perfect except for very close work such as darning and stitching, contracted as she moved her head from side to side, the straight lines of her vision dodging, as it were, in and out the tree trunks along the bank. But why was he so late in coming? She put her hand to her ear, but there was only the occasional tweet of a bird, or the burr of the stream, or the soft whisper of the breeze through the trees overhead. Why didn't he come?

Betsy was as impatient and as full of fancies as a girl waiting for her sweetheart.

Better go into the house to take up some of her work to occupy her thoughts and energies; but she had changed her clothes and anything dirty was impossible.

Betsy had changed her clothes, and all because Griff was coming. Had she followed her usual routine, she would have been carrying pails of water from the brook ready for the cattle in the morning: but Griff was coming. Whatever could be keeping the boy so long? She smoothed the front of her dark flannel bodice, the one she had washed last week; then she felt whether the silver brooch

was in position on her broad chest—the brooch fastening the white silk kerchief around her neck; and when the starched white apron had been given a flip she limped to the back door to see if he were coming from that direction. You never could tell where he would spring from—the little precious! Yes, *her* little boy, whatever anyone else chose to say. It was she had brought him up. The first years of a person's life were the most important—the first eight years in particular.

It was *she* had brought up Griff.

But—here was the bitterness, the unjust bitterness—after eight years he had been taken away from her.

Betsy was now sixty-two, but the last twelve years seemed not to have altered her very perceptibly. She was more coarse, perhaps, and in the village she was increasing her reputation as a woman with a “tongue,” but she still looked quite as strong, reminding one of a horse, so tireless and so vigorous. Her eyes were still keen and bright, although the lines on her face had deepened, particularly around the mouth, hardening her expression. Her hair was getting white. She never wore stays, because the steels got broken and pinched her, and so her body was still broad and shapeless, while her huge chest, with her voice and her manners and her thick full neck, seemed to unsex her. Looking at her, you got the impression that she would live for ever, that death would be afraid of her, and that she would never die.

Back in the kitchen, Betsy pulled up the Windsor armchair and sat down. When she cleaned the cow-house, carried pails of water from the brook, or dominated meek old Francis her husband, she was a coarse, untutored, disappointed old woman; but immediately she began to think of Griff she became a foolish old creature, all heart and sighs and tears.

And now, filling the armchair, gazing with unseeing eyes into the red fire, she thought and pondered.

When she was forty she had left the service of the Chapels to marry Francis; but she would not have married him had it not been for the great child-hunger in her nature. She would have preferred remaining at Penlan were it not for that reproach haunting her like

an evil spirit, for ever assailing her self-esteem as a woman.

Then the awful disappointment.

And then Griff had come.

Before Griff came she used to tell God that He was hard and cruel, treating her unfairly; but afterwards she told Him He was good and kind and bountiful. And all because He had sent her Griff.

The hardness, the disappointment, the sourness—they all disappeared like a scowl does before a fit of laughter. Almost better than having a child of her own, she was bringing up the youngest of the Chapels, that family she had always adored. It was like Mary with Jesus Christ. And Betsy had been happy: the voluminous mother-soul of her was satisfied beyond all dreams. How she had listened to the tiny darling's chatter and talked to him in his baby language, teaching him and plainly pronouncing words so that he might repeat! How she had watched him grow up—begin to go to school—and how she had delighted in watching his attempts to imitate his father and be a Man!

And then Griff had been taken away.

But his old foster-mother had not let him go without a fight. Her faculties bristled even now at the recollection, and she stirred in her chair and clenched her thick brown hands.

Betsy remembered so well that day Chapel had come home earlier than usual, bringing that young woman with him in the trap—that girl Jane. She remembered it all so well, as if it had happened yesterday, and she could picture it all this very instant if she but closed her eyes. She could see Chapel, big and fine-looking, coming in through the door leading a very young woman by the arm—a young woman who seemed to have been crying a lot, and who was carrying a baby in a big plaid shawl; she could see him at this very moment bringing her in and taking her to this armchair, arranging the red cushion and telling her in tones Betsy had not heard from him for many, many years—

“There now, my dear, don't you cry any more. I'm going to look after you.”

And then he had turned to Betsy and said : " She's going to stay here a week or two."

And Betsy had understood at once and had sympathised. The poor little thing was in her trouble, in her shame, and Josiah was one of the old Chapels, a gentleman that would not let the world tread on a ruined girl who had once been in the family. But immediately Betsy heard of the arrangements for the future, that Chapel had in some mysterious way got hold of Graig the Builder's house, that Jane was to be housekeeper there, and that Griff was going as well, her attitude had completely changed.

" What ? " She had turned on Chapel. " You're not goin' to let a girl like that—a girl without a character—bring up your boy, are you ? "

In reply Chapel's eyes had danced with that nasty devil in them. " You bad woman," he had told her, causing her to be afraid of him. " I'm looking after that little thing, and if anybody has got a word to say against her, I'm sorry for him."

But the most merciless cut of all had been when he had turned on her and said : " You're jealous of the little thing. She's young and got a child—and you haven't."

And Betsy had writhed, even as she writhed this afternoon in the armchair, knowing that what Chapel had said was true.

But there were sounds reaching her ; somebody whistling ; somebody——

Betsy snatched up the corner of her apron, hurriedly wiped her eyes, and began to chuckle until the whole of her shapeless body shook.

III

A GREAT MAN OFF TO SCHOOL

“ HULLO, old sport ! ”

Griff was coming in boisterously through the doorway, the towel around his neck, a smile lighting up his face, his step alert and the brown hair around his cap gloriously untidy. And Betsy, hurrying forward with her limping gait and beaming face, was making as if to take an affectionate hold of him ; but Griff, by means of a side-step, adroitly eluded her. Then he threw the cap and the towel on the table and with an air of possession seated himself in the Windsor armchair.

Betsy ambled after him, helping him to sit, as one might say, unable to control herself. But she must scold him for being late ; indeed she must.

“ Where 'ave you bin, boy ? ” Her voice was as masculine as ever as she spoke quickly. “ Where 'ave you bin ? ” Then her tones began to trail as she looked proudly at him. “ I bin waitin' for you for hours.” But her manner now said how glad she was he had come, and her broad hand was busy stroking his rebellious hair into order.

“ I was late in starting, Betsy,” Griff told her in his full boyish voice—in the manner of a grown-up man, Betsy thought. And then he glanced out through the small window deep in the wall—the little precious.

“ You bin in the water agen,” Betsy rebuked, so ridiculously proud.

“ You must do something to keep yerself cool this weather.” Griff's eyes swept the table and then gazed towards the fire—exactly as his father's eyes might have done.

Betsy understood immediately. “ To be sure ! ” She

bestirred herself. "You arre wantin' somethin' to eat, my little pet. You wait you now. We'll 'ave tea ready pretty quick, I can tell you." She was at once his slave; the kettle was filled and put on the fire, and with mysterious movements a plate of something was placed in the oven to warm. Betsy forgot all about the other certain person who laid claims to having brought up this boy, forgot everything except that he was here alone with her—no-one but themselves, just as they used to be previous to four years ago. The cap and the towel, in a twink, were hanging on the nail behind the door.

"You mus'n' eat too much now, must you? You'll be 'avin' dinner at 'ome before long."

"Oh, I don't know!"—with a dry smile. "All depends what you got to eat."

Betsy put up her finger and looked secretive. "You wait you now. I got somethin' nice in the oven; somethin' special for you."

The table was laid, laid for one of the Chapels; the best tea-service was brought and the table became a study in white. Never was table laid with such pride; no, not even for a king.

"Now then, my little sweet! Come on. Look! I got the tea ready." And then she helped him to sit down, as though he were still the infant. "Here's somethin' you will like." She had brought the plate from the oven. "You like um, don't you?" Her face was covered with smiles.

From the pile of pancakes, so neatly rolled, she picked up one with a fork and deposited it on Griff's plate. The little precious was very fond of pancakes; they were his favourite sweet, and Betsy was of the opinion that she had no equal in pancake-making. At least, she felt certain she could make them better than could Chapel's house-keeper.

Both were at the table, Griff at the head and Betsy round the corner on his left. And the boy, hungry after the swimming, was eating with relish the buttered pancakes.

Old Betsy was a jolly good sort, although she was such

a funny beggar. She was different from Jane, because she never made a fuss about things and always let a chap do as he liked. Even when she had her hair off, you only had to wink at her and ask her what she was getting ratty about, and you got round her in no time. The worst of her was that she always wanted to be kissing you, or squeezing you, or calling you "little sugar—little precious," or some *muck* like that. She knew how to make pancakes, though. Lumme! These were a bit of all right. . . . Griff dug his fork into the diminishing pile and brought another pancake to his plate.

"So you're goin' off to-morrow," Betsy said at last, looking at him across the corner of the table very much as though she were predicting a death in the family. She took a long sip at her tea, and as she replaced the cup in the saucer she sighed audibly.

"Aye." Griff's mouth was full. Too full, Jane would have said.

"Llandovery?"

"Aye." Griff pronounced it *Ah-ye*.

"Long way, i'n't it?"—with another sigh.

"Change at Cardiff, an' then Llanelly. Very long way from here," Old Betsy's pancakes were ripping.

"Big school, i'n't it?"

"Oh, aye! One of the best." His indifference showed that pancakes were more important just now.

Then Betsy grew ruminative, and her brows drew together as though she were collecting her thoughts. Her manner showed she had given this subject a great deal of attention.

"People that go far from home to school—they are good scholars, i'n't they?"

"Of course." Griff had not really looked at the question from this point of view.

But Betsy was approaching her mission, and her glance became confidential. It was strange to listen to this old woman talking to the boy of twelve on an equality, but so it was, as though they were both the same age. Betsy had grown deadly serious. She had one hand on the table beside Griff's plate, while the other was touching the silver

brooch on her chest, and her great body leant forward towards Griff.

"Let me see now! I bin askin' a lot about this Llan-doverly College. Some very big men have come from there, Griff," she said as if prophesying his fate.

"Well, you see——" Griff began very grandly.

"The Vicar was in that school, Griff; and your Uncle David was there too. And look what big men they are! The Vicar savin' people's souls, and your uncle savin' people from gettin' hanged and things like that! You'll be growin' up a big man, Griff," she told him with a tinge of awe in her voice; "a big scholar."

Griff moved uneasily. "Oh, aye!" he agreed.

But Betsy was deep in old dreams.

"Your family 'ave always bin big men. Look at your father now, worth his thousands. One of the biggest men in the place. There's only one bigger than him, an' that oughtn't to be. Your family was the very biggest in this place for 'undreds and dundreds of years."

Betsy was now the unreasonable, fanatical worshipper of a family whose traditions were in her bones; the soft light of sentiment had gone from her eyes; for the moment her thoughts had dug among the ruins of an old stock, until her feelings had hardened. She was now the same Betsy who *talked straight*, her heart aflame for the Chapels.

"Mind you, your father have done a lot to bring it back; but now, Griff, you are goin' farr away to school, and you got to come back an' be a great man. Your old family must be the biggest of all." She shook her head energetically and tightened her lips. "Mind you that now!"

There was a fire in Betsy's eyes as she spoke; there was spirit in her harsh masculine voice; and her coarse features were almost fine as this love of her patron family got hold of her. Griff had stopped eating; he was staring at her, wonderingly, his brown eyes open. Here was a side of Betsy he had never quite grasped before, for the "funny old beggar" in her had vanished.

"I 'ave told you scores of times that Wern used to belong to your family. You know why you haven't got

it now, 'cause I told you. Every time I do see that man, Hughes the agent, I do think to myself 'tisin' right. But ever since I did hear you was goin' to Llandoverly College, I bin saying to myself: 'Only wait till Griff 'ave growed up!' . . . There—there, now. I didn' mean to tell you about all this to-day; but indeed to goodness there you, I couldn' help it. I was in your family twenty-five years. But mind you, Griff! Mind you, now—" her finger was shaking at him—"when you have growed up, you got to be a bigger man than Hughes the agent."

Betsy took up the corner of her apron and wiped her eyes, while the boy opposite sat watching her in amazement. She had stirred his imagination. At first he had been inclined to think she was talking her usual *muck*, but Betsy's enthusiasm had taken hold of him, and something within him had been moved. It was a sign that his usual cocksureness had not revealed itself.

Their parting was a subdued one, and for the first time for many years Griff felt no reluctance, no hurt to his boyishness, in allowing Betsy to kiss him.

He was unusually thoughtful as he walked homeward along the bank of the brook. The towel was across his arm, his hair had been brushed before leaving the Windgap, and there was not so much swagger in his carriage. Betsy had stirred his mind, and he was seriously wondering whether anyone could be a great man while having but a scanty knowledge of such subjects as Geography and History and Grammar. He would like to be a great man; in fact, he had always intended being one. He had made up his mind he was going to be one; but exactly what kind of a great man he had never been able to decide.

There are such broad varieties of greatness.

And now, here was Betsy of all people saying he must become a Great Man. Well, he was going to be; he had made up his mind he was going to be, and it was useless saying anything more about it. But bigger than Hughes the agent? An enormous task. That was what Betsy had said. Lumme! Bigger than Hughes the agent!

"What d'you think of *that*, young Griff?"

But the little chap somewhere within him seemed to understand; indeed, he seemed to have solved the whole problem.

"Shut yer teeth, see! That's all you got to do. And pretend you're a little bit afraid—only you're not afraid real, see? It's only like fighting, or jumping in the pond. But you got to shut yer teeth—tight."

But greater and more important than Hughes the agent? More important than the man to whom all the boys of the village touched their caps? All the boys except Griff, that is, for he never touched his cap to anyone but the schoolmaster, and to him because the act was dictated by exigencies of policy. Griff was independent.

He passed Penlan with these thoughts in his mind, and, emerging from the lane into the road and turning to the village, he espied coming leisurely in his direction two figures of people he immediately recognised.

As far as Griff could tell from a distance of a hundred yards they were chatting together amicably and freely as they came along, the taller figure bending her head to look down into the face of her companion clinging to her arm. They were Hughes the agent's daughter and her governess. They came nearer, the young woman of over twenty and the child of ten, talking and sometimes laughing merrily as they approached.

And in a second the enormity of the task Betsy had set him bore down upon Griff.

All black stockings and fair hair this girl appeared to be; but even the black stockings enhanced the impression of her superiority. And the yellow hair—Griff considered it yellow—lifted her abnormally above other girls. She came near enough for Griff to see her clothes, and here again was the same sense of superiority. It was not exactly in the material from which the clothes were made; it was something altogether beyond Griff's artistic development to understand.

But she was only a *bally girl*.

Griff had very little experience of girls; they were no use at all in fighting or poaching or football; they were soft-fleshed things ready to blubber; it was wrong even

to hit a *girl*; and only boys fond of jack-stones or touch or games of that sort ever played with girls.

This *kid* was only a bally girl. This little kid with the yellow hair and the black stockings. So as she passed, Griff looked down upon her condescendingly, just as a boy fond of football and fighting would upon a kid with long black stockings—a boy, that is, who possessed Griff's self-assurance. And as he looked at her, cheekily holding her glance as she went by, he might well have been saying with a perky toss of his head: "Oh, *I'm* Griff Chapel. That's who *I* am."

Now this girl with the yellow hair was quite unaccustomed to meeting any of the village children with glances stronger than her own; usually, she was passed with shy looks, just as a girl from a large house should be passed, and so, naturally, this boy in a blue jersey was a horrid boy; and horrid boys have an instinctive knack of robbing ladylike girls of all their good manners, causing them to be like other children—inclined to vindictiveness when annoyed.

And Griff, hurrying on, felt a temptation to look back and watch the daughter of the man whose greatness Betsy had said he must surpass.

"You're a rotten little kid," he said quite resentfully, aiming his remark at the yellow hair cut in a straight line across her shoulder-blades. "That house you are living in ought to be ours."

It was at this instant the deplorable thing happened.

The young lady lost control of her conduct, for she turned her head to look after that nasty, horrid boy. And when she discovered that he, too, had turned to look back, her manners were totally wrecked. She put out her tongue and made faces at him.

Griff seemed to leap in his skin. For a second he was paralysed with the shock of the unexpected. Then, as with a burst, his senses returned to him, and he whispered hoarsely to himself—

"Well-I-go-to-hell!"

Griff was not altogether above a remark of this nature; but these were extenuating circumstances, and there was

excuse for him. The occasion was unprecedented, and the words were forced out of him.

“What d’you think of that, young Griff?” he asked as he neared the Farmer’s, laying special emphasis on *that*.

But the younger Griff seemed not in the least disturbed.

IV

ODD OLD STICK

DINNER-TIME at Garth was approaching.

Once, the house had been known as *Garth View*, because it faced the mountain of that name; but *View* had savoured too strongly of villadom; it resembled far too closely the type of name given to those terrible jerry-built houses up the valley, and so Chapel had changed the place to simple *Garth*.

Griff was in the scullery dutifully washing his hands and face, his father was upstairs in the bathroom, and Jane was in what she called the Back Room. Griff rubbed his face vigorously with the towel, and after drawing the sleeves of his jersey over his wrists and brushing his hair in front of the glass beside the back door, he went into the hall, through the first door on the left, and entered the Back Room where Jane was preparing the table for dinner.

The air of this room seemed to be filled with an odour of bees-wax, and anyone not initiated would surely have slipped on the brown linoleum with the brick pattern, so glossy it was. There was plenty of room for moving about, for the room looked somewhat bare, although amply furnished. The dining-table, half-a-dozen small chairs of a Queen Anne style, and a low oak sideboard were the chief articles of furniture. The grate was empty, but the bars shone black and fresh; and touching the heavy curb was the black rug. It would have been useless looking for specks on the high ceiling, even above the hanging lamp, for it was spotless.

And here was the instigator of all this orderliness and tidiness bending this instant over the table as she arranged the cruet and the glasses.

"The trunk's gone, then, Griff," she said when Griff came in.

She was dressed in black, a young, neat, slender figure. Her dark hair was parted down the centre, brushed as flat and as uncompromising as it would go, and fastened in a bunch low on the nape of her neck. Around the top of the collar of her black bodice a fringe of white showed against her throat, and covering the front of her skirt was a small white apron whose strings made a starched bow at the back of her waist.

"Oh, yes." Griff was more polite here than at the Windgap.

"I expect they'll give you a chest of drawers, or something, to put your clothes in." Her voice was low, as if its inclination was to be habitually sad. "I like that navy-blue suit, don't you?"

And here was a new impression of her as she smiled. Her face, usually, was not so easily read; it was as a rule a mask hiding what lay below. There was the uniform paleness; not an unhealthy paleness, for her skin was clear. Here, it appeared, was a woman who *knew*. There was a deep-rooted understanding beneath her eyes, and just at that point the mystery of her came in: the mixed suggestion of sympathy and hardness intermingling. And when you learnt her age—she was but twenty-seven—and saw the thready lines under her eyes, you began to wonder whether her experience of the world could possibly have been sufficient to warrant that dominant note of seriousness in her manner. She seemed an odd compound of two ingredients: an uncertainty and a distrust of life on the one hand; and the housewife, expert and efficient, on the other.

"That one's all right," Griff was ready to agree about the navy-blue suit as he crossed over to the window. He had tried on the new suits, and, mysteriously, they had given him a sense of a *good* appearance, of a superiority such as he had seen in that girl with the yellow hair and the black stockings this afternoon. "But I like them all," he said very politely to Jane.

Jane softly smiled and went towards the door. Griff drew aside the lace curtains and looked across the pavement

at the garden and the stable, wondering what old France might be doing. Francis never now went round the district hedging and shearing for the various farmers; his time was fully occupied at Garth. He attended to the garden, acted as groom and handy man, and the pay he received was extravagantly in advance of the actual value of his services, enabling Betsy to maintain the comfort to which Chapel's stay for eight years at the Windgap had accustomed her.

Then Griff heard his father coming down the stairs, and here was old France walking stiffly down the garden on his way to the kitchen to have dinner with the maid.

Griff heard his father enter in a hurry as though he were going to catch a train, his heels digging into the linoleum; and Griff turned to watch him. Immediately, the whole room seemed to alter; it had appeared bare before, but now the room was full, as if, suddenly, the air had been electrified. But Griff had always felt like that where his father was concerned; he had vague memories of those nights when he had slept now and again with his father at the Windgap. Touching him, you felt very tiny little quivers passing through your body, and something inside you at once grew warm; and if ever you chanced to rub your hand on his clothes, you felt those very same quivers again. Griff had a great respect for his father. Never in his life had he been chastised by him; but he always had the feeling: "Lumme! If he'd only just *start!*"

Griff saw his father take hold of the top of the chair, move it back a little, bang the legs into the linoleum, and then seat himself at the head of the table. From his coat pocket he took the *Echo* which he began to open. Before he commenced to read he fixed Griff with his sharp eyes, and in his strong voice demanded—

"Did you fill that tank to-day?" He spoke in Welsh.

"M'm." Griff nodded his head and went to sit close to his father.

Chapel settled himself to read.

His father was Griff's pattern, and unknown to himself he began to study and copy him again. Already was there

some similarity between them; for instance, both parted their hair on the left and brushed it straight across, though his father's hair was short, and Griff's was long and brown and curly—like a bally girl's. Now and again the man shrugged his shoulders or bared his teeth, and the boy copied every movement, although his shoulders were not so broad nor his teeth so long. At this moment there lay not a scrap of humour in either; they looked at everything exactly as it was; they were both disillusioned men of the world. And both were clean, and both were lean and powerful, each in his way: the father with his clear tough skin already heavily lined, and the boy with his smooth, healthy, transparent complexion.

But Griff had come back to the question of dress which had been bothering him ever since the afternoon. Naturally, he had always liked a new suit, and always took pride in considering himself *a bit of a toff*, but that kid with the yellow hair had made him think. Here was the same thing in his father again; something *good* about his clothes. Griff gave up puzzling, for the subtlety of the problem seemed altogether beyond his grasp. But he could see his father's white collar and black tie, the white shirt-front and the wrist-bands, as well as the grey tweed suit.

Griff gave up puzzling, for his father was talking to him.

"Here," he said, handing Griff the *Echo*; "take this out and ask them when that food's coming."

His tone was snappy, for, as Betsy had discovered years ago, Josiah Chapel was not to be counted among the most pleasant of mortals when hungry.

But here was Jane coming in, a young vital woman, followed by the maid, and Griff returned to his chair after folding the newspaper and putting it under his jersey for future reference.

Jane carried three plates, with beef ready cut from the joint, and placed them—one for Mr. Chapel, one for Griff and one for herself. The maid bore two tureens containing vegetables, and after depositing them in the centre of the table she hurried out and brought the gravy boat. Jane did the helping of potatoes and French beans and plenty

of gravy, and after handing around the tiny basket that held the chunks of bread, she sat down facing Griff. No attempt was made at conversation and the only sounds to be heard were the discreet rings of the knives and forks on the plates. None felt the silence since it was the rule, and everyone was busy with his own thoughts and this task of assuaging the demands of the brute within. All three were healthily hungry, nevertheless there was an atmosphere of extreme moderation about the meal, as though these people ate for nourishment and not for enjoyment.

The first course over, Jane filled the three glasses with water from the glass jug, and while the other two drank she collected the dirty plates and took them into the kitchen. Following her when she returned came the maid carrying plates of rice pudding on a tray.

It was during this second course the conversation, scanty at best, commenced, as though serious business were over and freedom existed for the luxury of talk. But it was a queer conversation, kept going chiefly by Jane and Griff facing each other across the table. Both their minds were full of Griff's departure, but the peculiar atmosphere of the household had formed a habit of restraint and forbade even a semblance of exuberance. And occasionally, but very rarely, the conversation got three-cornered, when Chapel offered some remark.

"You'll be able to find your way all right, to-morrow, Griff?" There was a soft smile on Jane's pale face.

"Yes, of course I will. Change at Cardiff, then Llanelly."

"You can always ask," Jane suggested wisely, and Griff agreed, while his father showed not the slightest interest.

"You'll find it strange for a time, I expect."

"Oh—soon get used to it."

Then Chapel asked: "What time is the train going from Cardiff?" But he did not address Griff; he was looking at his housekeeper, and she had to pass the question on to Griff. It was in this manner Chapel generally addressed his son—through Jane.

So Jane repeated to Griff: "What time does the train start from Cardiff, Griff?"

“Quarter past ten.” He always waited for the question to be repeated before condescending to answer; that was Griff’s peculiarity. “I’ll have to go by the twenty past nine from here.”

Jane glanced at Chapel to see whether he were listening.

When Griff got up next morning, he found his father already gone. Jane and he had breakfast early, and at five past nine Francis had the trap, with the portmanteau inside, ready on the roadway.

“Here’s the money for your train-fare, Griff.”

Jane was handing him some money as they stood in the porch. The door was open, and down below the slope Francis was patiently waiting.

“And your father told me to give you this sovereign. This, with what you’ve saved—you’ll have quite a lot. Good-bye now, Griff! You’ll be back Christmas.”

Griff ran down the steps and jumped into the trap; Francis clicked his tongue at the pony, and they began to move. Griff looked up at the house; Jane had disappeared, and the door was closed. Jane was perhaps hurrying to get Willie—her boy—his breakfast; but Griff considered that probably she might be crying—women were like that. But this morning it was not in Griff’s heart to call such behaviour *muck*.

Griff was thinking of his father, who had not even said good-bye to him, but had left the money with Jane. Never in his life had he associated the word *muck* with his father; the idea would have been altogether too preposterous.

“Here, France,” he said to Francis, on his right. “I am going to drive.”

“She’s too fresh,” objected Francis in his monotonous voice.

“Don’t want any of yer lip now,” Griff told him, poking him with his elbow. “You watch now, France,” he said a moment later when they had changed places.

Francis jerked his head in submission, for he had as much control over this boy as Betsy had. Francis did watch as commanded, and very soon he saw the pony trotting briskly through the village, heard the trap rattling and the portmanteau dancing on the tailboard. “A wild

young devil," Francis used sometimes to describe Griff to Betsy, who would smile and say, "Exac'ly like the Chapels, i'n't he?"

But Griff was still thinking of his father when they reached the station. He might have said good-bye!

Griff jerked his head and grinned crookedly.

"Odd old stick," he said to himself.

V

THE LAWYER

THE firm of Llewellyn and Macdonald occupied imposing and commodious offices in St. Mary Street, Cardiff.

Mounting the two steps from the pavement, you passed through the broad entrance and stood on the large oblong mat. Ahead was the staircase leading to the other floors of the building, and to your right were the swing doors inside which, on a stool behind a short counter, sat an office-boy ready to reply to all inquiries outside the scope of the law. Ignoring this official, were it by any means possible, you walked through the door in the low glass partition and came to the clerks' room; and at the far end you caught sight of another door, the door of the room of the managing clerk, the most important man on the ground floor.

It was early on a Saturday morning, a few minutes before the commencement of business, and a heated discussion was in progress between the four clerks in their own department.

"Cardiff! Don't talk such blooming rot. They haven't got an earthly."

"Wait till you see the forwards on the move. Then p'raps you'll change your opinion. They'll make rings round your little gang—see if they don't."

"What about the Swansea half-backs?"

And so the discussion continued. The Cardiff and the Swansea teams were to meet that afternoon at Swansea, and the rivalry between these two most important of Welsh towns was bitter. Abruptly, the voices of the clerks ceased, for someone was outside. They heard a thud, the well-known thud of a heavy bag being thumped on the counter, and then a voice speaking to the office-boy.

"Here, Lightning! Look after this bag, and bring it round to meet the one-ten."

Then the door of the low partition opened, and the idol of the office, an athletic, well-groomed young fellow, came in.

"Good-morning, Mr. Chapel," the clerks greeted together.

"Good-morning!" A brisk, pleasant tone.

It was Griff.

"Who d'you think's going to win to-day, Mr. Chapel?"

"Well! Cardiff's got a chance." Griff pushed his bowler hat up on his forehead. "We've got a very fine lot of forwards—if they'll come off. P'raps I'd better say nothing about the three-quarters!" He smiled knowingly and walked across into the room of the managing clerk.

Griff was approaching his twentieth birthday, had left Llandovery two years ago to enter the firm of Llewellyn and Macdonald as an articled clerk, and, very recently, he had failed his Intermediate Law Examination. Griff was a keen footballer and had played regularly last season for the Cardiff Seconds. Since the commencement of the present season, however, he had been recognised as the most promising of centre three-quarters, and the chief writers to the football editions of both the *Echo* and the *Express* had been loud in his support. And to-day, this very afternoon, Griff was receiving his chance. He had been chosen first reserve as left centre for the Cardiff Firsts; the continued misbehaviour of a sprained ankle had left the place vacant, and Griff was going to Swansea.

The clerks went on with their discussion after Griff had passed through. "There's the man who's goin' to give your Swansea three-quarters some trouble to-day."

"If he gets the chance."

"He'll make his own chances, don't you worry about that. Lord! Ever seen him tackling? Deadly tackler—deadly."

"That tiger spring he's got!" supplemented the other Cardiff partisan. "Never seen anything like it—strike me pink!"

"Aye, and that swerve! My God! Never seen anything like it. Certain to get his cap; certain."

Then suddenly there happened a hurried scuttle, and in a second one of them was tearing off yesterday's number from the block calendar, another was busy with a ledger, the third was absorbed with the morning's post, while the fourth scowled at a recalcitrant steel pen. Never before have four clerks been so completely overcome by a greed for work. A bald-headed, frock-coated man walked in, silk hat in his hand, and passed through to the room where Griff was seated, feet on the low mantelshelf, absorbed in reading that morning's copy of the *Western Mail*: the Managing Clerk.

"Good-morning, Mr. Chapel!"

"Morning, Mr. Bowden. Morning!"

"What's the news? Anything particular?"

"Nothing much."

"Except the match to-day, I suppose? See you're playing."

"What?"

"Notice you're playing, I say."

"You're a funny old stick, you are, Bowden. Didn't think a respectable pillar of—what d'you call that little show of yours? Didn't think you *could* take an interest in such a *sinful* thing as football."

"Well—when it comes to one's own office! There you are! Not much going on without us old folks knowing about it, I can assure you. . . . Now then—" Mr. Bowden was ready for work—"you might have a look through this bill of costs; and that sale—have a look if the thing's drawn up properly. Those clerks outside there! Haven't got the brains of a rabbit, not one of them."

"It's like this," Griff explained, taking his feet from the mantelshelf and folding up the newspaper to put it aside; "all the brains of the firm's in this room, so you can't expect much anywhere else—can you?"

Griff's self-assurance was as evident as ever it had been; he was on easy terms with all on the ground floor, while the reserve and the aloofness of the two principals were the only factors that saved them from a similar relationship. As yet, Griff had never met a man whom, in all respects, he considered his unquestionable superior.

He was dressed in a navy-blue suit, good and superior looking, as he himself would have said, and as the name of the tailor inside the collar of his lounge coat would have testified. His collar was now a low double one, and his tie was black covered with tiny white dots. There was a wholesomeness and a cleanness about him, extending to his linen: the soft cuffs with the gold links, the soft front of the shirt upon which the waistcoat lay so evenly—another witness to the good tailoring; the shirt-front, white with thin black lines close together. His brown hair was cut short, and the wave in it was well-nigh imperceptible.

As he walked from the fire to the table filling the centre of the room, you observed that he had grown considerably since that day he left home for Llandovery. He was somewhat above medium height: five-foot-eight, ten-stone-ten: those were the latest results published in this morning's football columns of the *Western Mail* and of the *South Wales Daily News*. And when you came to consider his build, you thought him sturdy; but he would get sturdier as he grew older. At all events, you were immediately sure he was compact and sound, constructed on a reliable foundation, for there was such exuberant vitality in all his movements, such an impetus in his body whenever he stirred. And he was the athlete all over. That almost indiscernible tendency of his legs to be stiff, like a "cat walking on hot bricks"! The loose flexibility of his muscles and the minute suggestion of strong clumsiness! As an animal he appeared an almost perfect creation; strong bone, firm muscle, exquisite condition, beaming health. A finely poised animal, physically sensitive and erect and proportionate.

Griff sat at the table, took up the bill of costs, crossed his glacé kid boots, and began studying the items. As he read, his eyes fixed themselves on the paper with a concentrated intentness, as though he could be very cold and calculating on occasions. His nose hooked slightly, resembling his father's. But had you sat opposite him, watching him across the table, you would have seen a countenance, broad, with eyes rather far apart, a somewhat large mouth; a countenance such as is so often found

at the head of solid, prosperous, old-fashioned business houses; a country face, almost a farmer's face, inherited from a solid old country stock: a face chipped from granite with a smile on it.

But over him all, like a thin coating, lay a subtle inexplicable rawness, for his features had not ripened and set, his lips were so round and his skin so smooth, and his voice seemed hardly as yet to have decided to settle down and be calm, for there was a rasp and a hollowness on the edges of its notes. He was a sight upon which a decadently artistic woman beginning to be attacked by senile decay would have absolutely doted. He was so masculine. And the youthfulness of him! The pulsating, vigorous, vital youthfulness of a delicious young male!

And, there was no *muck*. Not the least suggestion of the dandy, but a strong, superior boy with a quiet superior taste in dress.

Griff worked steadily and solidly for an hour, checking the items of the bill of costs and examining the terms of the sale-treaty, and then, pushing back his chair, got up and said: "Had enough of this lot. They are all right."

Mr. Bowden looked up from his papers and rubbed the tip of his nose with his pen. "Show them to Mr. Macdonald, will you? That bill's got to be sent off this afternoon."

Griff passed out, whistling as he went through the clerks' room. "Now, Lightning," he said to the office boy behind the short counter; "don't forget the bag and the one-ten."

"No, sir. I'll be there, right enough, sir."

Bounding up the stairs, Griff reached the door having *Mr. Macdonald* painted across the middle. He knocked, entered, and approached the old Scotsman sitting at his pedestal desk with a pair of folding glasses fixed half-way down his nose.

"Good-morning, Mr. Chapel," he said, pleasantly enough, pursing his lips and blinking over his glasses at Griff.

"Morning, Mr. Macdonald. . . . Bill of costs for that

Williams affair; got to be sent off this afternoon." Griff placed the papers on the edge of the desk. "And the terms of that sale at Penarth."

Mr. Macdonald blinked again over his folding glasses.

"Verra well. Leave them there. I'll look at them in a moment."

VI

THE ARCHITECT

GRIFF departed quietly from Mr. Macdonald's room, closed the door softly behind him and bounded up another flight of stairs. Here there was no ceremony of knocking, for he pushed open the door and burst in.

"Hullo, old cockalorum! . . . Busy?"

Seated at the other end of the large mahogany table was a man of about twenty-eight; absorbed in one of a pile of many sheets of drawings that lay in front of him. He had long black hair, large black eyes, a very pale face, a butterfly tie flying over the front of his waistcoat; and his outspread fingers that held down the sheet he was studying were exceedingly white, and long, and bony. He looked up, and his black eyes brightened still more when he understood who was there.

"Thought 'twas you when I heard that infernal noise. Come in, Chapel." He took his long fingers from the drawing and moved around in his chair.

The invitation was scarcely necessary, for Griff came and sat on the table, so that his glacé kid boots dangled in the air.

"Lord! But I got news for you, Chapel. Remember that design I sent to London some time ago?"

Griff nodded. "Gallery of some sort for the L.C.C., wasn't it?" He was familiar with all the enterprises of this young architect. "Three hundred quid at the end of it!"

"Well, I've got the second."

"No?" Griff sprang around to him.

"Fifty quid premium."

"Congrats., Saunders; congrats., old man!" Griff was shaking him wildly by the hand. "Told you it

would fetch something. Those pillars and columns were business-like—damned useful-looking. It's what I been telling you all along; you put too much of your *muck* into things. You're up in the air, playing with your foggy ideas of beauty. No good, Saunders; no good. You've got to come down and do something useful."

"All right; no more of your jaw." Saunders reached for his hat; he was naturally elated. "Come an' have a wet on the strength of it."

"Can't. Playing this afternoon." Griff went back to sit on the table and dangle his legs.

Saunders sat in his chair, took out a cigarette and began to smoke.

The fact of the matter was that Griff expended more of his mental energy on architecture than he did on law. And architecture, together with football, had absorbed so much of his time during the last two years that sitting the Intermediate Examination of the Incorporated Law Society had been a farcical proceeding. From a law-student's point of view he spent far too much time in this young architect's office. And the two were so directly opposed in type, Saunders the theorising Bohemian and Griff the materialistic unromantic realist, that the marvel was they agreed so well. At the beginning of their acquaintance their opinions had wofully clashed, for Saunders had been the dreaming idealist, with ambitions leaning towards Ecclesiastical Architecture and a future spent in designing and building beautiful churches; he had been a miracle of archæological knowledge; he talked of the Hellenistic and Roman Arts, of Egyptian methods and ideas; of the Byzantine Schools; of the French Gothic and the English Gothic; of Architecture of Rhetoric and Architecture of First Principles.

And Griff had laughed at him, calling all his theories *twaddle* and *muck*.

"That sounds topping," he would say in his most unromantic manner. "But what principles are *you* working on—*now*? Never mind a tinker's ha'penny dam what those old fossils did centuries ago. What is the position *to-day*?"

And Saunders had called him "a Philistine; a materialistic, sordid Philistine."

"But what's the good of all your knowledge and all that string of letters you've got after your name," Griff had insisted, failing to understand, "if you're not going to earn any coin? You don't come to this office for the sake of yer health, do you?"

And Saunders had begun to think that, after all, the son of a canon attached to Llandaff Cathedral could not afford to live in the air, nor *on* such rarefied sustenance.

Then Griff would change his tone. "I don't pretend to know any real architecture, but I do know a man's got to come down before he can go on."

And Saunders, really, had been affected. With a realistic, unromantic creature like Griff one was bound to be influenced to some extent. Then Saunders began teaching Griff about such things as Quantities, Sanitary Fittings, Plans and Working Drawings, Stresses and Strains, Surveying and so on; until Griff might well have been an articulated pupil to an architect and not an articulated clerk to a staid firm of solicitors.

And even when he studied law—as he sometimes did—instead of mastering the contents of the textbooks set and specified for the Intermediate Examination, he wandered into broader fields, to such subjects as: the Bastardy Laws, Bills of Sale and Bonds, Coalmines and their Regulations; Fairs, Markets and Frauds; the Game Laws and Laws of Husband and Wife, Landlord and Tenant, Principal and Agent, Lands and Tenements, Mortgages and Leases. In the branches of law that immediately appealed and interested, Griff would have passed any test all the law societies in the world wished to set; but those specified textbooks had been dry as dust, far-away and uninteresting, and Griff had failed the Intermediate Law Examination.

And so, on this Saturday morning again, Griff was attending to architecture on the second floor while neglecting the law which was downstairs.

"What the devil you got there?"

Immediately, his eyes were alight with interest, for a drawing always had an immense power over Griff. His legs ceased dangling, and he went round to stand beside Saunders. He had just caught sight of a plan on a water-

proof blue sheet, with myriads of lines marked in white. The drawing Saunders had been studying when Griff came in.

"Plan of a ferro-concrete bridge," Saunders explained. "See the bridge? See the arch?"

"Ferro-concrete?" The word was new to Griff; and sight of the plan delighted him; it looked so intricate and difficult, something worth unravelling.

"Takes a lot of explanation. Don't quite understand it all myself, yet. Come up on Monday, and we'll spend a couple of hours over it. But look here, Chapel!" Saunders's black eyes lit up with enthusiasm. "You know I been looking for something to specialise on? Well, I've found it. This ferro-concrete is the building material of the future. I'm going into it thoroughly. There's money in it."

Griff prepared to go. "What about that fifty quid?"

"We'll have a feed together to-night. Can you get back by—half-past seven?"

"Usual spot?" And Griff was gone.

"Can I take those papers, Mr. Macdonald?"

Mr. Macdonald pursed his lips and blinked over his folding glasses at Griff.

"Really! Really! I haven't found time to look over them yet. Send one of the clerks here in half-an-hour."

"Seems to me," said Griff to Mr. Bowden on the ground floor a moment later; "seems to me it's time to consider about giving young Macdonald the poke. He's beginning to slack."

It was one of Griff's ideas of humour to pretend sometimes that the managing clerk and he were the heads of this substantial firm.

VII

THE GOURMET

AT a quarter-to-seven that evening Griff was outside the Great Western Station at Cardiff. He felt tired and somewhat sore, for during the game he had been rather roughly handled; whenever he had gone into the rushes he had not been treated any too gently. He smiled softly as he thought of it, remembering some of the scowls the Swansea players had cast upon him, as though, were it not for their sportsmanship, they would have liked to kill him. And he rubbed the aching part under his right eye.

Griff stood a moment on the pavement under the glass covering and looked up and down the street, at the hoardings across the way, wondering why the surroundings of railway stations were always so bleak-looking, so ugly and so unprepossessing.

He put up a hand, and a cabby on his perch waved his whip as a sign that he was coming. Into the hansom Griff bundled his bag, then buttoned his overcoat, for it was cold.

At the *usual spot* he flung his bag to the floor, walked across to the bar and ordered a drink. "And put a drop of hot water into it, miss, will you?"

He carried his glass to a small round table and sank into the roomy, cosy armchair, crossed his legs and rested. He took a sip at the steaming glass, looked at his watch, settled down again until Saunders should appear at the end of the half-hour.

"Oh, Mr. Chapel!" A second young miss had come in and was beckoning him over the counter. "I've got a message for you."

It appeared as though Griff were fairly well known in the establishment. He muttered something under his

breath; he was tired, and here was this—this idiotic girl disturbing him. He emptied his glass and went to lean his elbow near the foot of the sandwich dish.

"What's the row about?" he asked her.

"Mr. Saunders was here this afternoon," she simpered; "and he asked me to tell you that he can't meet you to-night."

"That's all right."

"He said *perhaps* he'd be about later on. And oh, Mr. Chapel! You must be proud of yourself to-night."

Griff shuffled his feet. "Don' want any of your muck, now."

"But all the papers are full of you. And everybody's talking about you." She smiled again, showing her little white teeth. It was nice being on such intimate terms with him.

"Let's have another drink, please."

She brought him the drink. "Whatever's the matter with your eye? Look!" From somewhere beneath the counter she whipped out a small mirror. "Look! It *will* be a sight to-morrow," she told him, fixing her small teeth on her lower lip, and lowering her glance at him. "Oh, the brutes!" she said. With the tip of her finger she touched the bruised spot. "It's *too* bad," she sympathised.

Very soon, Griff was out in the street again, carrying his bag with him. Of course, old Saunders's failure to turn up was unavoidable, whatever the cause. But Griff was at a loose-end; and he abominated loose-ends. He had looked forward to that dinner; he had had nothing to eat since the match and was ravenously hungry. Now where should he go? . . . But he would be alone; and he did not want to be alone.

Immediately, a thought struck him and he hailed another hansom, gave an address in Roath and settled down once more in the corner. The streets were darker and less frequented, but Griff was pleased with this sudden idea of dining with his uncle. He rubbed his bruised cheek-bone and dug his fingers into that stiff portion of his thigh. No doubt about it; he had had a proper gruelling.

"And that sloppy girl in the pub!—with her silly grin and her laugh and her soft flesh." Griff chuckled. What would she have looked like had she played in the match this afternoon and been knocked about? Then her fluffy hair, the bit of black ribbon round her neck, and the locket on her blouse. But girls were like that. And she had touched the bruise under his eye with her rotten little finger. In disgust he flicked the bruise with his hand. What if she with her lockets and her smiles and her thin arms had had to stand in front of one of those devils of forwards? Ridiculous—ludicrous!

But here was his uncle's house.

He ran up the steps, put his thumb on the bell-push, and waited. In a moment the door opened and a boy of fifteen stood aside for Griff to enter: a boy with a row of bright buttons foolishly close together running in a line from his throat, over his pigeon chest, down to the bottom of his ridiculously short little monkey jacket.

"Here, Buttons," Griff said to him, handing him the bag; "give this to one of the girls and tell her to shake them out a bit. I'll call for them on Monday. . . . Anybody about?"

"Mr. Chapel's at dinner, sir," replied the staid little fellow.

But at this point an elderly lady with white hair, and dressed in black, appeared in the hall: Mrs. Treharne, the housekeeper. She addressed Griff in Welsh.

"I thought it was your voice, Mr. Griff. Why didn't you come a little earlier?"

Griff tipped her under the chin and winked at her: "If you're going to start rowing—look out!"

"Give me your overcoat and hat," Mrs. Treharne told him severely; "and don't be foolish."

"Guv'ner started dinner yet?"

"Yes. But you know he doesn't like being disturbed."

"Since when?"

"Of course—since it's *you*."

"Now you're talking sense. Got enough grub in the house? That's the chief point."

It was an old plan of his to upset Mrs. Treharne, for such a remark challenged her housekeeping, and since she

was not always nimble enough to follow Griff's ideas of humour, she got huffed.

"There's always sufficient of everything in *this* house, Mr. Griff." She tossed her head and tightened her lips.

"Now you know what I keep telling you about losing your temper! It's a most deplorable thing in a woman your age," he told her very seriously.

The gentle old lady was forced to smile; she had been *sold* again by this young imp. "Go away with you," she said.

Griff's laugh pierced into the dining-room and reached his uncle, who turned to the maid clearing away his soup plate.

"That's——" began David Chapel.

"Mr. Griff, sir!" supplied the maid.

"Go and ask him to come in."

"How are you, Uncle?" Griff walked across the carpeted floor and seated himself at the table. "Don't you wait," he said, helping himself to a sardine. "I'll soon catch you up. I'm jolly hungry."

"That's right," said David Chapel with one of those sudden jerks of his head in Griff's direction. "Help yourself."

Very little talk passed between them during dinner, for Griff was ravenous, and his uncle watched him satisfy his youthful appetite. But now and again Griff would offer some remark.

"My word! But this soup's tiptop. You can't appreciate a square meal till you've been in training for a week."

"Eat then; and don't talk so much."

And now and again Griff would find time to look around and study the familiar surroundings. There was everything here to please that liking he had for good and superior things. He was enjoying his dinner; more than ever was he glad of his decision to come here instead of dining at a restaurant, however first-rate. The beef—done to a turn—was ripping. And the wine? It did one's soul good to drink it. Then the apple-pie and cream? Delicious. And these nuts?

But the wine!

It seemed to find its way into every little cranny of

your body; it crept into your legs, soothing the stiffness; it bubbled through the muscles of your arms, allaying all aches; it stole into that bruised patch beneath your right eye and stopped the swelling; it even seemed to flow around your brain drowning the tiredness in a most gentlemanly way. The wine!

"Honestly," said Griff, as they both got up, "I've never enjoyed a meal like that in my life before."

"All very well your coming here uninvited, and then spinning a tale of that sort!"

"You can go on greening as much as you like," answered Griff as they walked across the hall; "but it's a fact. Makes you feel you'd like to develop into a *gourmet*—that the word?"

"No—*gourmand*," corrected his uncle, turning away his head to grin at the wall.

"That's right," advised Griff; "rub it in. I know I've dug a hole in your supplies."

They were now in the study, and when his uncle had switched on the light in the reading lamp on the desk, and had taken a cigar-case from one of the drawers, they sat in deep-seated armchairs, facing each other across the hearth. A fire burned brightly in the low grate, and its light played on the surfaces of his uncle's patent leather shoes and of Griff's glacé kid boots. The far end of the room, with its shelves of books, lay in indistinct shadow. The barrister's face was rather vague in its outline, but his white shirt-front, plainly defined in contrast to the lapels of his dinner jacket, had on it the dancing rays of the firelight.

Griff took a case from his pocket and placed a cigarette of an Egyptian blend between his lips; his uncle lit his cigar, and they both crossed their knees and smoked. His uncle and he were very good friends, without a suspicion of that reserve which existed between Griff and his father.

"They've knocked you about rather badly, haven't they?" questioned his uncle from the armchair, with his eye on the bruised patch on Griff's cheek-bone.

"Spoils my beauty a bit, doesn't it?" laughed Griff, with that heavy hollowness on the edge of his voice.

David Chapel bent over the arm of his chair towards the desk and took up a newspaper lying there. It was the football edition of the *Echo*, and before dinner he had been reading about the Cardiff and Swansea match. The account depicted Griff as the hero of the match: how he had caused Swansea to change their tactics because of his unshakable defence; and at last, how, if this eulogistic journalist were to be believed, beating the whole of the Swansea team, Griff had scored, saving his side from defeat and covering himself at the same time with glory. While reading, David Chapel, with the worldliness of a lawyer, had smiled at the extravagance of the journalist, wondering whether he chanced to be one of Griff's particular friends. But the truth was that the journalist's fancy had been captured by Griff's play, and if, in the natural course of things, he turned out to be an old Llan-doverly boy into the bargain, well—that was an accidental coincidence in the world of journalism, and but another proof of human frailty.

But however much David Chapel had cynically smiled in his legal worldliness, in reading the account he had been inordinately proud of Griff. And it was not to-day his liking for Griff had started. Even as a boy there had been something in him to attract his uncle's attention in no small degree—when he had come, sometimes with Betsy Michael, sometimes with Jane, sometimes with his father, and occasionally for a week or a fortnight of his summer holidays. It was a simple matter to prophesy that a personality such as Griff's would always be somewhere on the top in the world's affairs—unless! And it was here the lawyer's one doubt came in. He had not liked the failure to pass the Intermediate Examination of the Incorporated Law Society, although he had said nothing. It was not a good sign. His one misgiving had been that Griff would waste his youth and, worse still, get into a habit of wasting.

But—he had reasoned afterwards—the boy was only passing through that period which every boy of any spirit, given the opportunity, will pass. Griff was wild; no doubt about it, not the slightest. About certain phases of life he knew more than a boy of his age should know,

while there were other phases of which he seemed strangely ignorant and innocent. But there was not the least sign of viciousness in his nature. . . . His uncle had tossed his head. A year or two more, and Griff would settle down to the seriousness of things; shut his teeth and win through. A boy with the grit and determination shown by Griff on a football field could not possibly fail to win through.

So to-night, in the faint light of the reading lamp and the fire, holding the newspaper in his hand, David Chapel looked, a soft pride in his keen eyes, across the hearth at the sinuous, athletic figure of his nephew sunk in the depths of the opposite armchair.

"You seem to have been doing big things to-day, Griff. Making a name for yourself."

Griff looked at the silk shade of the electric lamp and at the bright circle of light on the desk. "Usual muck in the papers, I suppose! . . . But where did you get hold of those cigars? I tried one of them last week."

"Tried one of them, did you?" He smiled at this awkward attempt at turning the conversation. "Who told you to touch my cigars?"

"I was here," Griff explained, coolly jerking his head at the book-shelves; "looking up something on Contracts, and your box was on the desk. Rotten tack, I call them. But you needn't fear; never no more." He threw the end of his Egyptian cigarette into the fire and glanced at his watch. "I think I'll be off and catch the nine-thirty. Bit tired," he explained, as he got up, wriggled his legs to get the creases of his navy-blue trousers into line, and pulled down his waistcoat.

"By the way—" his uncle got up, and they stood side by side on the rug—"your father called here about four o'clock."

Griff turned and looked down into his uncle's face: "Where was he going?"

"Mathews, the timber merchant, was with him. They were off to Monmouth for a run in Mathews's new motor-car."

The barrister had his hands deep in his pockets, legs apart, as he gazed at his strong, modest nephew.

"Just *my* idea of things," said Griff in confidence; "a motor-car! . . . Now I'm off."

"Here!" His uncle was opening a drawer in the desk and was bringing out a pocket-book. "Your birthday's coming on soon, isn't it?" he remarked, as his fingers made beautiful little noises in his pocket-book. "Little present for you," he suggested, handing Griff two lovely bits of crisp paper. "Buy yourself a new suit, perhaps," he waggishly hinted.

Griff winked knowingly. "Catch me," he said, with a grin. "All tailors' bills go to Garth—that's my orders; and I never break um," he added. "Thanks very much, though!" Griff folded the two five-pound notes carefully and placed them in his breast pocket with a gentle solicitude for their welfare. "Bound to come in handy now that Christmas is coming."

In a moment Griff was stepping briskly down the street in the direction of the tramcars. It was typical of him, that with plenty of money in his pocket he should be economical, without a thought of looking round for a hansom.

VIII

ETERNAL YOUTH

SEATED back in the corner of the tramcar, Griff stretched himself and blew out a long, steady breath. He had had a glorious dinner, better far than any restaurant could have supplied. In his pocket were those two bits of paper. Not that he was ever very short of cash, for that was one of his father's good points : he was never mean nor a stinge. But still, an unexpected ten pounds greatly added to the zest of life. The dinner had proved to be beyond criticism, and the wine delightful.

Dismounting from the car in Queen Street, he entered the *usual spot* and inquired whether Saunders had been there, and then out again into the lighted street—the brilliantly lighted street. He had most decidedly—most decidedly—been looking at things from the wrong angle before dinner. That little barmaid was not the sloppy kid he had imagined. How glossy her hair was ! That black bit of ribbon round her throat was intriguing—that's it ! Damned good word that—intriguing ! Griff smiled wickedly as he whispered the word. How that locket had twinkled in the light ! . . . Devilish odd ! There seemed to be something about these soft-fleshed girls he had not noticed before. That girl had touched the bruised spot under his eye, and how soft—

He arrived at the top of Queen Street and stopped until the traffic cleared so that he might cross into Duke Street. And here, as he waited, someone brushed the sleeve of his overcoat and glanced up at him with mischievous eyes aslant, temptingly and invitingly. One of those— Griff looked after her. By Jove !

Yes, these girls ! Queer, after all, that he should know

so little about them ! They were creatures quite strange to him—of another world. Even as a boy he had thought they were silly things that giggled or cried ; it did not seem to matter which. But to-night, for some mysterious reason, things were different. There was that girl full of sympathy for his bruised eye. She had touched him with her finger, and her touch had been really cool and soothing now he came to think of it. He had been an idiot to picture that tiny girl in front of a rush of tearing forwards. The idea was brutal.

He knew everything about men ; had turned amongst them ; knew how they talked ; what they did—everything. And sometimes these men had talked about *life* and *seeing life*. He had known what they had meant, but he had never been curious. There was Saunders, for instance, who had been a student in London earlier in his career. Saunders had seen all there was to see ; Saunders knew things ; Saunders had seen life ; Saunders had lived. And here was he himself raw and inexperienced. And all because he had ignored life, because he had never been intrigued. Well, the solution was to go and see life ; to go and live.

Griff took out his watch as he turned the corner into St. Mary Street. It was a quarter past nine. Then it must be the eleven-fifteen to-night. Jolly handy that last train—only been running a couple of months. He wondered whether the railway company had put on this late train in order to give young chaps like himself a chance of *seeing life* ! Devilish accommodating of them if they had. He would have to hunt up the General Manager and stand him a drink.

She was a dark, diminutive thing, that you could "pick up and put in your pocket," as Griff thought. Her long brown fur coat and the tiny cap of the same colour and material had first attracted him as she was about to enter a tramcar at the corner of Wood Street. And now, they stood on the pavement together, chatting away like old friends. Her hands and wrists supported a ridiculously large brown fur muff ; she must have been about twenty-three, and she had a tantalising way of

calling him *chéri*, and of looking up at him with adorable black eyes.

"You're French?" Griff was seeing life.

"But yes, *chéri*!" Her voice was light, like a child's. Griff had started to live. "Where are you going?"

"I go to meet my friend to-night. A lady friend. She comes to stay with me to-night."

Griff looked down at her, pursing his lips. "You can't go home yet."

"But yes, *monsieur*! I meet my friend at half-past ten."

"Loads of time before that. Come on."

She immediately linked her arm through his, and her muff was aslant as she tripped along at Griff's side chirruping away in her deliciously queer English.

They mounted the steps of an hotel, a select place where quiet was obtainable. They passed through the hall with its tall palms, down a step and along a well-lighted corridor, into the buffet where the light was more subdued and which was deserted. In the far corner stood a table with a palm on it, and to one of the arm-chairs behind this Griff led her.

"It is very *intéressant*," she said, tilting up her chin, looking around in approval, and then bringing her bright eyes back to Griff.

"Rattling show," he answered, living most intensely. "What do you like best?"

She was seated, pulling the fur coat into shape around her frock. Her small gloved hands were patting the muff. "I am very fond of absinthe," she admitted.

Griff crossed to the bar and brought back with him the two saucers each holding the spoon, the lump of sugar and the long tapering glass. As she mixed the liqueur, he took off his muffler and opened his overcoat.

"And who is this mysterious friend you are going to meet?"

She had the spoon poised over the top of the glass and was carefully pouring water in drops from the jug to the sugar in the spoon. She waited until some of the sugar had dissolved before tilting the spoon to let the water splash into the absinthe. And all the time Griff observed the

shapeliness of the small hands within the close-fitting brown kid gloves.

"She comes from France, surely," she replied, still intent on her task. "She will marry herself next week at Newport."

She went on repeating the process of dropping water on to the sugar in the spoon, pouring the water from the spoon into the glass, until the colour of the liqueur began to change. It was like one of the experiments he used to perform in a test-tube at Llandovery. The absinthe had at first been like brandy with a greenish tint, but when she finally filled the long tapering glass with water and stirred the whole, it became milky.

"Marry herself, will she?" How naïve she was!

"But, yes!" She was now mixing her own absinthe. "She will marry herself to her friend, and they will be happy What name of the hotel?" she asked abruptly. "It is very proper, is it not?"

"Glyn; Glyn Hotel." Griff studied her face, her black eyebrows, the soft skin, the dark complexion, the slight suggestion of powder, and he knew that he was alive.

"I do not smoke in public," she said when Griff offered his case. "But I shall take one." With an impulsive movement she took hold of his hand and laughed joyously into his eyes. "I shall love you, surely! You are so *chic*!"

"And I'm devilish fond of you," he told her, pressing her little hand—bounding into the very midst of life. He lit his cigarette and then took up the glass; and somehow as he held the glass the surface of the liquid quivered, just as though his hand had been unsteady. "Absinthe and Women," he whispered under his breath and wagged his head. "Here's topping good luck!"

"A thousand a year! That is what you say, is it not?" And she sipped.

Griff sipped. He had not tasted absinthe before. He took another sip and thought it resembled the taste of one of those patent cough mixtures. He took a third sip—just the thing to creep around one's brain and drown the tiredness in a most gentlemanly manner. He leaned

far back in his chair, stretched his legs and loosened the bowler hat on his forehead. No aches; no stiffness; only a glorious feeling of content—a soothing lassitude in possession of his senses.

“And whereabouts d’you live?”

“Ah!” From her muff she took out a handkerchief to wipe her lips; such a stupidly small handkerchief; and a faint perfume stole into Griff’s nostrils. “I have a very nice leetle flat.” She took out her purse and handed Griff a card. She bent over and stroked the sleeve of his overcoat. “I shall love you, surely!” There seemed to be genuine fondness in her eyes as she petted him.

“A leetle flat?” He mimicked her tones. “That’s a bit of *all* right.”

He also leant over, and in a moment they were plunged in deepest confidence, unconscious of what went on around.

Two men came bustling into the buffet and stood at the counter.

“Wha’s it to be?” The man in the heavy motoring coat, with a pair of goggles slipped up on his cap, put his hand into his pocket and brought out some silver. “Two whiskies, miss, and a soda—split!”

The taller of the two looked casually around the room. He stared, turned to his glass, gulped up the whisky, and hurried to the door.

“Come on,” he cried briskly. “Let’s get off.”

“It is a very nice leetle flat.” Her fingers tightened on the sleeve of Griff’s overcoat and she rubbed her head against his shoulder. “And I have need of a friend.”

Her eyes danced most enticingly. Already was she immensely fond of *chéri*; she was sure they would become very excellent friends. She took off her gloves and rubbed her hands together in the ecstasy of this new affection. And then she held one of Griff’s hands and he felt her fingers and palm, soft and warm and—delightful to the touch.

“I am a very nice girl,” she said confidingly. “And I shall love you, surely! You are so young, so *chic*, so much a gentleman!”

"And I'm getting devilish fond of you, too, I must say."

Ripping little thing she was. The dark complexion; the long eyelashes. He was living; he was learning things. He was at the very heart of life, hearing the very throb, solving the mysteries, getting to the very core of things. And last, he was getting to know girls. Griff rolled his head and smiled.

"But now, I must go to meet my friend." She had commenced pulling on her gloves. "You go to your home, do you not?"

Griff buttoned his overcoat and together they left the buffet. Before putting her into a hansom he bent to her ear and whispered: "I'll come and see you in your leetle flat, right enough."

"And you will be a good boy, always, will you not?"

He stood on the pavement alone, chuckling at this fresh *naïveté*, and watched the hansom drive away. "Well, I be damned," he ejaculated as soon as it was out of sight. He pulled himself together, stuck up his head, looked around.

Saunders was at his elbow; Saunders with his pale face, his butterfly tie and his beaver hat; Saunders eyeing him from head to foot.

"*You're* in a nice state," Saunders said. "Where you been?"

Griff looked at him with intent steadfastness. He knew as much about life as Saunders did. "Having a stroll round."

"Who's that I saw you putting in a cab?"

"Friend of mine," Griff answered with a newly acquired off-handedness. "But look here!" He wagged a finger at Saunders. "You've done me out of a dinner to-night."

On the top of the steps of the Glyn Hotel Griff halted, and turning very gravely to Saunders, inquired:

"Wha's yer s-ser-ious sopinion of a-ab-absinthe as a liqueur, ole man?"

IX

A VISION

THE two men left the buffet of the Glyn Hotel, passed through the well-lighted corridor and the hall with the palms, descended the steps and crossed the pavement to the powerful car standing there in the street.

"It's pretty cold, isn't it?" remarked the man in the motoring coat, stamping his feet and drawing the collar up around his ears.

"It is," replied the other, as though he were morose and reluctant to speak.

"Jump in; we'll soon get warm after whizzing through the air a bit." He pulled the goggles over his eyes and put his hands on the steering wheel. "Ready?"

"Let her go!"

Chapel sank back into his corner, and his face was black and sour as he hunched his shoulders against the cold and thrust his hands deep into his overcoat pockets. He stared stolidly in front of him, but he saw nothing of the tramcars, nothing of the horse vehicles which the car was constantly evading, neither did he hear the repeated, raucous, warning hoot of the horn. He did not even feel the rocking movement of the car upon its springs. He pushed himself into the cushions and stared stolidly ahead, stared in black anger at a vision vivid, burningly vivid, before his eyes.

Two persons sitting in two armchairs behind a table holding a palm! But for Chapel it contained dreadful meanings: decay, poison, failure, waste, decadence—everything that sapped vitality and made man a slave to be tossed and battered by relentless Fate.

A prostitute, for all her finery! A wanton with her vile trade and her decadent cajolery and her Iscariot

smile ! And sharing her vileness that drunken youth with swollen, heavy eyes : a rake, a renegade, a vicious personified degradation of a family !

He was sufficiently a man of the world to anticipate and tolerate the ways of youth, but here was something infinitely worse, following in the wake of other things. He knew the boy drank, that he had reached home unsteadily more than once, and that he mixed with men who were fast and wild. And he had said nothing : not a single remonstrance had he breathed, believing that increased years would bring wisdom.

But that examination !

That had been failure ; and failure of any kind meant an inability to cope with Fate. It meant the beginning of the Juggernaut's mutilation.

The sight to-night had given him a shock, causing his whole nature to totter. He saw in it another attack of Fate upon himself ; one of those treacherous, unscrupulous attacks. Fate was cheating again, and every faculty in him bristled.

Fate had started a new move. Fate was attacking him through his son. He clenched his fists and wriggled in his seat. He wanted to get out and move about. This damnable car was stifling him. He wanted room to move his arms, to hit out at something. The thought of this fresh unscrupulousness maddened him. He wanted to fight.

Fate could not beat him any other way. Fate was striking at him through his son.

That drunken youth would get into its clutches. That drunken youngster would pull down the family again. The ignominy would be greater than ever. All those years he had worked to rebuild the fortunes of the family would be in vain.

Family ! Family ! How he had worked ! How he had slaved for that love of family ! How he had toiled to regain the old stability !

All these years he had been trying to get back, not to Wern as a construction perhaps, but back to the old eminence, back to the old position of the Chapels. And he was getting back ; in a few years he would be

back. And here was Fate seeking his downfall through his son.

The sides of the car seemed to be walls closing in around him.

Was Fate, after in all other ways failing, to master him through his son? Was this the beginning of the inevitable end? Was mutilation really to come? Were the dreams of a resurrected, rebuilt family to be lost and vain? Would his bones begin to crack?

There was one thing in the whole creation—only one—that could defeat him. Only one thing, and of that he had not the slightest fear. The only thing that could conquer him was what some men feared so much—Death. He chuckled wildly.

“I’m one of the top dogs. I’m one of the bruisers. I’m going on.”

“Going to get out to-night?” The car had stopped. “What the devil you been laughing about?”

“Watching you moving your head like a pointer on a scent.”

“Seem to be enjoying yourself anyhow. Well, here’s off. Home in three minutes. Good-night, Chapel.”

Chapel stood a moment glancing after the red tail-light of the car until it was out of sight. He shivered in the cold. He turned and mounted the steps to the door of his home.

X

MATHEMATICS

GRIFF sprang out of bed at eight o'clock on the following, Sunday, morning, and after pouring out a glass of water he drank it greedily, stretched himself, yawned and looked around. With a crooked smile of memory he hurried into the bathroom.

With his pyjamas over his arm he soon came back into the bedroom again. Then, suddenly remembering, he stepped in long easy steps to the oval glass of the dressing-table and carefully studied the patch under his eye which had been so sore last night. It was practically gone; only a small cut with a ring of light brown around it—hardly visible.

"Must have bled," he told himself. He looked once more into the mirror. "Not a sign!" He had thoroughly bathed his eyes in cold water in the bathroom. "Nobody could say I was a bit off last night."

He hurried to complete his toilet and began to whistle. He combed and brushed his hair, selected a collar and a tie, brushed his light grey suit and made ready to descend.

The memory of a voice suddenly rang through his mind: "I shall love you, surely!" He glanced at his reflection in the mirror and winked at it understandingly. Then he went down to the kitchen, still whistling.

"Hullo, Moses in the bulrushes! At it again?"

At the table, with a sheet of paper in front of him and a pencil in his hand a boy of twelve was seated. He had his hands in his hair, apparently deep in intricate thought. This was Jane's son, and his name to everyone but Griff was William, shortened for the sake of homely use to Willie.

Griff picked up a pair of boots on his way and sat near

the window putting them on. From the scullery came sounds of the maid at work under the tap.

"How long does light take to travel from the sun to the earth, Griff?"

Willie was a terrible boy for *facts*. His knowledge in that direction was prodigious, almost uncanny. Dates in History he had at his fingers ends. He knew all the capes in the world, Griff was sure; the names of rivers, their lengths, the countries they watered, the principal towns upon them—all these he could repeat as though his brain were a tape on a Stock Exchange unwinding and giving latest market prices. He could tell the birthplace of every commodity in the world: corn from Canada, jute from India, mutton from New Zealand, and so on in a way that made Griff shudder for his own History and Geography. On Polar Expeditions was Willie especially strong. The boy was constantly with a sheet of paper and a lead pencil, committing some fact to memory or working at some fantastic calculation such as the one he was engaged upon this Sunday morning.

"What's the idea?" asked Griff, lacing his right boot and not looking up.

"If you know that, you can say how long the world will last after the sun's gone out; supposing it does go out!"

"Beyond me, Billiam. Couldn't touch a thing like that." Griff commenced lacing his left boot.

"I haven't finished yet. The earth's getting nearer the sun, or further away—which is it, Griff?"

"Not guilty," pleaded Griff.

"Well, if you knew the distance between them in a thousand years from now, then you could work out——"

"Here, drop it." Griff got up and stamped his feet on the red-and-white tiles. Then he took the pencil from Willie and pretended to be on the point of writing. "Now I'll give you a problem. You know I was a bit hot myself on Mathematics when I was in Llandovery. But there was one sum we never could do. None of the chaps could do it; none of the tutors even. So you can guess it was pretty stiff. And now I come to think of it, there was a lot of writing to the papers about it that time.

Scientific journals and all that lot, see? . . . Now where were we? Oh, aye! Everybody said the answer must be easy—simple solution; sort of thing any idiot might wake up with any morning. Now you're a bit of a lightning calculator, let's see what you can make of it."

Willie had his brows heavy, ready for the problem. "What is it?"

"I'm coming to it. Listening? . . . If a herring and a half cost three ha'pence——"

"Here!" Willie screwed up his eyes. "You don't ave me-ee!"

Griff was astonished. "What's the answer, then?"

"What will a dozen cost? They call a thing like that a *chestnut*, Griff. Ever bin 'ad?"

And Willie went on with his calculation about the sun and the earth: an involved proportion sum, as he had already seen, as soon as sufficient data had been gathered together.

Griff tapped him on the shoulder.

"Look here, whiskers! About this sun and earth business! Let's suppose light takes a minute to come from the sun to the earth——"

"A minute? You don't know anything about it."

"Suppose, I said;—easier to reckon. How long would it take to go back from the earth to the sun? Now then, ready reckoner!"

Willie was once again screwing up his eyes.

"Had again, Mr. Griff! It's all absconded in the earth," he informed, plunging at last beyond his depth. Then Willie abruptly changed the subject, and asked—

"Who scored for Cardiff Firsts yesterday?"

But at that moment Willie's mother announced that breakfast was ready, and Griff followed her through the hall into the Back Room.

"Clever young kid, that," he said to himself, thinking of Willie.

At the door of the Back Room Jane had stopped with her finger to her lips. "He's got one of his *days*," she whispered, inclining her head towards the door. "So don't do anything to upset him."

far back in his chair, stretched his legs and loosened the bowler hat on his forehead. No aches; no stiffness; only a glorious feeling of content—a soothing lassitude in possession of his senses.

“And whereabouts d’you live?”

“Ah!” From her muff she took out a handkerchief to wipe her lips; such a stupidly small handkerchief; and a faint perfume stole into Griff’s nostrils. “I have a very nice leetle flat.” She took out her purse and handed Griff a card. She bent over and stroked the sleeve of his overcoat. “I shall love you, surely!” There seemed to be genuine fondness in her eyes as she petted him.

“A leetle flat?” He mimicked her tones. “That’s a bit of *all* right.”

He also leant over, and in a moment they were plunged in deepest confidence, unconscious of what went on around.

Two men came bustling into the buffet and stood at the counter.

“Wha’s it to be?” The man in the heavy motoring coat, with a pair of goggles slipped up on his cap, put his hand into his pocket and brought out some silver. “Two whiskies, miss, and a soda—split!”

The taller of the two looked casually around the room. He stared, turned to his glass, gulped up the whisky, and hurried to the door.

“Come on,” he cried briskly. “Let’s get off.”

“It is a very nice leetle flat.” Her fingers tightened on the sleeve of Griff’s overcoat and she rubbed her head against his shoulder. “And I have need of a friend.”

Her eyes danced most enticingly. Already was she immensely fond of *chéri*; she was sure they would become very excellent friends. She took off her gloves and rubbed her hands together in the ecstasy of this new affection. And then she held one of Griff’s hands and he felt her fingers and palm, soft and warm and—delightful to the touch.

“I am a very nice girl,” she said confidingly. “And I shall love you, surely! You are so young, so *chic*, so much a gentleman!”

"And I'm getting devilish fond of you, too, I must say."

Ripping little thing she was. The dark complexion; the long eyelashes. He was living; he was learning things. He was at the very heart of life, hearing the very throb, solving the mysteries, getting to the very core of things. And last, he was getting to know girls. Griff rolled his head and smiled.

"But now, I must go to meet my friend." She had commenced pulling on her gloves. "You go to your home, do you not?"

Griff buttoned his overcoat and together they left the buffet. Before putting her into a hansom he bent to her ear and whispered: "I'll come and see you in your leetle flat, right enough."

"And you will be a good boy, always, will you not?"

He stood on the pavement alone, chuckling at this fresh *naïveté*, and watched the hansom drive away. "Well, I be damned," he ejaculated as soon as it was out of sight. He pulled himself together, stuck up his head, looked around.

Saunders was at his elbow; Saunders with his pale face, his butterfly tie and his beaver hat; Saunders eyeing him from head to foot.

"You're in a nice state," Saunders said. "Where you been?"

Griff looked at him with intent steadfastness. He knew as much about life as Saunders did. "Having a stroll round."

"Who's that I saw you putting in a cab?"

"Friend of mine," Griff answered with a newly acquired off-handedness. "But look here!" He wagged a finger at Saunders. "You've done me out of a dinner to-night."

On the top of the steps of the Glyn Hotel Griff halted, and turning very gravely to Saunders, inquired:

"Wha's yer s-ser-ious sopinion of a-ab-absinthe as a liqueur, ole man?"

the fire for the kettle when she heard his voice, like the growl of a heavy dog, speaking to Griff.

"Stop there a minute."

She heard the growl in his voice. She turned and saw Griff's eyebrows raised in mild surprise. She saw the scowling face of his father. Jane hastily gathered together the dishes and hurried out.

The door had closed, and Chapel and Griff were alone, facing each other across the corner of the table. Both seemed to have been waiting for the click of the door catch.

From his calculating glance across the corner of the table, Griff might have caught sight of an opposing team opening out a dangerous attack on the football field. His body seemed softly to vibrate in its physical sensitiveness as he sat coolly awaiting the approach of the attack. The anger in his father's voice had told him there was battle in the air; the tone had held a rasp which something deep within him resented. Unconsciously, he drew his chair nearer the table and seated himself more firmly. That pugnacity within him had been moved. He was ready.

"Well!" he said as soon as the door was closed. "What d'you want?"

His father had his eyes upon him, cold and stern. The coolness irritated him, and the veins of his neck got swollen. "Where were you last night?"

"Last night?" Griff stiffened himself. "I had dinner in Roath."

"After that." The Bruiser was beginning to show. "Where were you after that?"

"After that?" More than ever did Griff resent the tone. Here was someone trying to frighten him; and that remained to be seen. There was no need to stand talk of this kind from anyone, father or no father. "You'd better go 'n' find out," Griff told him impudently. "And if you think you're going to bully me, you're up the wrong street."

Chapel was on his feet. "What did you say?" Only with an effort could he keep his hands pressed on the table.

"I suppose you're talking about——?"

"Yes, I am. I'm talking about the Glyn Hotel."

Griff's calculating glance changed to one of amazement. Concerning the state of his home-coming last night he would not have been surprised to hear;—but this?

"There are some things you don't talk about," he said with an impatient sneer.

Chapel was still controlling himself; but it was difficult. The arrogant youngster was now, in his lofty manner, trying to teach him. He sat down; he was the bully now. No need to make an extensive show of temper; no need to play with words. Fate was attacking him through his son, and he had found a way to deal with Fate.

"Last night was the end of it." He was the Bruiser with power to tread. "I've finished with you. If you think I'm going to stand by and see you throwing away the money I've earned, you're wrong. I've said nothing about the company you've been keeping nor about the habits you've got into. But last night was the end of it. I've finished with you." He saw in his mind the crumbling of the stability he had slaved to rebuild.

Griff was stupefied. "What d'you mean by that?"

"For one thing, you're not going to that office in Cardiff again."

As he heard the hard, pitiless voice, the whole ground seemed to shift from beneath Griff. The whole of his youth rose up against the injustice. It was unfair. What he had done—the worst thing he had ever done—did not warrant this. It was unfair. But he knew it was useless arguing, for he might just as well go and strike his head against a wall as try and get his father to alter one of his decisions. But it was unfair. Tears came very near to his eyes. He was used to playing straight and square, and his young nature rebelled.

"Anything else?" He was now roused. "What am I to do if I leave the office?"

"To-morrow morning you can go down to that house I'm building in St. Fagans. Graig will find something for you to do. And if you want to go to the devil, go your own way." He moved his chair and got up. "Fate, be damned!" he was thinking. He shrugged his great shoulders and in his dominating way jerked his head in

the direction of the door. "Now you'd better be off," he said.

But mention of Graig had been the one thing needed to set Griff aflame. He felt that he was being trodden on. He felt the attempt to break his spirit. Then that fire leapt into his eyes. Someone was trying to master him. Someone was trying to tread on him. He bounded to his feet. He was out to fight.

"So you think you're going to tread on me like Graig, do you? You think I'm going to be a rotten little dog like Graig? You'd like to smash *me* up as well?"

His father sprang around. "Sit down, you fool," he roared.

"I won't sit down." Griff's voice also was raised.

"Sit down, I tell you," his father warned in more dangerous calm. Then he suddenly leaned forward, all his self-control shattered. Anything and everything standing in his way he was prepared to smash.

Griff leaned forward also, and their faces almost touched. "You told me to go to the devil. *You* can go to the devil, too!"

Threateningly, his father raised his fist. "If you don't sit down, I'll hit you down."

That set all the raging devils loose in Griff. That cold, penetrating look jumped into his eyes. He seemed like a young tiger ready to spring. He was afraid of no man.

"If you strike," he cried, "I'll fight, mind you! By God, I'll fight!"

And then, like a flash, their whole natures stood bare and naked in their eyes. Both had been challenged. They glared at each other with a savageness that was unhuman. For a moment they stood helpless, their bodies trembling in their passion. Civilisation might never have been. The Chapel devil was there in all his nastiness. And as they glared into each other's eyes, one was as grimly determined as the other. Each realised, instinctively, that if the other did strike, neither would give in. Both were prepared to fight to the bitter end. There was the same unbending strain in each of them; each would sooner feel his body torn to pieces than have his spirit broken. Better death

than dishonour through defeat. If they fought, one of them, at least, would be maimed.

Slowly, the habits and restraints of generations of civilisation brought back to them their scattered senses. Reason began to prevail.

Griff drew a deep breath; he shrugged his shoulders; he turned from the table and walked into the hall. His face was pale and his hands were violently shaking.

A moment later his father crossed the hall into the room where he spent most of his time while at home. It was a large room containing his desk and book-case, and the bay window looked down upon the roadway.

He did not resent Griff's attitude. In common fairness he could not, however unnatural it might have been. He had not gone into the interview expecting the traditional dutifulness of son towards father. His treatment had not been conventional, and he was tolerant enough not to expect convention in return. True, he had struck against the unexpected. He had never dreamt that his son possessed that same unflinching spirit of the top dog. He had met a bruiser as strong as himself; but by good fortune he had held the advantage and had been able to beat his way forward.

Fate had tried to crush him, and Fate had been beaten.

"Fate be damned!"

He sneered at the helplessness of Fate once a man took it by the throat.

He went and sat in the black leather armchair before the fire and took up a newspaper which he began to read. But even as he read his mind kept reverting to that passage with his son. Not for a second did he resent Griff's rebellion; but what he did resent was something in Griff's manner. Throughout, there had been some mastery of the situation in the youngster's manner—a smooth, easy, self-confident ability to deal with every emergency as it arose. His father resented the smooth self-assurance. But the finest show of all had been when the youngster had turned away and had left the room. The action had been one to madden his father, because in the act of self-control his son had proved himself to be the wiser. In an instant he seemed to have recognised how outrageous a fight between a parent

and his son would have been. It was this sublime superiority all along his father resented.

His father grew envious of Griff; he grew jealous of the lad's qualifications. He saw how the youngster would go through life; his progress would be easy because he took for granted that things must come his way. He had commenced his life without doubts and misgivings. He would go straight on.

Chapel seemed to forget that Griff had lived all his life among surroundings that breathed nothing but success; that the very air he had sucked in was charged with this stern, unbending superiority; and that the example ever before him was the bruiser, the man who knew the secret. And further, the boy was descended from a stock which had always ruled; this spirit of unquestioning masterfulness was in his blood, poured down through generation after generation.

XII

SYMPATHY

GRIFF, meanwhile, was pursuing his prearranged Sunday morning walk. The air was bitterly cold, and it was necessary to maintain a swinging pace to keep oneself warm. What occupied Griff's thoughts for some time was the astounding callousness of his father in thus summarily checking his career. But that was a pill best swallowed with despatch, for his father's decisions were adamantly unalterable. The next question concerned the attitude he had assumed towards his father, and for this he was at first genuinely sorry. His respect for his father had always been so great. But—and here the regret left him. All very well to speak of a son's dutiful subjection to the will of a parent! But what was the respect due from a parent to his son? If anyone—be he father or no father!—violated his position in such a way as to try and crush another, was not that other justified in fighting for himself?

Griff knew there were some people in the world who meekly bowed their heads and submitted ingloriously in such circumstances. He had met boys of that kind at school, boys who, on the receipt of the first hard blow, meekly gave one best. That had not been *his* way of fighting, nor his way of playing football, either. He was not going to submit. *He* would not live as a creepy sneak, toadying to anyone! Where did one's own self-respect come in if one lived crushed under the heel of another man?

"I'd rather be killed," he said vehemently to himself, clenching his hands within his gloves.

It was too terrible. Fancy living all one's life without any distinct individuality! Fancy being another man's victim, the slave of another man's whim!

"I'd rather be killed," he thought, "than be like Graig."

Dinner at Garth on Sunday was a mid-day meal, and to-day it was a failure judged from a standard of cheerfulness. There was Jane facing Griff across the table, sitting very uneasily in her chair, her hands nervously unsteady as she picked up the dishes and shared their contents, just as though she expected another storm to break loose. His father was there, a little blacker looking than usual, but there was nothing else to remind one of what had happened earlier in the morning. It seemed that his decree had been published—his law administered, his proclamation made—and the matter had ended. Griff looked at him occasionally, at the strong cast of his face, at the compact head, at the broad shoulders. After all, one could not help respecting him. There was something so rock-like about his will, something so grandly final about his decrees. If one admired strength at all, one could not help but admire his father.

A touch of his saving grace of humour returned to Griff as he gazed at his father in this light. He turned his attention to his plate. "Odd Old Stick," he breathed to himself.

Griff knew quite well that they would never quarrel in this way again. They were too much alike; the peril of the issue was much too great. And now that at last they had learnt how similar they were, they would avoid each other, tolerating each other's existence without a sign, but always avoiding any direct conflict. Griff was familiar enough with his father to be aware that he was too large a personality to stoop to bickerings. It was either a straight sledge-hammer blow or nothing at all. His father never indulged in half measures.

They would never quarrel like that again.

After dinner Griff got his overcoat and bowler hat. He was going to the Windgap because he wished to see Betsy. Of all the people in the world Betsy was the one who understood him, and she in her turn was the one he best understood. Every square-inch of her huge body breathed out sympathy. Sympathy! That puzzled Griff. He had never wanted sympathy. It was what he would have

called *muck* not so long ago. But to be honest, he knew it was for sympathy he was visiting Betsy. Not the spoken words of sympathy, but that—what was it? Betsy and he seemed to be able to get together and touch, to get close together. Not their bodies—not their minds. What was it? It was a queer thing to say, but Betsy was the only person in the world whose *soul* he could touch. It was odd, but many of the things he had classed as *muck* were beginning to assume incredible value.

“I’ve never known anything about these things,” he said to himself as he passed through the village; “I’ve always been on my own.”

It was very odd, but this seemed a period of change in his life. Naturally, his father’s decision that he was to leave the office altered everything. But there was something else, something behind that. To commence with, he had not been used to thinking so much. And now this morning he had been meddling with such things as individuality, and getting hopelessly beyond his depth. Last night, too, he had been thinking in a manner he had never thought before—about girls. Not that rotten little barmaid, nor even that French girl. There was something deeper than all that—something better—a purer lot of thoughts. He saw now how it had all begun: Saunders unable to meet him; the desire not to be alone; the dinner at his uncle’s house. And when he had got back into the streets, he had been alone again. Company! That was what he had wanted.

It must have been ideas such as these had been in his mind last night when he had begun thinking of girls in that strange way. Perhaps this was the mystery of girls—not those rotten notions he had last night, but something in their natures that allowed you to get *close*, to *touch* them.

Supposing you knew a girl like that! A girl to whom you could tell everything—one who would feel by instinct what you felt yourself! A girl you could get close to—a girl whose whole being would blend—

What the devil was he thinking about?

Griff was on the path running along the brook to the

Windgap. He took a vicious kick at a rotten piece of bark on the ground in front of him, and laughed.

"Damn girls. I'm going to see Betsy."

"Well, I never!"

Griff was approaching the Windgap, and Betsy had seen him.

"There's that boy Griff coming."

Betsy was running to the front door, her body rocking from side to side, her hard old face quivering with smiles.

"Why didn' you send to say you was comin', boy, for me to make some pancakes forr you?"

She was leading Griff by the arm, just as though he were unable to walk himself.

"There you! There you! Take your coat off and give me your hat, and go 'n' sit by the fire. Shift round a bit, Francis. Want to keep all the fire to yourself? That's right now. You give me your coat. And go 'n' sit down. Where-'ave-you-bin, boy? I'm ashamed of you, indeed-there-you-I-am! Where 'ave you bin not comin' to see me for a week? If it wasn't for Francis bringin' news about you, I wouldn' know if you was alive or dead."

Griff stood over her, winking at her. "Busy, Betsy; been very busy."

"To be sure!" He was studying in Cardiff to be a solicitor now, and growing up to be a big man. "But go 'n' sit down."

"Hullo, France! How's the cough?"

"Better to-day," grunted Francis, relapsing into silence.

Francis was passing through one of his periods of gloom and depression, searching his heart and puzzling out his salvation. Yesterday he had succumbed to an uncontrollable fit of temper, and he had thrashed a dog most unmercifully. He had been hurled back into this moody uncertainty and reminded of his utter damnation. He glanced into the fire and spoke not another word. The next week would be spent in repentance until the gloom would be dispelled, until his soul could again be saved and the certainty of glory reconstructed.

Griff had tea with them, and since Betsy was going to the Evening Service at Hermon, Griff and she walked together through the village.

"You ought to go to church sometimes, Griff," Betsy was advising. "Indeed, there you, you *ought* to go."

And, strangely enough, Griff followed her advice, for he turned in at the lych gate, walked along the gravel path between the old tombstones, and entered the church for the first time for several years.

XIII

A WINDFALL

GRIFF'S twenty-first birthday was approaching, and he had obtained a year's experience of Building.

Long ago had he ceased to regret the sudden check in his career, for during the past year he had been in touch with the inner working of his father's business, and had seen the extent and the quality of its operations. From a purely financial point of view, Building, on his father's scale, was much superior to the Law. And there was another consideration which quickly softened the regret: the life was healthier; it suited him better in every way, for, instead of being cooped up in an office, he worked chiefly in the open air.

Griff was essentially an out-of-door man; his athleticism was so opposed to confinement.

The relationship between him and his father had been a strange one. At home they spoke not a word to each other; at work his father treated him as a superior workman.

Only once had anything resembling a clash occurred, and that had been at the end of Griff's first week in his altered surroundings. Graig had taken in the week's wages-sheet for Chapel's inspection, and after a hurried glance Chapel had asked in his abrupt way—

“Who wrote this down?”

The first three items read thus—

<i>J. Chapel</i>	.	.	.	£5	0	0
<i>G. Chapel</i>	.	.	.	£3	3	0
<i>E. Graig</i>	.	.	.	£3	0	0

and Chapel had a finger pointing to the second item.

“Who wrote this down?” he asked Graig.

"Mr. Griff. I put him on that lot."

"Send him here to me."

And Griff had come into the office. "Well, what's the matter?"

"Think yourself worth three guineas a week, do you?"

Griff looked at him. "Yes, I do."

"Then you can go and change it to thirty shillings."

"Then you can cross it off altogether. If you think I've come here to be under Graig—you're wrong."

The result of the interview was: "If you're not worth it at the end of six months you can clear out."

On this particular morning a year later Griff was supervising the workmen engaged on a house they were building for the head of a Cardiff shipping firm. His father had been from home for the last fortnight, going without any explanation of his absence, and Griff had been understudy with a roving commission, superintending the three houses then in course of construction: one on the outskirts of Ely, another near St. Fagans, and this one a mile from Llantrisant.

And this house was typical: a construction of stone, large and high, nearing completion. There were the stone pillars supporting the porch before the doorway, the veranda running along the front, the broad square windows, the intricately gabled roof—a type of house beloved of the moneyed business man. But into it all there seemed to have been breathed some monstrous spirit of strength. When completed, there would be a wall around the acres of garden, a terrace in front of the house, a lawn in front of that, surrounded by newly planted fir-trees. But these things were not yet.

The general foreman on this house was Graig, and inside the office Griff found him.

This office was a different affair from the white hen-house arrangement on wheels of a dozen years ago. It resembled a small bungalow, for it had a porch and black roof and window frames painted white. Inside the door there was a miniature hall with a window at the far end, and from this lobby there opened two doors, one on the left into Chapel's private room and the other on the right into

a more general chamber. Griff walked into the room on the right, and after hanging his hat took out a piece of soap and a towel from the table drawer. Graig was seated at the table studying a plan.

But what an altered Graig! One remembered him as the dashing, successful speculative builder, shoving up houses like mushrooms. One had recollections of boasting talk of Big Things. Hardly could one credit that here was the same man at this table bending over a plan!

The bowler hat on his head was green with age and its rim drooped and was shapeless—a dilapidated hat splashed with lime and dirt to give it a variegated appearance. And that was the keynote of the whole of him—dilapidated. For the green of antiquity had worked its way into the material of his coat, although the patches on the elbows showed a more youthful disposition. His collar was dirty, and his narrow tie had long ago forsaken the attempt at maintaining even a semblance of an inconvenient shape. And what was evident in his clothes was true of his person.

His shoulders stooped; his small eyes were shifty, and blinked incessantly; the whites of his eyes were shot with narrow lines of red and the skin beneath them was heavy and puffed and swollen. His black, scraggy moustache drooped aimlessly, and the ends were waxed only on certain inspired occasions. When he tittered one saw that several of his teeth were missing. Graig was fifty-six, and on his face one read the history of the man's habits. He had taken his last kick years ago and had meekly succumbed afterwards. He had three pounds a week and seemed satisfied. He had gone with the tide; had drifted with the tide. The Juggernaut had rolled over him.

Griff bent over at his side a moment, glancing at the plan.

"You were a deuce of a toff last night, Graig," he teased at length. "My word! A regular howler."

Graig heaved his shoulders, and into his shifty eyes came the look of an old buck being chided for his favourite sin. His eyes sparkled until they became mildly wicked; he blinked the red rims over his eyeballs; he tittered; he pulled at the shapeless collar of his coat and smiled. He simulated a regular devil of an old buck.

"Teach you young chaps something, I tell you!" He tittered again, and blinked his little bloodshot eyes. He wished to imply: "I'm a gay old dog—what?"

As Griff washed his hands in the pail, under the window of the lobby, he pictured Graig as he had seen him on the previous evening on his way to the station to catch the next train to St. Fagans. As he wiped his hands on the towel, Griff thought of the gossip running through Porth of the senile proclivities of Graig.

"Good God! Haven't you heard about him? Haven't you heard about Graig and his fancy woman? Who is she? Some married woman down St. Fagans way. And the tale's going round that that last child of hers is the same spit as him."

Such was the general run of the male gossip of the village; but the women were not so tolerant.

"The old lecher! Somebody ought to shoot him. Gallivanting about with that—that hussy, when he's got daughters as old as her. And what about his poor wife? But there—she haven't got no spirit left. If I was her I'd shoot him some night—the old——"

But Graig, invulnerable to all criticism, inspired by his amorousness, his hat at a rakish angle, a flower in his button-hole, his moustache waxed, the light of the gay old dog in his blinking little eyes, would pass through the village on his way to the station to catch the next train to St. Fagans.

Griff returned and placed the towel and soap in the drawer. "What you doing?" he asked as he sat down.

"Want to get some measurements for those drains in the back."

"Right you are! Go 'n' have a look after those plasterers. I'll bring the drawings round for you as soon as they're done."

But Graig had already scuttled out through the door like a rabbit, and Griff, with a smile, walked to the window to look along the front of the house. As he had expected! Graig was running at a brisk trot, and there at the far end of the building was the contractor coming smartly towards the office. Griff was struck by the contrast: the prosperous man and the wreck trotting at his heels.

Inside the room on the left of the lobby Graig pulled back the chair, so that his master might sit down; then he hung his master's hat on the peg on the wall. "Any orders, Mr. Chapel?" he asked, returning to the table.

A sharp glance from those grey eyes: "Haven't you got anything to do?"

"Yes, sir. Just had orders to go 'n' look after them plasterers."

"Orders?" Chapel was thinking. "More of that youngster's large management."

"Here!" He took a paper from his breast-pocket. "Start those carpenters on that staircase. I'll be round in a bit to see how you're getting on."

"Stair, Mr. Chapel? We got it up—got it up. Finished it yesterday."

"Got it up? Who told you to put the dam' thing up?"

"Mr. Griff, Mr. Chapel. We started on it as soon as you went away."

"We'll go an' have a look at it," said Chapel without further comment. He had sudden visions of pounds wasted.

They went out together, Chapel silently angry and Graig trotting dutifully at his heels. They passed between the stone pillars and entered the spacious hall. In front of them was the broad staircase with timber still white and fresh. Chapel took out a bone two-foot rule and measured. He placed his hands on the thick rails and tried to shake them; he stamped on the steps seeking some instability; on the first landing he stamped and measured again. The point where the stairs turned at right angles received his special attention. All the way from the bottom to the top, from the top to the bottom of the huge house he stamped on every step. It had been his opinion that no-one on the place could have fixed that staircase without a working drawing from him, and then not without his personal supervision.

Without a word he turned and walked back to the office.

"Marvellous it was, the way he done it." Graig was still at his heels. "He's took to building like a baby to his milk."

They did not know that Griff had studied two years

under a highly qualified architect, neither did they know that all his evenings during the past twelvemonth had been spent with plans, with books on Building Construction and the like. Griff had been playing the engrossing game of Dark Horse. During this last year Griff had been taking his work very seriously.

When his father returned Griff crossed the lobby and entered the opposite room. For a fortnight he had been planning this interview, and since there were never any preliminaries between them, he commenced his business at once.

"I want you to give me something better to do. I don't fancy hanging around here with nothing at the end of it. Going on like this is only wasting my talents."

His father looked up at him with the sarcasm he knew so well how to place as a curl on his clean-shaven lips. "What are you wasting?"

Griff curled his own lip in contempt and said nothing.

But his father continued.

"I was with your uncle last night. He's had three thousand pounds in my business for the last twelve or thirteen years. He's giving it to you when you are twenty-one. P'raps that will make a difference."

"It will," Griff said.

His heart was bounding. "Three Thousand Pounds!" He repeated it, unbelievably: "Three Thousand Pounds!"

XIV

A GIRL

It was not only in this work Griff had grown serious during the past year.

On that Sunday night when Betsy and he had walked together through the village Betsy had said: "You ought to go to church sometimes, Griff." And he had followed her advice, had turned in under the lych gate, had walked along the gravel path between the graves and had entered the old church. His unaccustomed attendance was easy to explain. He was not in a mood to be alone. He wanted company.

The interior of the church was familiar, for Jane had made him attend regularly during his boyhood. He listened to the Vicar begin reading the prayers, to the responses of the congregation and to the singing of the hymns; and he began to feel that somehow, after all, there was something soothing and restful here, if only to be among the sounds of human voices and to be aware, however remotely, of the presence of these people.

But very soon Griff's thoughts had left the congregation and his mind had forsaken the beautiful service.

There was a crooked grin around his mouth, for memory had brought an impish picture to dangle before his eyes, and very soon he was once again on the roadway glancing over his shoulder at a girl putting out her tongue and making faces, at a girl with long black stockings and yellow hair cut in a straight line across her shoulder-blades. At this moment she sat a few pews ahead of him, very correct and prim, judging from her back. Her hair no longer hung down, for it was gathered up—a thick plait doubled up and secured by a big bow of black ribbon which

seemed to want to say: "Wait a little while, and we're going up altogether."

That big black bow of ribbon soon became more interesting than the Vicar's cheery red face; the black hat became more engrossing than the congregation; and the colour of that peeping plait got more difficult than the points of the optimistic sermon. Years ago the sweeping *yellow* had been description enough to satisfy all boyish demands; but the search for a better word occupied as long to-night as it took the Vicar to preach his sermon; and even then the description was not at all satisfactory, for Griff was weak in colours. *Fair* was one of his discoveries, and *very fair* was the best effort to describe the colour of that hair.

There were but two in the pew: the girl with the *very fair* hair and the maid from the house accompanying her.

At the end of the service Griff watched her pull on her dark long coat; he saw her smile at the maid; and then his eyes were upon her as she came down the aisle towards him. She was well built, rather tall; her hair under the big hat was—yes!—very fair; her eyes seemed to be grey; her features were inclined to be large; a fine-looking girl. Those grey eyes met his for a moment, trying to beat down his glance. And then Griff grinned, for she jerked around her head, as though her neck had been a hinge, and as though some memory had flashed through her mind.

Griff walked homeward. On the way he passed her and the maid. They would go as far as the stile fifty yards or so beyond Garth, to the footpath forming a short-cut over the brow of the hill to Wern.

Griff was thinking. Girls were no longer girls as they had been. Since last night and this afternoon they had become beings holding vast possibilities for friendship. He had seen this girl smile; he had seen her eyes alight with a warm intimacy as she had spoken to the maid; and he had seen the sudden jerk of her head when she failed to lower his glance. He smiled as he remembered this. She was antipathetic towards him; she resented him; she had something against him. But that proved her mind and feelings were of the active variety.

Griff thought: "It's those blooming passive, inactive people I can't stand."

On the morrow commenced his new life, and very quickly the period spent in the lawyers' office sank into a dream. He bought a complete set of drawing materials and some books on building, and took for his own use the front room at home, the one opposite his father's across the hall. For the remainder of that season he played every Saturday for the Cardiff Firsts, and generally met Saunders after the match. He seemed to have left fooling behind, and only rarely did Saunders and he have what they termed "a night off," for the architect, too, had begun being busy. Slowly, he was descending from the sky of his theories, and already had his toes touched earth. Sometimes Saunders would come to Garth on a Saturday evening and remain till the last train on Sunday.

And so the months passed, and Easter came around again.

It was during these Easter holidays Griff developed an exceedingly warm friendship for young Owen, a boy of sixteen, the Vicar's son, home from Llandovery on vacation. Griff plied him with cigarettes, invited him to come and watch the training for the next Saturday's match, found him a seat on the Grand Stand to witness this match, revived old memories of Llandovery, and discussed with considerable humour those common foes—the schoolmasters. And the cause of this abnormally warm friendship was disclosed on the Sunday previous to young Owen's return to school.

Owen and Griff were strolling together after Evening Service in the direction of Garth.

"Wait a minute, will you?" Owen suddenly cried. "Here's Miss Hughes coming. P'raps I shan't see her again before I go."

"Oh, aye! Miss Hughes. Might give us an introduction, Owen, while you're about it."

"Don' you know her?"

"Well, no, not exactly. Not to speak to her."

"Right. She'll catch us up in a minute. . . . Hello, Miss Hughes!" Owen was now the boy who never smoked cigarettes, the boy who won Greek prizes. "I waited

because I mightn't see you again." And then he hurried through the introduction: "This-is-Mr.-Chapel-Miss-Hughes!"

The same process was repeated: the hold of glances and the abrupt turning away of her head which said as plainly as plainly: "I don't want to get to know you."

Nevertheless, before Griff got into bed, he was thinking: "What's her name? What do they call her down the village? . . . Miss Bessie. That's it. But I prefer Bess. Nothing jingly about it. Sort o' name for a good pal. What do *you* make of it, young Griff? Plenty of opposition in the air—what?"

But the little chap's counsel was ever the same, unvarying, like the laws of the Medes and Persians: "Shut yer teeth, see! That's all you got to do. And pretend you're a little bit afraid—only you're not afraid, real, see! But you got to shut yer teeth—tight."

And in another bedroom in another house another soliloquy was in progress: "He's rough. He drinks. He's wild. He's that horrid boy that made me put out my tongue. I hate him—no, I don't. I don't think of him, much less hate him."

And yet, oddly enough, next morning she took up the *Western Mail*, and for the first time in her eighteen years puzzled over the hieroglyphics of Rugby Football. The terms were as Dutch to her, but she soon got to see that the name Chapel appeared very often.

"Chapel's tackling was as usual keen and vigorous," she read. "The line was in danger when along tore Chapel with one of his tiger springs. Chapel was invincible."

"Yes," she said sarcastically as she threw the paper one side; "he might have written that last sentence himself. He thinks he's so sure of everything. The way he looks at you! I'll never speak to him again; and if *he* speaks to *me*, I'll take no notice of him. He was too wild to be left in a lawyer's office. His father took him from *there*."

The summer had come and gone since that night; the hayfields had been mown and their crops gathered; the autumn also had passed, the fruit-trees had given up their fruit and the cornfields their golden harvests; the cold

weather had arrived, and Griff's twenty-first birthday and Christmas were approaching.

And during these intervening months Griff had been busy. Much to the consternation of the Selection Committee and the Cardiff Football world he had retired from the team. He had no time for training was the reason he offered, and for all their pressure for a reconsideration of his decision he had remained firm. Griff had finished with active football. Saunders came sometimes, a converted Saunders, and Griff had observed an intimacy springing up between the young architect and his father. For some reason he connected this fortnight's absence of his father with Saunders.

Twice only during those months had he come into direct contact with Bess, as he had labelled her in his mind.

The first time had been near Garth, when Griff, coming from the opposite direction after a walk to the top of the mountain, had encountered her and the maid on their way from church. He had raised his hat and said, "Good-evening!" and she had stiffly inclined her head and echoed, "Good-evening!" But it was the inclination of her head had attracted Griff, for it expressed so comprehensively: "I suppose I have to be polite; but I wish that boy Owen had not made the politeness necessary."

Inside the house Griff had held a consultation with his younger self. "Very pleasant young lady, isn't she?"

But the younger Griff simply drooped an eyelid, as one might say, and thought the occasion not of sufficient importance to warrant a repetition of his customary advice.

Their next meeting, however, showed a distinct advance.

"Good-evening, Miss Hughes!"

"Good-evening."

"Been a nice day, hasn't it?"

"Yes, it has."

XV

THE OLD FAMILY COMING BACK

THE younger people of Porth were a more enlightened generation than their elders. During the last twenty years the village had altered beyond all recognition; and now, instead of holding a few scattered little thatched cottages, it consisted of rows of slated houses, several clusters of semi-detached villas, and many respectably large houses standing solitary on the outskirts.

This younger generation had discovered the world of books, and soon they were deriding the intellectual paucity of the place.

"Why can't we have a Public Library at Porth?" these awakened children clamoured.

So loudly did they cry, and so persistently, that the fathers of the village had been forced to scratch their heads and promise: "We'll have a public meetin' on it." Just like a coroner's inquest, these older people thought, to proclaim beyond all cavil that the preposterous thing was dead.

And so the public meeting was called.

The main room of the school was lighted for the occasion; men and women filled the desks drawn closely together for the unusual number. The maps on the walls held no terrible memories for the old men, but with the younger ones it was different. They began to search for initials carved years ago on the sloping desks; they vainly strove to shake off that boyish awe with which the room was associated. Unconsciously they began repeating, as they glanced at the map of England and Wales above the master's table: Flamborough Head in Yorkshire, The Naze in Essex, and so on around the coast till their eyes passed Braich-y-Pwll in Carnarvon and arrived at that

Cape, whose name they had forgotten, in Cumberland. And when the old Schoolmaster entered the room, peering with those sharp eyes from under his bushy brows, the illusion was complete, and they quaked in their cramped position because they had forgotten the name of that Cape in Cumberland.

But abruptly the chatter of the audience ceased. Hughes the agent, as a Magistrate and a District Councillor, took the armchair behind the master's table, and supporting him in similar armchairs were, on his right the Vicar and the Minister, on his left the Schoolmaster and Josiah Chapel.

Hughes the agent was a short, stiffly-built man, with a red face, grey hair beginning to get thin above his forehead, and grey *tooth-brush* moustache; a stern, authoritative, autocratic man; a man accustomed to having his word regarded as law, a man used to rule. As Agent of the South Wales portion of the great Blathwaite Estate he had in his hands the fortunes of hundreds of farmers; and counting these and their retinues, Hughes might well be said to be the master of a thousand destinies. When he spoke Mr. Hughes stood stiffly erect, glancing around as though in search of opposition on which he might immediately tread. His voice was sharp and snappy, and his sentences were clipped and brisk. In the intervals of speaking he coughed a short barking cough, and he addressed the meeting in Welsh.

"Ladies and Gentlemen!" He stood erect, aggressively, behind the master's table, and Griff, seated at the back, wondered with a grin whether Hughes's daughter had inherited her activity of feeling from her father.

"*Huh-a!*" Mr. Hughes coughed his barking cough as he proceeded. "I don't propose saying very much at the beginning. *Huh-a!* You know why we are here. We are here to consider the advisability or the *non*-advisability of building a Public Library in the parish. *Huh-a!* Of course, I have my own private opinion on the matter, but I should like to hear the feeling of the meeting—*Huh-a!*—as I don't want to influence you in any way. *Huh-a!*" Mr. Hughes sat down, a very influential, if not an expert,

orator. "Now then! Somebody say something. We haven't come here to look at one another. *Huh-a!*"

Mr. Hughes settled down in his chair, surveyed his audience and expressed very plainly, in Griff's opinion: "I'm complete master of this little lot."

Griff, cramped up in the back row, listened to the opinions of the older men; original expressions they were, untouched by culture, for these men spoke as they lived—close and true to the wiles of nature. He listened to every speaker, but almost could he have foretold the bias of their minds, so familiar were they all to him. The younger householders, speaking in English for the most part, stood in favour of progress, a few of the older men siding with them, and the others voicing the opinion: "We've been without these trimmings all our lives; we've never felt the need of them; so we don't see why *you* should want them."

Griff listened to the Schoolmaster, naturally on the side of enlightenment; to Hermon's young Minister, fiery in a cause; to the Vicar, more non-committal with his leanings to a physical rather than an intellectual ideal.

Then Hughes the agent got up to summarise the discussion, and while his sharp eyes pierced the audience, and his thick *tooth-brush* moustache bristled, and as he barked his sharp aggressive cough, Griff studied the many-coloured map and listened.

"*Huh-a!* As usual in these meetings, there's nobody come to the real point. *Huh-a!* Now the very first thing I thought of was: Where's the money going to come from? *Huh-a!*" Then his eyes suddenly fell on Chapel to his left. "What do *you* think of this business, Mr. Chapel? You are an influential man, and a heavy rate-payer. We'll hear what Mr. Chapel has got to say. A responsible man," he added by way of a corrective to the irresponsible ones. Coughing once again, he sat down.

Immediately, all eyes were upon Chapel, and none more eagerly than Griff's. He watched his father rise, a tall, dignified man, a man with a kind of weighty importance in all his movements. Never before had his father appeared to Griff as distinguished, but to-night there seemed to be some majesty about him, some greatness of

bearing as he stood towering above the others. His eyes were so clear as they slowly ran in a comprehensive glance across the audience, his face appeared graven, and the wholesomeness and the virility of him set him as a man apart. Griff listened to the calm, unemotional voice, and yet he felt he had not seen his father just like this before. He leaned forward and listened as though expecting some new revelation of this man whose personality and force had already gripped his audience.

"I have been trying to find out how badly these young people want the library," said the deep voice quite evenly. "And I think they're serious. I can understand why there's so much opposition. The old people are against it because it will increase the rates. And as far as I can gather, the chairman is against it, too."

"I haven't said anything about it yet," Mr. Hughes protested snappily.

But Chapel raised his hand deprecatingly, while Griff was inclined to wish these two old warriors would make a straight fight of it. It would certainly be a struggle worth witnessing, Griff thought.

But his father was speaking. Griff leaned forward. He had caught some vibration in his father's voice, some almost imperceptibly altered timbre in its notes.

"I am very proud of Porth. I am very jealous for Porth." He stopped a moment, and Griff caught the movement of his throat that showed he was swallowing with an effort. "I was brought up in Porth. I have always lived here. My—my family have always lived here. They—they have always taken a big interest in the place."

Griff was regarding him with open eyes. His quickened ears throbbed in sympathy with the emotion that seemed to float through the air to him from his father.

"Now!" The strong voice rose in pitch. "For the sake of the old associations of my family, I am going to make you an offer. The Parish Council can find the money to support the Library if we can build it. Well, I make this offer: I will build a Library and give it to you—if the Council will do their share after."

For a second the people seemed not to understand, and then their applause commenced.

Chapel, on his way home, was thinking : "The old family's coming back !"

The Library was nothing. The love of family was racing through his blood. A part of the dream had come true. For eighty years there had been the ruins, the old stock in the dust of its decay. He had put life into the ruins, had pumped life into dead bones, had once more begun to make them a beautiful stability.

"Family ! Family !" He murmured it with the blood dancing through his brain. "The old family's coming back !"

And Griff, also on his way home, had not recovered from his astonishment. His father's munificence was insignificant beside the other discovery he had made. His father had revealed his soul, and had plainly shown the ideal which made him tread his way through the world. For the first time in his life Griff saw his father as a human being with great ambitions.

Griff was remembering the lessons old Betsy had for ever been teaching him throughout his boyhood : "Your family have always bin big men. And mind you now, Griff, when you have growed up, you got to be a big man, too !"

As he walked home beside the churchyard wall he was saying to himself : "Funny how we're working for the same thing—and he won't have anything to do with me !" And now Griff saw the meaning of the relationship existing between them. "The family's got to be built up at any cost. I was incapable, and he threw me overboard." Then the irony of their relation struck him and he grimly smiled. "Odd Old Stick," he breathed to himself. "But he's a Big Man !"

Very soon afterwards a committee was selected by the Parish Council. A site was chosen on the corner across the road from the Farmer's, designs were submitted to the committee and approved, and the building of the Library began. On Chapel's recommendation Saunders was appointed architect and, greatly to his surprise, Griff was

placed in charge at an increased salary of three pounds ten a week. Griff had no delusions, however; he was a glorified general foreman who had proved his efficiency.

The Library was progressing and Saunders was there on one of his rare visits. He and Griff were in the small office whose window—broader than it was high—looked down upon the white-washed front of the Farmer's and upon the lych gate farther to the right.

"Come up the road a bit, Saunders. I've got something I want to show you."

But what a metamorphosed Saunders stepped so jauntily down the plank from the office! Gone was the beaver hat. No longer the butterfly tie flapping in the breeze. No longer the pale face, either. He wore a bowler hat, a Christian tie, ate beef, and walked like an energetic Philistine. Saunders was earning money, quite a lot of it, and liked it.

They went together, past the school and Hermon, some distance farther along—two alert young men, prosperous and well-groomed: Griff sturdy and getting broader across the shoulders; Saunders slight and sprightly.

They stopped after a few minutes, and looked over the hedge of a garden where fruit-trees were already beginning to shed their leaves. In among the trees the white walls of a cottage glistened in the autumn sunlight, and over the walls, like a cap, fitted the brown thatch of the roof.

"I bought this lot the other day," said Griff, nodding at the house and the garden and the fruit-trees. "The old woman died a couple of months ago, and the children started squabbling;—so they sold it."

"Freehold?"

"Aye. I'm going to pull this down and put two up instead. I want you to give me a rough design—bit of Dutch about it, you know—red tiles on the roof and white rough-cast walls—something pretty. Chance for you with your ideas of beauty, Saunders."

Saunders grinned. "Got a tape?" he asked very unromantically as he felt the outsides of his coat pockets.

"Shouldn't be surprised if your father gave up his present business before long," he remarked as they walked back.

"Gave it up? I don't think so. Here's this Library. Take something to fill that hole in his banking account."

"I wouldn't mind betting he'll be in Ferro-Concrete before another year's passed."

"Well—let me know if it comes about. I might do myself a bit of good," Griff suggested.

XVI

OPPORTUNITY

At this time Saunders was hard at work specialising in Ferro-Concrete, and his enthusiasm filled all his conversations. Chapel and he naturally had much in common, and sometimes, during those week-end visits, they would cross the hall into Chapel's room and continue the talk commenced at dinner. During these conversations Griff would leave them together, retire to his own den or stroll alone on his favourite walk to the top of the mountain, for at home there existed no bond whatsoever between him and his father.

Chapel and Saunders would sit together in the lamp-light, with the pedestal desk behind and the fire in front of them, both with their knees crossed, Chapel smoking his after-dinner pipe and Saunders his cigarette. Chapel was interested in these conversations; his keenness kept him alert to all fresh possibilities of his business, and although he distrusted the long hair and the butterfly tie—they were effeminate in his opinion and clashed with his own extreme masculinity—he very soon discovered that this young man with the pale face knew what he was talking about. Not only was he an expert on paper, but he had the practical principles of his profession on his finger-tips. And if there was anything in the world Chapel appreciated in his hard way, it was efficiency, a man master of his craft.

“ And what's this Ferro-Concrete you're talking about ? ” he asked one night from the depths of his black leather armchair as he smoked his pipe after dinner. “ I've heard a good bit about it lately.”

And Saunders had explained. Really, he said, the thing was simple enough. Cement and sand mixed—like

mortar—in certain proportions; that was the idea. And then he went on to explain how, in order to get the concrete to bind, iron bars were embedded in it. “These iron bars bind the whole thing together, d’ye see, Mr. Chapel? They put the necessary spring into it as well, to meet all vibrations, as in a bridge, for instance.”

Chapel got more interested still when Saunders had instructed him further; and when he had studied books on the subject he was completely enamoured.

Later, when Saunders was in touch with a firm of patentees, he became more explicit. “But there’s nothing like seeing the actual thing. Look here, Mr. Chapel, I’m putting the finishing touches to my own education. Take a holiday and come with me for a fortnight.”

Among other places, they visited the North of England and found themselves in the midst of the construction of a sea-wall and a pier. They watched the making of those long wooden boxes and the filling of them with concrete which when set would be long pillars known as piles; and then they watched the heavy steam-hammer driving these piles down and down to support the foundations of the sea-wall in the shifty ground. In the Midlands they saw a huge bridge spanning a river and across which the heavy traffic was already rolling. They journeyed to London and visited a Cold Stores, a massive grey-brown building, complete and manufacturing ice that very day. But the place of greatest interest was the Ferro-Concrete Exhibition at Bristol, where all the varieties and the possibilities of the new material were shown. And what especially appealed to Chapel was the houses put up and standing there as exhibits.

Immediately after the tour Saunders had commenced work for a London firm owning valuable patents. The firm consisted of two partners: Gregory, an elderly man of the old school, and Launce, a pushing, bustling man of forty.

“Mr. Saunders!” Mr. Gregory had said in his genial way one morning. “We’ve got the chance of some work outside Cardiff. Do you know of a solid man who would take up the contracts? No riff-raff, mind! We want to open out in South Wales, and we’ve got no-one there.”

Saunders mentioned Chapel, and the matter reached a head on one glorious afternoon in early spring. Saunders had made an appointment and Mr. Gregory was coming to see Chapel. They walked together through the village: the metamorphosed Saunders and the gentlemanly little man in his morning coat and silk hat.

"Presented it to the parish you say?" asked Mr. Gregory as they passed the Library with its imposing entrance: the doorway with its two small arches supported by three pillars under a main arch.

Chapel welcomed them, and immediately *placed* Mr. Gregory. He held a high opinion of these business men of the old school. There was no bluster about them; but appearances, as Chapel knew, were deceptive, and under the geniality of this old gentleman's manner there must most certainly lie as acute a brain as one might wish to find.

After tea, Saunders and Griff left the other two to themselves. Mr. Gregory offered his cigar case, but Chapel declined, preferring his pipe.

"So do I, too, Mr. Chapel," concurred Gregory as he sank into the armchair in the study. "There's nothing to my fancy like an old-fashioned briar pipe." So he dug his hand into the capacious pocket hidden somewhere in his coat-tails and in a moment they were both very comfortably smoking.

For some time they talked—of anything and everything but business, as is the business man's idiosyncratic way. But Mr. Gregory's merry little eyes had been busy ever since they had alighted on the trim maid who had opened the door an hour ago. They had observed the orderliness and the air of solid prosperity about the place. And now, as he sat back in the armchair, his small hands sometimes stroking his white hair, and his clean-shaven lips constantly making puffing little noises as he puffed at his pipe, he looked across the hearth and studied Chapel.

"Now then, Mr. Chapel!"

The little eyes had suddenly lost their merriness, the lips had ceased making the puffing little noises, and the little body had put an end to lolling back, for it now leant forward very eagerly with its elbows on its thighs. The

smoking had been finished, and the pipe had disappeared into that capacious pocket hidden in the coat-tails. But the manner was always genial and the voice was always quiet and low.

"I'm going to make a long speech," Mr. Gregory said in his nice way.

He made his long speech and ended by saying—

"Take those two bridges, and you'll never regret it. You're a made man already, but you must have seen what prizes there are in Ferro-Concrete. Take these two bridges as a start, and we'll do everything we can to help you."

Mr. Gregory took out his green silk handkerchief and methodically wiped his forehead.

"Well!" Chapel got up and stood on the rug. "I'm going to be quite open with you. I'd like to take these bridges. But—I've got two big contracts on hand now, and I must finish them. And by then I suppose you will have found somebody else. If it wasn't for these houses I wouldn't hesitate a minute; but as it is, it's no good talking." He placed his pipe on the mantel-piece. "What do you say to a walk for a bit of fresh air?"

Gregory stared at him, amazed at the finality.

But when Gregory and Saunders were gone, Chapel found himself possessed by a disquieting mood, for his philosophy of life had just undergone a rude, abrupt modification.

He had already thoroughly studied the several aspects of Ferro-Concrete and had estimated the financial possibilities it held. As a builder he had generally counted his profits in hundreds, whereas a Ferro-Concrete contractor might confidently anticipate thousands. His imagination had leapt at the prospect; he would be working and living on a much larger scale. As Gregory had said, there would be tremendous interests involved. Instead of employing a few hundred there would in a very few years be thousands of men. The organiser, the manager, in him delighted in the prospect. Building a house, however large, was nothing to him now; he had exhausted

it; he was bigger than it. He wanted new enterprises to risk, to explore, and to master.

But the only possible means of going ahead in this case was riding rough-shod through agreements, and that he could not do. However mercilessly he trampled on those who got in his way, he was scrupulously straight in his business transactions. He had an unbending respect for obligations which partly explained his success; his word was as safe as a bank. And besides, he was not a fool to destroy his personal credit; his instinct as a business man forbade that.

"Damn!" He growled and swore under his breath. "To be stopped by such an infernal thing as this!" He was angry and disappointed, inwardly fuming at the helplessness of his own creation.

Griff, on the other hand, returning after seeing Gregory and Saunders off in the train, was in a mood of elation, every nerve of him alive. For two years he had been playing a waiting game, leading a negative existence, but waiting—always coolly waiting for that one instant of opportunity which was bound to come. Sooner or later, life would give him an opening. It might have been a long game of football lasting two years. And now like a flash that moment of opportunity had come, as it was bound to come. The ball of chance was flying in the air in his direction; the responsibility of the next move depended upon him. Life had given him the opening.

He walked into his father's room and spoke to him for the first time at home for two years. He walked into the study and closed the door behind him. "I want to talk to you for five minutes."

His father took the pipe from his mouth and with one of those cold glances pierced Griff standing by the side of the desk, strong, vital, alert, ready to attack. But his father did not speak.

"Mr. Gregory said you would take up those contracts if it wasn't for those two houses you're building now. Is that right?"

For a moment there was no answer. His father was running his eyes over him as if resentfully taking his measure. "Yes," he grunted at last; "it is."

Griff discerned the weakness of the opposing side's defence. "If you got somebody to take those houses off your hands you could——"

"What are you talking about?"

"I'm going to make an offer if you listen."

"Oh!" Chapel's lip was curling. "Make me an offer, are you?"

Griff disregarded the sneer. He was too deadly earnest to pick at trifles. "Yes. If I took those houses, you could go on."

"That's my business." He opened his pouch and began filling his pipe.

But Griff was roused. "I know your position exactly. You think if I went smash, you'd be drawn in."

His father looked up, knowing from experience, now, that Griff was not lightly to be pushed aside. "Well, since you understand, that's it exactly."

"I know. But I'm not going to smash. You are not the only man in the world that can succeed."

"That won't be much consolation if you do smash!"

"No; I know. But since you want to go into Ferro-Concrete, it doesn't say much for you if two houses can beat you!"

That blow struck home.

But Chapel knew Griff would not have approached him without some sensible suggestion. That was one thing about the youngster: he seemed to have his head screwed on the right way. "What's this offer you're talking about?"

"First of all—d'you think I could carry on those two houses myself?"

"Yes," in fairness he had to admit; "I think you could." He gave the answer grudgingly, but he knew it was true.

"The only thing in the way is, that you might be drawn into a smash?"

"That's it; and I'm not going to be."

"Would three thousand pounds be enough to cover, supposing I did go smash?"

For the first time Chapel showed real interest. "What's that? Say it again."

“Now I’m coming to my offer. Let me have those two houses to finish them, and I’ll deposit the deeds of that land and the houses I’ve got, as well as the rest of uncle’s three thousand—— I’ll deposit those in the bank in your name. Is that good enough?”

“And what do you want to get out of it?”

His father spoke to him on an equality now, and Griff knew he was prepared to deal. “I want a fair share of the profits—a quarter on this house that will be up in three months, and three-quarters on the other one. And I want to use your name for a year till I get on my feet.”

“And how long is this security to be on my name?”

“Till those two houses are finished. You’ll know by then whether I’m going to smash or not.”

Chapel sprang to his feet. “I take you,” he said. “But mind, as I told you before, if you go to the devil, you go your own way. If you smash I take that money to cover myself. We’ll go to Cardiff on Monday and have it put down in black and white.”

XVII

BESS

"THAT'S my favourite walk. When I played footer I used to go to the top of the mountain nearly every night."

"You don't play now, then?"

She knew quite well he did not, for she had read about it in the *Western Mail*.

Griff had waylaid Miss Hughes on her journey home from church, on one of those fortunate nights when she chanced to be alone. It had become a habit with him on a Sunday night to watch just before six o'clock whether the maid accompanied her, to time the end of the service, leave Garth, cross the stile, and walk slowly along the foot-path towards Wern. It was a simple trick, and for some reason or other the maid did not accompany her as often now; perhaps it was because she was older. At first she had been very short in her manner, but persistence is a wonderful thing. Rebuff had no effect whatsoever upon Griff; he knew the value of waiting. "No good rushing life," as he often told himself; "let her alone and she'll always turn up trumps."

"No, I don't play now," he answered as they went together up the sloping field. "Too much work. I'm half sorry, though. Always used to feel so fit. You know the kind of feeling—like to knock somebody down. Ever felt it?"

"Indeed, I haven't. A most horrid kind of feeling, I should think."

"Oh no! Doesn't make you feel a bit savage." Griff was looking at her from the corners of his eyes and was quietly laughing. "I forgot, though! Girls and women don't like rough things, do they?"

"I've never thought of it." She was not quite as tall

as Griff, but she had such a way of tilting back her head that her grey eyes gave the effect of looking down upon him. "If any one wants to be rough, it's nothing to do with me."

"Very pleasant young lady," Griff was thinking. "But we're getting on." Aloud he said: "But we were talking about walks! Don't you ever go for walks? Walking, you know, is a rattling exercise."

"Sometimes I walk from the house along here. It's very nice, especially if it's a starry night."

"Must be fine."

"And now you're not to come any further. And don't talk to me again. I'm always late if I meet you."

They had reached a gateway the length of two fields from Wern.

"Good-night," she said.

Griff looked into the grey eyes; they were actually smiling, and they seemed to be saying very distinctly: "You think you're very clever, don't you?"

"Good-night," he answered, and he watched her go.

"Got her. By God! Got her. Did you see that, young Griff? The miracle's happened; the oracle's smiled. 'Sometimes I walk along here,' he mused on his way home; "'it's very nice, especially if it's a starry night.'"

Bess's little world was all astir.

Ever since returning from school she had been somewhat dissatisfied with her surroundings. For fourteen years of her life Wern had been the universe; its little round had been the world; its habits the world's habits and its thoughts the world's thoughts. Everything was rigid and regular, moving in set grooves with no unexpected deviations. Everyone got up at a certain hour; her father returned every day at the same hour; her mother supervised the household in exactly the same way every day; every maid had her allotted tasks. The little world worked like a clock; the organisation was so perfect. Sometimes it was difficult to tell the days, so alike they were; and to make sure you looked at the top of the newspaper or at the calendar. And there were certain things you had to do, and certain things you had

not to do—everything so defined; almost could you have lived without any brains at all.

But school altered all those ideas.

The girls Bess met there lived in quite a different world. Their minds were broad and free, and the only restriction was their own good sense. And they had been fine girls, high-minded girls, not the least bit loud and boisterous. They seemed not to have inherited any clogging conventions; they never had any knowledge of that "setting an example" to the lower grades of humanity such as was constantly being taught at Wern. Here at Wern one was taught that all eyes were upon one, and to live in fear of setting a wrong example and of crossing the bounds of proper behaviour.

So, at home after her school life, Bess was at terrible war with her surroundings. But she often told herself: "I am a coward; I'm an awful coward."

She could not shake off those early impressions. She knew those early impressions were wrong and narrow, but she could not shake them off. She told herself that she obeyed her mother too slavishly and that her father's dominion over her was too autocratic; but she knew she had not the courage to revolt openly.

"I'm a coward," she would think. "But I'll break out some day, see if I don't!"

And then Griff commenced pushing himself into her life. Strangely enough, she had immediately sided with the old-fashioned upbringing. All the distrust of a wild free spirit awoke; all the narrow prejudices of the Puritanical rearing crowded through her mind. Griff was wild; he drank, and would probably develop into a drunkard.

Besides, the history of the Chapels was a part of the neighbourhood's gossip, and especially since Josiah Chapel had established himself so firmly. The family and all its past were frequently and openly discussed. There were dark pages in the family's history, and everyone knew of that old talk of the curse. And curses very often skipped one generation to reassert themselves in the next. In this light had some of the good people discussed Griff's youthful escapades. There had been a devil in him when he was a boy, the older folk remembered; if there chanced

to be any mischief he was sure to be in it—somewhere. When he had left Llandoverly to go to the office in Cardiff, he had broken loose properly. The curse was coming back. They watched him, sometimes riding along the lanes on one of his father's ponies, or driving the light gig; and most graphically were tales revived of that old Daniel Chapel, years and years ago, who had driven on his solitary madcap drives, a terror to the mothers of small children. Oh yes! This youngest of the Chapels would carry on the traditions well enough. True, he was sober in his wild rides, but he was young yet; the old spirit was in him without a doubt. And did not these fresh tales travel all the way from Cardiff? And had not the good people seen him, if not actually drunk, very shaky on his legs as he walked from the station to his home?

Porth was a small place, and this gossip could not fail to filter through to all ears. Certainly, it had reached Bess.

But he had not interested her at all until young Owen introduced him. He was but a part of that vague mist somewhere on the edge of her subconsciousness. Immediately she had spoken to him, however, she began to think of him. He was too forceful a being to pass unnoticed, but her thoughts were not the least bit complimentary.

"He's too wild to be left in a lawyer's office. His father took him from there!"

But the forces against Bess were too strong.

His very wickedness intrigued her, as Griff would have said. This spark of the devil assigned to him just that courage which she lacked herself. Most likely he delighted in shocking these punily virtuous people and quietly grinned while he did it. He could grin in a very self-satisfied way, she had already observed. He seemed the sort to scoff at and set no value upon the opinions of others; he seemed so self-contained, so sure of his own strength. After all, however bad he was, he stood for this larger fraternity of tolerance and broadmindedness.

Another of the forces against her was that love of adventure within herself—that curiosity of her sex. Boys were strange to her. All those months when she had simply passed the time of day to him, she was filled with

the old distrust; but the love of adventure, the curiosity, the instinctive female inquisitiveness, condoned in a most distressing manner and slowly built a pedestal for him.

So far had matters developed that on this particular Sunday night she had unbent so far as to smile, to throw out a challenge, which Griff had not failed to understand: "You think you're very clever, don't you?" And by this impish challenge both knew that a very great barrier had been broken down. A touch of humour, like a warming breath, had stolen into the acquaintanceship. Indeed, something of the kind was inevitable after the previous confidence: "Sometimes I walk from the house along here."

And Griff, eating his supper, had pondered: "I wonder will there be any stars out to-morrow night?"

XVIII

THE ELIGIBLE PARTY

GRIFF stood on the patch of black ashes in front of his bungalow of an office, having just arrived from the other house he had commenced building a month ago. He stood, a sturdy figure in his navy-blue suit, scanning with sharp calculating eyes the massive house twenty yards ahead of him. The scaffold poles were being taken down.

"It's going on," he thought with pleasure, and, turning, walked smartly through the lobby and entered the room on the left, once his father's.

The athlete was still evident as the ashes crunched under his feet, but he had grown broader and stronger and deeper-chested.

He crossed the small room and, after hanging his bowler hat, came back and sat at the table, crossed his feet, and took up the bundle of green invoices put there for his inspection.

There were the same wholesomeness and cleanness about him: the navy-blue suit, the double collar, the dark tie, the gold cuff-links, his brown hair cut short with the wave only just discernible. But there was a change in the face bending over the invoices; and especially here, amid his work, was the change so noticeable. All the rawness and unripeness had gone; his lips were no longer round like a boy's nor were his cheeks so smooth. His countenance, broad, with the eyes rather far apart, had set at last; and there were a few lines beginning to show, in particular those two upright lines on the base of his forehead above the hooked nose. Once one had the impression of a country face, of a farmer's face; but the

small moustache, severely clipped at the ends, now rather modified that impression; it gave a smarter, somewhat more aristocratic, if supercilious, air to his general appearance. Griff had gone into the serious business of life, and life according to its habit had begun stamping its die upon him.

Not that life nor its seriousness had overwhelmed him! It meant that life demanded hard fighting, that was all. Two years had gone since he had deposited his possessions in the bank, and since his agreement with his father had been put into "black and white"; and during that time Griff had obtained real glimpses of life's eccentricities.

"It's a game; it's a game!"

That was his idea of life, but, nevertheless, a serious and a hard game; not a bitter game, but a hard gruelling affair, in which a man was bound to win did he possess the necessary pluck and endurance. And in that spirit Griff was fighting.

He put the invoices back on the table, got up, wriggled his legs to get his trousers into shape, and walked to the window, where he stood awhile quietly breathing and looking across at the labourers taking down the scaffold poles. Under his small moustache there was the suspicion of a smile, and into his eyes had come that look of dare-devilry which seemed to have become a part of him.

There was fun in fighting; there was enjoyment to be had out of it.

He dug his hands deep into his trousers pockets and looked across at the house. Sound of the men's voices coming in through the open door was as music to him.

The two houses taken off his father's hands had been completed long ago and Griff had not passed through—not even had a glimpse of the Bankruptcy Court. And here, by glancing through the window, he could see another fight in progress—the roof on already, and very soon he would be counting up the profits.

"Come in!" And Griff went back to the table to

meet Graig waiting there obsequiously, blinking his eyes. Griff dug a finger into the invoices and cast one of his cold calculating glances into Graig's bloodshot eyes. "Got this stuff up from the station?" His voice was clear and firm with all the hollowness gone!

"Yes, Mr. Chapel. Got the last load up after dinner."

Graig had never been able to form a reliable estimate of his new master. He was young and very efficient. There was something about him very cheery and breezy, but that impression could not be trusted, for in his eyes there was always that suggestion of "spoiling for a row."

And that dare-devilry, that constant readiness to fight, made Graig very uncertain as to the best way of treating the *guvner*. Graig solved the difficulty by being obsequious.

Griff went to sit at the table. "Everything going all right?"

Now the tone was breezy, for the hauling of all that material from the station meant that Graig had been really busy. Graig brightened. "Everything up to the mark."

"Those men are a bit slow with those poles." Griff sprang to his feet. "We'll go an' wake 'em up a bit."

"Yes, Mr. Chapel." Graig trotted to get the *guvner's* hat.

Instinctively, Griff stepped out smartly, and at his heels ran the dilapidated Graig. Graig was now Griff's little dog, and his chief concern was to keep secure his position as general foreman with its wages of three pounds a week.

After a time Griff came back to the office, and stood again by the window, idly rolling a pencil between his fingers and gazing aslant through the window, past the corner of the new house, at the distant landscape.

He had every cause to be pleased with himself, and, considering everything, he had no reason to complain. He was twenty-four.

He wondered!

He was not exactly a nobody. And his interests in other directions also were broadening. Next week he was contesting an election for a seat on the District Council, and he had not much fear of the result because his father's munificence over the Library would help him immensely, and there was the old stability of the family which every one seemed to be recalling just now.

As far as he could gather from his canvass of the voters, they all appeared of the opinion that the Chapels had a sort of hereditary right to govern the affairs of the neighbourhood.

Well, then?

It should not be so impossible. What was the accepted term? That's it—an *eligible party*. Was he an eligible party?

"Damn the eligible."

But it was no use approaching the subject in that way; this was a serious matter. Griff kicked the leg of the table and grinned.

That was how the world would look at it, however much he grinned; and that was how old Hughes would look at it, too—if he condescended to look at it at all, which Griff had grave reason to doubt.

Bess would certainly be an eligible party, and a very desirable one into the bargain. Some day or other she would be the owner of Wern and Penlan, without mentioning her father's solid cash. It was all very well being emotional, but there were occasions when Griff could be extremely calculating. Bess held in her person the possibility of enabling Griff to bring the Chapels back to Wern, of permanently re-establishing the family in its old surroundings. And during these last two years Bess and he had become great friends. He was meeting her to-night.

"Wouldn't I be a mug," he told himself as his eyes gazed through the window at the distant landscape, "if I let this chance go? Here's life chucking it in my face. . . . We'll make Mr. Josiah open his eyes one of these days. Bringing back the family, is he? . . . 'Nuff said, young Griff."

Griff smiled understandingly under his small brown moustache and went out.

Outside, he beckoned to Graig who came immediately, trotting at his master's command.

"I'm off. And if I'm not here in the morning, shove those men on. . . . Good-night, Graig."

"Good-night, Mr. Chapel!"

Graig smiled and blinked his eyes in a frightful hurry of delight. The *gouverneur* was in a good humour.

XIX

A PUGNACIOUS DOCTRINE

It was very dark when Griff left home that night at half-past eight, and as he descended the steps he felt a fine drizzling rain being blown into his face by the keen March wind.

One of Bess's virtues was her punctuality, and within a minute of Griff's arrival at the second gate from Wern, which had always been their meeting-place, she came. She had on a long grey waterproof cape reaching almost to the ground; she wore no hat, but the hood of the cape was drawn over her head. Her hair and the edge of the hood formed an oval frame to her face. And she carried an umbrella. She was not quite so much of a coward now, and she was rather proud of the fact. She defied parental authority to the extent of prolonging her meetings with Griff to the length of an hour; and when her mother asked her where she had been she was able to answer without a blush: "For a walk."

"But I'm an awful liar," as she told Griff; "and it's all your fault."

And Griff, with his comforting philosophy, would submit: "But you've been for a walk; so it's not a lie."

He opened the gate for her when she came. "You won't get wet?" he asked, glancing up and down the length of her grey cloak.

"No, and I have very strong boots on." There was something boyish about her voice and smile as she looked at Griff. "But this grass isn't very nice, is it?" By this time she had imbibed a great deal of Griff's masculine freedom; and generally when with him she was very brave.

Griff took the umbrella. "Let's go out to the road."

They walked along under the umbrella, Bess a little shorter than Griff, their shoulders sometimes bumping as they went.

"I must get back in time, you know, Griff. None of your silly tricks and keeping me late, now!"

"That's right. You blame me. Funny isn't it—" he grinned at her—"but it's always my fault. Ever noticed?"

"Well, it is. If it weren't for you I shouldn't be here now—and I shouldn't get those black looks at home. And I'll have to tell another lie to-night again."

"Tell the truth, then."

"Yes, I can just imagine Mrs. Hughes's face. 'Please, mother! I've been with that Griff Chapel!' She'd have a fit. . . . Seriously though, Griff, I'll have to stop seeing you."

"Oh, aye!"

"It's all very well to talk like that." Her tone had grown more earnest. "They're bound to find out some day, and then there'll be an awful row."

"You're old enough to do as you like, surely?"

"I daresay that's how it seems to you. But you don't know. You've got an idea what father is like—and mother's about the same where I am concerned. . . . I'm a coward—that's the fact; I'm a beastly coward. I ought to do as I like; but I don't, and there you are!"

This was an old spectre—the only one that ever came between them now. They walked on in silence.

"You ought to be canvassing, Griff," Bess said suddenly as they began mounting the hill.

"Prefer being here."

They at last reached the small bridge crossing the brook. This was the spot where they often halted when they walked in this direction; a lonely, dark, unfrequented spot, for very few used this road to the mountain in the night. Overhead were the trees whose spreading branches spanned the roadway. Here on their right was the stone wall of the bridge, and by bending over the low parapet they could watch the water tumbling from the culvert to the pool down below; and this miniature waterfall kept up a constant roar, shutting out all other sounds.

Both leaned over for a moment, glancing down at the splashing water, of which only specks of white foam were visible in the darkness. Their elbows touched as they rested on the curved top of the wall.

"Has it stopped raining?" Bess stepped outside the cover of the umbrella and looked up into the dark branches of the tree overhead.

"You can't make up your mind. That's what's the matter, isn't it?" asked Griff when she was satisfied that the fine drops were still falling.

Bess turned to him. "Can't make up my mind? What for?"

"Well—to go for them."

Bess smiled. "That's just like you," she said. "Go for them!" she repeated to herself, still smiling.

"I haven't told you before," said Griff; "but I'll tell you now. I had a proper row with my father about four years ago, and I thought it all out then."

"Do you mean you quarrelled with your father?"

"Oh, proper set-to! We never talk to each other now. Only spoken to him once at home for four years, and that was when I offered to take two houses off his hands."

Bess came near, curious. "Hasn't he been helping you then, since you've been a contractor yourself?"

"No. He told me to go to the devil my own way." Griff laughed. "But this is what I was going to tell you, because I thought it all out then. Everybody's got what you might call an individuality, and everybody's duty is to keep it. If anybody tries to crush you, you've got to fight, and fight like blazes. You have always got to fight, that's the truth of it."

"Fight?"

"Yes. Fight against things. That's what life is."

"But don't you believe in Fate? If things *are* to happen, they're bound to."

"Rotten idea. No fun in that. May as well go and sleep straight away. Won't do for me."

"You mean, of course, that because I feel opposed to my parents, I ought to fight against them?"

"That's the hammer. That's the idea."

"But I'm not sure it's right to be opposed to them."

"You start fighting," urged Griff, "and then you'll see the fun. When I was a nipper I used to have no end of fights. If you only knew what it was to feel the skin scraping off your knuckles against the other chap's teeth—Lord!—you'd know what fun is! And that's why I used to like football. Bowling a giant of a fellah over like a ninepin, and going for the line, boring yer way through with yer head! You start," he enticed her; "then you'll see the fun."

Bess had drawn back a step. "You're a regular brute, Griff," she told him.

"But—er—er—— Girls and women are not like that, are they?"

Bess continued softly to smile; this was a new side of Griff; something so different from herself.

"Come along," she said in a moment, "or I shall be late and have a worse row than ever. . . . You're a funny beggar, Griff!" she told him as they went down the hill. She adopted a phrase from his stock sometimes.

"He's only a great big boy," she told herself later when alone. "You start fighting," she remembered from his teachings, "and then you'll see the fun."

She smiled a softly superior, indulgent smile, such as only women can.

XX

ON THE COUNCIL

"I WANT you to support me on this motion."

It was a District Council meeting, and Griff was whispering to the man sitting on his left.

"What lines are you going to take?" asked his neighbour.

Griff grinned crookedly. "Wait till I start; you'll soon find out."

And with that Griff sprang to his feet.

For a second he glanced around the large oval table almost filling the floor of the room, and saw about him the fifteen members who could so easily be divided into three groups: the landed gentry well fed and superior; the prosperous tradesmen obese and self-satisfied; and the four or five labour members. After his eyes had swiftly run around the portraits hanging on the walls they settled on the Chairman there some distance on his right at the head of the oval table—Mr. Hughes the agent.

"We have been told very clearly by you, Mr. Chairman," Griff began in his deliberate, cool way, "that this proposed new road from here to those collieries is a matter of the utmost importance. I quite agree. I quite agree as you do that this particular road would bring business to this side instead of allowing it to go into a town which holds no interest for us as a Council. It is a road that should be constructed." With a glance around the table, he added: "I can quite understand the readiness of the Council to spend money on it. But——"

The other men sat up, knowing that now was coming the sting of Chapel's criticism.

"But——" Griff proceeded, quite as calmly, emphasising every word—"what occurred to me as you and other

gentlemen discussed this proposal—what occurred to me was this : It is not only the public who are going to benefit. I have been looking into this matter, and I find that right away from here, right away through the three miles of country to the collieries, that road will pass through property belonging to Mr. Blathwaite."

Most of his fellow-councillors leant forward eagerly. They were never quite sure what to expect from this lithe, healthy-looking, spruce young man, who had not been on the Council for more than two years. He seemed to fear nothing and nobody.

Griff watched Hughes, and he saw that the effect of his remark was immediate. He saw the usually red face get redder with anger, and in a flash Hughes had leapt to his feet, storming with rage.

"What's that got to do with it?" he shouted.

"If you will allow me to go on, Mr. Chairman," Griff pleaded in an aggravating coolness. . . . "That's admitted?" he appealed to the others.

"Well, then! This is my position: Mr. Blathwaite is a very estimable man, a man highly respected in the district, and a man who takes a great interest in us, and who has done a great deal for us as a locality. I have a great respect for Mr. Blathwaite, but I venture to believe that he would be the last, if he knew of the scheme, to expect us to vote public money for the development of his private estate. Because that is what this road is going to do. And I have a shrewd idea—" he boldly threw out the challenge to Hughes—"that is the reason why our Chairman, who is, as we all know, Mr. Blathwaite's very efficient agent—that is the reason why he is so eager to push forward the construction of this new road."

But Hughes could not restrain himself longer. It seemed as though Griff with his shafts had pierced very raw spots indeed. "D'you know—d'you know you're insulting me?" he shouted, forgetting the dignity of his eminence as Chairman. "D'you know what you're suggesting?"

"I am not *suggesting* anything," Griff replied with provoking coolness, watching the bristling of the white tooth-brush moustache.

It was then Hughes forgot himself. "I forbid you to speak—I forbid you," he cried. His features worked with uncontrollable emotion.

Griff remained standing, watching the man's helplessness with amusement. With that cool, sarcastic flicker on his lips he irritated Hughes into still greater passion.

But by this time others had sprung to their feet, supporting Griff. "Stick to it, Chapel," urged his left-hand neighbour.

With a sudden movement, Hughes had kicked back his chair. "You—you young whelp!" he roared, all power over himself gone. For the first time in his life he was experiencing defeat, and at the hands of a Chapel. "You and your father——" He made as though to rush at Griff, but some of his friends took hold of him and pushed him back into his chair.

Griff was still waiting. "I'll manage this little lot," he said to the group around him. Not for a moment did he show his hatred of Hughes. His strength lay in his sublime self-control. Some of the old scores were being repaid. Griff had learnt many lessons since that quarrel with his father, and no longer was he impetuous in a fight; he waited for Hughes's friends to soothe him and to persuade him that young Chapel, however insulting, was well within his rights. Evidently, they succeeded.

"I said just now," Griff went on, when the room was again normal, "that Mr. Blathwaite would be the last to countenance the spending of public money for the development of his private estate."

"Do you mean to say——" asked one of Hughes's friends coming to the rescue—"that our Chairman is abusing his position on the Council to further his ends as Mr. Blathwaite's agent?"

"That's a straight question," panted Hughes, now more formidable in his desperation. "Answer it."

"I say this," replied Griff: "If the Chairman supports the motion as it stands he will be countenancing the use of public funds to his own ends."

Mr. Hughes again showed signs of restiveness, but his friends restrained him.

"Is that plain enough?" challenged Griff.

"What is *your* suggestion, then?" came the lofty query from another of Hughes's supporters.

"If the road's to be constructed at all, the Blathwaite Estate should bear half the cost. As the motion stands, I vote dead against it."

Griff sat down, knowing quite well that at last he had impaired Hughes's despotism, that the motion would be lost, and that a large number of old scores had been paid.

It was Hughes had started this trouble between them, for Griff had been careful for private reasons. But at a meeting about a year ago Hughes had gone out of his way to administer a snub to Griff, and ever since there had been war. Griff forgot all caution. Someone was trying to impose his will upon him. Hughes was trying to get him under his dominion as he had the majority of the Council. And Griff had fought. It was in his nature to fight on the least sign of attack. And both had openly assailed on the slightest provocation.

In the meantime the quarrel had widened. It was no longer a clash of personalities: the older seeking to dominate, and the younger man resenting. The quarrel had developed into a fight between a Chapel and a Hughes.

The clash between the two families had come at last after smouldering for several generations. Hughes and his father had owned and occupied Wern ever since the downfall of the Chapels, and the Chapels had bitterly resented the presence of the alien in the old home. One after another, Griff's grandfather, his father, and Griff himself—every one of them, throughout his life, had grown into the habit of casting longing eyes over the brow of the hill at Wern with this hatred smouldering in their hearts. It was in their blood, this hatred, brooding, developing, waiting for an outlet; and now the chance had come to pay back old scores.

It was a debt, whose repayment was demanded by family memories, and the settlement was inevitable as long as a Chapel lived. Sooner or later, in one generation or another, the clash was bound to come.

And Hughes, there at the head of the table, was well aware of the Chapel resentment. He felt it instinctively. He had seen it several times in Josiah Chapel's eyes, and

to-day he had seen it for the hundredth time in Griff's calculating glance across the table. He had seen the bitter hatred in that cool flicker of amusement, and he had fumed because that young whelp of a Chapel had beaten him. This was no fight over a road. Hughes knew it was not, and he was aware of Griff's knowledge that he knew.

Griff glanced at the light brown wainscoting running around the room and at the portraits of former chairmen hanging on the walls.

He had been reared with this hatred in his heart; a part of his natural inheritance it was—a hatred fostered by old Betsy Michael's teachings.

"Wern 'ave bin in your family for 'undreds and dundreds of years. It oughtn' to have bin lost." And whenever she had wished to stir up his ambitions the formula had always been: "When you have growed up, you 've got to be a bigger man than Hughes the agent. Mind you that now, Griff!"

Hughes was ever utilised as a comparison; Wern was always brought into the reckoning.

Griff and his left-hand neighbour went out together when the meeting was over.

"You let him have it properly to-day, Chapel."

"About time, too. I couldn't stick him any longer."

His companion was Bangor, a man of about forty who owned a small estate between Porth and Llantrisant. He was also a cousin to Blathwaite, the great landowner, whose property development Griff had been criticising. Their intimacy had sprung up partly because of their common resentment of Hughes's lofty domination over the Council. For years Bangor had been trying to break Hughes's despotism, and, when Griff had been elected, he had recognised a kindred spirit, impatient under any man's rule and irritable under restraint.

"D'you believe that was really his idea—developing the estate on the cheap?"

"I do. Dam' rotten tactics, I call it. D'you think Blathwaite knows about it?"

"Good Lord, no! He'll have the laugh of his life when I tell him I've been voting against his precious

agent. . . . Going home? Then you might as well ride so far."

A mile from Porth the car stopped, and while the chauffeur got down to swing open the iron gates, Bangor said—

"You must come to dinner some night, Chapel. Ah! Blathwaite will be here on Monday. Come then. . . . Useful chap to meet, you know."

Griff set off, and as he went he listened to the wheels of the car crunching the gravel as it glided down the drive behind the trees. He smiled to think how he had been accepted so unquestionably by these landed gentry of the district. Possibly there had been two reasons at first: the old position of the Chapels and the present eminence of his father. In the vague rumours and gossip of the neighbourhood Griff knew there were very tall tales going the round regarding his father's wealth. As a Building Contractor he was reputed to have made no inconsiderable fortune—the gift of the Library proved that; and now, since he had gone into Ferro-Concrete, the tales had grown into fables.

"That dock he's making in Cardiff. Employs thousands of men on that job alone. Must be a fortune in it. Must be *rolling* in money."

Griff had felt it very pleasant to move forward under the shadow of his father's wing in this way; but such a method did not appeal to his temperament. He must be accepted for his own worth, and to-day's events proved that he had not been altogether a failure.

But— What would Bess think of it all?

XXI

IN PRIVATE LIFE

AT dinner on the following Saturday evening Griff was the subject of his father's very close scrutiny. Throughout the last six years their relation had been very much the same—one of silence, and since they now met nowhere save at Garth they exchanged not a word. Chapel interested himself not at all in his son's enterprises; all he cared about was the satisfactory completion of those two houses, that Griff had withdrawn the three thousand pounds security, and that his son had not been through the Bankruptcy Court.

But on this night at dinner he frequently scrutinised Griff in perplexity. His son was proving a mystery to him. Earlier in the day he had read the account of the last Council meeting; the pressmen had made greedy use of their deliciously unusual copy and had described in full the acrimonious passage between Griff and Hughes.

The blind was drawn, the hanging lamp was alight and the fire burned brightly. Jane had finished the helping and now all three were seated in their accustomed places: Jane facing Griff across the table and Chapel presiding. It was a scene very similar to those of Griff's boyhood, except that he and Jane spoke more frequently. Chapel's presence did not dominate them so much now, for Griff's personality was not to be suppressed, and Jane had blossomed under his example.

Their meals had retained the old simplicity in spite of Chapel's wealth. His family had always been plain, straightforward folk, hating affectation, and it was in accordance with his tastes to keep the old-time simplicity in his way of living. Plenty of nourishing food, that had always been the Chapel rule, without any nonsense of

French cooking and the like. The only addition one might have observed in the setting of the table was a bottle of port standing alongside the gravy boat; but that was in perfect agreement with the most ancient of family traditions.

Usually, Chapel kept passive, seeming not to hear, but to-night Jane noticed that he often glanced at Griff as though unable to understand him.

Chapel was thinking of the account he had read of the Council meeting, and he would have given much to discover Griff's motives for this bitter attack upon Hughes the agent, the natural enemy of the Chapels. Had he obtained this glimpse, possibly he and his son would have been drawn together in a manner undreamt of by either. But Chapel saw only the surface workings; he regarded the quarrel as a clash of opinions, at most a clash of personalities. He resented the fact that it was Griff, and not he himself, was at last having the chance to pay back old scores.

Here was the envy again. His son seemed to have all the chances. His son's progress had been easy and unchecked. And more, his son had not made the mistake he himself had made. His son turned among men, the best men of the neighbourhood, freely and on an equality; and a few moments ago he had heard him tell Jane to look up his dress suit because he was dining with Bangor, and meeting Blathwaite the landowner, on Monday night.

Jane lingered over the task of folding the table-cloth after the maid had cleared the dishes and Chapel had gone to his study across the hall. Griff had gone to the arm-chair by the fire and was lighting a cigarette. Jane walked to the grate and made a pretence of poking the coals. Her figure was very slim and neat; her face was still pale, and she did not look as if she had recently passed to the wrong side of forty. The slimness of her body made her appear still girlish.

As she stooped before the fire, she suddenly turned her head to look up at Griff. "Why did you do it, Griff?" she asked in her sad, sweet voice.

"Do it?" Griff in his chair glanced down at her perplexedly.

"Quarrel with Mr. Hughes, I mean. I saw it in the newspaper."

"What's up, Jane?" he asked, beginning to smile, for the way she looked at him was puzzling. "If he quarrels with me—well——" Griff shrugged his shoulders. "What you driving at?"

"It's no use pretending with *me*," she told him in her womanly way and beginning to smile in mischief. "You are not so clever and mysterious as you think." Griff and she were friendly, and she knew that for all his hardness and his masculinity he was a very boyish, domesticated animal at heart. "D'you think I don't know?" she asked him, bringing her face nearer, and glancing at him very steadily.

"You got a bee in yer bonnet, old dame," Griff informed her as he blew smoke into the air; but he was still puzzled.

"All I can say is," Jane said as she made ready to move to the door; "this is the first time I've heard of anyone trying to get a woman by making an enemy of her father. . . . Now, Mr. Griff! What do you think of that?" Jane pecked at him and vanished.

Griff gazed after the starched bow. "Well, I be damned," he muttered. "Who'd have thought *she* knew?"

On the following Monday, Bangor gave Blathwaite an account of the Council meeting and of the discussion over the road; and Blathwaite had been very much amused.

"This Chapel! Who is he?" he had asked amid his laughter. "Must be a game sort to go for Hughes. I know from experience. I'd like to meet this youngster. Strong type, Charlie—what?"

Blathwaite was about thirty-five, tall, slight, and he spoke with a touch of the Kensingtonian accent. As a rule he lived on the other portion of his estate in Bedfordshire, but his interest in his property often brought him to South Wales. He owned a house in the neighbourhood of Neath, but generally he preferred making Bangor's home his Welsh headquarters.

That evening they sat after dinner, the three of them, smoking, talking, and drinking Bangor's excellent wine.

"Do you know, Mr. Chapel——" Blathwaite asked in

his drawl. "Do you know you owe me several thousand pounds?"

"Daresay!" Griff answered in his cool way. "All depends what system of Mathematics you adopt." Then with a chuckle he added, "Bangor owes half of it, anyhow!"

After this, the relation between Griff and Bangor grew more intimate, not only in their public capacities, but in their private lives as well, until it became a habit to dine frequently at Bangor's place. Several times did Griff meet Blathwaite, and possibly it was the mutual dare-devilry and love of a fight that attracted them to each other.

XXII

IMPOSSIBILITY

NINE o'clock on a fine summer morning !

And Griff was in his father's gig, waiting outside the open white gate, through which he was eagerly peering to see the drive stretching up away like an avenue underneath the overhanging chestnut trees—to Wern.

“ Steady ! Steady ! ”

The mare was fresh and restless, now and again viciously tugging at the rein in Griff's hand, or working her mouth till the bit and the curbing chain jingled, or digging the road with her hoofs and pricking up her ears in an impatience to be gone. Glorious sunshine. It brightened up the harness and the mare's brown coat, and the black varnish of the gig, and the black-and-amber spokes of the wheels.

What did it matter if the mare were restless ? She was full of life, as everyone and everything ought to be.

But here was Bess coming in the distance where the drive curved under the trees. Then she drew nearer, rather tall, broad-shouldered ; nearer still, and Griff made out the navy-blue skirt, the white linen blouse with its tremendously expansive collar, the navy-blue jacket over her arm. And now she was waving her blue parasol and beginning to run. Yet nearer, and he could distinguish the white tegal hat with the black ribbon—the fair hair, the smiling face and laughing eyes. She was walking through the gate, nearly out of breath. She was looking up at him ; full of life, as everything and everybody ought to be.

“ Been here long ? ”

“ Only just come.”

"Here! Hold my coat and this thing. You watch her; I'll get up right enough."

She ran around the back, got a grip with both hands and a foot on the step, and here she was in the gig beside him. The mare was rearing and plunging once more, but in a moment they were trotting along quite briskly. Everything was grand—absolutely grand.

"Are they gone?"

"Went by the eight train, both of them. . . . I don't think I should have come though, Griff! Supposing they found out?"

Griff chuckled, and from his more elevated perch looked down at her. "Anyhow, we're here. Sufficient for the day— How does it go?"

Bess had recovered her coat and parasol, and now she was glancing over the fields they were quickly passing, enjoying the far-stretching landscape. Her parents were from home that day, and Griff and she were going to spend it together.

"It's fine though, isn't it?" Her grey eyes were alight as she looked up at Griff.

"Grand; absolutely grand." Her very fair hair was glorious.

"It couldn't have been nicer had we chosen the weather."

"Fate," suggested Griff very seriously.

"Yes," nodded Bess, laughing again. "It's rather nice feeling really wicked, isn't it?"

"Champion."

"I suppose this is how boys feel when they—what d'you call it?"

"French leave from school, you mean?"

Bess nodded her head again in short jerks and laughed.

"There's this about it," answered Griff from his wider experience; "you're always certain of a dam' good licking in the other case."

"Griff!" she called his name in rebuke. "I'm always telling you about it—that sort of language."

"Sorry," Griff growled as he quickly turned his head to look at the hedge on the other side.

They reached the tavern where they were to lunch, and when the mare had been stabled they set out to explore

the surrounding lanes and footpaths. There was a strong suggestion of *breed* about the pair of them as they went together: Bess well-knit and well-dressed, erect, with some hidden dignity of carriage; and Griff in his grey suit, strong, lithe, and athletic.

"There won't be anything very dainty about the lunch, you know," Griff warned as they strolled along.

"If you're thinking of me, don't worry. I can take pot-luck as well as you. And really, Griff, I shall be as hungry as the deuce by one o'clock. But I'm beginning to talk slang, like you."

"Well, if you don't worry, I won't." Griff was happy again and kicked a stone out of his way. "You *are* a good sport though, Bess. Let's carry yer coat for you."

Bess twirled her parasol. "That a reward for being a good sport?" she questioned mischievously, handing over her coat.

Griff looked at her calculatingly for a moment. "Now you're getting funny," he told her, placing the coat over his arm. Then he took out his case, lit an Egyptian cigarette, and in a moment the breeze was playing with the smoke and carrying it over the hedge. With his hands deep in his pockets and the white silk lining of Bess's jacket showing on his arm, he strolled along lazily. "This is a bit of all right—what?"

Bess was laughing at him. "You do look a ruffian, Griff!"

"What's it matter how you look if your heart's all right? But come and have a look at this." He led the way to a gate. "People talk about Switzerland and Cornwall and all that sort of rot; but look at this! Ever seen anything to beat it?" He indicated the dip in the ground and the rising hill across the small valley. "See the river—and the fields—and that little wood? And look at that brown field! Take some beating, you know, Bess!"

"Bluffing again, Griff?" Bess had turned upon him with a teasing look.

"Eh? What's the joke?" He saw her white teeth as she smiled mockingly at him. "Straight," he again

drew her attention to the scene; "wouldn't you call that a pretty bit of country?"

"I thought perhaps you were having another game; pretending to be poetical, or something of that kind."

"That's it; rub it in. I'm not supposed to have much brains, I know. Brute force—that's it, isn't it?"

"Not exactly. But I do think you're a big bully."

Then they both laughed together again.

They spent the time till lunch in this manner, indolently, enjoyably, and as they commenced their way back to the tavern Bess remarked—

"What did that woman say? 'If the butcher happens to pass we shall have roast beef; if he doesn't we'll have to put up with cold lamb.' What's the time, Griff? I hope that butcher will have come, don't you, Griff?"

They covered another five miles after lunch. The mare was stabled at the back of an insignificant, single-licensed inn, which acted as farmhouse as well, and which they found deserted except for the mistress of the place. Griff acted as his own ostler, unfastening the harness from the shafts while Bess stood at the mare's head. This was greater fun, Bess thought, than before, and with much amusement she watched Griff take off his coat, fasten the mare to the manger, hang the harness on the nails on the wall, and carry some water for the mare to drink and some hay for a feed. Later, when he had swilled his hands and face, she held his grey coat so that he might brush the dust and hay from his trousers and his waistcoat. There was something unusually familiar about this sight of Griff in his shirt-sleeves; she had an intimate sense of helping him, somehow, as she held his coat, feeling its texture between her fingers.

And now, they walked together, hesitating a moment at the mouth of a lane over which the grass had grown.

"Try it?" Griff was asking.

"If you like. It looks interesting."

"Must lead to somewhere that's been abandoned. A gold mine, p'raps," he hinted.

"Yes," Bess agreed, jerking her fair head in the delight of this day of beautiful adventure.

Down the lane they sauntered, leisurely and lazily,

sometimes dragging their feet through the soft green grass, and now and again Bess would flick an obtruding twig with her blue parasol.

When the stile at the end of the lane was reached, Bess climbed to the top, while Griff leant over the gate at her side. There was silence between them for a time, and Bess dug the point of her parasol into a hole in the gate-post and brought out a shower of powdered dry-rot; and Griff stared at the little gutter almost dry, at a ewe with the lamb by her side climbing the slope ahead, and at the blue sky.

"You know, Bess," Griff said as though emerging from his thoughts; "you always talk a lot about Fate. I'm beginning to think there's something in it," he added, turning to look at her.

Bess ceased digging out the dry-rot. "Are you?" She shook her head. "Try some other way, Griff. I'm not such a simpleton."

Griff grinned and shuffled his feet. "All right, then. I never did like going for things sideways."

"That bit of bluffing was too transparent," Bess objected, smiling at him.

Griff took her parasol and jacket and hung them on the gate. "Serious now, Bess!" He was studying the white linen blouse with its prodigiously expansive collar, the face very slightly tanned, the clear grey eyes and the teal hat with its band of black ribbon. "About our understanding each other so well! That's what I meant."

Bess moved her foot. "Well, why didn't you say so?" She was immediately sympathetic.

"I wasn't bluffing altogether about Fate just now. Look at it in this way." And Griff began to demonstrate. "Everything in the world develops, you see. Everything evolves. Everything's bound to go on from stage to stage."

"Of course!" Bess was finding it hard to hide her amusement. Plainly, Griff was in difficulties, and she had never before seen him in a difficulty.

"So it stands to reason our being such good pals is bound to develop. And that's where I'm beginning to believe

Fate comes in. I'm not bluffing now," he firmly maintained, looking to see whether she were still suspicious.

"Yes. But what are you driving at?"

"Now let me finish, and then you shall have a chance."

"All right. Go on."

"I mean we're suited to each other. . . . We never quarrel, do we?"

"No."

"Well, then!" He might well have been the footballer going for the line. "That's what I'm coming to." He had forced the opening and he was ramming his way. "Hang it all, Bess! We ought to get married. . . . Wait a minute; I know what I'm talking about now. That's why I say Fate, or something uncommonly like it, comes in."

But Bess had sprung to the ground and had come quite near to him. "No, Griff." She spoke very decidedly. "That's where I come in. . . . We're too good pals, aren't we—too good to be silly and afraid of talking plainly?" She held his glance very steadily. "Honestly, Griff! D'you seriously think I can marry you?"

"Why not?" he blurted out.

Bess answered: "Because you've quarrelled with father."

"That's the old tale."

"No, Griff; it isn't."

"If you thought enough of me, you wouldn't trouble a toss about him."

"That's not right, Griff." She took a tight hold of the lapels of his coat. "Now, Griff! I want a straight answer. Why did you quarrel with him? Pal to pal truthfully, why did you quarrel with father? I'm not a fool. I knew that some day you would want to marry me, and yet you seemed to be deliberately spoiling everything. Why did you quarrel with him, Griff?"

Griff took her hands away from his coat, and for a moment he looked at the sky.

"I'll tell you," he said. "I don't know what you'll think, but you see, our people used to be the owners of Wern—and ever since we've been out of it, we've resented it. Perhaps your father sees red as I do when we start to fight. I know he feels the same hatred. I tried to

keep out of it because of you; but he went for me, and well—I had to fight; just had to.”

“But it’s silly to talk like that. I’m as much a Hughes as my father, but I don’t feel any hatred towards you Chapels.”

“No. Perhaps you don’t. Women are not the same. You haven’t got the bump of family men have.”

“I don’t see why we shouldn’t.”

“It’s not in your natures. Women are meant to blend families, to link them together.”

Bess stepped back. She was regarding him with some coldness. Here was Miss Hughes, the future owner of Wern. She spoke a shade more coldly, as though more guardedly—

“You mean that the Chapels would come back to Wern?”

“That’s it.”

“But don’t you understand that by quarrelling with father you’ve made it impossible?”

“No, I don’t. If you——”

“Don’t shift the blame over to me, Griff. Of course, I hadn’t all these things in my mind, but I asked you not to quarrel with him: I did my share then. I couldn’t tell you more plainly—I couldn’t tell you: ‘Don’t quarrel with him, or I shan’t be able to marry you!’ . . . It’s your fault, Griff.”

“Hang Wern!” Griff took hold of her arm. “It’s you, I want.”

Bess shook her head and freed herself. “There’s another side to it, Griff. You must remember I’ve been brought up with father and mother. I daresay I’m a coward, but I can’t go against them.”

Griff leant over the gate and watched the trickle of the narrow stream. He had expected something of this kind, but he had not the slightest notion how to deal with it. Bess was in question, and there was no chance to fight. And emotions were strange territory to him.

He turned to her very abruptly: “But if you’re with me, there’ll be no need to be afraid of them?”

Bess shook her head. “There’s something else. If I married you as things are now—do you think they’d

ever forgive me? I'd never have Wern. And I don't feel inclined to lose Wern. You must remember, I love the place as much as you Chapels do—more than you possibly *can* love it, because I've been brought up there. It's no use, Griff, is it?"

"But see, Bess!" Griff began to plead, trying to get hold of her again.

She shook her head very definitely and stepped back: "It's not a bit of good."

Griff shrugged his shoulders almost impatiently. He turned, put his elbows on the top of the gate and gazed into vacancy. After a while he took out a cigarette and began to smoke.

Bess watched him. She saw that his face had grown hard and that there was an ugly look in his eyes. She went up to him and put her hand on his shoulder. "What's the matter, Griff? You'd be disappointed if you didn't get Wern, wouldn't you?" She tugged at his sleeve. "Come on, Griff; let's go."

She took up her jacket and parasol and stood waiting for him. As they went along the grass-covered lane she touched his arm again.

"You would be disappointed, wouldn't you, Griff?"

Griff did not answer.

"Griff!" She tugged at his sleeve and made him stop. "We can be good friends?"

Griff looked down at her. "Oh yes."

"It needn't always be like this!"

"Eh?" Griff suddenly sprang into life. "What did you say?"

"Well—*some* time. . . . Come along!"

Griff snatched at her coat and hurried her along. "Oh," he cried. The clouds had passed. "I'm a regular *devil* to wait."

The world was all right again.

"You're a regular brick, Bess."

Bess had brightened because Griff had, and now she smiled softly to herself, thinking: "And you're only a great big boy."

XXIII

ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN

GRIFF had come along by train to Llantrisant from the house he was building near Ely. He had been a District Councillor for three years, another election had recently taken place, and the new Council was meeting this afternoon for the first time.

As Griff stepped out from the station he caught sight of Williams, the magistrate, leaving the hotel where he usually stabled his horse. Griff waited for him, and they went together towards the Council offices.

"How are yer?" cried Mr. Williams cheerfully, as he pushed the grey felt hat up on his forehead and smacked his breeches with his riding crop.

"How are you, Mr. Williams—all right?"

"Oh, very well. How's yer father?"—commencing to pull off his brown kid gloves.

"Tip-top. What's on the go?"

"What d'ye mean, my boy? What d'ye mean?" Mr. Williams stroked his grey moustache and frowned at Griff.

"Meeting, Mr. Williams! Got anything special on?"

"Oh, nothing out o' the usual. Put Hughes in the Chair, I suppose."

Griff stroked his chin. "I see."

"Look here, Chapel!" Mr. Williams took his arm coaxingly. "When you goin' to stop them dam' monkey tricks of yours?"

Griff looked at him in feigned surprise, but said nothing.

"Drop um now, Chapel. Drop um, indeed, there's a good fellah! You're only upsetting things and causing a lot of ill-feeling. Say you'll drop them dam' tricks of yours, there's a good fellah."

" Seriously, Mr. Williams— Don't you think it's time some of you were upset ? "

" Tut-tut ! No good talking like that. What is it you want ? Now, Chapel—look here ! I've always had a big respect for your family ; you're a good solid old stock. Now, look here ! Promise not to give any more trouble, and I'll propose you for the Vice-Chair to-day. Then Hughes and you can let the old bad-feeling die down, and be good friends. You could be very useful, Chapel—I say that much for you—if you'd leave your silly dam' tricks alone. Now what do you say to it ? "

" That's just the thing I'm up against, Mr. Williams," said Griff, stopping in his walk. " I know all about it. You want me in that clique of yours, and I'm not having any. Now that's telling you straight."

They stood outside the door of the Council Room, and Mr. Williams, foiled in his design, began to lose his temper.

" Damme ! " He turned on Griff. " It's no good talking to you." And he stamped into the room.

Griff followed Mr. Williams with a smile under his small moustache. It was by no means the first attempt to win him over. And now they had offered him this sop of the Vice-Chairmanship !

Inside there was the usual hubbub of a first meeting : the old members congratulating one another upon their survival and discussing with sympathy or joy the non-appearance of those the election had swamped ; and the new members, as yet somewhat modest in this unaccustomed atmosphere of greatness. To Griff it all resembled the opening of school after the long vacation : some boys gone down and others come to take their places.

There they were, the three groups—the landed gentry, the prosperous tradesmen, and the alert labour members. Griff looked around a moment, and he slowly began to smile, for it was rather odd to see the aristocratic Bangor in friendly converse with the most prominent of the labour men. And now Bangor was strolling across to the group of obese shopkeepers.

Griff button-holed the man Bangor had just left.

" How things going, Watkins ? "

"These new chaps are all right, I think; they're sure to vote with me. If Mr. Bangor can manage that lot he's with now——"

"I think it'll come off." And Griff walked around to use his influence with the shopkeepers.

The room was fast filling, and the hubbub of voices increased. Some of the members had already seated themselves round the oval table. The two reporters were in their places in the far corner, and the clerk had come in with his bundle of documents under his arm.

Then Mr. Hughes arrived.

His short, stiffly-built figure bustled into the room. He came in, not by any means as stern as usual; indeed, his red face had a suspicion of good-fellowship hovering among its bold features; his eyes under the heavy grey brows were most oddly softened. He was a changed man. He greeted everyone, freely, and his voice was not at all sharp and snappy, nor did he appear to bark when he spoke. With several of the members he shook hands. He even nodded to Griff—a short, jerky nod, it is true; but still—a nod.

Marvellous, Griff thought, how human nature accommodates itself when popular support is in question.

Hughes came in with a cheerful confidence. For fifteen years he had been Chairman of the Council, and to-day he would be re-elected. An excellent arrangement.

Griff carefully watched him, understanding full well the cause of Hughes's altered demeanour. He knew the feeling and had experienced it himself when canvassing for votes prior to an election. Friends with everyone—to get his suffrage; and then everyone could go and hang himself—until the next election.

All were seated around the table now, fifteen of them, Bangor on Griff's left; and there, straight across, facing him sat Hughes, buoyant, smiling at his neighbour—confident.

All eyes were upon Hughes, implying that he as Chairman of the previous body should take charge of affairs. In a moment he was addressing them.

"*Huh-a!* You know," he began in his confident, superior way, "that it's my little habit to sit by here

at the beginning of the first meeting of every new Council. *Huh-a!* When I look round, I find there are several of the old faces missing. *Huh-a!* But I am sure you will join with me in welcoming to our midst the new members. *Huh-a!*” For the edification of the newly elected he explained, “We are a very happy body of men as a rule. *Huh-a!*”

There were some who turned questioning eyes upon Griff at this point; but Mr. Hughes was proceeding.

“But to business. I have very great pleasure, indeed, in proposing our old friend Mr. Williams to the Chair. We all know Mr. Williams—an esteemed magistrate and a man highly respected by us all. I propose Mr. Williams to the Chair.”

Mr. Hughes sat down, nodding as he did so to one of his cronies.

But Griff, springing to his feet, had forestalled the clique’s cut-and-dried methods. With his hands deep in his pockets and in his calm deliberate way he spoke.

“I beg to second. As a little compliment to the—the esteem in which we hold Mr. Williams, I beg to second Mr. Hughes’s proposition.”

Hughes and Chapel in agreement! There were strange looks cast upon Griff as he sat down; some of wonder, some cynical.

Soon Mr. Williams had installed himself in the chair and was addressing them in his high-pitched little voice.

“Thank you, gentlemen. Thank you. It’s a little job I always do at the beginning of every new Council, as most of you know. But you understand—I am very much obliged to you all the same. Now then! You all know it’s not my habit to waste any time.” He picked up an agenda paper from the table in front of him. “I shan’t be here long, so let’s get my little bit of business over.” He took out his eyeglasses and perched them on his nose, and while the others had time to look at their agendas, Mr. Williams scribbled a little note. “Pass that along to Chapel,” he whispered to his neighbour.

“Now then, gentlemen! The first bit of business is the election of a Chairman for the Council. O’ course I don’t want to point out to you, gentlemen, that it’s very

important what kind of a Chairman we elect. There's Mr. Hughes—been our Chairman fifteen years—fifteen, isn't it, Mr. Hughes?"

"Quite right, Mr. Chairman. Fifteen," came the beaming reply from Mr. Hughes.

"And in my opinion," the temporary Chairman went on, "I don't see any reason to make a change. Now then to business. The election of Chairman, gentlemen!"

As Mr. Williams sat down his eyes ran around the table in search of Griff's, and the very decided shake of the head he got in reply filled him with annoyance. He had thought that perhaps young Chapel had come to his senses. The note he had sent was: "*Shall I propose you for the Vice-Chair?*"

"The election of Chairman, gentlemen!" repeated Mr. Williams.

Immediately, there was a member on his feet, and without preamble he said: "I propose Mr. Hughes."

This gentleman was known more for his wealth than his oratorical powers. Still, a safe supporter of the leading spirits.

"I second Mr. Hughes," came another voice, like an echo of the first.

Mr. Hughes was jubilant, softly drumming his fingers on the table.

"Mr. Hughes proposed and seconded," the magistrate at the head of the table chanted in his hurry to get through with his bit of business. "All in favour——"

Hughes was pleurably excited; in fancy he could see Williams vacating the chair and himself rising to occupy it again as he had done for fifteen years. Almost did his legs move so that he might stand erect.

"Half a minute, Mr. Chairman!"

That young whelp of a Chapel was up, and with raised hand was checking Williams's galloping methods of conducting public business. This young whelp was attempting trouble; but Mr. Hughes smiled very tolerantly. For fifteen years his majority had been so safe.

"Half a minute," this young whelp was saying, hand uplifted. "I have another proposition to make. I propose Mr. Bangor to the Chair."

"I second Mr. Bangor," came the voice of Watkins, the leader of the labour members.

Mr. Hughes still indulgently smiled.

"Tut-tut-tut!" Mr. Williams was coaxingly objecting from the head of the table. "I hope you're not serious, Mr. Chapel? What's to gain by going on like this? You are only causing dissension—only splitting us into two. Come now, withdraw your motion, there's a good fellow!"

"Put it to the meeting, Mr. Chairman," was Griff's reply.

Mr. Hughes listened with the benign assurance that this young whelp would very soon be taught a lesson.

"Well, then, I'll put it," said the Chairman. But he was angry. This was carrying them dam' monkey tricks too far.

"All in favour of Mr. Bangor," he snapped. He was surprised at a man like Bangor mixing himself up in such damned tomfoolery.

"All in favour of Mr. Bangor!" Mr. Williams repeated.

Hughes looked up with his superior forbearance. The hands of those voting against him were up. Idly, he commenced to count them. And then his heart began to beat, wildly. Six! Seven! Eight!

All the men were on their feet, bending over the table, awed, their faces ashen.

Griff watched in horror. He watched the blood mount to Hughes's face. He saw his body shake convulsively. He heard the awful attempt to curse him. And then he saw Hughes collapse into the chair.

The doctor was there within a few minutes. "Heart," he said. "I warned him not to excite himself."

Griff turned away.

"That's put an end to it," he told himself.

Griff was thinking of Bess.

BOOK III

FAMILY

I

ANCESTORS

It was an hour previous to the *rising* of Hughes's funeral, and Griff was in his bedroom changing into his black clothes when he heard the sounds of his father's footsteps crossing the landing to the top of the stairs.

"Jane," he heard the strong bass voice calling. Griff smiled softly, for, judging from the tone, his father was in difficulties, and he was apt to become very impatient when things went wrong. "Jane!" The bass voice got sharper.

"Yes, Mr. Chapel," came the answer from below. "What is it?"

"Bring me another collar. . . . This dam' thing," Griff heard him mutter as he returned into his bedroom.

Jane came running up the stairs, into Chapel's room, and opening a drawer in the dressing chest she took out a collar from the round leather collar-box and handed it to him.

"Now brush a bit on that coat and waistcoat,"—while he bent forward to the mirror, fixing his collar to the stud at the back.

Moving her trim figure noiselessly about the room, Jane took up the clothes-brush, picked up the waistcoat from the bed, and began to brush. She would have been amused had she not been so accustomed to these duties of a valet. Useless telling him she had brushed them all before placing them on the bed a quarter of an hour

ago! With the waistcoat in her hand she stood waiting, watching him struggle with the tie and seeing his reflection in the looking-glass: the sharply defined features set in scowling annoyance, the white shirt and the braces.

"Blast the thing," he muttered, screwing his tie around angrily.

Jane put down the waistcoat. "Here! Let *me* see."

Chapel turned. "Put this dam' tie under the stud at the back there."

Jane stretched up her arms. "Bend down, then, or I can't reach it."

With an ill grace, like a boy forced to obey, he stooped, and Jane secured the tie under the stud, walked round to the front of him, arranged the black knot, stuck in the small pearl-headed pin which he ungraciously handed her, patted the tie, drew the large square corners into position and stepped back a yard to survey her handiwork.

"There you are," she told him, signifying that all was satisfactory. Then she handed him the remainder of his garments, one at a time; first the waistcoat, and while he buttoned this she held up the morning coat; and so on with the overcoat and the silk hat and the gloves, until he was completely dressed, a superior, masterful, tall, strong, distinguished-looking man.

"Got a handkerchief there?"

"In the pocket of your inside coat."

"Now where's that umbrella?"

Jane could not keep back the smile. "I'll get it when you come down."

When she turned to go downstairs, Chapel's eyes followed her, and the light in them suddenly changed. Her figure was so trim and slight, so neat; and she held her small body and her head so erect.

"Thank you, Jane," he grunted unwillingly when she gave him the umbrella as she stood holding open for him the front door.

Griff was running the velvet pad around his silk hat when he heard the front door close, and stepping forward into the bay of the window he saw his father set off energetically down the road, looking the solid prosperous

man of consequence that he was. "No flies, Josiah," Griff sent after him with a smile.

It was an equally prosperous-looking, and perhaps a more immaculately dressed Griff that ran down the steps of Garth some five minutes later. There was every sign of the good tailor about his appearance. The black overcoat fitted so well about his shoulders and hung so perfectly balanced. The bent-back corners of his linen collar, the black tie, and the white slip gave him that superior tone which he loved so well. The trousers lay so evenly over the uppers of his glacé kid boots. And there was his smooth silk hat—and the umbrella tightly rolled which he carried in his hand like a walking-stick!

"No flies," as he had described his father. Something good about his whole appearance. Perhaps to match that suggestive twinkle of dare-devilry in his eyes, that free athletic swing of his shoulders—perhaps to match these the silk hat should have been a little aslant on his head. But it was not. As he stepped smartly down the road he looked the alert cosmopolitan young man-of-the-world.

In a few minutes he had overtaken a villager and his wife on the way to the rising of the funeral at Wern. The man replied quite readily to Griff's cheery greeting, but the woman seemed taken aback, as if the sight of him perplexed her.

"He's never goin' to the funeral, is 'e?" she asked in outraged righteousness as she watched the athletic figure in black pass on.

"Shud-up, mun," was the whispered warning from her husband. "'E'll 'ear you. Why shouldn' 'e go—same as us two?"

"John—I'm surprised at you. Why shouldn' 'e go, indeed? But there—some people 'ave got the face of brass."

"Don'-talk-so-silly, mun. Don'-talk-so-silly."

"Silly, am I? Killin' a man, an' then goin' to 'is fun'ral! Silly, am I?"

John turned upon her. "Stoppit," he commanded unceremoniously. "You go blabbin' about the place like that, an' you'll land yerself in a pretty pickle, I can tell you."

John's attitude expressed the male opinion of Griff just now, while his wife's stood for the aspersions cast upon Griff by the women of the neighbourhood.

Griff knew that for the remainder of the afternoon he would be the subject of very critical glances and of very caustic comments; but the fact troubled him not at all. This was not the first time to be under the fire of village criticism. He was not the least bit sensitive. He was quite aware of the opinions going around concerning him since the Council Meeting. Morally, if not directly, he was being held, by many people, responsible for Hughes's death. Had it not been for the opposition to the election of Hughes as Chairman, so ran the contention, the heart attack would not have come on, and the agent would have been alive at this very moment.

Griff walked on through the village, and he had not quite arrived at the white gate of the Wern drive when he saw, coming from the opposite direction, a pair of bay horses smartly trotting. In the open carriage, behind the liveried coachman, someone with an upraised umbrella was hailing him. The same umbrella poked the coachman in the back, and at the entrance to the drive the carriage stopped. Instantly, Griff recognised Blathwaite and Bangor waiting for him. By the time he had reached them the tall, thin Blathwaite had alighted and was stamping his feet on the roadway.

"Come along, Chapel; I'll walk with you," Blathwaite was saying in his polished tones when greetings were over. "Charlie's going to wait here."

Blathwaite and Griff walked up the drive together.

"Sort of thing I don't care much about, you know," Blathwaite was explaining under the shadow of the overhanging trees.

"Not much in my line, either," agreed Griff.

And so they walked on, chatting pleasantly as they always did. But very soon Griff found something in Blathwaite's manner to puzzle him. There was the old freedom and absence of *side*, but Griff had a queer feeling of being measured, that for some mysterious reason Blathwaite was taking stock of him.

"Very sudden—Hughes's going off, wasn't it?"

"Most unfortunate it should have happened there."

"Bangor's just been telling me about it." Blathwaite was quietly smiling. "You seem to have made a dead set at him—the pair of you?"

"It was about time to break that clique. Bangor's Chairman, anyhow!"

Blathwaite softly chuckled, but Griff again had that feeling of being measured. Generally, Blathwaite's manner gave one a misleading impression of languidness, but to-day he was openly keen and penetrating whenever he turned his eyes in Griff's direction.

But Griff was approaching Wern, the old home—the old home of the Chapels, and within him he felt some odd, strange sensations.

For a second he seemed to forget everything—even the presence of his aristocratic companion—everything except that he was treading the drive underneath these trees—approaching Wern, the old home.

He was treading on the drive this very instant, hearing the sound of his feet on its hardness, just as the old Chapels had trodden on it generation after generation after generation. Only to imagine it! From this very spot, perhaps, they had looked through these trees at the sky, exactly as he was doing this very second. Only to picture one of them—a healthy, hearty old fellow, with a gun under his arm as likely as not, and a couple of spaniels at his heels! Another of them—on horseback, red-coated, off to the hunt! Certain it was that Chapel children had played among these trees!

"Yes," he was replying to his aristocratic companion after they had passed a group of farmers. "They're all your tenants."

But Wern! Here was *Wern*! And those odd emotional sensations got more insistent and more clamant.

The drive had sharply turned to the right and there, twenty yards ahead on their left, was the old house; bare, romantic, old. It made the blood dance in Griff's body.

The front of it was low, austere, grey, long and gaunt. There in the middle was the door, a big broad door, so broad that it looked peculiarly low; an old, black, oak door, studded, with a great heavy knocker large enough

for some aged castle. The windows were flat casement windows. It must have stood like this for centuries.

But there were no ancestors about to-day, unless there was some truth in that whimsical talk of ghosts. To-day, this was a place of gloom. The blinds were down—white blinds almost touching the leaded panes of the flat casement windows. And these people filling the semi-circular space before the house were strangers dressed in black.

There *was* one of the old family here; his father, near those font-like things on the edge of the lawn, talking to Williams the magistrate.

Josiah Chapel, too, had felt those throbbing sensations as he had come up the drive, and, because he was naturally more impressionable than Griff, he had felt them with greater force. They took hold of him and seemed to make his whole being throb. He stood now in front of the house, talking to Williams, but his thoughts were not in the conversation. He seemed to be grappling with an impossibility. Could he not in some way get hold of Wern? To get the Chapels back within this house he would sell his very soul.

Was there not some way!

II

ASTONISHMENT

BLATHWAITE, Bangor and Griff were leaving the churchyard together; they had passed under the lych gate and were stepping out into the roadway when Blathwaite said very casually to Griff: "You might offer me a cup of tea, Chapel!"

"Certainly," answered Griff in his astonishment. "You come along as well, Bangor?"

"No." It was Blathwaite replied for his cousin. "He's sending round his car for me in an hour."

The matter seemed prearranged and Griff was more puzzled. But this was an unexpected honour, having the great Blathwaite as a guest, if only for a cup of tea. So, inclined to be pleased, Griff led the way towards Garth.

"That's over," said Blathwaite, shaking himself as if to get rid of the depressing influence of the funeral.

The white-aproned maid opened the door for them and took their umbrellas, hats and coats, and the next moment Blathwaite was entering Griff's sanctum.

"Sit down, Mr. Blathwaite," Griff invited. "I'll go 'n' see about that cup of tea."

Blathwaite stretched his long legs and moved slowly towards the bookcase against the wall opposite the bay window. He ran his eyes along the rows of books inside and began to smile in an amused way. Just as he had expected! Most of them were books on building; there were a few law-books amongst them; several on various aspects of sport; but no *belles-lettres*, not more than half a dozen novels. Typical of Chapel; and Blathwaite was making a special study of Chapel just now.

The room, also, appeared to please him, for there was nothing pretentious about it. The table, with its polished

surface, looked business-like with its drawing-board, cigarette-box and book. His own gloves were the only things out of place there. The two armchairs were solid, and the broad Chesterfield couch near the window seemed capable of affording rest. The thick green carpet was soft and noiseless under his feet; and there were the heavy curtains hanging from the rings on the strong pole, the pictures on the walls, the black rug and the bronze fire-irons——

What had Charlie said? "Breed about young Chapel. Family's been round here since the Flood."

Bathwaite came back to the table, glancing cursorily at the drawing-board. Pinned on it was a sheet of paper with some drawing half-finished, and beside the board lay a rule, a couple of lead-pencils and an eraser. The neatness of it all did not escape his attention. Here on the other side of the board lay a silver cigarette box, which he took up and studied. Some more Chapel!—red coats of the huntsmen, hounds, the swinging sign of an inn! He put it down with a smile and picked up the book lying a little farther along. He read the title: *Practical Building Construction*.

Bathwaite repeated the first word of the title—"Practical!" It explained Chapel so thoroughly.

When they had drunk their "cup of tea," they sat in the armchairs, opposite each other across the black rug.

"Have a cigarette, Mr. Bathwaite?"

The maid had taken out the tray, and in a moment they were smoking. Bathwaite had moved his chair nearer the wall, his head was leaning against the mantel-piece, and his eyes were gazing languidly into the clouds of smoke he blew into the air. Griff stooped for the tongs, picked up a small cinder from within the curb, and threw it on the fire. A lull had come, and they continued quietly to smoke.

"It means a great loss to me, you know, Chapel."

Griff waved a hand to clear away the cloud of smoke before his face. He wondered whether he had missed some previous remark. "What's that?" he asked. Bathwaite had altered his position; he seemed to have roused himself, for he was sitting upright in the armchair.

"Hughes's death, you know."

Here was the other side of Blathwaite, now; the indolence of bearing had gone. Here was the keen Blathwaite, with dark eyes exceptionally bright as he fixed them on Griff.

"Yes, I suppose it does. Hadn't thought of it in that light."

"A very difficult job to replace him. Hughes was very efficient; remarkably so." This was Blathwaite the landowner, the sharp owner of property. "It's not an easy position to fill. It wants a specially good, all-round man."

"I suppose it does." Griff was mildly amazed at the confidences. "You'll find plenty ready to fill it, though!"

"Plenty of a sort," Blathwaite corrected. He threw his cigarette into the fire and uncrossed his knees. "Hughes, as I said, was just the man." He got up quickly, bent his long body until his elbow rested on the mantel-shelf.

He put his foot on the fender.

"Supposing I offered you the position, Chapel! Would you take it?"

Griff stared at him. "What?" He leapt to his feet. "Me?" he exclaimed. "D'you mean you're offering me Hughes's position?"

"Yes." Blathwaite was watching him very closely.

"Half a minute!"

Griff was pulling down his waistcoat in nervous little jerks. He commenced perambulating the room, his mind in a jumble. Hughes the agent's position? The mighty Hughes! Griff Chapel in the place of the man whom everyone had regarded as a little god?

"Naturally," Blathwaite was saying from the hearth, totally mistaking Griff's perturbation, "I know you're doing very well as you are. And your father's pretty wealthy, I know."

"Tisn't that," Griff told him hurriedly. "I want to get hold of the idea." He came back to the hearth. Griff was now the business man, sure of himself and of his own worth. "The idea came as a thunderbolt," he

said in explanation of his excitement. "But my experience fits me for the work, now I come to think of it."

"Yes." Blathwaite was amused, yet pleased, at the self-assurance. "You've got a working notion of the law; you're an out-of-door man; you're used to managing men and turning among men. You were in a lawyer's office for two years—I've been over your career pretty thoroughly," he said in reply to Griff's astonishment. "But the point is: Are you prepared to discuss the matter further?"

"I am, most decidedly." But he must try to hide his eagerness.

"Well, then——"

They sat down again and discussed the question of money and other incidentals. "It isn't so much the actual income," Blathwaite explained, "because you get hold of valuable information which you can always turn to very good account."

"I have an idea of that."

Lord! How difficult it was to contain this exuberance! What would Bess say to this? What would his father think? What would everybody say to it?

"Well—— Do you accept it, or do you want——"

"I accept."

"That's settled, then. I wanted to get it done."

A quarter of an hour later Griff stood on the roadway watching the back of Bangor's car till it was out of sight. Turning, he bounded up the steps and entered the house. He had not yet recovered his breath, as you might say. It was all so stupendously wonderful.

"Struck me all of a heap," he said to himself as he sat down.

Wonderful! Miraculous! Blathwaite's agent! He—Griff Chapel—was to take the place of the mighty Hughes; Hughes, the giant of all the greatness and influence of the district! Incredible! Past all belief. He must have time to let the idea soak into his mind. As yet, it seemed too impossible to be true. He could not believe it. And it had all happened to *him!*

Life was grand. Life was a fine thing if one but let

her have her way. Certainly, one had to be prepared when she gave the order to fight; one had to keep a watchful eye upon her while allowing her to play her own game; but let her alone, get to know her little tricks and oddities, and life was exquisite.

Just to have something to do, he poked the fire and, leaning forward with his elbows on his knees, he unconsciously began slowly to tap the poker on the top bar of the low grate.

And it was true. What used old Betsy to say? "Mind you, Griff. Mind you now! When you do grow up you got to be a bigger man than Hughes the agent." Old Betsy was a ripper. Knew what she was about, did Betsy, though a stranger might consider her a queer old stick. Good old Betsy! Perhaps he would go down to-night and tell her. Old Betsy would understand.

Griff put down the poker. Abruptly, his thoughts had taken a serious turn. He was on top of that confounded dilemma again.

Life was not all right; decidedly not.

He sprang to his feet impatiently. He was complaining already.

But what was Bess's opinion of all that had taken place? So far, there had been no chance of discovering Bess's point of view. So much depended upon that.

He stretched out his hand for the silver box on the edge of the table. Nothing like a cigarette to help one out of a quandary!

He had watched Bess this afternoon—getting into the coach at Wern, and afterwards at the graveside. Dressed in black she was, with a black veil half hiding her face. And that black veil had made her look damnably distant, damnably superior and—a Hughes. . . . Not very encouraging.

"What do you make of it, young Griff?"

It was the first time he had ever asked the younger Griff for sensible advice. But the young lunatic only muttered something about—"Shut yer teeth—tight."

Griff was forced to smile. The boy in him was by no means yet dead. And after all, there was solid sense in his advice. Griff jerked his head.

The same old game, he supposed! Waiting, coolly waiting for that second of opportunity.

"Come along, Griff. Dinner's ready."

The door behind him had opened and Jane was calling.

"Dinner?"

He looked about him. The room had begun to grow dark without his noticing it.

III

" A THOROUGH BLACKGUARD "

Bess's mother was a woman who compensated for her rather small body by an aggressive manner. Possibly so long a contact with her more aggressive husband had taught her a great deal; but she possessed strength of personality of her own, and nature abetted by example had made her what she was. The keynote of her was an extreme respectability, and there was always that need, that duty of setting a pattern for her servants and more especially for those less fortunate women of the village. She was full of that rigid love of a high-toned respectability.

She sat very erect in her chair at breakfast one morning, and when she raised her hand to pat the hairpins into her grey hair there was rather a dainty twist in her white wrist. When she addressed Bess across the table her voice was sharp and loathingly hostile towards the matter under discussion; but one felt her tones could not have been altogether unpleasant had she chosen.

" It's to-day that fellow Chapel is coming here, isn't it ? " she wanted to know in her well-spoken way.

Bess also was sitting very erect in her chair—a lesson learnt in early childhood. " Yes, mother, " she answered in her contralto voice. Bess was busy at that moment with her bacon, so there was no reason whatever for raising her very fair head.

" And who's to see him I don't know. I hate the sight of the fellow; not that I've ever seen much of him. " Having eased her mind to a certain extent, Mrs. Hughes went on with her breakfast, until Bess's next remark disturbed her again.

Bess looked around the vase of flowers at the black

figure across the table. "Is there any need for *anyone* to see him? Let one of the girls show him into the office, and he can take away all the things belonging to the estate."

Her mother put down her knife and fork with a very decided movement. "Don't talk nonsense, girl; don't talk such nonsense. Do you think I'd trust a fellow of that sort amongst your father's papers?"

"I don't see why not!" Bess objected, fingering the handle of her cup of coffee.

"See why not?" her mother echoed in amazement. "There are some of your father's private papers among those things. D'you imagine I'd let the fellow come here if it were not for that? I'd have got the whole lot packed up and sent to him. He shouldn't set foot in this house, I can assure you, if I could help it."

Mrs. Hughes picked up her knife and fork.

"Ask him to put our private things on one side, then," offered Bess as a suggestion.

Mrs. Hughes again placed down her knife and fork, as if resignedly. "Whatever's the matter with you this morning, girl? I never heard such rubbish in my life. There are hundreds of pounds in the safe, and some of it belongs to us; how much, I don't know. That's one reason why someone's got to be with him."

"But he's not a thief, mother, whatever he is."

"I wouldn't trust him with a farthing—" she tapped the white tablecloth with her dainty hand—"a farthing of my money. The blackguard! He's a thorough blackguard."

Bess gave up and continued eating.

"What's more—" Mrs. Hughes was determined to make things plain—"your father's got bonds and certificates worth thousands of pounds there somewhere. *Now* do you understand someone must go through all these things with him? And I'm not, I'm sure." She picked up the knife and fork and dug the fork into the bacon. "I'd want to pull him to pieces—the young blackguard."

Bess stretched out for the coffee-pot. "Who's going to see him, if you don't?"

"There's only you left."

"Me?" The coffee-pot slipped and nearly fell from Bess's hand, and she looked at her mother with an expression closely resembling horror.

"You'll have to." That tightness around her mother's mouth settled the matter, and Bess knew she would have to obey.

"If you wanted someone to go through them," Bess continued to object; "why didn't you get one of those solicitors up?"

Mrs. Hughes tossed her grey head as though relinquishing hope of making her daughter understand. "I can't understand you to-day. You know how I abominate the very thought of a lawyer. What time did that blackguard say he was coming?"

"Half-past two."

"Then be ready when he comes. And get through with it as soon as you can, to get him out of the place. As long as he's in the house I'll have a feeling that we are being poisoned. I can't understand Mr. Blathwaite choosing a fellow of that sort!"

Bess deemed it wise to remain silent. Supposing her mother knew that this blackguard had asked her to marry him!

"I thought Mr. Blathwaite was a different kind of man. I'm disappointed in him."

And there the discussion ended.

Five minutes before the appointed time Griff was walking up the drive. He had not taken the short-cut across the fields because he knew the path led to the yard at the back of Wern; and as yet he could not bring himself to decide that he was on terms sufficiently intimate with Mrs. Hughes to warrant an entry into the house by way of the back door. He had smiled at the thought. But such was his attitude this afternoon. He was quite aware that he was cheating himself into a light-hearted mood, while feeling exactly the reverse. He had not the slightest conception what the character of his reception would be; there was no clue. Whom he should see, what he should encounter—not the remotest clue here, either. All he

knew was that as agent to Blathwaite he was going to select and have carried away those papers, books and deeds which were now his. Mr. Blathwaite had called upon Mrs. Hughes telling her of the appointment, and between them they had decided that the best arrangement would be for the new agent to go and see what did belong to the estate and what to Hughes.

As he walked up the drive Griff was fully aware that he was cheating himself into a feeling of "don't care." Characteristically, he hoped for the best and prepared for the worst. He felt that this visit, if he should meet Bess, would be momentous, that Destiny would be looming over him, that during this afternoon his future would be decided. There was uncertainty in his heart, and this was the first time he had felt it there.

He was passing through the gate at the top of the drive now, and the next instant the old house burst into view, long, low and gaunt. There they were—the small-paned flat casement windows with the sun shining upon them. Three sharp taps he gave with the tremendously heavy knocker, and the sounds seemed to rattle right through the house; and Griff wondered whether that uncertainty in his heart had anything to do with the sensation of hearing echoes bounding through the place.

A maid stood aside for him to enter, and now Griff's eyes were busy with his surroundings. He tried to stifle these feelings within him. This was the interior of the old Chapel home; he seemed to be at the very throb of that heart of family life.

This hall was a room in itself. Here on his left was the fireplace; against the wall was an old oak settle black with the years which had crept into its timber. Straight ahead was a gun cabinet holding half a dozen guns with their black barrels gleaming. And there in the far corner stood a grandfather's clock above whose brass face a little sailing ship was rocking to and fro most sprightly like a saucy, dancing, smiling little mischievous boy. And there, in the half gloom, were the upright rods of the ancient staircase.

"Will you come this way, sir?" And the maid led him into a room opening from the left of the hall. Her

stolidity steadied Griff. Her expressionless face seemed to him an index of the spirit of the household in agreement with those glances of condemnation which he had received from the women of the village. A maid in a blue cotton dress and a white apron to intimidate him? Griff's feet dug into the rugs and clapped on the bare boards of the polished floor as he followed her. "If you will sit down, Miss Hughes will be here in a minute."

He was now within what had always been known as the office. "What did that girl say?" he asked himself. "Was it Miss, or Mrs.?"

He walked to the table in the middle of the room and took a chair. Behind him was the fire; in front of him the table, and, completely filling the far wall, from floor to ceiling, were rows of shelves. The top four shelves were filled with black japanned boxes, and from the white letters painted on them to tell their contents he judged that there lay the legal paraphernalia of his future business. These black boxes were familiar, reminding him of Llewellyn and Macdonald's office in Cardiff. On his left stood a bookcase, and the books within the glass appeared uncommonly like ledgers. To his right, between him and the window, was a roll-top desk locked and mysterious. Behind the desk, in that recess in the corner, stood the safe, green and black in its silent secrecy.

Griff liked the look of the room; it was unlike an office, for there were the thick carpet and the small panes of the window deep in the wall. The room had a touch of cosy homeliness in spite of the shelves and the bareness.

But the handle of the door turned and Bess came in.

"Good afternoon," she greeted him, and immediately turned to the still open door before Griff had time to decide upon her expression. "You'd better come in, Polly. You can help to move some of these things." Bess entered with the maid behind her.

Griff was standing at the table, inwardly swearing at the presence of Polly. Even now he had not the slightest understanding of Bess's attitude. She looked unfamiliar, but uncommonly fine, in her black dress. There was the same low broad cut of the collar, but to-day the corners were down, secured to the front of the blouse, and discreet

in their discipline. Black seemed to set off her fair hair and light up that bit of pink under the slight tan of her complexion. But she looked infernally distant, with firm, unmistakable touches of that dignity and haughtiness for which he had no liking. The Miss Hughes, without a doubt.

"Mother thought one of us should come and get any private papers that might be here," she said, coming to the other side of the table and not looking at him.

"Of course." Griff was eyeing that confounded maid near the door. "Want to go through everything, do you?"

Distant—damnably distant.

"Mother thought we should. Here are the keys."

Queer that Bess should be handing him the symbols of his new authority!

"Very well. . . . She here to help?" he asked about the maid.

They examined the contents of the black japanned tin boxes—leases, plans, maps, surveys, minerals, repairs. He brought down the large books from the bookcase, and disclosed particulars of drainage accounts, rents, workmen's wages and gamekeepers' accounts.

And all the while Bess was imbibing these new impressions of him. Her previous knowledge had been of a private nature; she had never seen him at work before. Now, he appeared as though some super-energy possessed him, and she got an idea that she, as a friend, was far away from his mind. He was occupied, fully occupied, by the work he was doing.

When the shelves and the bookcase had been turned out Griff went over to the desk, selected the right key from the bunch, and when he had the top rolled up he nodded in Polly's direction and remarked, "Don't think we'll want her any more!"

"She'll be useful," Bess decided.

"All right." He tossed his head in resignation. "If you sit at the table, I'll hand some of these over, and you can have a look at them."

He had hypnotised Polly, and her opinion of him was

that he rushed one off one's feet with his forcefulness. One ran about the room, scurrying here and there, and all with such a good grace because he ordered one about so cheerfully. One could not possibly disobey, not even hesitate, not even think of disobeying. Polly again watched him. He had been right through every drawer of the desk, and now he was taking the bundle of papers from Miss Hughes, and now again he was swiftly sorting them—so swiftly that Polly was certain Miss Hughes was not following him. Three piles he was making of the papers, and as he divided them he kept saying—

"Private—estate—doubtful." And that was how he went on: "Doubtful—estate—private—doubtful—" So quickly! The bundle in his hand was sorted.

"We'll soon finish now," he told Miss Hughes when he had been through the safe. "That cheque-book and pass-book—private. These belong to the estate. Now about this money! I'll see how much belongs to the estate, and you keep the rest. That satisfy you?"

"That's quite right."

And now, all the business was finished.

Miss Hughes was standing, and her hands were hurriedly arranging the papers in front of her into greater neatness. Mr. Chapel was also standing, placing two brown leather bags of money into his coat pockets.

"You can go now, Polly," he said, just as though he had been her master. "Thank you very much. You've helped us quite a lot. . . . You can go," he ordered again, more sharply as he looked towards the door, for Polly was hesitating, considering that Miss Hughes was the one to obey now that the other work was done. But his eyes seemed to say that he would come over and help her if she did not move of her own accord.

Polly turned, and as she walked to the door she fancied hearing Miss Hughes stir to follow; but of that she could not be certain. Still, she should have waited for Miss Hughes to tell her what to do; but—with a man like that!

Bess did move to follow Polly, but a firm grip on her arm had restrained her. Immediately the door closed

she shook off his hand and faced him. And no longer was there any doubt in Griff's mind. She looked uncommonly fine in that black with the tall bookcase in the background. The fair hair over her forehead and the grey eyes that had laughed so often at him! But good Lord! She was miles away from him. Her body, usually so supple, was rigid. The straight nose was straighter than ever he had seen it before. Her lips, so full and red and round usually, were severely, damnably closed into a stern narrowness.

Opposition!—and he must fight. Change her into Bess the pal. Melt her—that was the word, the only word, for she seemed frozen, as cold as the frigid zone.

“How do *we* stand, Bess?”

He saw that his question moved her. He watched her place a hand on the table beside her pile of papers; a hand seemingly whiter than usual in contrast to the black sleeve.

“Please don't call me that again.” Her voice was horribly cold. It make him feel as though an icicle were running down his spine. “If you had the slightest sense of decency, you'd know how we stand.” She had not the least desire to go away now. “I'm sorry I ever knew you.” Her words were cutting into him; she was so scornful. “You know what's happened, and you have the presumption to ask how we stand? I think you're despicable.” There was the old trick of raising her head to look down upon him. “Now, perhaps you know how we stand.”

“M'm!” Griff watched her turn and go out. Yes, he *did* know. He shook himself. Best put the thought away for a time. He shook himself vigorously.

Polly was at the door, waiting for him.

“I'll send for those things,” he told her with his old cheerfulness in the hall.

Going down the drive he wondered whether he would always be able to throw it off so well.

Then that side of his nature which helped him out of difficult corners came to his aid. Very abruptly, he stopped under the trees. Remarkable! He had just

received the most scornful dressing of his life, and he had not made the slightest attempt to retaliate!

"Like a schoolboy," he admitted to himself. "Had to take a licking whether I liked it or not. . . . But it was Bess."

It was Bess, and he could not fight Bess. It was Bess—just Bess. Everything was explained.

IV

THE AGENT

THE first lesson Griff set himself to learn in his new life was that a landed estate is really a large industrial undertaking. The estate began to appear to him as a large factory, or an ironworks, or a colliery worked for profit, but perhaps under more humane conditions, for these farmers he had to handle were independent in spirit and called for tactful treatment.

Griff naturally possessed a genius for concentrated effort, and a month had not passed before he found himself grappling with problems in forestry, architecture, law, surveying and the like.

His room at home very quickly changed its appearance. The bookcase was now filled with those ledger-like volumes, while the wall facing the bay window was hidden by shelves similar to those he had seen at Wern; the black japanned boxes at the top and the large portfolios behind the sliding doors at the bottom. In the far corner stood a new safe, the door of which required some muscle to swing open. And very soon, on the wall in the recess near the window, a telephone appeared.

His first tour of the estate convinced Griff that if he were to be happy he must devise some swifter mode of travel. He wasted hours waiting for trains, and more hours in outlandish places where there were no trains at all. He hated the trouble of writing to farmers to meet him, and the thought of continuing thus year after year filled his energetic soul with horror. Then he decided to buy a motor-car, a low, two-seated, grey, swift, silent-running creature; and ever afterwards racing about the country filled him with delight. He soon became known to the indulgent police of many counties.

In his room at night he was busier than ever. Work, work, work—from morning till night, with hardly a moment for anything else. But work was enjoyable if congenial; he had been brought up in a school that taught love of work, and where an example of prodigious energy had always been set.

When September came along, he was able to blend a little pleasure with the work. Early one morning, he motored to Swansea with a double-barrelled gun at his side, and for the remainder of the day he inspected the farms of the three farmers he had invited to join him, looked into the preservation of game, examined the work of the gamekeepers and, incidentally, shot partridges. On another day he met Blathwaite at Bangor's place, and the three of them set out to examine property and shoot more partridges. When the winter came he would no doubt be able to take stock of the farmer's proficiency in hedging, and introduce a little fox-hunting into the study at the same time. But during those first months it was a hard grind to obtain a general mastery of the estate as a whole.

On the night Blathwaite had offered him the position, Griff had been elated, remembering his boyish estimate of Hughes's importance. But since, his fervour had cooled. It was all very satisfying to one's self-esteem to notice how the people of the village recognised one's eminence; it was agreeable to observe how one's significance on the Council was established; very pleasing it was to receive the salutes of the farmers and to have this sense of influence over the destinies of hundreds of families; and especially pleasing was it to know oneself as a force among all sorts and conditions of men. . . . But there was something empty about it all.

There was Bess.

Here lay the explanation of the emptiness, for what were all these things worth—this success, this newly acquired influence, this relative importance—what were they all worth without Bess? Life had been easy with him; but perhaps it was seemingly easy, for he had fought and worked hard, and his labour deserved success. And now the thing he wished for most was denied him! Maybe,

here was another of life's ironies which he was constantly meeting. Giving a man everything save the one great prize! Was he asking too much of life? Was he expecting too much? Life was complex.

But what was he to *do*? It never occurred to him to remain passive; it was not in his blood.

Somehow, he could not believe that Bess had used those words to him. He could still hear her voice, biting and scornful: "I'm sorry I ever knew you. I think you're despicable." Somehow, he could not believe that she had meant them. . . . He could do nothing; at least, not until Bess and her mother returned to Wern. They were away—where, he did not know. . . . He had a special talent for waiting, and the chance would surely come to speak to her, and—well—— Persistence is a remarkable quality!

V

BUSINESS

TOWARDS the end of October Griff was in his office at home one evening, reading the letters which had come by the six o'clock post. One, especially, interested him, and to read it again he took it with him when he sat in the armchair. It came from the agent of the South Western Colliery Company asking for an interview. Griff had not met Mr. Bowen yet, but had been looking forward to seeing him for some time. A large proportion of the Blathwaite income came from this particular company in rents, royalties and wayleaves.

Mr. Bowen was a particularly important man; he arranged the sale of the company's smokeless coal to the navies of many nations, and, among other things, he stood, so the rumour ran, in peril of being knighted when the New Year's Honours came to be scattered.

Griff got up from his chair to the telephone, got the number from the letter heading, and had himself "put through."

"Hullo! . . . Yes, I am Chapel." Something in the voice at the other end caused Griff to bristle. "Meet you at Cardiff? I can't. . . Impossible, I tell you. As much as I can manage to get back here by five. . . You'll be here to-morrow, then?"

Griff hung up the receiver with a smile. Mr. Bowen, evidently, considered himself one of those beings who should be chased about the country.

At five o'clock on the following day Mr. Bowen was facing Griff across the black rug of the office.

Mr. Bowen was a slight little man with a very large head and enormous corners to his white collar. Inclined to be bombastic in his manner he was, and feverishly

restless in his movements. Well known for his philanthropy and support of charitable institutions in private life, he showed none of these admirable qualities in his business transactions. A man of varied and immense experience.

The South Western Colliery Company had for some time been considering the question of extending their operations by sinking new pits on the Blathwaite property, and Mr. Bowen had arrived to discuss preliminaries by means of a friendly chat, as he very carefully explained to the Blathwaite agent.

Mr. Bowen now sat, jerking his glance about the room, as though searching for inspiration or a replenishment of that nerve force he so prodigally expended in his restless movements.

"Good stroke of business to-day, Mr. Chapel," he was saying in his heavy voice so disproportionate to his slight body. And then he rubbed his hands energetically together and looked searchingly at the younger man facing him.

Griff was sitting back in his chair, studying him. "Glad to hear it," he said. "What was it?"

"Big navy contract." Mr. Bowen was rubbing the knees of his striped trousers. "Switzerland—growing nation. . . . Ha! ha!" Mr. Bowen smacked his knees and laughed heartily. "Didn't come off, I see, Mr. Chapel. Always try that on people. You got no idea what enjoyment I get out of it. You ought to hear the questions I get on the Swiss Navy!"

"Very funny, must be," Griff agreed. Humour from a man of Bowen's disposition was dangerous. "But what about those new pits?"

"Of course—of course!" Mr. Bowen was nodding his large head, but it was not so much a nodding as a vibration. "Little weakness of mine, you know—to wander away from the subject. We'd better have a look at the map first, so that you can follow exactly what I mean."

Griff thought there was a great deal too much alertness in his way of getting to the table to allow many weaknesses to creep into his mental equipment.

"Here you are, Mr. Chapel." The little man had

unrolled an ordnance map he had brought with him, and now he was holding it on the table with outstretched fingers. "Hold that corner down, will you? I've got it all marked in red ink." He began to point. "Those two little crosses—there they are, look!—are the two shafts, upcast—downcast. That straight line shows the main line of workings. But this is what I want to show you. See those dotted lines? They're the siding. . . . Got a scale?" He measured. "The shafts are a mile to the railway. Keep that in yer mind, Mr. Chapel. A mile."

"Half a minute!" Griff crossed over to the shelves, and from one of the portfolios he got a map similar to the one Bowen was holding on the table. "Let me mark it on this. We can't advance very much till I know where we are. . . . That's the exact place of the shafts and workings, of course? That's your final decision."

"Oh no!" Bowen objected with horizontal vibrations of his huge head. "Oh dear, no!" He completely repudiated the idea. "Depends what terms we can fix with your estate."

"I see. I quite understand. But that's where the coal is?"

"To the best of our knowledge. . . . By the way, Mr. Chapel! Let's have a look at your estate map for this part."

Griff was placing aside his own map. "Now that's very queer," he lied; "but that very section was torn, and I'm having another copy made."

Mr. Bowen hurried back to his chair. "The Blathwaite people had a survey—a geological survey made about fifty years ago by a man called Reynolds. Don't suppose you know anything about it, Mr. Chapel! Surprisingly clever man; had a sort of instinct with the South Wales strata. Do you know if you've got his map?"

"I'm not sure what I've got there and what I haven't, to tell you the truth," Griff again prevaricated as he jerked his head at the shelves. "But I'll have a look and let you know."

"Now that siding, Mr. Chapel." Bowen was tugging at the lapels of his morning coat, somewhat puzzled by this young fellow's manner. "Mile long it will have to

be, as you remember. Dead money—dead money put into the ground." Here was the more real Mr. Bowen at last. "What are your terms for that land?"

Griff coolly crossed his knees. "Rents and royalties and wayleaves—all the same as before. You know the terms as well as I do."

Mr. Bowen began to get disturbed; his tremendous head again commenced its horizontal vibrations, and with clenched fist he struck the palm of his left hand to emphasise his objections.

"Never do, Mr. Chapel. As a man of business, I tell you it will never do. Useless sinking; no hope of success; *not* the slightest. We're putting a fortune into your estate, as you know quite well. We want more consideration from you. The Blathwaite estate is a regular millstone round our necks already. And just think, Mr. Chapel, what you'll lose if this coal is not worked on your property. Just imagine it for a second! Why——"

Griff interrupted him with a laugh. "We'll always be big enough to look after our interests; you can be sure of that, Mr. Bowen. . . . But I must say you're very pessimistic after that good stroke of business you carried through to-day!" Griff reached the cigarette box from the mantelshelf. "Have a cigarette," he urged in a friendly way.

Bowen puffed at his cigarette. "I've heard something about your *father*——" he said. His tone had changed, and there was between them now that hard understanding of the fraternity of business men.

"When d'you think you'll want that land to start the siding?" Griff asked at length.

"Well, not just yet."

Griff crossed to the shelves, and when he returned there was a map in his hand. "Here's the Reynolds survey that you wanted."

Mr. Bowen was instantly excited, for he leapt from his chair and gesticulated with his arms. "Have you got it? . . . Now why didn't you show it before?"

Griff spread the map on the table. "Didn't like your methods, Mr. Bowen," he said.

"Apologies, Mr. Chapel," soothed Bowen. "But you

did look rather young; and you know what business is. . . . Now let's have a look at it. . . . There's the brook. Here's the spot." His finger dug into a large patch of black. "That's quite enough, Mr. Chapel. There's no one ever understood the No. 3 Rhondda Seam like this Reynolds. . . . We might want that land sooner than I expected, Mr. Chapel."

Bowen seemed to have no desire to wait any longer, for he was pulling on his overcoat. "That little glimpse has saved us another survey, Mr. Chapel." He pressed his silk hat on his huge head. "Good-bye, Mr. Chapel." He shook hands and whispered confidentially: "Get a bit of money into this concern. Just to show there's no ill-feeling, I'll manage it for you."

So much for Mr. Bowen.

Griff moved across once more to the shelves as soon as Mr. Bowen was gone, and brought out the map which was supposed to be torn and away being copied. These estate maps were apt to reveal too much.

While examining this map, Griff made a discovery that made him stop and stare in amazement. To be absolutely sure he measured and examined again.

The main workings of this proposed colliery would cross a piece of land which did not belong to the Blathwaite estate. Not a very large piece; the estate map showed it as four fields—about thirty acres in all—

Very queer!

Griff lit a cigarette and began to think.

This looked uncommonly like a *chance*.

He walked to the top of the mountain that night to look around the subject.

VI

CHANCE AND THE MAN

AT half-past nine the next morning, Griff's car was climbing what he considered the most vile road it had ever been his lot to encounter. Running down the slope of the mountain three miles from Porth, being shaken uncomfortably every yard he went, Griff was not long in reaching the farm owned by a man named Richard Richards. Earlier in the morning, by judicious inquiry, Griff had found that Richards was also the owner of those thirty acres stuck so obtrusively in the midst of Blathwaite property.

"Oh yes, sir! I do know you right enough."

Mrs. Richards was dusting with her apron the settle near the fire of the kitchen into which Griff had boldly walked. She was a neat old woman, just the kind you would expect to find after learning she was the mother of four big sons. In a moment Griff had her at her ease. "Quite homely," as Mrs. Richards described him later; "the same exactly as if I was talkin' to one of my own boys. You wouldn' think, there you, he was Mr. Chapel the agent. Talkin' Welsh an' all, indeed to goodness!"

"Very good boys they are." Griff had got her to tell him of her sons, a very sure way of reaching her heart. "Only Tommy, my youngest! I don' know what to say about 'im. He's a nawful boy; but a good farmer, mind you!"

Then the story unfolded. Tommy—"A couple o' years younger than you, Mr. Chapel!"—was the black sheep, who had caused Mrs. Richards many sleepless nights wondering what was to become of him.

"Oh, he's a nawful boy; but a good farmer, mind you!"

And Tommy had at last got himself into difficulties.

"I was against her terrible at first, Mr. Chapel," said Mrs. Richards from the Windsor armchair opposite. "But Tommy did bring her here, and there was nothin' for it but she would help me with the tea. And I did take a likin' to the little thing, there you. I must say, she's very useful in the house. And these things will 'appen, as you do know. And I do think, indeed, she will make a very good wife for him. Indeed, I'm gettin' very fond of her. Yes, yes—goin' to get married next week. Only the wust of it is, his father won' do nothin' for um. Very funny, our Richard is like that. Once he have got his money locked up in securities an' things, he won' sell anything to have a halfpenny out of him. Very funny 'e is in that way."

"What's Tommy going to do when he's married?" asked Mr. Chapel the agent softly from the settle.

"Oh! 'Look around.' That's all I can get out of him, whatever that do mean . . . You must excuse me, Mr. Chapel, because I'm his mother, you see. . . . But I don' suppose you 'ave got a farm you could let him have? I never thought of it till this minute; but you askin' about him so kind-like—I did think of it at once." And then she began to plead. "He's a good farmer, mind you. And those wild boys, Mr. Chapel—they do often make the best men, if you 'ave noticed. And our Tommy is like that."

"But—even if I find him a farm he must have the money to stock it."

Mrs. Richards shook her head sadly. "'Tisn' possible. Our Richard is very funny. May as well ask him to give his 'ead as ask him to sell something. I 'ave coaxed and coaxed—but he won't."

Griff was very sympathetic. "I've got a little plan, Mrs. Richards. I'd like to buy those four fields you've got on the other side of the mountain. They're in the middle of our property, and they're not much good to your husband. Now if he would sell them, perhaps I could get a farm for Tommy, and you could coax the money for the stock."

"That's very good, Mr. Chapel. Only I'm afraid he'll want too much money for um."

"You think he'll sell them, then?"

"Them fields are the only things I've seen him willin' to sell. Mr. Hughes tried to buy them— But here he's comin', and you can talk to him yourself." And Mrs. Richards hurried out to meet her husband and explain the meaning of the motor-car and to acquaint him of the august presence in the kitchen.

Then Richards came in, an old man with hair and beard turned grey. To Griff he doffed his cap, and his manner was diffident without losing any of its independence.

"What are these roads you've got around here, Richards? Can't you get anything done to them?"

Richard had now taken the chair recently vacated by his wife. "Now that road," he said, drawing his hand over his shaven upper-lip—"if I've said about it once, I've said a hundred times—haven't I, Mary?" He made the appeal to his wife standing near the table.

"I'm sure you have, Richard," she seriously confirmed.

"Haven't tried in the right way, p'raps," suggested Griff from the table. "What Council are you under?"

"Your Council, Mr. Chapel."

"Written to the engineer?"

"Written to everybody, nearly, until I'm sick and tired of it. I wish you would do something, sir. It's a disgrace, it is. . . . If you've got no objection, sir?" Richards was exhibiting his pipe by way of asking permission to smoke.

"Smoke away," answered Griff, drawing out his case. "Have one of these?"

"No, indeed, sir, thank you! I can't make anything of um—can I, Mary?"

"No, I know you can't. It's only our Tommy do smoke them things."

"I do like a little smoke," Richard was explaining, "after my walk round the farm in the mornin'. . . . Reach me the tobacco tin down, Mary!"

Mary obeyed, walking across the hearth and bringing down the cylindrical tin from the mantel-shelf.

Subtle intrigue was out of place with a man like Richards, so, as soon as they were softly puffing, Griff commenced upon his business.

"I've called to see you about those four fields. I didn't know they belonged to you till the other day!"

"Oh dear me, yes! Bin in our family—how long, Mary?"

"Indeed, I couldn't tell you, Richard," came the answer from near the table; "'undreds of years, p'raps!"

"They're not much use to you," Griff contended. "You never do anything with them. They're quite wild."

"I always got a feelin' they are *there*, Mr. Chapel. And that's a lot."

"Perhaps you'd sell them?" hinted Griff.

"Not very particular," informed Richard with an aggravating indifference.

Griff ascertained the amount Hughes had offered ten years ago, repeated the offer, and made ready to go. "Think about it," he said again. "I'll be coming this way—Thursday to-day!—I'll be round next Tuesday. Think it over by then."

He shook hands with the pair of them, giving Mrs. Richards' hand an extra pressure, as is the habit of fellow-conspirators.

Griff went out of his direct route on his homeward journey to call upon the Council engineer.

"Dropped in to see you about it," Griff said affably, when the position of the road had been indicated. "Rotten state; and I'm thinking of sending in a bill for tyres. Can't you do something? At once, you understand! Where are the road gangs?"

"All tied up, Mr. Chapel."

"Now just to oblige me." Griff was extremely pleasant, with the other side of him just showing as his fingers drummed the table. "Couldn't you start doing something up there at the beginning of the week? You won't suffer for it, you know," he suggested further.

"I'll see what I can do, Mr. Chapel." The engineer, like the other Council officials, had decided that Chapel

was too great a force to have his wishes disregarded. Besides, Chapel's influence on such a question as an increase of salary— Griff, as his car ran past the gate of Bangor's drive, smiled sarcastically to himself. Remarkable what men will do! Not so many years ago he had been attacking Hughes for abusing his position as a councillor for the furtherance of personal ends. Remarkable how unscrupulous is human nature!

On the afternoon of the next Tuesday Griff was once more sitting on the settle in Richards' kitchen, this time smacking his breeches and gaiters with his riding-crop. This district, he had decided, was too rough for motoring, and he had ridden one of his father's ponies instead. Coming up the side of the mountain, he had passed a road-gang and a steam-roller busy at work, and on his entrance Mrs. Richards had snatched a moment to whisper: "Let 'im ask about the farm, Mr. Chapel. He do like to think he is doin' everything hisself."

Richards regarded Griff with a kind of awe. "What I bin trying to do for a lifetime, sir," he said; "and you bin and done it in a couple of days! They started on the road yesterday morning—didn' they, Mary?"

With a man in this temper, business on a very reasonable and advantageous footing was possible.

"And what d'you think of the offer I made you last week?"

For a quarter of an hour they haggled. The deeds were brought and eagerly examined for mention of Mineral Rights. They were there, intact.

"There's another little business, sir," Richard was saying, refusing to commit himself. "There's one of these boys here gettin' married."

"Oh! That so?"

"I don' suppose you got a farm comin' empty 'fore long? You know us. 'Tisn' the same as if strangers was askin' you. But if you've got one comin' empty, I should be very glad if you'd give this boy here a chance, Mr. Chapel."

"Well, I've got a farm, Richards, and if you'll sell me this land, I'm prepared to talk about it."

"Very good, sir."

Then the bargaining restarted; the land was sold—legal expenses to be borne by the purchaser.

"If he only knew!" Griff was thinking in his jubilation. "I'd give him another thousand—two—three thousand." Aloud he said—

"Now about this farm. It's a rule with me, Richards, never to let a man have any of our land unless he's going to stock it well and make the most of it. How's your son off for capital?" Griff caught Mrs. Richards' glance of gratitude.

"I was coming to that, Mr. Chapel. And if you wouldn't mind, I would like to have this business finished off as soon as you can. I'll have to help this boy, or I'll never have any peace with his mother."

"I'll have the deeds drawn up by two o'clock to-morrow, if you like; and I'll have the money ready as well."

And so it was arranged, Griff making the necessary notes from the title-deeds before departing.

"Tell Tommy to come and see me to-morrow night," he told Mrs. Richards out in the yard.

After passing the road-gang on the way home, Griff stopped the pony at the mouth of the lane leading to the four fields. Standing upright in the stirrups, he tried to catch a glimpse of his new possession, for these fields were not to be absorbed in the Blathwaite estate. They were to be his—Griff Chapel's—as the transfer deeds drawn up by Llewellyn and Macdonald to-morrow would show.

"It isn't so much the actual income," Blathwaite had explained over six months ago; "because you get hold of valuable information which you can always turn to very good account."

Griff mused as he stood upright in his stirrups: "Well—I *have* information that coal will soon be worked under these fields, and I *am* turning it to good account."

Then the immensity of the deal struck him. For the first time he realised its hugeness. And his eyes opened in disbelief that *he* should have carried it through—that the thing should have happened to *him*. If coal were worked under those fields, it would mean a safe annual

income in Royalties amounting to four or five thousand pounds for several years, and a further annual income of a thousand or more in Wayleaves for the remainder of his life, and probably for the next generation.

The enormousness of it all caused him to quiver with pleasurable excitement.

Was he lucky? Was life throwing things into his way? But was it luck, after all? Or had he trained himself to seize chances the instant they arose? It seemed that opportunity could not show its nose without his immediately snapping at it. His dealing with Bess was the only thing he had bungled.

It did not matter if it were luck. The land was his. He urged the pony into a trot down the hill. . . . Another of life's ironies—anything but the one great prize!

But thought of the manner in which Mrs. Richards had helped caused him to smile again. "And people imagine there's no sentiment in business," he thought, with a chuckle.

Griff did not know at the time—for he had no conscious ambition that way—but the possession of these four fields was the chief factor which enabled him a few years later to force his way into the Directorate of the South Western Colliery. And this deal with Richards was also the first of a series of moves which revealed his acumen, and made him in middle age one of the most powerful forces in South Wales finance.

Somewhere near the end of October Griff was in his office when the telephone bell rang. Looking at his watch he found the time to be nine o'clock, and he wondered who could possibly want him at this hour of the night.

"Hullo! . . . Oh, that you, Mr. Blathwaite?"

"Charlie and I," he heard, "have arranged a day's shooting at Neath to-morrow. Are you free?"

"Er—er—NO. Very important appointment in the afternoon."

"Thought you'd like to join. Good-night!"

Griff hung up the receiver, went back to the table and picked up the folded sheet of notepaper lying there. He

turned it over in his hand. Grey paper, small—so feminine! He read the note—

I have found something else. Can you manage to call here about four to-morrow afternoon, please?

B. H.

The note had been bothering Griff all the evening.

“Something else? What’s it all about? Has she found something else belonging to the estate, or does she want to give me a dressing? Anyhow, here’s a *chance*.”

VII

AT PORTHCAWL

BESS lived at Porthcawl during those months following the death of her father.

An enjoyable existence it proved at first, if somewhat uneventful; a change from the too evenly ordered life at Wern. There was the shopping in the morning; the drive after lunch with her mother and her aunt—Mrs. Hughes's sister, the widow of an extremely prosperous Swansea solicitor, who accounted for Mrs. Hughes's abomination of all lawyers. There was dinner in the evening, and then came a few hours' quiet reading afterwards; and bed at half-past ten. Nothing very exciting, although decidedly a change.

At breakfast Bess's aunt never appeared, for she was a self-appointed invalid, with a tendency towards dyspepsia and a touching carefulness regarding diet. Mrs. Hughes had not been a month in the place before her managing hands had gripped the steering gear of the household. And since her sister had always belonged to that shiftless variety of humans, there had been no awkward difficulties. Mrs. Hughes now arranged the meals, ordered the supplies, controlled the servants, and the house became a well-organised, perfect-working mechanism, such as Wern had always been.

They were at breakfast one morning, Bess and her mother, just as they might have been twenty-five miles away on the outskirts of Porth; and Bess was reading the only letter the morning post had brought her. It came from the family solicitors in Queen Street, Cardiff, and after reading Bess passed the typewritten sheet across the table to her mother.

Mrs. Hughes's comment was caustic enough. "I never

heard of such a thing. I suppose the father is as much a blackguard as his son."

The letters contained an offer, a very substantial offer, from Josiah Chapel for the purchase of Wern.

"Even if we thought of selling it—" Mrs. Hughes was dreadfully angry; you saw it from the way she viciously cut her bacon—"I'm sure those Chapels would be the very last. Write and tell these solicitors—and pretty sharp, too—that we don't want any offer from such people. Impudence!"

And Bess obediently wrote, for she quite agreed with her mother's opinion of the Chapels.

Later in the morning she walked into the town and ordered things for lunch; when the afternoon arrived she sat with her back to the coachman and accompanied her mother and her aunt on their drive for fresh air; when dinner was over and night came, the three of them went upstairs to the sitting-room, and while Bess read her book under the red silk shade of the electric standard lamp, her mother worked on the white shawl she was knitting and her aunt shamelessly dozed. At a quarter past ten the maid brought up the three glasses of hot malted milk on a tray, and the room awakened to consciousness again.

"It's very hot," Bess's mother remarked, taking out her handkerchief the better to hold the glass.

"It's very good for one," Bess's aunt repeated at intervals between her sips.

And Bess agreed that the malted milk was both very hot and very good for one.

All alone, up in her bedroom, Bess would heave a sigh unconsciously, without knowing how prophetic or how potential was that nightly sigh. Entering the room she turned on the light by means of the switch at the head of the bed. Usually she liked to lie reading for the first half-hour in bed; it was so cosy and comfortable. No need to stir and blow out a candle. One had but to stretch up one's hand to the wall—a click!—and out went the light. But to-night she did not read. She lay in the dark, listening for a moment to the faint hum of the sea in the distance. She was thinking of the letter which had come by that morning's post. It had troubled her all day. It had kept

challenging her to face and honestly understand the meaning of all that had happened during these past months. This letter brought back with it thoughts of Griff, and immediately Bess knew she had not been sincere with herself, not open, not frank, as she should have been.

For the first time in her life she differentiated between these two opposed modes of thinking: the traditional and the original. In the first, one thought exactly as one had been taught to think; one's mind worked in grooves worn deep by precedent—as others had always thought before. There was nothing individual in such a mode. For instance: a man who was the cause of the death of one's own father was a creature to abhor. Everyone agreed it was so. Her mother said it was so. It was right according to all general standards.

But there was a personal method of thinking—in one's own distinctive way—the way in which no-one else could think. The man who had indirectly caused her father's death was Griff, that great big boy who could laugh so merrily, who was so fond of bluffing, and who said he had never had a pal but her: that Griff who could be so sympathetic, who could understand so thoroughly.

But the world's way of thinking must be the correct way. It was unnatural to regard with any fondness a man who had done what Griff had!

She must not trust herself because her ideas were unreasonable. She must keep repeating that Griff was a monster, that he had killed her father—while in her heart she knew quite well that the opposite was true. Why? He thought more of her than he did of anything else in the world. He had told her. And he was the kindest, most sympathetic, most understandable boy that had ever lived. But her mother was right; certainly she was right.

Naturally her mother could not understand the feelings which had prompted Griff's father to make that offer. But *she* could; Griff had told her. Griff wanted to get back to Wern; Griff had told her. And what Griff told her she always understood; everything he said gripped hold of her; it sank into her very being and became part of her. The Chapels back in Wern! She understood, and as she lay in bed, listening to the low persistent hum of the tide,

she had a feeling that she was not doing her share to help them to get back. She understood, and there were to have been Chapel children back in Wern again. Griff had told her. Not in actual words, for there was never any need for Griff to say things in puny words.

But her mother was right. She ought to hate him; but it was her duty to forget him. Griff was a monster. She was a Hughes, and the sense of family was too strong to let her forgive. Griff was a monster. -

Then suddenly Bess began to find fault with her surroundings and her present mode of living. She thought of it as she sat facing her mother and her aunt on one of those afternoon drives. How Griff would have laughed at the idea of it! A girl tied eternally to the company of these two old women: one a pampered invalid and the other a dominating creature. A young life obsessed by the weighty responsibility of two beings arrived at old age! She thought of it again as the maid brought in the three glasses of hot malted milk at a quarter past ten that night, and as the three of them sat, like domesticated old frumps, sipping the hot malted milk.

"It's very hot," she heard her mother say.

"It's very good for one," came the support from her aunt.

But to-night Bess did not agree that the milk was very hot, or that it was very good for one, either.

"Aren't you going to finish your milk?" her mother asked as they rose to go to bed.

"I don't want it."

"But you ought to take it. It's waste leaving it."

"It's very good for you," came the support from her silly aunt.

Bess bade them good-night, and her comment on the occurrence as she stood within her bedroom door was—

"And I'm nearly twenty-six!"

Quickly, she turned on the light, and as she sat before the mirror of the dressing-table, taking the hairpins from her fair hair, her thoughts grew prodigal again.

"If anyone tries to crush your individuality," Griff had once said, "you've got to fight." She remembered

something else he had said, too! "You can't make up your mind. That's what's the matter, isn't it?"

Griff had always been the one to understand. Bess gathered together her hairpins, put them in a heap, and took up the brush.

And Griff had been right; quite right. It was Griff should be with them. Griff would teach them about the importance of their paltry afternoon drive for fresh air. He would be the one to tell her aunt exactly what he thought of that stupid, special diet for her dyspepsia. Griff would have let them know what he thought of that hot malted milk for supper!

She had laughed at him once for saying one must fight. But that only showed how stupid she was, and how marvellous was Griff. He had spoken from experience; he had been at Llandovery among other boys, and knew boys took advantage if one did not assert oneself.

She supposed she hated him now—but she was quite within her rights when thinking of him as he used to be, and when profiting from what he had told her.

It was when she commenced wondering how he liked his new work, what he might be doing—it was then she overstepped reason. Her fingers lingered over the second long plait; they loitered so much that at last they stopped. Her little gold watch on the dressing-table in front of her said it was five-to-eleven. What could he be doing now? Perhaps he had had a busy day and was tired. He seemed to be ever so far away. She listened for a moment to the tide humming its way up the sands. Did he think of her sometimes? She looked up, and the eyelashes in the mirror were wet.

On the next night, open revolt began. They were as usual in the well-furnished sitting-room, Bess near the lamp with the red silk shade, her mother knitting her white shawl and her aunt audibly dozing. At a quarter past ten the maid came in with her punctuality of doom. But to-night there were two glasses only, one for Mrs. Hughes and the other for her sister.

Mrs. Hughes put down her shawl immediately. "Where's your milk, Bessie?" She had very sharp eyes.

"I don't want any, mother." Bess looked up from her

book rather cautiously, anxious that the matter should end with her reply.

“Pooh! Bring another glass of milk,” ordered Mrs. Hughes.

Bess closed her book and got up. “D’you think I don’t know what I want, mother?”

“Sit down and drink the milk when it comes.”

Bess moved towards the door. “I don’t want it,” she said very calmly. “And I’m sure no-one’s going to make me drink it.”

She hurried to her bedroom, telling herself on the way that she was a coward. “Why couldn’t I face her to the end? I wonder would Griff laugh at me, or would he understand? You can’t fight everything at once.”

VIII

WOMAN

THERE was more revolt on the following afternoon.

The carriage was outside the door on the small semi-circular drive, the coachman was on his elevated perch, the two sisters were already in their places, and a maid was tucking a rug around their aged knees.

"Dear me! Where's Miss Hughes? Go and tell her we're waiting."

In a moment the girl returned with the astonishing information: "She's gone out."

"Gone out?" Mrs. Hughes was horrified.

"She said she was going for a walk by herself."

At that instant Bess was at the station, watching the passengers alight from a newly arrived train. She had come to the station because the bookstall here was the most up-to-date in the town, and as she returned down the main street she was disposed to be pleased with herself. There would be fearful trouble when she reached home, but she had been braver than she had considered possible, although brave only in a half-timid manner. Still, she was a step nearer freedom, and as she set off down the pavement her fair head was higher than ever it had been, her shoulders were very square, her carriage much freer and her bosom rose and fell as though already she were breathing a new air. There also came into her consciousness a touch of truancy, such as she had felt on that day of the picnic with Griff.

Her destination was decided upon, and soon she had left the street to cross the dunes, where her steps got slower because the sand was heavy.

Far away on her left were the villas, one of which was her aunt's beastly conventional prison; on her right were

the rocks and the sea, from which crept into her nostrils the energising ozone. She stood awhile, watching some rowing boats with the men in them small as dots. Farther out was a fishing smack, seemingly at anchor, being lazily rocked by the swell. Still farther out, against the horizon, steamed a massive ship, probably a collier just out from Cardiff or Penarth or Barry—whence? Maybe to the other end of the world. Why! the very scene screamed freedom. And she had meekly acquiesced to the tyranny of two old frumps in a stupid villa! She would come to these sands a great deal oftener to read and watch the sea and breathe in the freedom it so boldly taught.

Bess sat on one of the patches of coarse grass, took off her shoes to pour out the sand, and as she re-buttoned the straps she softly laughed, for this truancy was exactly what Griff would have enjoyed. For some time she sat and read; sometimes she raised her grey eyes to look seaward; and if occasionally her thoughts ran off in the direction of Porth it was because there was so much time for thinking, and because her thoughts were none too scrupulous in their methods and caught her unawares.

At five o'clock she reached home, but the trouble did not assume such fearfulness as she had anticipated, although it commenced hotly enough.

"What d'you mean, Bessie?" Her mother was dreadfully angry. "Where were you this afternoon?"

"I went for a walk."

Probably the sparkle in those grey eyes boded danger, for Mrs. Hughes's tone modified. "Is anything the matter with you? You'd better see a doctor."

"There will be something if I don't get more exercise." It was an evasive kind of bravery, but it sufficed; and Bess never more accompanied them on their drives.

Then came another letter from the Cardiff solicitor, with an increased offer for Wern, and Bess began to grow uneasy. What business had anyone to imagine he could possess Wern?

The third letter completely upset her. It asked them to name their own terms for the sale of Wern.

Their own terms! It just showed the character of the

man. Griff had once said that his father never stopped till he won. She began to feel as though Mr. Chapel had set a net, and that the cords were gradually tightening around her. He must have tremendous influence with these Cardiff solicitors, or they would have made him definitely understand that Wern was not for sale. It showed how dogged and persistent he was. He would not acknowledge defeat. A woman against such tactics was helpless. She had vague memories of how people, women especially, were often robbed of their property, and she knew the force of the family feeling in the Chapels. They could be hard. They would do anything before allowing themselves to be beaten. And there was Griff! Wern was his, if anyone's. And something seemed to tell her that the only person in the world to stop Mr. Chapel from getting Wern was Griff.

She felt as though something were driving her to that conclusion, and at last she became honest.

She had not shown these last two letters to her mother because she had not wished to hear the Chapels derided. And now at last she knew she had been afraid all along that someone else but Griff would get Wern. That was the truth. It was her destiny to bring Griff back to the old home, and she had been avoiding it. To her, Griff was the world; Griff was everything. And that meant—

Bess lay awake thinking of it; lay awake in the dark, listening to the hum of the tide stealing in through the open window.

She had been wrong all the time. Griff had said one ought always to look at things in the true proportion. And she had not. She had thought as others had taught her. . . . And suppose he had killed her father! Suppose he had even deliberately shot him with a revolver! Weren't those feelings within her greater guides than all traditions? Was not Griff more to her than any father? All these months she had been deluding herself into the miserable belief that she hated him, and every moment she had been thinking of him, wondering what he might be doing, trying to remember the sounds of his voice and listening to his step. Her father had tried to dominate

Griff, and Griff had fought. Griff had been right to fight; he was always right.

She was the only pal he had ever had, and she had forsaken him. The treachery! Just when she should have stood by him, she had turned disloyal. Turned traitor after he had said she was the only being close to him!

"I didn't mean it, Griff. I didn't mean it—I didn't!"

She had called him despicable. Called Griff despicable! She had said she was sorry she had ever known him. What did it matter if she were crying? It was time for her to cry. It was the only consolation she was ever likely to have.

"I've been a beast—a nasty beast."

And then everything in her mind was hushed by an overwhelming fear. "And now he won't want me. He won't want me. Of course he won't want me."

The thought was terrible. He had turned against her. He resented her insults. Griff was not the sort to take an affront lightly. And she could not blame him. Oh, what a fool she had been!

If only she could tell him how sorry she was! And she *would* tell him. She did not care a scrap what anyone thought. She would tell Griff she was sorry, and, perhaps, when he knew how really regretful she was, he might forgive her. If only she could be sure he would forgive!

She sat with her mother at breakfast next morning.

Mrs. Hughes's small body was very rigid; she bent her head over her plate in a most correct manner and masticated her food as though her sister's dyspepsia had taught her the advisability of carefulness. You read the strained relation of mother and daughter from their silence and their attitudes.

Bess, sitting there not half as erect as usual, looked across the table and wondered why she had ever been afraid of her mother. She kept on wondering until breakfast was ended, and then with a suddenness she spoke.

"I'm going home this afternoon," she said boldly.

Mrs. Hughes sat up as though galvanised. More of this defiance! "Going where?" Her lips were perilously tight, and her eyes were like steel.

"Home." Bess knew they would quarrel irreparably this morning; she had planned it should be so. She put her elbow on the table and her hands under her chin. "To Wern," she added, to make things plain.

Her mother regarded her hostilely and in silence for a few seconds. "But you can't go home." She was groping for her vanishing dominion. "I haven't made any arrangements to go home yet. I hadn't thought of going."

Bess answered calmly: "I don't think there's any need for you to come." She must be adamant, or perhaps she would break down and cause her mother to imagine she still held the mastery. "But perhaps I'd better tell you something first."

"I should think you had, because anyone more stubborn and more ungrateful than you've been lately, I've never seen."

The acerbity in her voice was just the fillip needed by Bess's uncertain bravery.

"I want to tell you something you didn't know before," she said. "It's about—about Griff Chapel." How queer it sounded to call him that! "I've known him for a long time."

"Known him?" Her mother was honestly puzzled. "Whatever do you mean?"

"We've been friends for a long time."

"Friends?" Her expression showed her immense surprise. "With that young blackguard?"

This maddened Bess. She had been a traitor once—but never again. "You mustn't call him that," she cried, clenching her hands on the white table-cloth. The tears of protection were not so very far away.

"Oh!" Her mother's lips tightened, and her tone was witheringly sarcastic. "When did you get to know him? When have you had the chance of being friends for a long time?" The recurrent downward sweep of her well-dressed head intensified the bite in her voice.

"I've been meeting him regularly." Never had Bess's tone been more sure.

"Very nice goings on; very proper, indeed. So you're deceitful, as well?"

"I suppose I am—from your point of view," came the answer to match the irony.

"And perhaps you're going home to see him?" was the goading suggestion.

"Yes, I am. I'm——"

"What?" Her mother was bending over the table; her eyes were wide open in complete disbelief. "Are you out of your senses?" But something within her said her daughter had passed beyond her control; there was a man in her life. "Have you forgotten he was the cause of your father's death? D'you know——"

"Rubbish," cried Bess impatiently. "And I'll tell you more. He asked me to marry him; and I'm going to——" Bess was quite firm, though she did not express that fear in her heart—"if he'll have me."

"Marry him?" It was too much for Mrs. Hughes. Her voice fell to a whisper, and she sank back into her chair. "You must be mad," she breathed.

"Perhaps I am—mad enough to know I shan't be happy——"

"Happy?" Mrs. Hughes sprang again into energy. "What happiness do you expect with a man like that? You're tempting Providence to blight your whole life. In a year he'll be ill-treating you; he'll waste all you've got; in the end he'll desert you. Don't you know his sort?"

Bess got up. "He'll have a lot more than I'm ever likely to have. And since he hasn't wasted his own, he won't waste mine."

"But think!"

"I have thought." Her individuality was at last recognised.

Her mother was now calmer. "Do you know what it means," she asked with deliberation, "if you marry that fellow? To begin with, I'll have nothing more to do with you."

"That's for you to decide." Bess turned to the door.

She was proud of herself, for she had not played the traitor. She had stood up for Griff. She had fought as he had always said she must. But at the back of her

mind was the faint consciousness of the cruel war between two generations. It seemed to her as though she had been forced to trample on parental control before she could reach her own happiness.

And even now she was not sure. There was always that terror in her heart that Griff would not want her.

IX

“ SOMETHING ELSE ”

THE sentences of that short note had kept running through Griff's brain all the night, especially the first : “ *I have found something else.* ”

Once again the heavy knocker at Wern awakened echoes that rattled through the house, and very soon Griff was passing through the hall, where he obtained hasty glimpses of the settle, the rugs on the polished floor, the gun cabinet, and of the old grandfather's clock with the saucy little sailing ship.

“ This way, sir ! ”

A smiling Polly was taking his hat, was opening a door on the right, and Griff was within what appeared at first glance to be a very homely room indeed.

The floor was similar to that of the hall, bare and polished, with rugs here and there. The room seemed not to contain a single cushion. All oak furniture, ancient stuff as black as the rafters of the low ceiling. Griff walked across the room, hearing the hollow sounds of his steps on the boards, and thinking as he looked around that there was some strong, almost primitive, simplicity about it all. This must be the Chapel furniture old Betsy had spoken about so often !

Griff sat in the stiff armchair on the hearth and felt his feet sink into the white sheepskin rug.

The fire burning on the floor far back in the chimney recess must have burnt on this spot for centuries. Odd to feel that in this same armchair with the carved back Chapels had sat generation after generation ! And it required no imagination at all to see those small chairs drawn up and a whole Chapel family sitting at a meal around the table. At that old sideboard against the back wall a Chapel wife must often have stood, handling these

very pieces of blue china, as likely as not. On that carved bench across the corner on the other side of the window probably a Chapel had rested after a hard day's shooting. The leather screen facing him would somehow not give up any memories.

Remarkable! Remarkable to be here with these warm memories around him! The dreams awakened by this bare, polished room with the black rafters were unending.

But Griff turned to watch the door opening and to see Bess coming in. He followed eagerly every movement of her, for the first impression he got was of Bess the friend.

"I thought you'd come," she said.

There was something of the old intimacy in her voice, something of the old friendship in her eyes. Her body was so supple as she half stooped with her hand on the knob, and there was the same curve of her neck as her fair hair almost touched the panel when she closed the door. But the next impression was of the formidable Miss Hughes, and all because of the rustle of her black dress as she moved from rug to rug across the bare floor. Griff had never before seen her so well dressed; and if she had put on this gown to terrify him she had succeeded already. The fact that she was rather tall and broad-shouldered made her more formidable, and being fashionably dressed in black—

Distant! Abominably distant!

Bess took up the poker, and, stooping on the white sheepskin rug, stirred up the fire burning in the recess. She said: "It's beginning to get rather cold, don't you think?"

But all the time her mind was busy thinking of these strange ideas of Griff. He had changed. She dared not look at him again; but he had changed. Even his clothes were altogether different. He wore a light suit of brown tweed; his boots were brown and stronger than those he used to wear; his collar was lower and his black knitted silk tie was very thick, the knot was so lumpy. He was so prosperous looking, so well-to-do in his appearance, so important looking.

"I suppose we must expect some cold now," she added.

But the change was not only in his clothes. He was different in every way. He had left her behind. He was an important man-of-the-world, and she was the horrid beast who had insulted him. "No, I don't think it will

be very cold yet," he was answering. And he was so horribly polite. She had often rebuked him for his slang, but she preferred the most atrocious slang in the world to this calmly even polish. She got up and went to the table, her hands behind her gripping the edge. She had lost him. A man like him would not want a girl like her. What a fool she had been, throwing away all chance of happiness! He met more people than formerly, and that explained his cosmopolitan manner. Probably he had met some girl who had set her cap at him. She could picture that girl: a mean cat of a girl without a single idea regarding decency. These girls of good families were beasts, and would hunt a man like Griff in a most unmaidenly way.

Politeness is an admirable quality, but it fell woefully in Griff's estimation during these first minutes. She was polite, meticulously polite, as she stood leaning against the edge of the table, talking nonsense about the weather. And he, not to be outdone, it seemed, must behave quite as correctly.

"You wanted to see me," he said at last, unable to stand the strain any longer. "I got your note last night."

"Yes, I wanted to see you." Bess looked up a moment and then dropped her glance to the white sheepskin rug. Behind her back her hands were nervously clutching at the table. She did not know how to commence. But she was determined to tell him, and the new effort of determination only caused her to appear more distant.

"I wanted to apologise for the way I spoke to you."

"Apologise?" Griff opened his eyes. But there she stood, and his suddenly born hope died. Polite apology, he presumed.

"Please don't say anything till I've done. . . . We've been at Porthcawl for the last six months."

She knew now he thought nothing of her, or he would not be so casual. He had always repelled an affront. She had insulted him, and he was keeping her in her place, at arm's length. But she had made up her mind to tell him how sorry she was. She crossed her feet and looked down into the fire.

"You know those sands?" She tried to speak more

buoyantly, but the dread at her heart was so depressing. "I've spent ever so much time alone on them. I've had time to think of everything."

Griff sat more erect and watched her more closely. She baffled him. Had her voice and manner changed, or was he deluding himself?

"Oh yes," he said; "I know those sands."

And then, in a flash, the character of everything was altered. She must win him. She must make him forgive. Explanations and apologies, as such, were useless. Years and years of dismal misery showed themselves to her as a future without Griff. Happiness was the most important thing, and then her nature got the mastery; she became the woman. Something greater than herself got possession and drove her, warned her of the terrible punishment were her destiny not fulfilled.

"I used to walk along those sands every day, thinking of what I had called you." She was the woman now. The feminine in her was fighting for its existence. Her eyes half closed, her fair eyelashes looked long and sweeping; her voice softened. Nature was now in command, and Bess in the struggle became alluring. "You used to say we should look at things in the true proportion." He must be made to understand that his opinion was the mightiest in the world. She valued it above all else. His judgment was the most marvellous. "And I've been trying to see things as you said I should—in the true proportion." She was honest, nakedly honest with the dishonest tactics of her sex, desperate for all the quietness of her manner. Her voice was sweet, throwing out those magnetic shafts to capture him. Her face and manner were sad and pathetic, as though all hope in the world were gone. Her small handkerchief was in her left hand, rolled nervously into a ball. "And I found out that I was wrong." No use appealing to his reason with an explanation. "It's you were r-right." Her voice caught and gulped in her throat; her eyelashes grew wet. "It's you were r-right. And I called you despicable." She sniffed and dabbed her eyes with the handkerchief. "I said I was sorry I ever knew you."

As in a dream, Griff watched her. He heard her voice

and his shoulders shrugged in perplexity. Her voice seemed slowly to hypnotise him and the tremor in her throat seemed to grip his diaphragm like a vice. She thrilled him, pierced that vulnerable part of his manhood, played with his emotion—won him. He hung on every word that fell from her red lips. The wet eyelashes shattered him. The shapeless ball of a little handkerchief unnerved him. Like a man hypnotised by surprise he stared at her. Slowly, as in a trance, he got up and dragged his way to her, something within him being drawn by that magnet within her. His hand crept along the edge of the table until it touched her hand, warm and soft. But his physical touch seemed only to make her sob all the more. She wept openly and her shoulders shook most pitifully. Once, she seemed to shrink under his touch.

"Don'—don't cry," Griff begged.

"I'm a be-beast," she sobbed. "I'm a nasty beast."

"Don'—don't cry," he pleaded in a whisper.

"But I am. I called you des-despicable. I said I was sor-sorry I ever knew you. And now you hate me, and you won't forgive me. I know you won't, and I don't care what happens to me. I don't care what happens." She freed her hand and buried her face in her handkerchief.

"But don't—don' cry. Don't cry, Bess. . . . Bess, don't cry." He put his arm around her shoulder and felt her body shaking.

"You won't want to marry a beast like me, and I don't care what happens." She was inconsolable.

"Eh?" Griff cried wildly. "What did you say? Bess! What did you say?" Rebuff or no rebuff, he put his hand under her chin and drew her to him.

And Bess, impulsively clutching at his coat, looked up at him unbelievably.

"Griff! Are you friendly? Say," she insisted; "are you friendly?"

"Course I am. But don' cry any more."

"And you want to marry me?"

"Of course I do."

Impulsively, she put her arms about his neck, pulled down his head, and kissed him: "Griff! I don't care what happens now you're friendly."

X

ACTUAL MIRACLES

GRIFF was never able to understand exactly how events happened on that astonishing afternoon. He had vivid recollections of coming to Wern, uncertain of the purpose of his visit. He remembered being in the bare and polished room with the old Chapel furniture. And then, suddenly, he seemed to have awakened and found himself in another room: the drawing-room with its carpet of a delicate shade of maroon. A woman's room. And it was here he had roused himself to find Bess sitting beside him, handing him tea in the flimsiest of cups and inviting him to buttered toast and Welsh cakes.

A miracle!

"Quarrelled with your mother? Never mind. I'll get Saunders to design us a house, a pretty affair; not too big at first. I didn't tell you, did I? But I made a fine deal the other day. Bought four fields where coal's going to be worked. We'll have any amount of money in a few years, Bess. Then we'll get Saunders to design a bigger place. Where shall we build the first house?"

Then Bess got mysterious. "You *are* a stupid, Griff." Marvellous how quickly a woman's tears clear away! "You needn't build a house at all."

"Got to be practical, you know," Griff suggested. Events had remained long enough in the incomprehensible.

"I think we'll live here—in Wern."

"I give in. You'd better explain. Can't make out anything this afternoon."

"Well——" More mystery. "Father left mother his money, and left Wern and Penlan to me."

"Whew-ew-ew!"

"You're wonderful, Griff. Going to take me without anything, weren't you?"

Griff never troubled to examine his good fortune too closely, for there was too much of the superlatively miraculous about it all. He accepted life's verdict, and did not question.

But the months had passed since then; the villagers had had time to cease gaping in wonder; and Bess and Griff had lived together at Wern over a twelvemonth. For a year the Chapels had been back in the old home.

What puzzled Griff for some time was the eminence on which he was suddenly placed. By intuition he gathered that he was being presented to the maids and all the others about the house as a mighty being whose wrath, once aroused, was a dreadful thing. Every word he uttered was absolute law, and the house was made to revolve about him. It made him suspicious at first.

"Seems as if she's pulling my leg," he said to himself in his slang. But gradually he got to understand that Bess really did consider him the most important being in the whole world; the most wonderful thing God had ever created. And the marvel of it all was that he, on his part, was inclined to be afraid of Bess in certain ways.

Wonderful, this intimacy with women! Inexplicable she was; paradoxical.

When they had been married six months Bess received a whole-hearted abettor of this canonising of Griff in the person of old Betsy Michael, who left the Windgap to come and live at Wern. The explanation of the change lay in the fact that his cough and his asthma had at last carried off Francis. A severe cold caught in the depth of winter developed into pneumonia, and he died with the assurance that his soul was saved. And so it came about that Betsy returned into the Chapel family, to the shrine where she had always worshipped. An older Betsy, certainly, for she was approaching eighty; but age had not begun even to daunt her.

"Jump over your 'eads, 'fore you have time to turn round," as she often told those girls in the kitchen.

Her position was one of dignity, second in command to the mistress, who was a "sweet lickle thing," as all the

Chapel wives had a habit of being. From the master Betsy had received strict orders not to do any hard work; but as the months passed and the mistress got more indisposed, Betsy gradually assumed the position of housekeeper. Her waddling, irregular steps could be heard moving energetically around the kitchen, through the hall, up the stairs, through the bedrooms.

And so this very happy year passed.

For Bess it was a completely new existence; none of the old restricting narrowness; none of the questionings of her doings. Griff had not the least notion of conventionality. Socially, also, her interests widened, for Griff and she often dined with the Bangors, who quite as often came to Wern. Once they had been to Mr. Blathwaite's place in Bedfordshire. Sometimes Griff brought home a member of the Council or a business acquaintance. And occasionally—delightful evenings!—he would drive her to Cardiff in his car, take her to dinner at a restaurant or to his uncle's, and then to a play at the New Theatre. They were always such close friends.

On this particular night they were alone. It was a week before the birth of their child.

When dinner was over Griff stood up and pulled down his waistcoat. Under the light of the hanging lamp he looked a sturdy figure there in his brown tweed suit. "Now for that walk," he said. "How long before you are ready?"

"Ten minutes," answered Bess. "Go 'n' have a smoke, Griff. I know how impatient you get waiting for me."

Inside the room with the old Chapel furniture he stood a moment on the sheepskin rug, looking down at the fire burning in the sunken grate. His out-of-door life was now completely stamped upon him, and with his brown boots deep in the white rug he looked a solid figure which would require a large amount of physical force to move. He was so compact; still so athletic. When he stretched his hand up to the high mantel-shelf to get his cigarette-box from among the brass candlesticks, there was such latent power in the movement of his arm. Although at ease after dinner, he still gave that impression of bodily vigour, for as he kicked the chair into position he suggested so strong a sense of subdued energy. He looked the country gentle-

man to perfection now: clean, sinuous, healthy. And his broad countenance intensified the impression. After lighting his cigarette, he threw the match into the fire and sat down. As he quietly smoked he sometimes drew a finger along his closely clipped moustache and sometimes glanced at the brown boot dangling with the shine of the firelight upon it. Suddenly he tightened the black silk knot of his tie and pushed the ends farther down under his waistcoat.

"Life is a fine thing," he half whispered to himself, with a smile that revealed his teeth. He felt so contented. What a glorious time this last year had been. He had evolved, had discovered himself. Someone who understood him through and through always near; warm friendship always at hand; the most marvellous girl ever created as his wife.

Bess opened the door and stood on the threshold. "Ready, Griff—as soon as I put my coat on."

As he helped her on with her long, thick, loose, navy-blue coat he thought she looked paler than usual to-night, and he wondered whether her high mood was but something to deceive him. One never could tell with these women. He pulled on his brown motoring coat and watched her dig a hatpin through that small cap arrangement which looked nothing and yet had cost such an amazing amount of money. From his pocket he took out a white silk muffler and tied it around her neck, placing the ends within her coat. She liked his muffler, she had often said, because it felt so manish against her skin. Griff put his hands on her shoulders and held her at arms' length. There was something so frail about her appearance to-night—so girl-like: the small velvet hat, her fair hair, her pale face, the white muffler under her chin. "For once in yer life I think you're good-looking," he said.

"You've said that before, Griff; so it can't be only *once*."

They passed down the drive, through the bottom gate, and walked in the direction away from the village. They went very slowly, Bess chattering all the time. She chattered so much that Griff got suspicious. Had it been lighter he could have seen and read the expression on her face. He had never been able to grasp the subtler side of Bess. He was able to go so far—up to a certain point—in understanding her, but beyond that point his ideas got nebulous.

He knew she could cheat him into imagining her cheerful when she really felt the contrary. On their return he grew more sure of her mood, for she had become silent. And because of the silence between them, the sounds of their steps on the drive seemed harsher, the darkness appeared to be deeper and the wind seemed to moan among the trees more sadly. His certainty of her depression increased as they got near the house, for her fingers had closed around his arm unconsciously, until her grip was very tight.

He said nothing, however, until they were back in the old room and he had helped her to doff her coat, and she stood with her expansive blouse collar up around her neck. Then he took her by the arm and led her nearer the fire.

"What's the matter, Bess?"

"Matter?" She pretended to be puzzled. "Nothing. Whatever makes you think that?"

"You're hiding something."

"I'm not, Griff."

Griff drew her closer. "Now, Bess!"

"I was thinking——" His sympathy had unnerved her, and with her natural impulsiveness she gripped the lapels of his coat and buried her face between her hands. "I was thinking of what's going to happen. Sometimes I'm so afraid, Griff."

Griff said nothing for a moment. He seemed to catch a glimpse of that fear of the unknown which terrifies a woman at such times as this. For a second he saw the ordeal through which she must pass.

"Don't look at it in that way, Bess. Show me those little things you were talking about last night."

She had brightened now. Marvellous thing a woman!

"You always cheer me up, Griff. You're wonderful. There, I'll give you a kiss. I've always been afraid of something, haven't I? Don't be ashamed of me, Griff." Then she laughed and pulled down his head so that she might impulsively push her warm lips against his. "I'm a lot braver than I used to be, aren't I?"

"You're a regular hero," Griff affirmed, smoothing her hair over her forehead.

"I'm not such a coward as I used to be, am I?—am I, Griff?"

XI

JEALOUSY AND RESENTMENT

CHAPEL and Jane sat together at dinner.

The back room at Garth was bright and cosily warm, for the strong light of the lamp hanging over the table threw brilliant rays into every corner.

Jane bent forward her head, and began transferring the apricots from the glass dish to the two plates in front of her. And all the time Chapel watched her. He watched her in an oddly furtive kind of way, with his eyes rather bright, reminding one of the manner his eyes had followed her—on that day of Hughes's funeral—as she left the bedroom after acting the valet; reminding one of that instant when the light in his eyes had swiftly changed and he had observed how trim was her figure, how elastic her step, how pleasing her manners, and how erect she held her head and her slight body.

There were slight clicks of spoon and fork against the glass as she raised the apricots to the plates, and once more a click as the spoon touched the spout of the white cream jug so that no drops might fall and soil the damask table-cloth.

But how small, he observed, were her hands, and how well she kept them. Her arms within the close-fitting black sleeves were so slender; so slender that he could easily snap them between his fingers. But that was a peculiarity of her: small and yet so efficient. Her black dress, uniform of the staid housekeeper, set off so boldly the paleness of her face, and that thin fringe of white around the top of her black collar made her look so matronly—ridiculously matronly. She was so tiny. It was incongruous that she should be so efficient.

"Here you are, Mr. Chapel." She quickly handed him

the plate with the yellow fruit swimming in the cream, and as she spoke her voice was low with that mixture of sadness and womanliness.

She was on the wrong side of forty by now, but to Chapel she was young, because she was so active, so diminutive, so slender. Those few streaks of grey in her hair were accidents; the thin network of thready lines beneath her eyes was a deceiver. It was on the roundness of her bosom as it rose and fell so regularly his mind liked to dwell; upon that wistfulness, that innate refinement, that absurdity of her matronliness—for they were the real Jane. She was such a tiny little thing in comparison to him. And this something—almost insignificance of build—appealed to and drew his masculine massiveness.

“These apricots are very nice, aren’t they?” she asked, looking across at him.

“Where did you get them?”

Once, she would not have dreamt of addressing him with so “thin” a question. She had noticed the slight difference in his manner directly Griff had left home. Perhaps with two such strong personalities in the house absolute calm was not to be expected. The house was not large enough to hold the pair of them. There was, however, no longer that strain to be felt, and, although the personality now dominating was forceful enough in all conscience, the fact remained that no opposing element existed, and the result was this greater feeling of ease and restfulness. At least, this was Jane’s explanation for the increased humanity of Chapel’s treatment of her.

“I’ve got news for you,” she said when he had finished dessert.

He did not speak, but slowly wiped his mouth with a vigour that made one think he wished to rub away his lips. He put down his table-napkin and turned his hard glance upon Jane.

“There’s a son up at Wern,” Jane went on, searching for the effect.

His brows puckered, and he exclaimed, “Oh!” He was inscrutable, and Jane was vexed.

“Yes; since this afternoon.” For her it was a great event. Griff had a son, and Jane was excited. Chapel’s

coldness disappointed her. She had not expected him to grow ecstatic, but he could have shown some feeling. She could not understand him though she had studied him for over twenty years. It was useless saying he had no feelings; she knew better. Her own presence at Garth gave the lie to such a contention.

She got up and placed the copper kettle on the fire to make herself some coffee. And again Chapel's eyes followed her. He turned his head and saw her cross the floor; saw her stoop, and noted the curves of her slender figure. Now the trim black shoe was in sight, and the flames lit up her pale face and gave her cheeks an unnatural glow. He jerked back his head when she made a movement to rise. Hurriedly, he took hold of his glass, gulped down the port, kicked back his chair and the next instant his heels were digging into the linoleum as he hastened to the door. It seemed as though he were calling upon his will to control some mad impulse. He appeared to be battling with something.

Inside his study, he walked backwards and forwards for some moments, his hands tightly clenched at his sides and his great shoulders hunched. Then growing calmer he stooped to turn up the wick of the reading-lamp on the pedestal desk. The light, cast downward by the white glass shade, shone upon his tough lined face, and for a moment his long teeth bared as in slyness. His short hair was quite grey, but there still remained the greyhoundish leanness of features. And now as he smiled, one caught sight, on the corner of one of his eye-teeth, a speck of gold stopping, hardly bigger than the top of a pin. Turning, he stepped across the hearth and selected a briar pipe from the rack on the right of the mantel-shelf—a slim briar, plain, without any silver band, with the wood of the bowl as black and polished as the vulcanite mouth-piece.

Jane's news had recalled Griff to his mind, and once again the old jealousy had sprung into life. He was remembering a conversation he had had over a year ago with his cousin David.

"Don't you know, either?" And David had bubbled over. "Going to marry Hughes's daughter. Oh, it's all

right. . . . Hughes the agent's daughter. . . . Take it from me, Josiah, that boy's bigger than either of us. You're worth a tidy little bit, I know; and I've made some sort of a reputation on this circuit; but— Don't you see what it means? . . . Hughes left the old place to the girl. Yes, yes; I've been making inquiries. The Chapels are going back to Wern. . . . Always thought he'd do something big. Leagues in front of either of us, Josiah!" And the barrister had chuckled as a sage might over the consummation of his prophecies.

And to-night again as he gripped his pipe and smoked, Josiah writhed under the lash of his jealousy as he had writhed under the enthusiasm of the lawyer. The youngster was always having the advantage over him. It was he should be doing all these things, and not his son. Always in essentials his son stepped in front of him. It was his son had quarrelled with Hughes; almost could Chapel have been jubilant over the agent's death had it not been Griff who had paid the last score. And then the steps and stages which must have led up to this marriage! A reasonable person would have imagined that indirectly causing the death of a man would have been sufficient to arouse everlasting enmity between two families. Instead, his son had married into the family and, more, he had in a way taken their very home from the Hugheses. And his father was envious, because he would never have had the cool audacity, the easy certainty to contemplate, much less bring about, such a result.

His pipe went out and he banged it on the desk.

The same kind of thing had happened when his son had taken over the management of the Blathwaite estate. Two houses on his hands were no deterrent; what the youngster did was to leave the houses to Graig and, consummate impudence, when he had no further use for his general foreman, he sent Graig to his former master to seek employment.

There was another point on which he was envious. He had not that freedom among men which Griff possessed. Certainly, he himself met and turned among the most powerful men of South Wales, but as a matter of business. Just now he was constantly meeting Cardiff's public men,

for he was constructing a reservoir for the Corporation. But it was this hard-headedness of business brought him into constant contact with them. To them he was the most important Ferro-Concrete contractor in Wales, and nothing more. That social part of a man's life was missing; and there was a vast difference between being received and acknowledged as a force on account of one's financial position and being received and acknowledged as a man. A world of difference. His son had these things.

He knew what it meant to make men tremble, for he had seen it a month ago at a meeting of the shareholders of that new railway under construction from Cardiff to the Rhondda. The number of shares he held made him a power to be feared and consulted. But that was financial power. Never had he possessed the power to make or unmake the chairman of a council; never had he had the option of accepting or rejecting a vice-chairmanship.

That was the kind of power he desired; it was the kind of power the old Chapels had possessed. And it was this personal power that built up a family and gave it eminence.

He suddenly determined to think no more of the subject; it only enraged him, and there was work to be done. Getting up from the chair, he moved to the desk as vigorously and as energetically as ever in spite of the fact that he was approaching sixty. Sitting in his revolving chair, he tugged at one of the drawers and, after bringing out a plan, he spread it upon the flat top of the desk. It was a plan of the reservoir he was constructing, an intricacy of white lines upon waterproof blue paper. He brought from his waistcoat pocket his eyeglasses and fixed them on his nose. Pulling the chair nearer the desk, he drew his brows into a frown in an attempt to concentrate upon the drawing. But he seemed not to have the usual control over his faculties. Shaking his shoulders in angry impatience, he moved the lamp a few inches farther away, and then, still unable to concentrate, he took up the slim old pipe, filled and lighted it, and tried again.

But this envy had got hold of him. Only a week ago he had had another conversation with David, whom he had met at the official opening of the dock which had taken him four years to construct.

"Heard the latest about him?" David Chapel seemed to take a delight in hunting up these accounts of his nephew. "He's got hold of about thirty acres in the middle of that land the South Western Colliery are just going to work. Bowen, their agent, told me about it, and his language was rather rough; but he had to admit that Griff was a smart young devil. He let them think it was all Blathwaite property, and now he's having a proper little game with them. . . . How did he get the land? . . . Bought it for a song, and he'll make a fortune for himself. Bowen thinks if he's got many tricks like that up his sleeve, Griff's going to be somebody."

Chapel crossed his legs under the desk. The same thing again! An easy progress through life. Not only a force socially, but here he was showing signs of becoming a power among business men—a financial power.

But the bitterest fact of all was this possession of the old home. The Chapels were re-established beyond a doubt.

"Damn the pipe!" Nothing seemed to be right. Even this infernal pipe would not draw. He took it from between his teeth and dropped it so that there lay a small heap of ash on the surface of the desk.

There was a knock at the door and he raised his head. His bass voice snapped out: "Come in."

The door opened and Jane entered. Immediately, the scowl disappeared from Chapel's face, and a close observer might have suspected the lurking of a smile. Jane stood a second with her hand on the knob of the door, for she was uncertain of the manner in which he would receive her. It was a rule that he was not to be disturbed.

"Can I talk to you a minute, Mr. Chapel?" she asked with a great deal of hesitation. "If you're not busy," she added hurriedly.

"Come inside," Chapel invited, folding the blue plan and replacing it in the drawer. She never bothered him with her housekeeping, and when he saw her standing in the gap of the half-open door he thought he discerned nervousness in her manner. "Sit down," he said, bending to shut the drawer.

As she came across from the door he turned in his

revolving chair, rested his elbow on the desk, his head on his hand, and then watched her seat herself. How gracefully she moved! It was a pleasure to watch her tiny daintiness. He was now more certain of her nervousness, for as she began to speak she took hold of the cloth of her skirt beside her knee and rubbed it between her fingers.

"It's—it's about Willie," she commenced in her low voice, suddenly growing bolder. "I don't want to bother you, Mr. Chapel, but you know more about the world than I do; and I thought perhaps you would give me your advice."

What a child she seemed. He smiled to help her. "What's it all about?"

"I don't want you to think for a minute I'm not grateful for everything you've done in letting him be articulated to your engineers."

"Now what is it you want to ask me?" questioned Chapel in good humour. These little women's methods of coming to the point were amusing—if aggravating.

Jane appeared to compose herself. "I—I've had a letter about him from his father."

Chapel started.

"His father?" It had scarcely occurred to him that such a person existed.

"Yes." Jane was more herself now that the first barrier was passed. "I have always heard from him, regularly—about once a year."

"I see." Chapel began to marvel at this hidden part of her life. "And now he wants to do something for Willie?"

"Yes. He knows that Willie will soon be passing his final examinations, and he thinks he might help him to get a good appointment."

"And you want my advice whether to let him help or not—that it?"

"If you please, Mr. Chapel. I'm sorry to trouble you."

"I see," he said, when he picked up the pipe from the desk. "What's he done for the boy already?" he asked bluntly. He seemed to be annoyed. "Don't answer if you'd rather not," he added gruffly.

Jane was accustomed to his hardness. "He hasn't

done anything, Mr. Chapel. But I may as well tell you," she continued quickly, "so that you won't mistake him. He's always offered to do something, but now I don't want to be unfair to Willie."

"Then why the devil didn't he marry you?"

His tone startled Jane, but after regaining her composure she smiled, as though she were about to attempt the impossible in seeking to make a male mind understand. "It would have pulled him down," she explained very simply.

Once again Chapel read that ridiculous, abnormal common sense in her nature. "Did he say that?"

"I said it, Mr. Chapel."

And there, it seemed, must end the revelation of that hidden part of her history.

But Chapel had forgotten his habit of impersonalism. For a moment he stared at her in astounding amazement. Here was something terrible in its simple greatness—that monstrous sacrifice of a woman. But another thought, a misgiving, came into his mind. His fingers on the desk closed around the bowl and stem of the pipe.

"Do you think anything of him now?" He shot out the question, savagely, as he bent forward.

Jane again smiled the sensible woman's smile. "One gets over things like that, Mr. Chapel."

The pipe stem cracked between Chapel's fingers. "Of course," he said. He breathed freely again.

"And I've been too comfortable here to wish for anything else." He could be gracious whenever one appealed to him.

Chapel placed the broken pieces of the pipe on the desk. "Now then," he proceeded in his business-like way; "I don't want to know anything more except this: Is the boy's father an engineer?"

"No, he's not," Jane answered readily.

"Then leave Willie where he is. There's a bigger opening than he's likely to get anywhere else."

Jane got up. "Thank you, Mr. Chapel." An exuberance of thanks would irritate him, and it was only on occasions such as this, when their relation got more personal, she properly realised what a wealthy, influential man he

was. He had suggested that Willie's future would be safe with him; and his promise was always sufficient. The very fact of his unbending and of his simplicity seemed to reveal his greatness.

Chapel sat, with his hand supporting his chin, watching her go out. He smiled cunningly. How buoyantly she stepped across the carpet, and how straight was her little body—like a young sapling chock-full of delicious life! How quietly she closed the door!

"She doesn't think anything of him," he said to himself in delight. He picked up the broken parts of the pipe and hurled them into the fire; then he blew the tobacco ash from the desk and chuckled artfully. For a moment he had been madly jealous when she had mentioned Willie's father.

"She doesn't think anything of him," he repeated craftily.

XII

SENILITY

AT half-past nine the maid knocked at the door and brought in his cloth cap and overcoat. A year ago Chapel had suffered from insomnia and the doctor had advised a walk before bedtime. The habit had been continued, and to-night the maid came in exactly as she did every night, to remind him of the time.

"It's half-past nine, sir," she said, standing within the door.

Chapel got up, and very carefully she helped him on with his overcoat, waiting to make sure that his hands were well within the armholes before commencing to lift. There was danger of an explosion were she an instant too soon.

"Have you got the key, sir?" It was the second part of her nightly formula.

The clearness of the fine night appealed to Chapel as he descended the steps, for there was a bright moonlight. Fifty yards along the road he crossed the stile into the Wern fields. He went this way sometimes. He mounted the path, walking slowly and quietly smoking his pipe, and ere long he stood on the spot where Griff had so often waited for Bess. The second gate from Wern.

Encloaking, pervading everything was this brooding silence of the moon and the night.

When he heard the whistle of an engine from the station in the valley on his left he took out his watch. Two minutes to ten! Then the train was three minutes late. He tapped his pipe against the gate, and as he turned his head he noticed that the lights of the Library had been put out. "Time to start back," he thought, buttoning his overcoat. The ten train always acted as a reminder.

Returning down the path he became more conscious of himself.

This, on which he was actually treading, was his son's land. Queer he had not considered it in that light before! "There's a son up at Wern," Jane had said. Odd that those closely related to him should appear so remote! This new event confirmed in a very significant manner the family's return to the old home. A Chapel and his son at Wern! And he, the grandfather, had had no hand in the return. Life could be really bitter when it chose. He had worked so hard.

As Chapel entered his study, he caught the faint odour of the burning oil, and after he had turned up the wick he threw his overcoat over the back of a chair and placed his cap on the corner of the desk. Here, everything was very still—even the fire, which was low with but one red coal among the grey ashes.

Chapel sat at the desk, drew out a pencil, some sheets of white paper and the blue plan in preparation for drawing sketches and outlines of the work to be done on the reservoir during the ensuing week. Ten minutes passed, but he was not successful. Line after line he drew, attempting those characteristically bold sketches his engineers knew so well. But concentration was impossible.

At half-past eleven he put down the pencil. "Don't seem to grip the infernal thing," he said aloud as he replaced the blue plan in the drawer. He did not seem displeased at his inability to work.

His mind was playing with the enticing, tempting vision of a slight, supple form—a slender woman. During the light of day he was completely his own master, but at night the senile devils in him broke loose. They made a slave of him. At night, especially late at night, his unbending power of dominion, his energetic forcefulness and his will of steel—they all deserted him. He became the slave of this delusion of a diseased fancy. The silence of the fields had commenced the desertion of his self-control, and now the silence of the house fully awoke this infatuation which had come into his existence.

A clock somewhere in the house began to strike twelve when he got up to place his pipe on the mantel-shelf. It

had finished striking when the lamp on the desk had been blown out. When he reached the hall there was not a sound anywhere save the staccato ticking of a clock in the kitchen. The whole house seemed asleep.

He was up on the landing now. The blood in his head was throbbing. His hands clenched at his sides trembled with the riot in his veins. Across the landing stood Jane's door, and towards it he stepped. His ear almost touched the panel, striving for a sound of her. He could picture her lying there asleep. He could imagine the rise-and-fall, rise-and-fall, of her delicious, round bosom. His body ached in desire. . . . Only a few boards between him and all he craved! Only the turn of a knob— He stood there for some minutes, indulging his passion, his mind fondling these images. These moments formed a nightly intoxication of his longings.

Inside his own bedroom he began at first to move about in an agitated hurry, but the routine of preparing for bed was so mechanical and deep-rooted that soon he was settling down into greater calm again. Habit now prevailed, and he was at the small table near the head of the bed. As he lit the candle, the gold match-box dangled at the end of his watch-chain. He applied a match to the wick and a black image of him leapt to the ceiling. He stood erect, and the massive image sprang to the window. He put his watch under the pillow and went with the chain and the match-box to the dressing-chest.

But to relinquish all thought of Jane was impossible, because everything in the room proclaimed her. Here on the chest lay a folded clean shirt, a tie and a collar ready for the morning. The trousers in their press on the chair and the boots in their trees near the foot of the bed were all put ready for him. Jane did everything, so that he should not be caused any trouble.

He stood near the table, a huge figure, his fingers held in the action of unbuttoning his waistcoat.

The madness had returned and he stood with expression rapt. He might have been listening to something. . . . How easy it was to picture her as she had come earlier in the evening into his room downstairs. He had imagined her putting her slender arms about his neck—sitting on

his knee. He had fancied feeling the softness of the flesh of her face; touching her face with his! Her flesh would be smooth as velvet. He would have liked to take hold of her, crush her in his arms, feel the warmth of her slim body against him.

Supposing she should come into this room, now, just as she was! So vividly did he imagine the possibility that he turned his head to look at the door in the delirium of such a fancy. He could hear a gentle knock, see the door timidly opening, see her entering—a straight, slim little woman in her white night-dress with her thick hair hanging down her back. He could picture himself going to meet her, reaching her, kissing her—kissing her mouth, her neck, her delicious breasts. And she would cling tightly to him, and he would feel youth leaping in his blood. Above all things he wished to feel that youthfulness!

But if, in reality, she could be got to come into his room at night! He had missed the good things of life; his life had been full of loneliness. No-one need ever know. They could keep the secret to themselves.

If, in reality, he could get her! If? If, indeed! The word seemed like a direct challenge, as though he were incapable of getting what he desired.

His mind was made up. He was going to get her. He had been wanting her for years. To-night he was going to get her. The old Israelitish idea of woman was correct. The old patriarchs with their masterful masculinity were right. Jane was his handmaiden, the chattel of her master. He desired her, and before he failed he would break her spirit.

His slippers were left behind and he was on the landing.

But he must not frighten her. She was beautifully timid as a dove, and he must coax her, fondle her, win her. She must join in this orgy of passion; together they would get drunk with passion. Youth would dance in his every vein. Above all things he wished to feel that youthful gush in his veins.

The icy knob of her door turned in his grip; the door opened noiselessly, and he stood listening. For a second his nerves were unsteady. The inside was alight as though

her candle were burning, but it was the moonlight rushing like a flood through the window to fill the room. He crossed the threshold, his hand still on the knob, his right shoulder touching the edge of the door. He was within the room. And there she lay, every feature visible in the moonlight.

One arm was stretched towards him loosely over the coverlet; the other was bent under her dark head on the pillow. She slept like a child, curled up to keep herself warm. He made out the abandoned, innocent childlike-ness of her face, as though sleep were a thing into whose care she trusted herself without a fear. He stood, contemplating her.

But even as he looked, the scene seemed to change. His prayer was answered, for youth was leaping through every vein. But it was memory of youth. Instead of this modern bedstead, he saw an old one of oak. Instead of the up-to-date furniture there were old oak things. Instead of being at Garth he was back in Penlan. And instead of Jane, there lay Gwen.

His wife was the only woman he had ever seen in bed asleep. Memories shattered his emotions. His head dropped; the heat in his blood disappeared and he felt cold.

"What am I doing?" he asked himself. "What am I doing?"

XIII

FACING THE TRUTH

NEXT morning, as soon as she heard the sounds of his heels ringing on the tiles of the hall, Jane knew that Chapel was not in the best of humours. When she placed in front of him the plate of porridge and the milk-jug her surmise was confirmed.

"Don't want it," he told her, pushing the plate aside. "Take it out of the way."

"But you ought to eat it, Mr. Chapel."

"Shift the dam' thing out of the way," he repeated, more deliberately and more threateningly, without looking at her.

Jane tossed her head, half smiled, then hastened to the kettle on the fire to make his pot of China tea. "Better not tell him till he's finished," she thought considerably. "It might upset him still more."

Chapel's eyes followed her as she hurried into the kitchen for the bacon. Generally, the cold light of morning brought him to his senses, but never until last night had his longings been so definite. But just when his determination to get her had been screwed to its highest pitch, Memory had beaten him. He thought he had conquered this Memory. After years it should surely have been dead. But last night that gap in his life had been as empty as ever. That wound had been quite as raw and that sorrow quite as acute as ever they had been.

But Memory, he decided, had gained only a temporary advantage, because it had caught him unawares. There was nothing in the world that could assert a mastery over him. What he desired, he obtained.

He wished now, as the bread broke into crumbs between his fingers, that he had not been so sharp with Jane over

the porridge. She was the gentle, captivating little woman upon whom he doted. He was not annoyed with her at all. He was annoyed with himself for allowing himself to be frustrated, for half confessing in a sentimental moment that anything could possibly deter him from a fixed determination. Submitting to a Memory thirty years old was a weakness. What he desired, he obtained. That had always been his religion.

Because his mood forbade him to be affable he remained silent throughout the meal, and when breakfast was over he placed his napkin on the table, consulted his watch, got up, his massive figure towering for an instant over Jane, who was still seated, hurrying to finish her coffee.

"Wait a minute, Mr. Chapel," she said, putting her cup in the saucer and getting up to face him. "I didn't tell you before—not till you'd had your breakfast."

Chapel bent down his head to glance at her more pleasantly. She was so near to him, and her diminutive body and her womanly manner of saying things always attracted him so. "Well, what's the matter now?" There was almost a suggestion of teasing in his bass voice.

"It was the postman. He said something about Graig. That he was killed this morning."

"Graig? Killed?"

Jane saw him pucker his brows. "Yes," she explained, watching his lips compress; "he was run over on the railway early this morning—so the postman said."

"Graig killed?" He seemed to be asking himself the question, slowly and unbelievably.

Jane had never seen him so concerned.

"Why didn't you tell me before?" he asked, so gently that Jane stared at him. "Go and see if the constable is at home." She was surprised at the rapidity of his decision. "And tell him I want to see him at once. . . . On the telephone," he called after her; "you'll get to him quicker."

Jane had never seen him so moved. But in a flash she got a glimpse of the bedrock nature of the Chapel character. An employee, a dependant, had been killed, and his master was stirred to the depths. Jane knew now why she had clung so tenaciously to this family. Inherently, the Chapels

were true as steel, so great-spirited, and above all, so human in the face of calamity to their dependants. It was this grand humanity, shown but once in all her previous experience of him, that had bound Jane so firmly to him and Griff. Once again she saw the gentleman in him, the sublime sympathy for a subordinate in trouble.

In his study, Chapel was pacing the hearth. For the instant he was thinking of Graig as the man who had served him so long and so faithfully. "Poor devil!" he kept muttering. "Poor devil!" Their connection had been close and intimate for so many years.

Once again Chapel saw Fate, as he had always seen it, driving men like impotent, unresisting sheep over a precipice to ruin and to hell. It was horrible, but Fate always kept on, never satisfied, never filled. It devoured men—like Graig.

"Poor devil!" Chapel repeated, in pity and not in judgment. "One of those men Fate crushes, absolutely."

Chapel did not go near the reservoir that day, for he busied himself with this business of Graig's death. He saw Graig's widow and the undertaker, called upon the Nonconformist Minister and arranged the funeral, went down to the offices of the railway company and interviewed the general manager to ascertain his attitude with regard to the fatal accident; and on his return home he again saw the constable and learnt of to-morrow's coroner's inquest, on the jury of which he had previously secured for himself a place.

He was thoroughly fatigued when he reached Garth at six o'clock; his tasks had been repugnant to him. When he drew up his chair to the study fire he was physically tired, but what troubled him most of all were the thoughts in his mind. He was a different being from the man who had set out that morning in search of Mrs. Graig.

At half-past seven a knock sounded at the study door, and the white-aproned maid appeared, half closing the door to peer for him in the darkness. "Dinner's ready, sir," she said on espying him in the firelight.

He turned upon her. "Light that lamp," he ordered brusquely. "And bring my dinner in here."

The girl departed to get the matches. "He wants us to take his dinner into the study," she told Jane in the kitchen.

Jane was at once puzzled. "In the study?" Never had he had his dinner there.

"Be careful, mistress," warned the girl as Jane went into the hall. "He's sitting in the dark, and he's in an awful temper."

Jane knocked at his door, entered, and walked around the desk to approach him. "Is anything the matter, Mr. Chapel?" she asked in concern. "Aren't you well?"

She might have struck him, so violent was the effect. He sprang to his feet, and with his hand in the act of rising he seemed to be about to push her away. "I have told that girl," he said, "to bring my dinner in here. Now get out—quick. And do what I tell you. And don't interfere."

Jane went out, seriously resenting his tone. "Take it in to him," she sharply commanded the maid when she reached the kitchen.

With dinner over, and the tray and the bottle of port cleared away, Chapel returned with his long, determined steps to the armchair.

"The only explanation, sir," the policeman had said in the morning, "is that he lost the last train from St. Fagans last night. 'Tisn't for me to judge him, but most likely he wasn't sober. He often lost the last train, and it was a habit with him to walk home up the line."

And it was over Graig's senile infatuation Chapel had been pondering all day. Graig's death was the direct outcome of his senile infatuation. He had been with his paramour at St. Fagans, had missed the last train; and he had been killed.

This side of male humanity was nothing new in Chapel's experience. He had known of numerous similar cases. Some were men who had remained single until their diseased fancy had made them slobber over some insipid girl whom they married in their dotage. Others were widowers who had become nauseously affectionate in their weak, sickly old age. Others were married men who had neglected their wives after lengthy years of faithfulness to fawn over

and tamper with and coddle virgins young enough to be their granddaughters. Such cases were familiar to him; they were to be found everywhere.

And now he must come down to fact and face the truth. Josiah Chapel had joined the ranks of the dotards. No use shirking the truth. No use prevaricating. He, Josiah Chapel, had become a senile idiot.

Oh yes! He recognised the old enemy. Fate had always been trying to crush him. And Fate must be taken by the throat. He knew exactly how to deal with Fate.

That was the meaning of this infatuation for Jane. Fate had started another move. All through his life it had been trying to crush him. He knew exactly how to deal with Fate.

When he got up to go to bed he was still very calm. He was fighting against something that had become a part of his very nature, and this would be the hardest battle he had ever fought. All his coolness was necessary. He must find a way of settling these last tactics of an unscrupulous Fate.

"We'll see," he muttered quietly as he blew out the lamp. "We'll dam' well see."

XIV

THE BRUISER

EARLY on the following morning the maid was on her knees on the study hearth, setting the firewood and the coal in the grate. With a puzzled, thoughtful expression on her face she suddenly stopped to listen to the noises in the bedroom over her head, and after deciding upon an explanation for the sounds she sprang erect and hurried across the hall into the kitchen.

"Mr. Chapel's getting up," she cried with some excitement.

Jane looked up from the bacon she was slicing to the clock on the wall. "It's not six o'clock, yet," she said.

"Well, he is. And if you'd only hear him!"

Jane had been disturbed ever since the unprecedented happening last night when he had dined alone, so she put down the knife and together they entered the study, where Jane was soon convinced of the truth of the girl's statement. They stood, the pair of them, with heads inclined, listening eagerly. Their master was always virile and energetic, but the stamp of those footsteps over their heads contained far more than energy. The ceiling shook; the whole house seemed to shake. The two women looked mutely at each other, but their eyes expressed so plainly: "He's got one of his *days!*" Both knew what that meant. The house was immediately alive with nervous uncertainty. Anything might happen.

"Finish this room as quickly as you can," Jane warned the girl. "And keep out of his way till he's gone."

The girl was unfortunate, however. He was inside the

door of the study before she was done, and she waited, her senses all aflutter, knowing that in a second she would be reprimanded.

Chapel tore in and stood with his back against the door he had just closed. There was something in his appearance resembling a huge animal caged. He stood, breathing heavily. His lean face was dark and scowling and overclouded, as though he hated the whole world. For the greater part of the night he had lain awake, getting to grips with Fate, and searching for a way to defeat this last attempt to crush him. And this morning, after fitfully dozing, he had awakened with this agony of pain shooting through his head. While he dressed he had been forced, time after time, to sit upon the bed, doubled up, his knuckles pressed into his temples to ease the torment. To shave had been horror indescribable. It was a devilish pain, for it maddened and exhausted him; it felt as if the bones in his head were being sawn, or as if knives were being driven into his brain. It had subsided somewhat now, but it might return at any instant. He stood leaning against the door, his great shoulders hunched as though he were prepared brutally to repulse the next attack of suffering.

His eyes fixed themselves on the girl kneeling on the hearth, and it seemed to him that she was there simply to annoy him. "What the devil are you doing here?" he called to her. "Why don't you get out of bed earlier? Now get out—quick." He moved across and sat down.

So nervous had the girl become, that the tongs slipped from between her unsteady fingers.

"Oh, for God's sake stop your noise!" he roared. "Leave the dam' thing there," he shouted on seeing her stop to pick it up. "Get out. And get that breakfast ready."

Jane was in the kitchen when she heard him enter the dining-room. There, he poked and dug at the fire. She was carrying in the coffee-pot as he put down the poker. He straightened himself, turned, and saw her. There was something awful the matter; she had never seen him look

so terrible. She began to grow afraid, for he was staring at her with black hatred and unveiled animosity. He seemed to be holding himself in check lest he should inflict upon her some bodily injury.

"Go out," he cried to her. "And don't come in again. Send that girl in with the breakfast. When I've finished I want to see you in my room."

Jane looked at him, intending to object, but she saw that he was suffering. The next moment, however, she was again resenting his bullying, domineering manner.

Chapel was seated at his desk when Jane went into his study after breakfast. There was a blue plan spread in front of him, but he seemed to be studying it more from a desire to divert his thoughts than to grasp its meaning. In his sternness, he appeared more gaunt, more massive than usual. Jane also was austere in her manner, for she resented his treatment of her, and at the first opportunity she meant to tell him so. Her pale face was set in this purpose, and her slight, black-clothed figure was rigid as she thought of the way he had set at nought her position as housekeeper. But when he looked up from the plan, she saw from the morose expression that this was no time for plain speaking; he was calmer and therefore more dangerous.

"You wanted to see me," she said, facing him over the desk. She was on her dignity.

He looked up and his eyes pierced her in hostility.

"You've got to go," he told her brutally.

Jane met his glance. "Go?"

"You've got to leave this house to-day. . . . Here's a cheque for you. Pack up, and don't be here when I come home to-night. That's enough," he said, nodding at the door.

But Jane did not move. "D'you mean to say I've got to leave this house altogether?"

"That's it. Now get off."

Jane still regarded him. For a second she thought him not responsible for his words.

"I've told you to go," he warned.

"Why have I got to go? I deserve to know that.

I'm not complaining, but I deserve to know the reason."

He thumped the desk. "You'd better go."

"But it's not fair. I've given the best part of my life to you, and it's only fair to tell me why I've got to go."

Chapel put his large hands on the desk and drew himself up. That devil had leapt into his eyes and he became the Bruiser. "Are you going?" he asked meaningly.

Jane turned to the door. His decisions were irrevocable.

"Fate be damned!" He would see whether Fate could crush him.

Chapel caught the twelve o'clock train to Cardiff, and, settling himself on the blue cushions of the compartment in a corner, facing the engine, he made himself comfortable. His feet were on the carpet; the window was lowered to let in sufficient, but not too much, of a breeze. He took from his overcoat pocket the hitherto unopened copy of the *Western Mail*, and began to read. Wriggling himself closer into the corner, he opened the paper to the middle pages and commenced reading an account of yesterday's meeting of the Cardiff City Council, when the new reservoir had been discussed.

The train had passed St. Fagans and Ely before he placed the newspaper on the seat beside him; and he returned his eyeglasses to the case in his waistcoat pocket.

He was now interested in the interior of the compartment. Wonderful how comfortable the railway companies made their trains these days! The dark blue cushions, the two bevelled mirrors, the pictures—he could recognise those opposite without moving from the corner or putting on his glasses. This one facing him, on the right of the looking-glass, showed very temptingly the sweeping curve of yellow sands of Whitmore Bay; the other one, on the far side of the mirror, was a village scene of a little place near Rhoose, rural and secluded. But that notice on the middle of the rack was ridiculous and unnecessary: *Not to be Used for Heavy Luggage*. Nonsense! Did the

company imagine passengers carried steam-engines and deposited them there on their journeys? Remarkable how futile were the thoughts of some men!

But the train would soon be running into Cardiff Station.

Chapel straightened his bowler hat. Wonderful the relief now that the pain had almost disappeared! . . . He had managed to get the inquest over without any troublesome allusions to Graig being made. As well, he had just crushed Fate once more. If this last attack had succeeded, he would have been a pretty specimen of a head of a family. The name of Chapel would have been an object of derision with a doting imbecile at its head. It was rather a pity that Jane had to suffer, because it was not exactly her fault. But Fate had chosen her as an instrument to attack him, and she had to go. She must not remain near him as a danger. But he had compensated her. That cheque would be sufficient to maintain her in comfortable circumstances for the remainder of her life. And now that he thought of it, perhaps he had better call at the bank. It was rather a large cheque, and the manager might cause delay, which would be an annoyance.

The train stopped and he alighted. It would not take him long to call at the bank, and if he took a taximeter he could reach the Rhymney Station in time for the next train to the reservoir. Out on the platform he stopped, and stood stock still. The porter, hurrying to bang the doors, looked at him in surprise. He seemed like a man who had lost his bearings. The empty train glided past him.

"It's not fair!" He seemed to be hearing the words for the first time. "Why have I got to go? I deserve to know that. I've given the best part of my life to you, and it's only fair——"

Chapel glanced up at the glass covering of the platform. Not fair——? That was not a Chapel motto. Fairness and justice, however hard. Straight fighting, however merciless. Those were the things he understood.

It appeared as if he had been misapplying this theory

of the Bruiser, and doing Jane a wrong. Harming her after years of loyalty and faithful service. Loyalty?

He understood now. By dismissing Jane he was running away from this danger; he was putting the temptation out of sight.

He hastened in search of a porter. "What time is the next train up?"

It was within himself the fault lay. Something within himself was to blame. Jane, after being loyal, was being made to suffer when it was a weakness within himself should be bruised. Her years of loyalty!

Rounding the corner by the Farmer's, he passed the maid, to whom he curtly nodded. She was dressed for an afternoon's freedom, and he thought it strange that Jane should have chosen this particular occasion to give the girl a holiday. Inside his study he doffed his overcoat and placed it across the seat of one of the chairs. Immediately, his eyes fell upon two pieces of paper which had no business to be upon his desk, and picking them up he found them to be the cheque for several thousand pounds torn in two. He tore them into smaller pieces, wondering whether she could afford to be so independent. He returned to the door, opened it and listened. There came to him sounds of movements in the kitchen.

Jane had heard him enter and had marvelled at his early return. As she closed the portmanteau on the kitchen table her manner was very uncompromising. Her slight figure in its precise actions showed very plainly that her sense of justice had been outraged.

Chapel came to the door of the kitchen, and as Jane turned and saw his tall body filling the doorway she knew that his *day* was over, for his features were drawn and tired, and not tense as they had been early in the morning.

His voice did not soften. "What are you doing?" he asked her aggressively.

Jane felt a desire to be ironic. Instead, she tightened her lips and buckled one of the straps of the portmanteau.

"What are you doing?" he asked her again, more firmly, and somewhat impatiently.

Jane tried her best not to put any rebuke into her

low tones. "I'm packing up, Mr. Chapel." The small key clicked as it turned in the lock.

"Take that bag upstairs," Chapel commanded her. "And get me some lunch," he added, turning away.

Jane stared after him. He had annulled one of his decrees.

Chapel went back into the study. "A man's greatest enemy is himself."

He would see whether he ran away from danger !

XV

TWO HOUSEKEEPERS

"I HAVE come to see you," Betsy Michael said doggedly, and somewhat unnecessarily. She followed Jane into the kitchen of Garth, her right thigh *giving* under her weight as she walked.

"And you've brought the baby, too!" Almost did Jane dance around the precious bundle as they reached the hearth. This was Griff's son! In her hurry to uncover his face she tried to open the shawl.

Betsy had never in her life been within Garth before, and never had she spoken to Jane since the day Griff had been taken from the Windgap. This visit had caused her much misgiving.

Betsy firmly removed Jane's eager fingers from the shawl. "You better wait a minute," she said distantly in Welsh. "I brought 'im for 'is gran'father to see 'im," she explained as she sat in the Windsor armchair after placing an empty feeding-bottle and another bottle full of milk on the table. "He ought to see 'im," she went on, arranging the soft white flannel around the pink little forehead. "He ought to see him," she added, further to explain. "I bin thinkin' 'e ought to see 'im," she repeated. It was a plain duty that brought her here. "An' that's why I've come."

But Jane was blissfully ignorant of the subtleties in the brain of this old woman of eighty with white hair, and was now on her knees in ecstatic raptures as she contemplated the healthy face of Griff's boy and toyed with one of his velvety hands. "He's exactly like Mr. Chapel, isn't he?"

Betsy glanced at Jane very curiously. This was the woman who cherished the delusion that she had reared

Griff. "I do think he's like his father," she corrected defiantly. "But he's the same spit as um all," she conceded as the more reliable authority upon the traditional physiognomy. "An' I'm bringin' 'im up—as you do know. Jus' like I did bring up the other two," she challenged.

"Of course! I'd forgotten. You nursed Mr. Chapel, didn't you?"

"*And Griff,*" Betsy made known to her very emphatically.

"I know." Half of Jane's attention was on the baby. "Griff thinks the world of you."

Betsy was amazed and stared at the kneeling figure in black. Perhaps she had been misunderstood. "Yes. It was I did bring up Griff, as I do say." And Betsy watched Jane still more closely.

"He was with you from the time he was born, nearly," supplied Jane.

Betsy shook herself in the chair, because she thought she must be dreaming. This other certain person was laying no claim whatever to the rearing of Griff. "Here!" She impulsively picked up the boy from her lap. "You can hold him for a bit, if you do like. Only don' wake 'im," she warned whisperingly; "'cause he's a terrible boy if you do upset 'im." Her point of view had changed completely. "He got the Chapel temper, right enough," she added with pride, and then set to watching Jane. To herself she was saying: "It's a sinful thing to judge people too 'ard."

But Jane was soberly inquiring: "How is his mother? How is she to-day?"

Betsy instantly pursed her lips. "Not a bit better, poor lickle thing!"

"It's awful, isn't it?"

Betsy warmed towards Jane. "Got up she did last week, for the first time. But if you could only see her walking about the house and staring as if she do see nothing! . . . Yes, yes—somethin' wrong with the milk. It do happen like that sometimes. . . . Melancholy she is, you know!"

Betsy had now dropped all her suspicions of Jane. She

was a sensible little woman who kept her house beautifully tidy. Betsy liked the way she held Griff's boy, and especially the anxiety with which she asked about that "sweet lickle thing," the boy's mother.

"I was thinkin'," she said to Jane after a while, "it would be better to put him in bed to let him sleep quiet."

Jane got up at once. "We'll put him in my bed."

"There!" said Jane, when they had him tucked in between the sheets. "He'll be quite peaceful."

"Till he do wake up," remarked Betsy from her wider experience.

Then Jane showed Betsy around the house, and when that was done they had tea in the back room.

"About Griff and 'is father," Betsy was saying over her second cup. "'Tisn' right, that's what I do say. Two of um big men, the biggest in the place and for miles round. Father an' son—an' not talkin' to each other!"

Jane was immediately sympathetic. "They quarrelled a long time ago."

"Of course, you do know about it. But it's a disgrace. What do you think about it?"

"They're too much alike to agree," suggested Jane.

"But it's not right. There's Griff, brought the family back to the old house— But p'raps you don't understand," she added with some doubt.

"Oh yes! I do."

"Then there's Josiah—a great man. But I do think of 'im as a boy, and then I do forget about him being rich and givin' the place a Liblally and always goin' by train in a first-class carriage. But this is what I do say—it's a disgrace for um not to be talkin' to each other. . . . Sh-sh-sh!"

Betsy had put up a warning finger and was listening. "There! He 'ave woke up!" And now Betsy was running waddlingly into the hall, for the house was full of and alive with lusty, angry baby cries. And very soon she returned with him in the shawl, and the kitchen became a Babel.

"Come an' 'ave a look at 'im," called Betsy through the cries. "Got a temper, 'aven't 'e?" She gloated over the fact. "Told you, didn' I? Exac'ly like um."

And Jane came to look at the fiercely kicking legs within the white robe, at the clenched round fists striking out in all directions, and at the eyelids closed in the determination to force all the blood of his body into his face now so frighteningly red and inflated.

"Dreadful boy 'e is, if you do upset 'im. . . . The water is warm enough now. . . . Do you think you do know 'ow to do it?"

Jane hurried with fierce energy, mixing the water and the milk in exact proportion, and Betsy rocked her huge body and crooned in her unmusical masculine voice. And then hungry lips closed about the teat, hollows appeared and disappeared in the two round little cheeks, and tongue and lips made healthy sucking noises. And the two women bent over him, proud of their miraculous ability to appease the mighty wrath of the youngest of the Chapels.

At that moment he opened his eyes. "I'll make you women jump," he might well have been saying as his toothless gums showed in a chuckle.

"Yes, you little rascal," Betsy scolded with ridiculous pride. "'E do know, right enough," she told Jane with a nod of her head.

An hour later Betsy sat facing Chapel across the hearth of his study. The boy lay asleep on her lap and Betsy's eyes were alight as she greedily watched every movement Chapel made. He had shut the drawer of the desk with such masterfulness, and now he was regarding her from his chair with such graciousness. A big gentleman. A great man.

"But I did nurse 'im," Betsy kept repeating to herself to calm that awe of him. "I did nurse him."

He was the same Josiah, however, as had lived with them at the Windgap, dominating, and a hard man. She understood him through and through.

"You're a big man, Josiah," she was telling him in Welsh. "I do call you by your name, or p'raps I would be frightened at you. But I don't look at you like that, or p'raps I'd start shiverin'. I do look at you when I was nursin' you, same as I was nursin' Griff, and this lickle angel agen."

Chapel had unbent and was regarding her with amusement.

"An' that's why I've come," Betsy continued, pursing her lips in the determination to proceed now that she had got so far. "I brought the baby for you to see 'im. It's only right for you to see 'im. An' it's wrong—" Betsy lost all her tact—"for you an' Griff not to be talkin' to each other."

Chapel stirred restlessly in his chair. "Perhaps you'd better mind your own business, Betsy."

Betsy jerked her head, doggedly. "Don' you think I'm afraid of you, Josiah, now. 'Cause I'm not. I do understand you, I can tell you. Griff 'ave brought back the family, an' you ought to be proud of 'im. And I could tell you some things about that, only I don' want to hurrt you. Mind you, I don' judge you, 'cause I do understand you exac'ly. But it's wrong for you not to be friends with Griff an' with 'is wife—poor lickle thing, and with this boy who you'll be leavin' all your money to some day."

Betsy got up and walked towards the desk.

"You musn' notice what I do say, Josiah," she hurried to apologise on observing his grimness. "I'm getting old now, but it do break my heart to see you an' Griff not friends."

"He's a very hard man," she told Jane out in the kitchen. "But somethin' is boun' to happen. The Almighty do bring things round very funny."

Jane helped her with the shawl and gradually Betsy's mood brightened. "You come over an' 'ave a cup o' tea one o' these days," she invited.

XVI

A MEETING IN THE NIGHT

JUST the night to cure insomnia ! It was so fresh.

And so that he might contentedly smoke until the coming of the ten train, Chapel raised a foot to the bottom bar and rested his elbows on the top bar of the gate two fields away from Wern. The gate where Griff had so often waited for Bess.

He had been puffing for some time when, from the looseness with which his pipe had begun to draw, he knew that the tobacco was getting low. That train seemed a long time coming ! He took out his watch and struck a match.

“ Confound that girl ! ”

It was no more than twenty minutes to ten ! That fool of a girl must have mistaken the time and had brought in his cap and coat too soon. His foot scraped impatiently on the bottom bar of the gate. Quite unknown to him, his ears had been on the alert for that low hum, and now that the train would not come for twenty minutes, he immediately became painfully aware of the darkness and the silence of the night about him, a silence almost eerie. He would go home.

He was on the point of turning, when he abruptly stopped and stood still, his whole attention gripped. Something had cut into the silence of the night. His quick ears had caught a sound somewhere ahead of him. A soft, insinuating swish of the grass came out of the darkness. “ A rabbit,” he whispered to himself, the softness of the sound influencing his judgment. At that instant, the thing approaching showed itself as an indistinguishable mass that puzzled him. In its weird uncertainty there was something which stirred the elemental

self-preservation within him. His whole being was on the defensive, prepared to fight. "Some animal," he thought, to stifle that ludicrous sense of fright. Very slowly, creeping almost, loitering, the thing approached out of the darkness. Then by degrees he began to make out a white patch, and he breathed freer. It looked like the white head of a cow; but it seemed so tall. Nearer it came; slowly—loitering.

Why! it was a woman! Queer that a woman should be roaming about alone on such a lonely spot at this time of night!

He watched her, and she seemed to be lost, or to be wandering. By degrees, as she came nearer, her form grew more distinguishable. The slow, regular movements of her feet; the dark skirt and the white blouse; the arms limp at her side; the head. She came, aimlessly, lost in absorption, or so it seemed, like an imaginative child lost in a daydream. And he gripped the top of the gate because he had begun to tremble, as though some terror from the unknown were creeping up to him.

She had stopped within a yard of the gate. She was hatless. She had seen him and was staring at him with fixed burning eyes.

Good God! It was his son's wife.

She came a step nearer, pushed forward her chin and peered into his face. "I know *you*," she said, as though she had made a great discovery.

Her voice was so toneless that he felt his blood run cold. She was near him, near enough for him to touch her did he but put out a hand. He was able to hear her uneven breathing. Her dumb scrutiny coming through the vague light paralysed him.

"D-d-d-do you?" he asked.

She came still nearer, and he saw her as she was: a young thing, refined; an inexperienced woman being shamefully treated by life. He had heard of her condition, but the knowledge had not moved him. She was remote, although married to his son. He had no feeling regarding her.

He saw her raise her arm. Her hand was on his sleeve. Her touch agitated him. It was the touch of a helpless

woman. And now she was looking up at him with an appeal in her large bulging eyes.

"I'm coming with you," she said, only she seemed to be begging him to let her come.

Then she stooped, and he saw her white fingers fumbling with the fastening of the gate. She could not open it, so she turned her head and looked up at him. So completely had he lost his self-possession that before he knew what he was doing he had opened the gate for her. She had squeezed around by the post, and now she was at his side. She was so delicate a thing, so frail, so fragile.

"You can't come with me to-night," he answered her. But his voice was shaking beyond all possibility of control. Her face was so white. Her rather broad shoulders drooped so. Her uncovered head looked so fair. Her shrunken figure was so delicate. "Why don't you go home?" he asked. But her eyes took all the nerve out of him.

She was looking up at him again with those staring eyes. "I'm cold," she complained to him.

"But if you go home, you'll be by the fire." He bent his head and coaxed her.

"I'm cold," she said again to make him understand. She seemed to know he was unwilling to take her with him. "Feel," she pleaded, listlessly holding out one of her hands to him.

He obeyed and took hold of her hand. The softness of the cold skin had a feeling so dainty, so opposed to and condemnatory of the hardness of his nature. "Won't you go home?" he asked, certain at the same time that she was stronger than he.

But she moved, drawing him with her. And as though some power were aiding her, an unusually fresh breeze blew as a gust through the gateway. Her very weakness drew him down the path towards Garth, and he went reluctantly, but unresistingly. He wished to have nothing to do with her; but she was so helpless! And without a hat, and without a coat in the cold night.

He put a hand under her elbow to help her up when they mounted the steep steps in front of the house, and, entering the hall, he led her into the study. He turned up

the wick of the brass reading-lamp on the desk; when he wheeled forward one of the armchairs its casters screeched as they rolled along the carpet. Soon he had her seated. He stooped, picked up the poker to stir the fire and immediately two small flames began to leap and flicker. And then he put on a little coal from the scuttle.

"There!" he said, lowering his bass voice. "You'll soon be warm now."

He still had on his cloth cap as he turned to look at her leaning forward in the chair. He tried to smile in friendliness even. But the gloom on her pale face and the hopelessness in her bulging eyes were so depressing.

She moved slightly, so as to get her hands nearer the fire.

"I won't be long." He looked down upon her from his great height, and then he moved with long, light steps to the door.

As he knelt before the sideboard in the dining-room he was glad that Jane and the maid had gone to bed, for it would have angered him to be discovered in such an act as this.

She was seated on the rug when he returned to the study, one foot under her and the other extended so that the shining black shoe and her ankle showed; and as she held the palms of her open hands near the fire she continued to stare into the flames. He poured some wine into a wine-glass and went to her, bending so that she might take hold of the glass.

"Drink it," he coaxed, for she made no movement, except to gaze at him so expressionlessly. "It will help you to get warm," he pleaded.

Instead of taking the glass she raised her chin and made a *moo* with her mouth, as a child might. "Why don't you hold it for me?" her helpless pose seemed to say. She was sitting on the rug, one hand with outstretched fingers supporting her. And Chapel stooped and held the frail glass by its stem; and she sipped.

He had a better, closer view of her now. The hair was very much fairer than he had thought, fairer than his own had ever been before it had begun to turn grey. The texture of her skin had such a fine grain. Her straight nose and the whole cast of her face showed breed—and

he liked that. When in perfect health she must be a well-built woman. But so feminine! Such an appearance of genuineness and such a high tone. A woman of the kind the Chapels liked. Everything about her was so marvellously strange to him, and yet so true to his ideas of what a woman should be. The extreme daintiness of her baffled and yet attracted him.

He marvelled.

So this was his daughter-in-law! Daughter?

But she was speaking to him. "My feet are so cold," she complained. And to refuse anything to her simple, trusting appeal had got impossible. She expected him to understand.

He put the wine-glass on the table and, getting down on his knee, he unbuttoned the straps of the shoes stretched out to him. Then he warmed one of his hands and quickly brought it to one of her stockinged feet, so that the heat in his palm and fingers might swiftly be transferred to her—in exactly the same manner as he had watched Betsy do for his son years and years ago.

He asked her after some minutes: "Are you quite warm now?"

It was time she went; it had been a mistake to allow her to come here at all. She did not speak, only nodded her head, for her attention seemed to be far away, and she again had her eyes fastened on the fire.

Chapel had seated himself in the armchair she had left. "Then let me put your shoes on. It's time for you to go home." And yet he had no desire for her to discover that he had no wish for her to be here. "They will think you are lost, if you don't go now."

"I'm not going home," she told him abruptly.

"They'll be worrying about you," he pointed out, watching her more closely.

"No, they won't," she sharply corrected. She was still gazing into the fire, and she was speaking in the same monotonous tones. "They don't trouble about *me*. . . . There's Griff! He doesn't care what happens to me. You don't know him. He'd like to see me out of the way altogether, and then he'd do as he liked. Go 'n' see that woman as often as he likes."

Chapel regarded her for an instant in strange wonder. "Oh, that's not right," he objected, seeking to comfort her. And then he recognised the futility of contradicting her.

"Don't you tell *me*," she said, turning upon him, and then looking into the flames as though all her grievances were pictured there. "I saw him with her. He goes to see her every day, and he takes her out in his motor-car. But it's my fault," she went on in severe self-condemnation; "I called him a *damned fool*—I did," she cried, turning swiftly on his mild exclamation of disbelief, "straight to his face." Her eyes returned to the pictures in the flames. "Perhaps he's got her in the house now. He doesn't care about me."

Chapel listened to the droning voice, so suggestive of sweetness in some old way, and yet so hollow. Had it not been for her condition, he might have sadly smiled at her ingenuousness. "You're foolish to talk like that," he remonstrated, and then remembered again that words would never dispel her delusions.

"He doesn't, I tell you! . . . Then there's that baby!" Here was another picture in the flames. "Griff told him to take no notice of me. . . . They took him away last week, and they haven't brought him back yet. I saw them. I saw them myself. They thought I didn't; but they're not so clever as they think."

Her eyes turned to him once more, and opened even wider, as though she were trying her hardest to make him believe.

"Better go home and see if the baby's come back," Chapel suggested, attempting to affect her in that way.

"I don't care if he hasn't. He tried to hit me the other day. His father told him to." She was openly seeking his sympathy. "See how they're all treating me," she wished him to understand.

Chapel stood up at last, recognising that firmness was the only solution. "You must go now," he told her. "And if any one of them does anything to you, you must come and tell me. I—I'll settle them." Before he was conscious of it, he had offered protection.

That seemed to please her. "Griff's afraid of you,"

she said impressively, taking hold of Chapel's hand so that he might help her up.

"But you must always do as I tell you," he said.

She nodded her head meekly. He must know that she was obedient.

He put her to sit in the chair again, bent down and rebuttoned the straps of her shoes, brought his overcoat to put across her shoulders and his cap to place on her fair head. He had some influence over her, he immediately perceived, for she was quite amenable under his firmness.

He took her home across the fields, right up the yard at the back of Wern.

XVII

A CHAPEL WOMAN

WHEN Chapel came to himself, as one might say, he inwardly resented his action towards Bess.

But she was not in control of her faculties; the night's happening would be forgotten; she would not bother him again. For an hour he had been a fool, a gullible fool, suddenly plunged back into the sentimentality of his early years. Her helplessness, her white face, her cavernous eyes, and her youthfulness had caught him unawares. For an hour her womanliness had disarmed him. He had seen her as his daughter-in-law, a Chapel bound to him by ties of blood: the mother of a Chapel. For a moment, as he had sat watching her before the study fire, he had dreamt of satisfying at last that craving for company, of quieting that persistent hunger for more society. She was his daughter-in-law. And such a fool had he been that the word *daughter* had made his heart beat in sentimental palpitation. His deluded fancy had suggested a means for filling that gap in his life. Probably it was a part of human nature to be properly mad at times!

He was thinking over it all as he sat at his desk on an evening of the following week.

Certainly she was related to him—by Law. But he had never known anything of her. Occasionally during her childhood he must have seen her about the village or on the station, but he had disregarded her existence. And now to leap out of obscurity to thrust herself into such high relief on his attention! What mattered it to him that she was married to his son? He resented her intrusion into the privacy of his life.

He turned impatiently to the blue plan of the reservoir

lying on the desk, fixed his gold-rimmed eyeglasses on his nose, and commenced to work.

The reservoir was advancing very satisfactorily. For some months his cranes had been busy, legions of navvies had toiled until the excavations were nearing completion and a huge rectangular hole gaped on the mountain side. To-night he was occupied with more detailed drawings of two sluices.

Now and again the venetian blind flapped lazily against the window-frame. The fire behind him was small, burning low in the grate, but exceedingly cheerful, red at its heart with two tiny lumps of coal black on its head. And Chapel kept on, steadily drawing. His forcefulness was evident even in his manner of working, for he never moved, never stirred his head, but kept on drawing swift, sweeping, sure lines, filling several sheets of white paper with his bold sketches. As he bent his giant shoulders over the desk, his firm lips were tightly closed. His grey hair bristled with energetic life. Even the pencil, which he held some inches above the point, seemed imbued with the same forceful aliveness.

He was pleased with the progress of the reservoir; indeed with the whole contract. It was likely to prove very profitable.

He had been busy for some time when suddenly he raised his head. He glanced over his glasses, across the desk, at the closed door in annoyance. If Jane wished to have people to see her, why the devil couldn't she have them without causing all that infernal commotion? He listened, his pencil in the air, his lean face expressing his scowling annoyance. Someone had banged upon the front door most unceremoniously, raising the knocker and letting it drop to strike with its own weight. And now Jane was quickly crossing the hall. An exclamation seemed to escape her when the door was open, and now she and the intruder were together, mute it appeared, for they made no sound. Why the devil didn't they say something, or move away into the kitchen? Not another line would he be able to draw till he had heard them go. He listened.

"You mustn't go in there!" That was Jane's voice.

And the next instant the knob of his own door turned.

No knock? The door moved around on its hinges, slowly. He took off his glasses and looked. Someone was entering.

His daughter-in-law was standing in the doorway, staring at him with her frozen eyes. The pencil fell from between his fingers. She was staring at him with that same awful fixity and that paralysing persistence of doom. Again he had that feeling of being face to face with a terror from the unknown. "Something is crushing me," the fateful eyes and drooping mouth seemed to say to him. Such a pale fairness he could not remember having seen before. The black velvet cap only made her still more frail-looking. The thickness of the brown motoring-coat, many sizes too large, only increased the impression of her thinness and fragility. She had raised the deep collar of the coat about her neck till the lobes of her ears were hidden; and her face, framed in so masculine a garment, seemed to peep out in wanness. It must be his son's coat. Her hands were pushed deep into its pockets.

He watched her come away from the door. "I have been here before," her sureness of movement seemed to tell him. And when she had crossed the room with her slow, dragging steps and had seated herself in the armchair, her manner implied, "I know this room quite well."

But she had no business to be here. He resented her presence. He wished to have no dealings whatsoever with Wern. But what was he to do? And she had come in so confidently, trusting him in her hopelessness. She had entered as though sure that here sat a friend. He turned in his revolving chair so that he might face her.

"Are you cold to-night?" he asked.

She did not reply, but turned and looked at him with her large bulging eyes for a time.

"Griff tried to run over me," she said at length. She had come to him with her complaint. "He tried to run over me with his motor-car." Now again she was gazing into the fire where all the pictures of her delusions seemed to hang. "He did," she emphasised. "Last night, down the drive." A faint smile of cunning twitched her mouth for a second. "And I stole his coat. But he tried to run over me. You told me to come and tell you!"

Someone bringing her plaint to him ! " I—I'll talk to him," he said.

" Yes, Griff's afraid of you."

He got up and closed the window. He helped her off with the brown, leather-lined coat. He shook up the fire and put on more coal. When he saw her move to come and sit on the rug he searched for a cushion and found none. At twenty past nine, before the maid was due to call him, he put on her coat for her and took her home over the fields.

As the weeks passed Chapel got quite aware of this change taking place in him. But he was incapable of action. When he considered her headaches, her loss of interest in things, her depression of mind, her delusions and her inability to decide and choose, his whole nature was pained. He knew that she avoided all other company but his, and that fact alone would have been sufficient to win for her this attachment he felt was growing.

How closely she had insinuated herself into his life was proved to him during those days when her symptoms became more intense and she had been kept closely guarded at home. Every night he had gone up the fields to look for her, wondering whether she would come this time and sit in his study. When that attack passed, and she had come to see him again, that demoralising terror of her ultimate fate was lessened.

She came to Garth every evening now, and as they sat together his being would throb under this touch of personalities in private life. He sensed the warmth of her presence. To touch a human body ! To feel the magnetism of human flesh ! The vibrating, tingling hypnotism of this common possession of human life !

This new intimacy resurrected the previous intimacy, for only once in his life before had he been in close contact with a human being. The intimacy with Bess recalled the intimacy with Gwen. And Gwen had always been a force, the greatest force in his life. Not a day had gone without his thought of her !

This habit of hardness had got too strong a hold of him by now. He was the bruiser, the top dog, the man who knew the secret. But with his daughter-in-law he need

not be so reserved, because she could not understand. The iron had entered his soul; life had been too terrible a struggle to allow of any softness in his nature. Nevertheless, this new intimacy intensified his desire to take his place among men as the old Chapels had done. Had he known he would have kept alive that softening power Gwen had exercised over him. But that was the great disappointment of life: this money-earning had sucked him in, and he was not taking his place among men as a Chapel should. This contact with his daughter-in-law seemed to show how far removed he was from the gentle things of life!

XVIII

DREAD

So Bess came night after night, and tighter did this affection for her fasten about Chapel. He lived for these evenings; all day he longed for them, for they satisfied that starved side of his nature. And all the while he condoned what he termed his weakness by thinking—

“She won’t always be like this. She’ll get better and stop coming.”

But in his heart he knew that with the return of her mental control would reappear his old solitariness.

So the weeks passed.

Immediately after dinner one evening he was climbing the path up the Wern fields, expecting to meet her at any moment. The spring was advancing, the air about him was mild after a day’s sunshine, and dusk had but just begun to fall. As he mounted the path the thought constantly recurring to him was—

“She’ll soon come now.”

He kept looking ahead, anticipating her slow, dragging figure to appear over the brow at any instant. And soon he was at the gate, two fields away from Wern, and here he stopped and waited as he always did. Once more he peered along the path in front of him. “She’s sure to come,” he continued saying to himself. He had a horror lest she should not come. He had a picture of her in his mind: the white face, the soft fair hair, the expression of immutable doom on her thin face, the shrunken body crawling along towards him. But there was no sign of her, and idly his eyes roamed over the fields that dipped down to the road between the station and the gate of Wern drive.

It was then he caught sight of her.

She was two hundred yards or so away, at the very bottom of the field on his left. And she was hurrying in a wild fashion.

His body stiffened instinctively. His eyes opened in frightened amazement as he saw her pass through the open gateway at the lower end of the field. Down the slope she was going, making for the station, or so it seemed to him. He was able to distinguish the white blouse and the violent swinging of her arms. But it was the wildness of the whole of her that frightened him. Some peculiarity, some indefinable unearthliness in her gestures, made him hold his breath. Down the hill she was tearing, possessed by an energy he had thought impossible. Her steps were long, hurrying steps. All her body seemed driven by an activity unhuman, superhuman. Her neck was stretched forward, as though some grim purpose urged her on.

He leapt the gate, and with his mind filled with apprehension he began to race down the slope.

A new terror gripped him. His mind spanned and counted the past few weeks. He understood, and the knowledge filled him with dread. Another attack, such as had kept her away a month ago, had started. She was dangerous, probably insane. She must have eluded them at Wern. She might do anything.

Several times he stumbled as he ran down the uneven ground. On the roadway he stopped a moment, searching for her to the left in the direction of the village, to the right towards the turnpike. Then over the gate across the road, and through another field, more even.

Gradually the distance between them was lessening. But now she, too, had begun to run. An instinct seemed to tell her that she was being pursued. She was running straight on, leaving Penlan on her left, and lower down on her right stood the Windgap.

As he saw her approach the brook he ceased running, waiting to see which way she turned so that he might cut across diagonally and check her. He watched for a moment, wondering which direction she would take.

Good God!

She had thrown herself into the pond, ten feet deep,

in that curve of the brook, under the shadow of the overhanging trees.

The hanging brass lamp in the hall of Wern had been lighted ten minutes ago, but it was not behaving itself at all well to-night. Betsy, standing beneath it and tilting up her white head, contemplated its misconduct with grave dissatisfaction. The flame was low and spluttered; the top of the wick was a thin circle of red. The hall was so badly lighted that Betsy was forced to half-close her eyes to make out the chain hanging behind the strong front door.

Betsy walked towards the kitchen and called: "Polly!"

Polly came in a hurry. "What's the matter, Mrs. Michael?"

"What's gone wrong with this old lamp? Go 'n' put a drop of oil in it, there's a good gel. An' bring the step-ladder with you. An' mind you don' dirty your clean apron, now!"

Within a few minutes Polly was perched on the third step of the ladder; the wick was relighted, the chimney replaced, and now the floor of the hall looked as glossy as a frozen pond; the barrels of the guns in the cabinet winked quite cheekily; the face of the grandfather's clock seemed as pleased as a freshly washed old man; and the chain, the bolt, the strong lock, even the little brass knob of the latch-lock—they all showed up, proud and confident of their ability to keep the safety of this old home inviolable.

"It's too high," Betsy criticised from below. "Turn it down—jus' a lickle bit," she advised, unnecessarily holding aloft the lighted candle.

And Polly, up on the third step, turned down the wick.

"There!" praised Betsy. "That will do very nice. You come down, now," she said to Polly. "An' don' you fall now, an' hurrt yourself."

Polly had commenced descending, with irreproachable carefulness, according to counsel; her neat ankle had stretched out of the impeccable security of the hem of her blue cotton frock; and the toe of her shoe had reached the second step, when she stopped, her eyes fixed on the closed door. Betsy, too, had been startled, for the candle-stick was unsteady in her hand, so unsteady that the

pale flame shivered. Both of them stared at the door, and now their heads turned till they were gazing into each other's wide-open eyes.

"What was that?" their startled glances demanded to know.

And again their nerves jerked, for there came another crash at the door, so close to them that they saw, almost felt, the vibration of the heavy timber. Polly clung to the top of the ladder, and whispering in her fright she said, "Go 'n' open it, Mrs. Michael." They were both still listening to the echoes chasing through the stillness of the house.

Another crash, louder and more violent, and Betsy, with features stiffened, stepped forward with the candle and pulled back the small brass knob of the latch-lock. The massive door flew open, hurled back on its hinges by a powerful foot, and the next instant Polly screamed, and the candlestick was shaking as though Betsy's hand were in the clutch of an ague.

Through the open door, into the hall, rushed the bulky form of Josiah Chapel. As a weight in his arms lay their young mistress, white and motionless; and they thought she was dead.

Her head lay in the crook of his left arm, and his right arm was under the bend of her knees. Her long yellowish hair hung straight down. Her white blouse clung to her breasts and showed the sharp outline of her corset. All her clothes looked as though they were glued to her, shamelessly revealing her emaciated condition. But the dreadful stillness of her!

And then Betsy looked up at Chapel.

His clothes, too, were clinging to his great body; the water was dripping from him. And so quick was her mind under this horror that she saw the only dry thing about him was his bowler hat. But at sight of him Betsy regained her composure. The coolness of him brought back her common sense. Not a sign of any emotion was there in him, unless it were the grim tightness of his lips. He was helping to battle against death.

"Where's her bed? You come with me, Betsy," he said. "And send the girl for some towels and blankets."

Betsy led the way, lighting their progress up the staircase. The sweet little thing was not dead, or he would not have wanted towels. The poor little thing had got one of her bad times, had craftily hidden the fact, and had tried to drown herself. But it was Josiah had saved her ! Betsy sighed and wiped away her tears with her hand.

“The Almighty is makin’ things straight agen,” she thought in the simplicity of her old heart. Josiah forced against his will to come to the old home ! It was a sign.

XIX

AT WERN

It was beyond Chapel's power to remain at home after changing into dry clothes; to have done so would have been purgatory.

Soon after nine o'clock he was hurrying up the Wern drive, and as he crossed the semi-circular sweep in front of the house the gravel crunched under his feet. When he looked up he saw a light shining dimly through the blind of the casement window of Bess's bedroom. He raised the huge knocker and gently knocked at the studded door, and when Polly opened it he passed into the well-lighted hall.

"Has the doctor come?" he asked, lowering his powerful voice.

"He's been here for a good time," Polly answered, looking up at this tall man in the thick overcoat. "For half an hour," she added, counting by the clock. Polly was nervous, for the terror of death over the household was sufficient without the disturbance of speaking to the wealthy, dominating Mr. Chapel. "Mrs. Michael is with him," she went on, amazed at this strange intimacy with the greatest power of the village.

"Then I'll wait. Where can I wait?" He snapped at her at once because she had not moved.

"In here, Mr. Chapel." Polly hastened to the door on the right, into the room lighted by a fire only. "Shall I light the lamp, sir?" she asked guardedly when they were inside.

"No. Go out and shut the door."

Out in the hall his eyes had been busy, and he was bitterly resentful. When he had brought in the motionless body of his daughter-in-law he had been absorbed

with the dread of what might happen to her; but now he had seen those old articles of furniture—had seen them for the first time for thirty years. That old clock was a part of him; those old guns had been handled by him so often in his boyhood!

He doffed his overcoat and hat and laid them on the bare top of the oak table. When the door closed behind Polly his tall figure stood rigid, his attention held by the muffled movements above his head. His face got hard, harder than any of his bouts with Fate had ever made it, and his lips parted so that his long white teeth snarled. Why could not death attack someone who was not afraid—someone who would hurl sneering defiance into his face, and not disport with so young a thing as this Chapel woman?

To ease this agony in his mind he stirred up the fire, and, pulling up one of the carved armchairs, he sat on the left of the hearth with his feet on the edge of the white sheepskin rug. The whole room was now alive with the spasmodic jumpings of lights and shadows, as though some bird were flapping its huge wings before the fire.

But the atmosphere of the room had gripped him, and he knew exactly where he was. Something within him warmed and swelled until it filled his throat and moistened his eyes. For thirty years he might have been dead and abruptly come to life again. He was seeing ghosts. That dresser! The blue china! The old chairs! The bleakness of the Chapel character was here, pumping through the room. He had sat in this chair before, but never in this room where his ancestors had lived. He should never have entered this old house, for sight of these familiar things punished him more damnably than anything else could have punished. His eyes were on the high mantel-piece, and the lights and the shadows changed those brass candlesticks into twinkling devils that laughed at him in scorn.

They seemed to acknowledge that he possessed more money than any of the old Chapels had possessed; but they mocked at him because he lacked the social influence.

Then he heard the step of someone descending the stair; and the next moment he was out in the hall.

"Have you seen one of them?"

It was Polly with a feeding bottle in her hand. "No, Mr. Chapel."

He returned to the room and paced the bare floor, his massive frame moving among the fluttering shadows. He was forgetful even of the old Chapel furniture. Every minute that passed added to the suspense; every second the tension grew. For two hours she had been unconscious, and he had a feeling that something in his brain must snap unless he knew soon that she was either conscious or dead.

The old clock in the hall began to strike; he counted the deliberate, penetrating rings; they sounded as familiar as though his mother were speaking to him. It was ten o'clock. And again, there were more sounds. The motor-car was running up the drive; it had stopped before the door; his son was crossing the hall; he was mounting the stairs.

Griff sprang out of the car, and as his sturdy, athletic figure crossed the hall he took off his white scarf and his hat and his coat and threw them on the old settle. His movements were quick and eager, but his clean fresh face looked careworn.

This morning Bowen, the agent of the South Western Colliery Company, had been acrimonious because Griff was forcing their hands over those fields lying in the midst of the patch of coal the Company was working; this evening had found him at Swansea settling the lease conditions of a portion of the Blathwaite estate which was being let for speculative building purposes. The day had been long and Griff was tired; but it was not the weariness of the long day that troubled him; it was the length of time he had been away from home. Nowadays he always hurried home as quickly as possible; he had that fear that something untoward might happen in his absence. Griff had discovered that Life could be bitter.

Betsy, up in the bedroom, had heard the car stop, so that when Griff reached the landing she was there waiting for him. She was the old woman brimful of experience now, in the midst of peril, facing death—by no means a strange nor a wonderful event. She was human and

practical, every one of her faculties cool and under perfect control.

"She's bad; very bad," she told Griff. "And the doctor's with her. . . . No!" She placed herself between Griff and the door. "Don' go in." She drew him some yards away and whispered: "She threw herself in the water, and she haven' come to herself yet. . . . No, no, Griff! You mustn' go in."

Then Betsy swiftly stepped aside. That Chapel devil was in his eyes, and she knew that woe betide anyone who stood between him now and his woman. It was madness to play with a Chapel in this mood. Betsy sighed and followed him into the bedroom.

Griff stood, leaning against the post at the foot of the bed. He was looking at Bess, curiously, as though he were trying to clutch at the meaning of what he saw. Some of his senses must have been dulled, a portion of his ability to feel arrested. He was taking part in something unreal. And yet he knew that this was Bess, that the young doctor was his friend Griffiths, that here close at his side was the faithful old Betsy! But everything was so unreal. He was a spectator of something in which he could take no action. In this room was something he could feel only in some vague way. Bess appeared to be a stranger for a moment, and so diabolical was this paralysis of his normal senses that he seemed to perceive some invisible weirdness about her. Something was hurting her and he could not keep it off. He could not fight for her! And because he could not help her he was sullen against everything in life that so unfairly attacked a girl like Bess.

He felt a hand under his elbow and heard Griffiths's voice: "Come along, old chap!"

Griff descended into the hall. The wind brushed his damp forehead when he reached the drive. Mechanically, he drove the car around the corner of the house, put out the lamps and closed the shed door. And then he paced the length of that semi-circular sweep of drive.

Life was showing its blackest face. But he must not whimper. He was contending with something far stronger than himself, and if he were beaten he must take his beat-

ing like a man. But it was hard—hard to know that Bess was being grossly victimised. But he must not cry out. Life must never be allowed to crush his spirit. Life had always been good to him; he must not whine when she showed her evil bitterness. No man could expect to be free from her hardness. Whatever happened, he must keep alive his faith in life.

But to have Bess crushed in this unjust way!

XX

FATHER AND SON

GRIFF turned at last into the house.

He wandered about aimlessly for some time with this excruciation in his mind, waiting for something his confused brain refused to define. The office was in darkness, and he returned into the hall. The drawing-room, so full of suggestions of Bess's personality, was also in darkness. The whole house was uncannily still, breathing in awe, and the ponderous ticking of the old clock penetrated everywhere pertinaciously. Aimlessly, Griff perambulated with insignificant details of the house magnified beyond all proportion in his consciousness. And the thoughts which circulated in his mind as he constantly stopped to gaze up the staircase were futile and inept: "When will they come and call me? Isn't there something I can do? Won't one of them ever come?"

But it was Bess, and his mind as usual was clogged with perplexity. Not once had he been able to save her from suffering. On every occasion events had so happened as to render him helpless. . . . He knocked at the kitchen door as soon as the idea occurred to him, and Polly came, closing the door behind her.

"What's happened, Polly?" He had been too devitalised to ask Betsy.

"I don't know exactly, Mr. Chapel," Polly whispered. The tension was too much for her. "Mr. Chapel brought her home."

Griff looked at her uncomprehendingly. "Do you mean my father?"

"Yes. He brought her—carried her, and they were both dripping wet. Mr. Chapel is in the breakfast-room now."

Griff turned hastily. "Thank you, Polly," he said quietly.

His father here! His father had saved Bess! . . . His father was the only one Bess had voluntarily sought for weeks! Ever since Bess had commenced going to Garth he had intended seeking reconciliation—but now? . . . He walked across the hall. His father had saved Bess, and no estrangement should stand between them any more. To his father, who had helped Bess, he would most abjectly humble himself. He opened the door and went in. As he advanced towards the fire he saw his father sitting among the fluttering shadows; and the strange thing was that it seemed natural that his father should be in the old Chapel environment.

His father heard him come in. He had been listening too long to those muffled sounds overhead to be capable of resentment. The suspense was exhausting him. He saw his son come within the light of the fire, and an instinct cried to him: "Here's one of us. He'd rather be killed than show he's suffering."

Griff began to speak, but his father interrupted him: "How is she? Has she come to herself?"

"No—no, she hasn't," Griff found difficulty in speaking. Never in his life had he been drawn so closely to his father. The same dread united them. They were nothing more than two Chapels striving to maintain the last vestige of control over their emotions. This fear tied them inseparably together.

"What does he say about her?"

"He doesn't say anything." Griff sat down facing him. His old respect for this powerful, distinguished man was awakened again.

"She makes me think of your mother," his father said; and Griff moved his glance to the fire so that he might not see the twitching of his father's face.

No further words passed between them, but each knew that the other supplied what his nature craved. With an instinct they warmed towards each other. They were men of one family waiting to hear the fate of one of their women.

The room sank into silence. The flames leapt. The

shadows fluttered. The old clock in the hall struck eleven, deliberately, penetratingly. The fire began to burn low, then hollow. The furniture got sombre and austere and sinister. The sounds overhead continued: just a slight movement: a hushed step on the carpet; and sometimes a board would creak. And these two Chapels, father and son, each comforted by the warmth of companionship, waited for life's decision.

It was approaching midnight when the turn of the door-handle galvanised both of them into apprehensive action. Both leapt to their feet; they moved to the door, eager, and yet fearing to learn too quickly.

Betsy, standing in the flood of light from the hall, saw them. She had expected to find Griff only, and the sight of Josiah made her halt agape. She had news to give, but for that second after seeing Josiah she was the old fanatic again. In her heart she had known that the Almighty would find a way and put things straight again. She had nursed the pair of them, and now that she saw them side by side her heart got too full. But she must not cry, or they would mistake the meaning of it.

"She is better," Betsy said, smiling and weeping. "We 'ave give her somethin' to eat. An' now she's sleepin' like a innocent baby."

Betsy went out immediately. The Chapels were best left to themselves when their emotions were loose, or they might frustrate even one of God's plans to make things straight again. Out in the hall she wiped her motherly old eyes; and as her stout body rocked on her way to the kitchen, she was thinking—

"The Almighty do know what 'E is doin', right enough!"

Griff accompanied his father across the fields towards Garth. Everywhere around them was the deep somnolence of the clear night. At this hour and on this elevation the air was raw and cold, causing them to tighten their overcoats about them. Each vividly felt that penetrant solemnity which envelops the earth from midnight until dawn. They trod on the grass, and the path between their

feet was visible as a line, irregular and broad. Down below on their right the village lay in slumber, with no sign of life except the bright light of the signal-box on the station platform; and there, a mile away, shone two lamps more subdued—one red, one blue—on the home signal-post.

In the stillness, they crossed the first field, and when the gate was reached Griff held it open for his father to pass through. As they crossed the second field Chapel grew curiously interested in his son. Practically, they were strangers. The sturdy figure in the brown overcoat was much more alert than he had been an hour ago. Chapel watched him move, so latently energetic. He was thinking—

“This is the man who has got hold of the old home. These fields belong to him.” Remarkable that so young a man had brought about so great a miracle!

In the uncertain light he peered at his son as though his glance might in some strange way discover the secret of such a wonder. . . . But this was the man who had forestalled him. The awful tension of the evening was over and Chapel was himself again, resentful and jealous. He cursed his own weakness for approaching Wern at all. But that Chapel woman was at the root! He cursed even the position in which he found himself.

And Griff was quite as intimately and quite as curiously interested in his father.

But Bess was better! The wind seemed to have taken it up: “Bess is better!” The red and blue signal lamps proclaimed it: “Bess is better!” But were it not for his father, she would have been dead!

Never, even in all his boyhood, had he been so closely drawn to his father as he had to-night. He had but to recall those years at the Windgap, and those years at Garth before going to Llandovery, to remember how his father had always been his pattern; how as an impressionable boy he had swallowed that gospel of forcefulness; and how his father, unconsciously, had taught him the unforgettable lesson that at any cost the Chapels must be re-established. He owed everything to this distinguished man—everything. Queer, in some mysterious way, that he had not realised that his father was the wealthiest man for miles

around, that he himself was the son of one of the biggest of Welsh engineering contractors !

They were nearing the end of the second field, however, and he had not yet made any attempt at gratitude, nor to bridge that estrangement. And his father was so peculiar that, were this opportunity not grasped, possibly the old strained relation would persist. He turned and, with his voice breaking, said—

“ I can't even try to thank you for saving Bess.”

His voice shook. He felt he would never be able to proceed. Words were inadequate. They reached the second gate, and Griff put his hand on his father's arm to stop him.

“ I want you to know, father,” he began again, “ how much I owe to you. You've helped Bess before. But it's not only Bess—it's everything. Without what you taught me I couldn't have been anything. I've got us back to Wern, but it was you showed me we had to get there ! ”

Chapel stretched out his hand and gripped the top of the gate. Had he been always mistaking his son ? His son's ambition had been the same as his own !

“ I've always wanted to thank you,” Griff went on. “ I've wanted to find a way to thank you for all you've done for me. . . . There's been a vacancy on the Bench since old Williams died——”

Here was the calculating, self-assertive Griff, the man of the world, the man of influence !

“ And I got *you* nominated for it.”

And his next statement altered in a second the whole of his father's future. Chapel stood gripping the top of the gate, amazed. He had attained the social influence of the old Chapels.

Griff said—

“ And to-night I heard for certain that you are being made a Magistrate ! ”

THE END



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