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, by Marie Connor Leighton**

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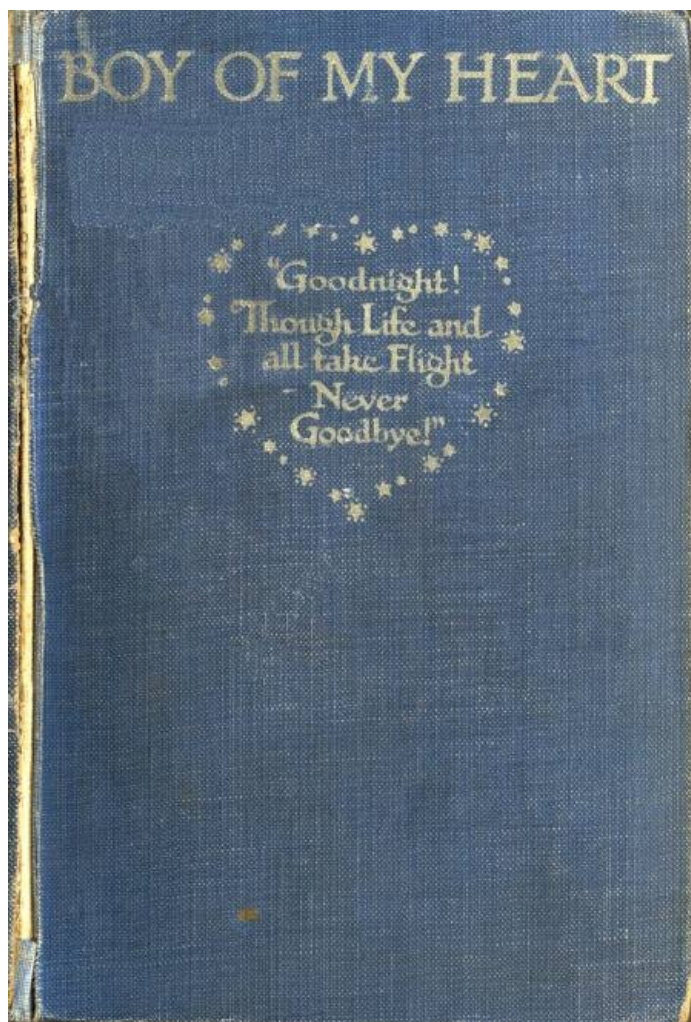
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BOY OF MY HEART

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BOY OF MY HEART

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TO
"LITTLE YEOGH WOUGH"

[Pg 5]

A FOREWORD

[Pg 7]

The Publishers wish to state that this is a book of absolute fact—not a work of fiction. From cover to cover it is the truth, and the truth only—a record exact and faithful, both in large things and in small, of the short years of a boy who willingly and even joyously gave up his life and all its brilliant promise for the sake of his country.

Even the tragic coincidence of the news of his death reaching his home in the very hour in which he himself was expected there on leave, is what actually occurred.

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PATRIOTISM

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"It is not a song in the street, and a wreath on a column, and a flag flying from a window and a pro-Boer under a pump. It is a thing very holy and very terrible, like life itself. It is a burden to be borne; a thing to labour for and to suffer for and to die for; a thing which gives no happiness and no pleasantness ... but a hard life, an unknown grave, and the respect and bared heads of those who follow."—JOHN MASEFIELD.

(Quotation found written in a notebook in the pocket of "Little Yeogh Wough" when he received his death wound, Dec. 23rd, 1915.)

PART I

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CHAPTER I WAITING

[Pg 15]

It is half-past nine o'clock at night and I, an eager-hearted woman, sit waiting still for dinner, with a letter open before me from my son in the fighting line. It is addressed to me in his pet name for me:—

FRANCE, 10.12.15.

DEAREST BIG YEOGH WOUGH,—

I feel very distressed about a sentence in a letter of Vera's that arrived a few minutes ago. I have been away from my battalion for nearly ten days now, and in consequence all my correspondence is waiting for me there and cannot be sent on because they don't know where I am precisely, and couldn't very well send over here if they did. The letter that came this evening was addressed: "Attached 1st — Light Infantry," and must have been sent on the chance of reaching me. In it Vera says that you seem changed since she saw you last—rather anxious, and worn, and very tired. I am quite at sea as to when and how she saw you, but gather from the context that she must have been down to Sunny Cliff. Is this so? But I do hope that you are not "rather anxious and worn and very tired." It troubles me muchly. Qu'est ce qu'il y a? Is it finances and family navigation; or working too hard; or myself; or what? Please do tell me. Is there anything I can do?

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I seem to be very much cut off from everything and everybody just lately. Sometimes I rather exult in it; sometimes I wonder how much of the old Roland is left. I have learnt much; I have gained much; I have grown up suddenly; I have got to know the ways of the world. But there is a poem of Verlaine's that I remember sometimes:

"O, qu'as tu fait, toi que voilà,
Pleurant sans cesse?
Dis, qu'as tu fait, toi que voilà,
De ta jeunesse?"

As I told you last week, I hope to be coming over again to see you soon—quite soon, in fact. Those words of Vera's, though, have troubled me much.

Meanwhile,

Very much love to Father and The Bystander,

Always your devoted,
L. Y. W.

P.S. (a day later).—Have got leave from the 24th to the 31st. Shall land on the 25th.

Such a very wistful letter! It is the saddest, I think, that I have ever had from him. But, oh! what the postscript means to me!

Land on the 25th!

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Our home—this house in which I am waiting—is very near the coast. It is not exactly at the spot

where he must land, but it ought not to take him more than an hour or an hour and a half to get here. And yet it is half-past nine at night on the 25th, and I and the dinner are still waiting!

There are others waiting, too. They sat in this room with me at first, but they got restless and now they are in different parts of the house, trying to do other things while they wait.

It is so useless trying to do other things when one waits for a really important thing to happen!

I am restless, too, but somehow my spirit's restlessness takes the form of a deadly bodily stillness. All of me is waiting under a spell of suspense, and I feel that if I make the slightest movement I may break the spell.

It is my darling boy that I am waiting for.

There are girls who may think that it is not romantic waiting for a son; not so romantic, anyhow, as waiting for a lover. But I know they are wrong. They have ideas, no doubt, of a grey-haired woman with a mob cap on and a figure stout to shapelessness, so that she has to sit in an attitude of extremest inelegance, with skirts of appalling amplex and shapeless feet on a hassock; but all mothers are not like this, though a great many very good, dear ones are. This is the sort that knows best how the boy's flannels are wearing and what state his socks are in. But there is another sort that knows a little less about his flannels, perhaps, and a little less about his socks, but a good deal more about his mind and soul; and of these latter are the mothers to whom the grown-up boys whom once they knew as little babies are not sons only, but friends, comrades, and, in a certain sense, adoring lovers.

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Twenty years old! How amazing to think that the boy I am waiting for is twenty! Of course, every woman with a twenty-year-old son says it doesn't seem more than a year or two since he was born. But it really is true, and is not said from any affectation. It only seems a very little while since my Little Yeogh Wough—as he calls himself—came into the world. I remember, soon after he was born, going to see a woman friend with a seven-year-old boy, and actually letting her see in my silly pride of juvenility that I thought her so old because her boy was seven; and now my boy, that I am waiting for here to-night, is twenty—and yet I do not feel myself old.

How the years glide by!

But, after all, though twenty years seems such a very long time, yet it is not much if you divide it into four spaces of five years. Five years are nothing. They go in a flash. Well, one only has to have four of those flashes and there are twenty years gone—and a baby has grown up to be a man.

And such a man, too—in the case of this boy that I and a spoiling meal are waiting for!

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I don't suppose any two women in the world would agree exactly as to what good points of body and mind go to make up the ideal man; and then, too, there are thousands of sensible people who believe that a mother can never see her children in a true light and with a clear eye. But where I am concerned their belief is wrong. I am not a born worshipper of my own kin, and if one of my children had a hare-lip, I think it would seem to me rather a worse hare-lip than anybody else's. So, when I say that the boy I am expecting is handsome and attractive, I am telling the truth. He has that best of all gifts—personality.

Personality is a wonderful thing. It is worth so much more than mere beauty. Every woman that lives knows how, once or twice in her life, at least—perhaps quite casually in the street—she has seen a man of whom she has instantly felt that the woman who belongs to him is very lucky. The man may not have been very handsome, and he may have been impecunious looking and badly dressed, but there was something about him which marked him out as a Man, with a capital M, as distinct from the mere empty shells of masculinity that walk about among us and have no power to thrill. I have always called this peculiar and rare quality in a man the "dignity of the watch chain."

People have laughed at me and have not understood; and so perhaps I had better try to explain.

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It has nothing to do with watch chains. In fact, a man with anything much in the way of a watch chain cannot very easily have it. Of course, it never goes with vulgarity. I only mention watch chain at all in connection with it because there is always a certain dignity about the chest of the man who has got it. Athletics will not give it, and yet there is something about the set of the shoulders and the build of the breast of a man with personality that makes a woman feel that his arms would shelter her better than any other arms in the world, and that to be the chosen love of such a Man would be the greatest honour and delight that life could give.

My Yeogh Wough has got this charm. I can't describe it exactly, but I know at half a mile's distance when a man has got it. I know directly I go into a church if any man of the congregation has it. And he, my boy, had it from the time when he was a few months old—as was testified to by the fact that a millionaire's wife who hated children asked that he might be allowed to be downstairs when she was calling on me, because, she said:

"He's beautiful. He's not like an ordinary child. There's something about him that draws me."

That seems only to have happened about a year ago, too. And now that millionaire's wife is a peeress and my Yeogh Wough is just twenty, is a lieutenant and an adjutant, and is coming home to-day on six days' leave!

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To-day? The day is already gone. It must be a quarter to ten by now and I dare not think of what the dinner must be like, or the cook's temper. If she hadn't known him and worshipped him ever since he was little, she would be in an unmanageable rage. I am beginning almost to be a little anxious, because this is his second leave and I am a believer in Compensation. In this world one never gets a good thing twice and the bolts of fate always fall from the bluest skies.

But I will shut these gleams of fear away from me. The room door will be pushed open presently and he will come in with his gay, firm step and his charming smile.

His smile has always had something surprising about it, because his eyes are so sad.

My Yeogh Wough!

It suddenly occurs to me that Yeogh Wough is a very odd name and must strike outsiders as very ugly. It has even something Chinese about it. His real name is Roland, and when he was very little and the pronouncing of an "r" was beyond him, he called himself Yoland and then Yo-Yo, and so it came to Yeogh Wough.

It certainly does look very ugly and Chinese. I am sorry for that, because he not only made it my name for him, but his name for me, too. I am Big Yeogh Wough, and he is Little Yeogh Wough. It is laughable that he should be the little one, because he is much bigger than I am now, having grown to close upon six feet in height; but he still signs his letters "Little Yeogh Wough," and he says he always will, as long as we are both alive.

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The initials L.Y.W. are at the foot of this message that I am looking at now, saying that he is coming home.

I am getting very hungry, but I will not begin dinner without him. He is bound to come within the next half-hour. I have worked out the trains with the utmost completeness dozens of times to-day. So has his father. So has his sister.

I will get his photograph down from the top of the cabinet and look at it. It will help me to get through the last few minutes—or perhaps half an hour—of waiting.

As I take down the photograph I knock off accidentally from the cabinet top a tiny newspaper cutting which I had put there in order that I might not forget it. It is only a cutting from a review of a book, which I have saved because of two lines quoted in it:—

"He needs not any hearse to bear him hence
Who goes to join the men of Agincourt."

I believe the lines are by a nephew of Mr. Asquith's. Anyhow, whoever wrote them, they have haunted me ever since I saw them two days ago.

To join the men of Agincourt! What a glorious thing! When I was a little girl and learned first about Agincourt I used to thrill. Now it is the same. I felt suddenly an intense longing to go out myself and do something hard and fierce and dangerous. Oh, yes, I know so well that the man who dies in a trench or in a charge and who lies unburied or gets hurriedly laid away under two feet of casual earth, is grander and more princely than the king who dies in a stately bed in his palace and is carried to his tomb between packed throngs, standing with bared heads! In very deed he needs no hearse who goes to join the men of Agincourt. But let it not be my Yeogh Wough! Not yet! Not yet!

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But what am I thinking of? I am not afraid for him. He will be coming into this room in a moment, looking into my eyes with his wonderful brown velvet eyes that have always been so amazingly sad, considering the gaiety of his laugh, and of all his ways.

No, death will not come to him—not in this war. I was afraid at first—I buried my face in my pillow and sobbed when at eight o'clock one morning the telegram came from Folkestone announcing that he was just going to cross the Channel—but now I have got confidence in fate. He was once taken by one of our friends to an astrologer who told him that he would probably become a soldier, and that if he did he would die a violent death by bullet or bomb, but not before he was fifty-eight. So he cannot die now, at only just twenty. He will get wounded; it is certainly time he got wounded, for he has been in the trenches nine months now and people are beginning to look surprised when I tell them he has not got a scratch yet. They will soon begin to think he hides all day in his dugout. Yes, he is certain to get wounded soon. But he will not get killed.

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Besides—how could there be any idea of death in connection with a creature of such vitality?

I feel my pulses quickening as I look at the photograph. He has not got perfectly regular features—that is to say, he does not look at all like a hairdresser's dummy—but, oh! how handsome he is and how full of charm!

One can see even in this half-length portrait that he is not vastly tall. But the fascination that I have called the "dignity of the watch chain" is there. It is such a rare thing for a mere boy to have this fascination! But he has it. It is a perfect sorcery in him. Curiously, it is hardly ever found either with extreme shortness or extreme tallness, but mostly in people on the tall side of middle height.

What beautiful furry lashes he has! And his hair flung back in the Magdalen sweep! Perhaps

furriness is the one characteristic that strikes one most as one looks at him.

I had a long roll of skunk once with a gilt tassel at the end of it, and his small brother, playing with it, said: [Pg 25]

"This is Yeogh Wough's tail. This is just the sort of tail he'd have if he had one at all."

"But what about the gilt tassel?" I had asked.

"Oh, he'd have that, too! If Yeogh Wough had a tail he'd be sure to get a gilt tassel for the end of it."

That was just like him. He always loves everything that is the best of its kind and the most effective. This is one of his weaknesses. But with what an air he wears his simple everyday khaki! I can quite see why they called him "Monseigneur" at his public school. His photograph draws me. I stoop my face and kiss it.

My Yeogh Wough! But is he wholly mine? Is there not somebody else who wants him even though he is still hardly more than a boy?

And now there floats before my eyes the vision of a girl; a small, delicate-faced creature with amethystine eyes, who is dreaming dreams that have got him for their centre.

What a forcing power for sex this war has been, and is!

And now suddenly, as I think of the girl, the cinematograph of the mind flashes a crowd of vivid pictures across the screen of my memory.

CHAPTER II THE EXTRAVAGANT BABY

[Pg 26]

These pictures rush back across my mind with intense vividness as I sit waiting.

It is between a fortnight and three weeks since I first had the hope that he might come home on this second leave.

The way the sudden hope affected me showed me how little I had expected that he would ever come home again. I had lived through the fearfulness and anguish of his death so many times in the early days when he had just gone out to the Front. One day in particular I remember when, in the quiet of the big house by the sea, with the drip, drip of the rain telling us that it was useless to hope to go out, we had gone to lie down for half an hour after lunch and to read an article in a newspaper on the hospital at Bailleul.

We were three of us resting on the wide bed—I and the boy's father and his sixteen-year-old sister, whom he always called The Bystander, who was lying across the foot of the bed. The newspaper article was by an American journalist, describing with mingled power and tenderness some dreadful cases that had been taken to the hospital. Then there was mention made of a boy soldier who did not seem very badly hurt and whom the doctor ordered to be placed on one side for conveyance to England. The American journalist looked at the boy a few moments later and then touched the medical officer's sleeve.

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"Doctor," he said in a low voice, "that boy will never go to England. He's going to sleep in France."

Going to sleep in France!

The awful, unspeakable piteousness of the simple little sentence cut through me like a knife. It seemed to me that all my heart and all my soul melted away in tears as I lay there and sobbed and sobbed.

The boy's father and sister were crying, too.

And then I prayed.

I had always been a self-centred, worldly woman, not much inclined to prayer; but in that hour I prayed with the humble passionateness of dread and desperation.

How I loved the boy—I, who had never believed that I could really unselfishly love anybody!

It had always been a wonderful thing that I should love him as I did—I who had never felt my heart yearn towards children. But he had been to me in a sense a child of atonement. When he was born I had said to myself that I would atone by devotion for many sins of selfishness which I need not particularise here.

But, then, it was easy enough to worship him in any case. For even in his earliest babyhood he had the peculiar gift of Style. He helped one to live, just as a beautiful flower does, or a great poem or picture. [Pg 28]

There are so many people in this world who are Impoverishers! They don't know it. Most of them

wouldn't even know what you meant if you told them they belonged to the great all-round cheapening class. Yet there they are, always making everything about them look worse than it is. Some of them are so far gone in want of style that if they went to Buckingham Palace they would immediately make it look like a shoddy place in Acton or Wandsworth. On the other hand, there are a few rare and blessed souls who would make a pigsty look a proper abode for royalty.

It has nothing to do with money. It has nothing to do with clothes. It has only to do with Self.

My Little Yeogh Wough is one of these.

From the first week of his life he made everybody about him live up to their income. He mutely demanded the best of everything, even while his mere presence lent a charm and glory to the worst of things. I had had ideas of a four-and-sixpenny woollen hat and a ten-and-sixpenny pelisse as quite good enough for any baby; but when I looked at him I saw that it had to be a thirty-five shilling hat and a four-guinea cloak. Somehow or other, he made his nurse quite a distinguished person to look at, while he himself soon became a delight to the eye, with his big, brown velvety eyes, his exquisite skin, his mass of shining curls and his portly little body—so portly that it looked as if it were artificially inflated and a puncture by a pin might cause a collapse.

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"I can't understand how it is," a friend said to me once. "As a rule, babies, like cats, make a place look common, but he never does. He's got a sort of kinghood about him."

This was true of him then as it is true of him to-day. And I was reverent. But there were times when I was afraid. For I am a believer in Compensation, and I know that where your special pride and joy are, there shall you only too surely be stricken.

If you are proud of your bodily beauty, then in that beauty shall you be degraded. Not for you then shall be the disease that comes in the leg or the toe or in some wholly unobtrusive place where no one need know of it. To you it will come either in the eye, so that you have to wear an eyeshade, or in the form of a skin disorder, so that the fairness and perfectness of your complexion may be lost to you. I have read of one of our most successful business men that his great passion in life being the taking of country rambles with a botanical interest, he had told himself that when he had made enough money to be fairly comfortable in life he would give up working and devote himself to walking as a hobby; but just as his business began to be successful he became paralysed in the lower limbs, and thenceforward could only go about in a bathchair.

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This is only one instance out of the scores that present themselves to us on every hand. Compensation is a very real and very pitiless Force. Knowing this, I was afraid; terribly afraid: and as I saw the beauty grow in Little Yeogh Wough's baby body and in his mind, which always, even from the beginning, seemed to know things which he had never been taught, I began to pray night after night:

"Don't take him away from me, oh God! Don't take him away!"

And now he is in khaki, a lieutenant and adjutant at just twenty years old—and is coming home from the Front on his second leave.

When I first realised that he would soon be coming home, I went out into the loft over the old stables and took his baby clothes out of an old trunk and looked at them. And, as I looked, it seemed to me such a little while since he had worn them.

How patient I had been with him in those days—I, who am not patient by nature! How I had walked up and down with him, sat up at night with him, sung for him strange songs about butcher boys and tom cats, and interrupted my work a score of times every hour for him! But I never yielded to him, not even in those babyhood days, for I wanted him to grow up to be a fine sample of manhood, and I knew that if he was to do that he must know that his mother was not weak.

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A little cream silk coat and a pair of cream woollen gaiters reminded me of his first tryings to speak. His little stumbling words had always had a thought behind them. How he had taken us aback one morning when he had presented himself before us with a pen behind his ear, saying with an owl-like wiseness: "Fishman doos that." This referred to the fishmonger whom he visited every morning with his old nurse for the giving of orders. And then, another time, when I was annoyed with my brother and said to him that something he had done was: "Just the sort of thing that eccentric males always do," the room door had opened suddenly to admit a little figure in the cream silk pelisse and woollen gaiters, and a baby voice had cried reproachfully:

"Not 'centric males. No!"

"He's beginning pretty early to stand up for his own sex," my brother said with a laugh that drove away the cloud of annoyance between us.

And yet the boy had in him that touch of the feminine which the best men have and which makes them irresistible. Already in his little way he had a knightly reverence for womanhood. Already his few pence of pocket money were spent on flowers for me.

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I remember that what struck me most when he came into the room at this time was his brave

little walk. He always had such brave, gay feet! I thought of this again last week when in answer to my question in a letter as to how his battalion had got all the way down from near Ypres to somewhere east of Abbeville, he said:

"We got a train for a bit of the way, but mostly we came on our feet."

Oh, the dear, dear feet, so plucky and untiring! And how I loved the "we" and the "our"! He always has identified himself with his men, so that they know that he cares for them, and they would follow him, as his colonel put it, "anywhere and into anything."

And that day in his small childhood the little feet had a charm that for an instant brought quick hot tears into my eyes.

He was very shy, though sometimes he could be very bold—as when one day, coming into the dining-room and finding a certain important person sitting there, he fetched on his own account a box of Vafiadis and, thrusting them under the visitor's eyes, said coolly:

"Ave a cigawette?"

At other times nothing could induce him to go into a room where there was someone who was a stranger to him. [Pg 33]

His first experience of serious punishment came of this sensitiveness and shyness. A very well-known but decidedly ugly man was in the drawing-room, and the child, under pressure, went in to be seen of him. But when he caught sight of the visitor, his feelings overcame him.

"Shunny man! Ugly man!" he cried; and he turned and bolted.

And so sweet was that ugly man that he not only forgave him, but declared afterwards that it was the wretched little insulter's charm and beauty which had led him to think of marriage in the hope of having children of his own. But, as for me—I left the visitor to my husband's care, and, following the three-year-old sinner out of the room and upstairs to the nursery, whither he had fled, I administered personal chastisement.

I soon found, however, that to punish him for social misbehaviour would not always be possible, because most of his naughtiness in this respect was due to nerves. It seemed to be a penalty attaching to his really unusual beauty that I should be unable to show it off. Many and many a time I took him to literary and artistic gatherings only to find myself obliged to send him home with his nurse before any exhibiting of him had been possible. The least excitement would throw him into such a fit of nerves as made even his grandmothers learn new wisdom about childhood. [Pg 34]

He was never gleeful. He had the sweetest, gladdest smile in the world, but there was always an underlying sadness in him that worried the many good people who imagine that if a child is happy it must needs be jumping about and laughing more or less noisily. And a great grief came to him at this time when his first nurse left to be married.

Fond though he was of me, he was yet so unhappy over this that he was very nearly ill. How different children's characters are! His sister, The Bystander, then three months old, never cared who nursed her. Nurses might come and nurses might go, but as long as she was fed and bathed and looked after, she cared not a tinker's curse.

And then there came two very important new-comers to the household—a black puppy, and the elderly woman who from then till now has been known as the Old Nurse.

Oh, that Old Nurse! what would she say now if she were watching and waiting here with us for her Master Roland to come home on leave, instead of lying in her grave as she has been for eighteen months, where the alarms of war reach her not!

CHAPTER III

THE FIRST STEPS OF THE LITTLE FEET

[Pg 35]

There is nothing like smells, or clothes, for bringing back the past. The scent of the American currant will always bring my childhood back to me when even music could not do it. The hardest-hearted criminal can be softened sometimes to yielding and to tears by some smell that brings back an old home life long since forgotten. In the same way the sight of clothes worn in other days sends the memory darting back across the years. So it was with me when I was rummaging among my Little Yeogh Wough's things and found a pink linen coat and knee breeches and a little white-frilled shirt that had been worn with them.

That little pink linen suit lit up the past for me just as a lamp lights up a dark place into which it is suddenly carried.

I had a vision of yellow curls under a sailor hat and sunning out over a white embroidery collar. I saw little brown hands always finding something to do and doing it masterfully, reckless of consequences. I saw happy Christmases and birthdays made stupendously joyous by the coming of luxurious toys, which may have been wastefully extravagant, but which helped, anyhow, to build a foundation of happiness for the child and his sister and brother to look back to in after [Pg 36]

years. I saw battles in the nursery in which the Old Nurse and the under nurse were sometimes worsted and even received personal injuries. But, above all, I saw two scenes which had a bearing on the future of my Yeogh Wough, who was one day to go to the trenches in France and Flanders and fight for his country.

The first was the occasion of the christening of his newly arrived small brother. The scene was a London church, and after the christening ceremony the clergyman looked at Yeogh Wough and then spoke to me.

"This elder boy was only baptised privately, at home, I believe?"

"Yes."

"Then he ought to be received properly into the Church. I will do it now."

And he put out his hand and drew Yeogh Wough towards him.

The boy went deathly white and we who watched him knew that one of his attacks of nerves was threatening. The big, brown, velvety eyes were for a moment shrinking and wavering. Then, as if something said within him that when one is a boy of just six years old one must go forward with things and play the game, he steadied and straightened himself suddenly, lifted his big head very high—it was like the head of a lion cub—and, though his cheeks were bloodless still, went through the ceremony without faltering.

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"He's got the stuff in him that heroes are made of," someone said to his father and to me. "He'd go to martyrdom just in the same way."

The other scene that stands out took place half a year earlier, when he was five and a half. He had been down on a visit to some relatives in the country and was talking about a particular pond which he had seen. Then his father began to tell him the story of how the famous American preacher Theodore Parker, when he was a little boy, was standing one day by a pond, looking at a beautiful flower that grew at its edge, when a frog suddenly came up out of the water. Young Parker took up a stone to kill the frog, but stopped because a voice within him, which was the voice of his conscience, told him that it would be wrong to take the harmless creature's life.

"Yes, fa'ver," Little Yeogh Wough nodded wisely. "I know about that voice. I've heard it, too. I'm hearing it now."

"You're hearing it now, Roland? What do you mean?"

"Why, down at Uncle Jack's there were some nice round things, all white and red and smooth, and I wanted them and I asked Auntie May if I could have them and she said: 'No, Yoland, you can't have them, because they're ivowy card counters.' And I didn't like her telling me I couldn't have them, so I took them when she was gone out, and I've bwrought them up here to London wiv' me. Nurse doesn't know. I've got them now. But I don't feel as if I want them now."

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"No, of course not. That was very wrong of you. You must go and get them at once and give them up to your mother or to me and we will send them back to Auntie May and tell her that you are very sorry."

"Yes, I've been sorry ever since I bwrought them up."

A little blue silk suit flashed my thoughts back to a garden party which the weather turned into an indoor party, and at which Little Yeogh Wough made himself a small Master of the Ceremonies, taking away from his smaller sister an ice which she had secretly captured and conducting her upstairs on the pretext that at three and a half years old she was too young to take part in social affairs. How the gay, brave little feet went about that day, with the joy of the May-time in the house, in spite of the rain, and outside all the glamour and the glory of a London that as yet knew not the Great War!

There is an American song in which a mother declares that she never raised her son to be a soldier. I never raised my son to be a soldier. I thought he had too much brain power for the Army, especially if there was to be no war. And yet I was making him a soldier every day, and, above all, every night.

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For every night of his life, from the time he was two years old, I had gone to see him in bed, as he phrased it. Now and again there was a break in these nightly visits, when I had to go out to dinner, and especially to an unusually early dinner; but, except for these rare breaks, I never failed the child in these good-night talks.

"Come and see me in bed, mother," was his regular appeal after his good-night kiss. And I went, and after hearing him say his prayers I knelt down by his bedside and talked to him, sometimes for a whole hour.

Not that he and I had long talks at these particular times only. All day long, until his school days came, we were together. I never talked down to him or tried to make myself a child for him. It was he who was always trying to reach up to me. When I brushed my hair or looked over my

clothes or dressed for some affair or other, he was in my room always and I talked to him in French, until he came to know in a tender easy way that tongue which has been of so much use to him in this past year of the War, when, as adjutant, and as Mess President of his battalion, he has needed to do a good deal of talking with people who haven't a word of English. He would hear me repeating snatches of poetry, too, and afterwards, when he was alone, he could be heard saying them over to himself in a way which showed that he perfectly grasped their meaning. He walked with me, drove with me, watched me at my work, and, as soon as he was able to read, began to read to me. For I had hurt my eyes by overwork then and could not read to myself. It was my Compensation for having him and for having at the same time a little—a very little—worldly success.

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This belief in Compensation has become a part of my life now and stops my natural gaiety. I have never had a happy day yet or a whole-hearted laugh without paying for it. This is what makes me afraid now that Yeogh Wough is coming home on his second leave. A man who is fighting for his country does not come home unwounded on his second leave without something happening.

Oh, if people would only see this and take care! But they are blind to instances of it that are about them every day. Lord Roberts bought his Boer War successes with the death of his son. Lieutenant Warneford paid for his double V.C. with his life when he next went up into the air. And so on.

At night, when I knelt by Yeogh Wough's bedside till my knees were sore, the things we talked of were different. We put Henley and Browning and Stevenson and others of their kind aside then and I spoke to him of what boyhood means and what manhood means; of the glories of manly work, such as engineering, shipbuilding, inventing, and the need for hard striving and straight living.

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"You must never be feeble, Little Yeogh Wough. Feebleness is a thing that nobody can forgive, except in old people and children. It's better to be strong in doing bad things than not strong at all. But you'll get to know when you grow up that badness is only a funny kind of weakness. You must be strong. Look at Kitchener! He's got on by being strong and thorough. They say that when the rails came for the building of the Soudan railway he examined every yard of metal himself, not trusting to other people. That's thoroughness."

I taught him what patriotism means.

He had lived through the Boer War, though it had found him hardly more than four years old. He had seen a woman burst into tears in the street when a regiment of Highlanders swung past, and I had told him why she had done so and all about Magersfontein. I had told him the story of the American Civil War, lighting it up with such things as the story of the play "Secret Service." I had put great figures up as models for him, and among them was the figure of Cecil Rhodes. I had taught him that the least little thing he did, even so small a thing as the mending of a toy, must be done thoroughly, because he was British born and had the British repute to keep up. And then together, he with his curly head on the pillow and his hand clasping mine as I knelt beside the bed, we would repeat poems by Newbolt and Conan Doyle and Quiller Couch. The one he came to love best was Newbolt's "Vitæ Lampada" with those lines:—

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"The sand of the desert is sodden red,
Red with the wreck of a square that broke;
The Gatling's jammed and the Colonel's dead,
And the regiment's blind with dust and smoke;
The river of death has brimmed its banks,
And England's far and honour's a name;
But the voice of a schoolboy rallies the ranks:
'Play up! Play up! And play the game!'"

"Do you understand this, Little Yeogh Wough? You are not likely ever to be a soldier, but you have got to carry all this out in ordinary life, as much as in war."

"This is the word that, year by year,
While in her place the School is set,
Every one of her sons must hear,
And none that hears it dares forget;
This they all, with a joyful mind,
Bear through life like a torch in flame;
And, falling, fling to the hosts behind:
'Play up! Play up! And play the game!'"

Oh, yes! Yes! I was making him a soldier with every day and night that passed. But I did not know it. Ah! If I could have looked forward and seen myself as I am to-night, sitting here waiting for him to come home from the trenches on his second leave!

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"You don't want me to be a real soldier when I grow up, do you, mother?" he asked me.

"Well, no, dear, I don't think I do. I don't think it will be enough for you to occupy all your mind with. You see, soldiering is an ornamental affair with us. It isn't as if we made a thorough

business of it, as the Germans do—though, when I had the good luck the other evening to meet the biggest military man of to-day and have a talk with him, he said it was one of our worst mistakes to think that no brains are wanted in the Army. He said we want all the best brains we can get, and the more of them the better."

Sometimes, when I left the boy, after tucking him in and pulling back his curtains and opening his window, I met the sturdy Old Nurse, who had been lying in wait for me.

"If you please'm, I wish you'd speak to that there Master Roland and make 'im behave 'isself better. I can't think how you thinks he's such a good boy and so reasonable. Why, the way he do carry on in the nursery is something shocking. He hid his myganas to-night till I was a hour and more 'unting for them and 'ad to air 'im a clean suit of them to go to bed in. You spoils 'im so that there's no doin' nothin' with 'im when your back's turned."

She was indignantly holding out a suit of pyjamas. I did my best to look stern.

"You know very well, Nurse, that I always punish him when he deserves punishment. I gave him a touch of the cane only last week." [Pg 44]

She made her long upper lip look longer.

"'M, yes. M'say, there's punishing and punishing. There's some ways of caning that's more like petting than anything else. Why, now, didn't you tell me that those two young gentlemen as was dining here the other night wasn't very well? That's Master Roland's doings. They 'ad that bottle of still 'Ock as 'ad been uncorked and corked up again, and Master Roland, 'e thought as it ought to be sparkling 'Ock, and he took and emptied all the Pyretic Saline into it—a new full bottle. What I d'say is, if you spoils a child——"

I left the good Gloucestershire woman to go on with her mumblings unheeded. But now, remembering how she always accused me of spoiling him, I asked myself if I really did so.

Did I really spoil him? If so, it was only a little, and I am glad—glad—glad—knowing as I do what he has had to bear since he went out to the trenches.

He, who had been so shielded, has learned during this past year what it is like to have the brains of a man you knew and cared for splattered all over you as you stand in your trench. He has learned what it feels like to slip and fall on something soft and slime-like on his way to a new trench at night and then to find that he had slid his hand into the decaying body of a long-dead German soldier. He has heard wild screams of women at night from the depths of a wood, and weeks afterwards has come upon murdered nuns lying cold and piteous, seven of them together. When I think of all this I thank God that he has at least a happy childhood to look back upon. [Pg 45]

He says in his last letter that he has learnt much and gained much and grown up suddenly and got to know the ways of the world. This has made me curiously uneasy. I have a fear that it may cover up something—some experience that I should not have liked him to go through. And yet—while he can still sign himself *Little Yeogh Wough*, I know that he is not lost nor utterly spoiled. I know that in spite of the new life and its duties and horrors, there is even yet a good deal of the old life left in him. He is still the "old Roland"; still mine—the boy of my heart.

CHAPTER IV

THE BOY'S TREASURES AND OTHER THINGS

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I went to look at his room, feeling that it ought to be done up before he comes home.

It would certainly be improved by new wallpaper, but I dare not have this improvement made. Superstition reminds me that I have often noticed how unlucky people have been who have had their bedrooms done up. They are always either ill in the rooms or else never occupy them any more. I decided at once that I would not have it done. The room was attractive enough, as it is, with its high, narrow, mirror-hung door leading into the bathroom, and its vast wardrobe packed full now with his ordinary clothes, his military great-coat—too long and cumbersome for the trenches, even in winter—and piles of small books which in the past two years he has bought out of his own pocket-money; and his sword.

The bed had an air as if it were waiting for him. The darling boy! How thankfully he nestled down between the sheets when he came home the first time! His big brown eyes were almost wild, that night. He had the look of a man who has been back for a time into savage life and wonders at the most everyday things of civilisation. [Pg 47]

"I haven't slept in a proper bed since I first went out," he said.

"Why, what about that French château where you said everything was so luxurious?" I asked him.

"Oh, everything is comparative!" He laughed. "I had a feather bed on the floor there and it seemed to be almost a wicked luxury even though there were no sheets or pillows and I had only my brown blanket over me."

Yes, even then, a fortnight ago, his bed had an air of expectancy about it, as if it knew that he had

written to say he was coming again. Above the head of it the wall was bare, because I had left it to him to decide what should be put there, and he never cared two straws what his room looked like as long as it had all the little things he wanted in it and was within a dozen yards of a bathroom.

That unlucky bathroom! Why is it that bathrooms and staircases cause more angry passions in a household than anything else?

I, for example, am not a bad-tempered woman. I am positive that even my worst enemy—my worst feminine enemy—would think twice before laying ill-temper to my charge; yet when anybody meets me on the stairs, or comes upstairs close behind me, I feel inhuman. I quite understand the mood of the late editor of one of the great daily newspapers, who drove from his house without notice any servant unlucky enough to meet him on the stairs. So, too, when a new London club was started a few years ago in a very tall and narrow house, I said it could never succeed, because all the people—members and servants alike—were always mounting and descending the staircases, like Burne Jones's figures on the Golden Stairs. And it did not succeed.

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In the same way, most men cannot bear that the door of any room, even the most private, in their own home should be locked against them. And this brings me back to the bathroom and Little Yeogh Wough.

When a bathroom is of the ordinary kind, the only cause of trouble, as a rule, is whether the hot water is hot enough. But this particular bathroom has three doors, and the occupants of the three contiguous rooms from which those doors give access occasionally emerged at the same time and fiercely disputed possession of the means of cleanliness.

When Little Yeogh Wough was at home he usually slipped in at a well-chosen moment by his particular door and, locking the two other doors on the inside, remained master of the situation, while various other members of the family, and notably his father, stormed outside. The boy had always been a fanatical devotee of the Bath, and since he has been in the trenches and personal cleanliness has been difficult, he has become more so than ever. He loves his room because of this door leading into the bathroom, and more so still because of the long mirror set in the door on his own side.

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For he is vain, my Little Yeogh Wough. There is nothing effeminate about him, though he knows a great deal of womanly lore and could, for instance, choose the right lace for a particular gown as well as I could do it myself. There is nothing of the tailor's or hairdresser's dummy about him, with clothes looking like those pictured in an illustrated booklet and hair plastered with the meticulous exactitude required of men going into a Thames racing craft, where one hair more on one side or the other might sink the cranky shell and plunge them into the river. He is smart and polished and speckless as any prince with a valet at five hundred a year, and he brilliantined his rather fair and very rebellious locks until in the process of subduing they became many shades darker than their natural hue; yet he always saw clearly and maintained firmly that clothes should set off the man or woman and not be allowed to make use of the glorious human figure as a mere peg on which to display themselves, while hair should never advertise the coiffeur. So, though he has always examined himself before looking-glasses and had pots of all sorts of toilet things on his dressing-table, yet he has always been the manliest of the manly.

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"Why shouldn't a boy look in the glass as well as a girl?" he said to me one day. "I don't see why it should only be the females that are allowed to take pleasure in whatever good things in the way of looks may happen to have been given them."

All his little personal ways came back to me as I moved about his room, making sure that nothing should be missing when he came. The back brush he had bought for the bath looked a little dusty, so I washed it. Even as I did this, snatches of poems which I would rather not have remembered just then kept on coming to my mind and my lips. There was a poem called "Aftermath" in *The Times*, which I shall never be able to forget. It begins:

"Yes ... he is gone ... there is the message ... see!
My son ... my eldest son. So be it, God!
This is no time for tears ... no time to mourn.
 In the years to come,
When we have done our work, and God's own peace
With tranquil glory floods a troubled world,
Why, then, perhaps, in the old hall at home,
Our eyes, my wife, shall meet and gleam, and mark,
Niched on the walls in sanctity of pride,
Hal's sword, Dick's medal, and the cross He won,
Yet never wore. That is the time for tears;
Drawn from a well of love deep down ... deep down;
Deep as the mystery of immortal souls.
That is the time for tears ... not now! Not now!"

And then the last line of some verses which I saw somewhere else, headed "The Second Lieutenant":

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"Up and up to his God,"

and, best and worst of all, Rupert Brooke's:

"If I should die, think only this of me,
That there's one corner of a foreign field
Shall be for ever England——"

When I got to this point, the tears which had been blinding me so that I could hardly see what I was doing brimmed over and fell on the back brush. Why did I let those tears come when I ought to have been smiling and singing because he is coming home?

I might as well be foolish enough to cry now, when I am sitting here waiting for him and when I know that at some blessed moment during the next half-hour he is bound to come in.

I was quite angry with myself when I wiped my tears away that time a fortnight ago. I dried the back brush with unnecessary energy and then took another and closer look about his room.

One of his hats and his riding whip hung together on the wall above shelves of books which he had bought himself. Every one of those books spoke to me of him as I glanced at their titles. Another bookcase was gloriously rich with his Public School prizes. Such handsome, wonderful books they are; and there are about fifty of them. What a tale they tell of power and effort! I had had a curtain made for the bookcase, to keep the dust away from these most precious of treasures, and as I drew the velvet folds back now and looked at the massive ornamental volumes, I felt a thrill at the thought that my continual spurring of him onward and upward had not been in vain.

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"And he has never disappointed me," I thought aloud.

No, he had never disappointed me. And people as a rule are so disappointing! One's friends fall short, one's lover says the wrong thing at the wrong time, or forgets to say the right thing—which is even worse—and one's dearest clergymen and favourite actors and heroes generally make unspeakable fools of themselves just as one is getting ready to fall on one's knees and worship them.

All my life I have asked too much of people and then been left gaping at their unsatisfyingness. So it was no wonder that I was always frankly amazed whenever I stopped to realise that Little Yeogh Wough had always come up to my expectations.

Not that he was ever a prig. Heaven forbid! I would run farther from a prig than from a criminal. He has always had heaps of faults. But they are fine faults. One never rams one's head against a blank wall in him, but always finds deeps and deeps behind.

"That there Master Roland 'ave got so many nooks and corners in his mind that you can't never tell when you've got to the end of 'im," Old Nurse said once, mixing up her words, but showing her meaning plainly enough. "And what I says is, 'e'll go on getting deeper and deeper all his life, till 'e gets into the sincere and yellow leaf, as the Scriptures calls it."

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Oh, how his room went on speaking to me of him! Sargent's picture of Carmencita, the Spanish dancer, is over the fireplace, with two fencing foils crossed above it; and above these again is a picture of two stately lovers walking by the shore in Brittany. The table near the foot of the bed had a pile of little military books upon it—"Quick Training for War" and its fellows—and dear little books of poems, and some sheets of his favourite green blotting-paper. He put himself out a good deal to get that green blotting-paper, saying that white showed the ink stains too much, while pink was an abomination, like a red flannel petticoat for a woman or a magenta pelisse for a pallid, blue-eyed child.

The dressing-table drawers were, and still are, full of things that he has no use for at the Front; all except the two small drawers on either side of the looking-glass, which have got a few old letters in them and a few odds and ends of nice things, such as solidified Eau de Cologne and the most deliciously fragrant shaving cream.

Shaving, indeed! Why, he has only done it for a year or so! I am sorry, by the way, that he has got a moustache now. Speaking for myself, I don't like a man with a moustache, except in the capacity of lover. Of course, I hate beards, anyhow. They always make me think of Abraham and Isaac and all those old uninteresting men whom no woman with any romance in her would look at twice, even if it were a case of him and of her being the sole survivors of the human race in the world. By the way, though, I did once see a beard which was attractive—or, more truthfully, was not unattractive. It was a short, silky, auburn beard, torpedo-shaped, and it was on a naval officer who was otherwise so charming that he might perhaps have carried off worse things than this with success. But, coming back to the moustache, it is a fit appendage for a man in the lover stage, because it gives an impression of masculinity. But when a man is my uncle or my father, or simply my friend, and above all, when he is likely to argue much with me, I prefer him to be clean shaven. It gives me a feeling of equality.

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When I was a little girl I used to wonder why a man's words, however silly, always seemed to have more importance than a woman's words, however wise; and I satisfied myself that it was because a man's statements nearly always came from under a moustache. Even if he only said how fine the day was, the fact that the remark came from a mouth that had a black or brown or golden porch to it gave it a quite undue amount of weight. On the other hand, when I talk with men whose faces are as hairless as my own, I don't feel that they have any advantage over me. So, as I often have long discussions with Little Yeogh Wough, I felt quite sorry when he had to get a moustache.

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Still, he is my Little Yeogh Wough, whose babyish and boyish weaknesses I have known and loved so well.

As I looked more and more round the room, I got more reminders of his small-boyish and babyish times. Under the bed, with several pairs of handsome boots, there was the wreck of an old, squeaky gramophone, and the yet more interesting wreck of a toy typewriter, with which, at the age of eleven, he printed twelve numbers of a monthly home magazine called "The Vallombrosa Record," all by himself. A dusty golliwog and a Teddy bear are jammed in among the ruins of these things, together with a few feathers from the tail of an old life-size cock which used to stand on the night nursery mantelpiece.

I opened the wardrobe. The first thing that my hand touched was a tape-measure, in the shape of a negro's head, with the tape coming out of the mouth. And how this thing brought back to me the Little Yeogh Wough of six and a half years old!

One fine spring morning, my secretary, Miss Torry, had scurried into my study in our London house with this thing in her hand and her face severe.

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"Really, you ought to begin training this boy's moral character," said she, speaking with the freedom of one who, though employed by me, was yet older than I. "You see this tape measure. He bought it for a Christmas present for his grand-mamma because he wanted it himself, and he felt quite sure she would give it back to him as soon as she knew he wanted it; but she didn't, and now he's been up there to Hampstead and wheedled it out of her. He's very selfish, you know, and it ought to be nipped in the bud. And he's extravagant with his selfishness—and so cunning, too! Look at the way he came to you yesterday and asked you for a shilling—at his age!—and went out and bought a miserable little peach for tenpence and brought it to you with a great deal of fuss and hung round while you ate it, so that he got you to give him quite nine-tenths of it, and then told you all the evening that he'd made you a present of a peach. Now this is a tendency that ought to be checked. Canon Bloomfield of St. Margaret's says that—"

"It's all right, Miss Torry. The boy is not really cunning, though he seems so. He has a dear little heart, and, in spite of his tricks, he would give his brown velvet eyes right out of his head for me."

I put down the old negro head tape-measure and took up a dark little overcoat dating from the time when he was seven. I had brought it in here out of an old box, meaning to give it away. It was badly cut, and so he had never worn it much; because, even at seven years old, he had known when a coat had no style, and had hated it. Certainly it used to make him—yes, even him—look almost commonplace.

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"Fancy the little wretch having known at seven years old whether a thing made him look commonplace or not!" I thought with a laugh as I moved the unsatisfactory garment aside.

He had known at that early age, too, whether my own clothes were satisfactory or not. He had always taken a vivid, throbbing interest in every new garment I had; yes, and in every new yard of ribbon and in every spray of flowers.

"Perhaps it's a good thing he has met Vera and taken a fancy to her, even though he is only a boy still," I said to myself aloud. "Such a fellow as he is might so easily get into trouble with the wrong woman—especially now that he's in khaki. There's so much dash about him. I should fall in love with him myself in five minutes, if I were not his mother."

Falling in love? How absurd it seems in connection with this boy whom I had given to the world, and whose very early boyhood was only such a little way back!

My cook has only been here eight years, and yet she remembers him as quite a small boy. It makes me laugh to think of her amazement when I mention that he has a great friendship for Vera.

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"Friendship for a young lady, mum? What? Master Roland? Well, I never did! What the boys is coming to in this war, I don't know. And there's the newspapers all advising 'em to get married before they go out. Mischievous nonsense, I call it. What's the good of getting married to a man who may leave you a widow inside of a month? Two or three girls I know have just done that, for the sake of getting the men's money. Downright mean, I call it, and hard on the taxpayers that have got to keep the soldiers' widows and orphans; and so I told 'em. Of course, it's different for your sort; but it's not right for the likes of us. It's not my idea of gettin' married, anyhow, and so I told my young man when he was going out."

"But wouldn't you feel more sure of him, Joanna, if he'd married you? You see, if he were your husband, and not only just your lover, you'd know that you could trust him out there, and that he wouldn't be flirting with French girls."

But Joanna laughed doubtfully.

"I don't see as that follows, mum. 'Usbands flirts just as much as lovers, from what I've seen. And I'm not afraid of my young man flirting, anyhow, because he isn't the sort. You see, he never calls me darling in his letters, or anything like that. If he was to do that kind of thing, then I should know that he was very likely carrying on with other girls. But he only puts in a 'dear' now and then, and that's the sort that you can trust."

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Wise philosopher of the kitchen! If only all women would judge their men as truthfully.

"But to think of Master Roland!" the cook began again.

Yes, to think of Little Yeogh Wough beginning to care for any girl!

As I went on rummaging in the wardrobe, I came across a little loose pile of letters which he had sent back from the Front. I should never dream in the ordinary way of reading anybody else's letters—I carefully avoid looking into his private drawer in this same piece of furniture—but it happens that he told me playfully that I could read any of the letters in this particular little pile, if I chose.

The first two were from myself to him. Of course I might look at those.

They bore signs of violent usage in the opening. I have a habit of fastening down the flaps of my envelopes with stickphast, and then making them still more secure by sitting on the letters in a book. So Little Yeogh Wough had often told me that, whenever he saw a letter of mine arriving, he sent his soldier servant for an entrenching tool to open it with.

Not that he had any right to tease me on this matter. For he followed the same plan himself in fastening letters. He always used stickphast and he always sat on the missives in a book.

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Whenever we bought a book that we did not enjoy, we took it to sit on as a correspondence flattener.

"Don't you ever believe anybody who says they've opened by mistake any letter that you'd written," Little Yeogh Wough said to me once. "It's a sheer impossibility."

The letter from myself to him, which I had just taken up, was one which he had marked to be put away later on in his despatch box for permanent safe keeping. I recognise it as one that I had written at a time when I knew he was in particular danger. Vera had made him promise that when there was going to be a great "push," or when any other circumstances arose which materially increased the ordinary risk to his life, he would send her a certain short Latin sentence. In an hour of crisis he had sent this sentence, and the anxious girl, who thought of him all day and dreamed of him all night, had passed on the warning to me.

A chill ran through my blood as I re-read my own written words:

"Monday, 27th Sept., 1915.

"MY OWN SWEET LITTLE YEOGH WOUGH,—

"The news from the French front this morning filled us with joy. For a moment I positively danced. All those thousands of German prisoners meant so much! And then a horrible thought came to me that it must mean worse danger for you; and now a letter from Vera says that you have sent her a few words—of which Big Yeogh Wough is perhaps a little jealous—to say that the posts will be stopped very soon.

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"This strikes me as very significant. It would have given me a danger signal, even apart from that 'short Latin sentence' which I hear you have also sent.

"Dearest, your Big Yeogh Wough, who has always been so proud of you ever since you have been born, is prouder of you than ever now. She is glad you are where your duty of honour and manhood demand that you should be. You are fighting, not only for us and all that we glory in, but for those who have died—and who are all your brothers, whether they were peers or privates. I feel at this moment that I should like to go the round of the whole army and kiss them every one—but keeping always a special kiss for you.

"But this pride and this gladness don't prevent me from being on the rack. I have been troubled for some days past; and I should have written to you several times during this interval in which I have been silent, if it were not that I have been much more than usually occupied with the delicate steering of things in general. But always my heart and my thoughts are with you, my very precious boy. I only wish my love could be of use as a talisman, to guard you against all the dangers.

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"Your always devoted, in all lives through which we may pass,

"BIG YEOGH WOUGH.

"Your cake will be sent off to you to-day. The Bystander has just written to you."

Ah, thank God! He came safely through that time of extra-acute peril. If he had not come through it—what sort of human wreck should I be now?

I shivered as I put the letter down with fingers that were not quite steady.

Then I took up another letter from the pile—a letter with a London postmark and with a Hammersmith address for its heading.

"What a common-looking, sloppy handwriting!" I thought as I looked at it.

And the thing began:

"You dear pigeon of a Roly."

And it was signed:

"Your duck of a Queenie."

And underneath the "Queenie" there were actually crosses for kisses, as if the letter were from a tweenymaid!

I got a shock. Shivers went down my back. What vulgar creature could this be who had dared to make so free with the purest-minded and least vulgar boy in all the world? Who was she that had taken advantage of him like this, just because he was at large and in khaki?

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CHAPTER V GOOD DAYS AND GOOD NIGHTS

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I know exactly the kind of woman this is.

Even in my indignation, I could not help half-smiling as I remembered certain angry complaints made by a fashionable mother whom I had met at a War charity meeting.

"It really is a shame that you can't let your fresh-minded boy go out into the world without his coming across snare-laying women," she had burst out confidentially. "The poor silly fellows get quite led astray by some of these girls that they meet where they're billeted—shoddy girls with a cheap prettiness and cheap little openwork stockings and flashy haircombs, and imitation jewellery, and no minds or souls. You know the sort. They're always hankering after small outings and excitements, and, of course, they would all like to catch baby second lieutenants, who may one day be something in the world."

She had been so much upset, this fashionable mother, that I knew she must have suffered.

"What a pity that this 'Queenie' of Hammersmith doesn't know better when she's wasting her time!" I thought. "Why couldn't she see that her 'Roly' might love a woman a hundred times worse than she is, but he wouldn't love her? Anyhow, he ought to have burnt her silly letter. I will see that he burns it when he comes back. I will not have such stuff defiling this consecrated room.... And yet—I wonder if it is the same charm in him that makes both Queenie and me adore him!"

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For it was certainly not because he was my son that I was wrapped up in him.

"Why ever do you think such a heap of me?" he had asked me more than once. And I had always answered him:

"Because, my boy, you are that strangest and most wonderful thing in all the world—an interesting young man. As a rule, the masculine person isn't worth taking the least notice of till he's thirty—except for athletics. I put that down in a diary once when I was a little girl and I should put the same thing down now. It quite takes one's breath away to find a boy who is athletic and fascinating at the same time. One feels that a drum ought to be beaten through the town. Do you know, you will even be one of the few persons whose weddings are not dull. And weddings, as a rule, are the dullest things that ever happen."

I had spoken so lightly and yet I had meant every word that I had said.

No, I need not be afraid that any of the shoddy, mean-souled women of this world will ever have much chance with a boy of his sort. And if, indeed, he really and deeply loves Vera Brennan, the dream-figure with the amethyst eyes, then she is very much to be envied of other girls.

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Was it for her that he had written the little poem which came to my hand at this moment among the letters, and of which he had sent one copy to her and one to me?

He had written it in Ploegsteert Wood soon after he had gone out to the Front, and the lines were as sad and as sweet as the little dark blue flowers that had made them well up out of his heart:

"Violets from Plug Street Wood,
Sweet, I send you oversea.
(It is strange they should be blue,
Blue, when his soaked blood was red;
For they grew around his head.
It is strange they should be blue.)

Violets from Plug Street Wood—
Think what they have meant to me!
Life and Hope and Love and You.
(And you did not see them grow
Where his mangled body lay,
Hiding horror from the day.
Sweetest, it was better so.)

Violets from oversea,
To your dear, far, forgetting land;
These I send in memory,
Knowing You will understand."

"Your dear, far, forgetting land!"

Oh, the reproach in those words! And do we not, most of us, deserve that reproach?

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I took out his sword from the drawer in which I had wrapped it away in silk, and I very nearly bowed myself before it in my passion of reverence.

Strange! That one should regard as so sacred a thing that is meant to kill!

Of all such things, it is only the sword that is held holy. Nobody reverences a revolver, while a dagger is mean and sly and a rifle is nothing in particular, like a gardening tool. But a sword is a glory and a joy, and now, as I handled the sword of the boy of my heart, I could have laughed for sheer delight in all the splendid things that it stood for.

What a pity that it should have become a mere show thing, wanted only on parade and never taken out to the Front!

As I stood holding the sword, my husband came into the room with a newspaper in his hand. He is a man who can hardly ever be seen without a newspaper in his hand. But this time his face showed that something new and grave had happened.

"Gretton is dead," he announced to me. "He was killed by a shell at Festubert five days ago."

I caught my breath sharply as my eyes met his.

"Gretton?" I exclaimed; and my voice sounded thin in my own ears.

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"Yes." My husband nodded jerkily. "I don't really like telling you about it, but this comes rather strangely on the top of ugly dreams I've had lately. I dreamt four times last week that I saw Roland and Gretton coming along arm in arm, laughing together, but looking more like upright dead men than living flesh and blood. And the queer thing about it was that, though they were laughing together, Roland was trying to get away from Gretton, and somehow he couldn't. It was as if something that was stronger than their own will kept them close to each other. There was something horrible about it."

I knew that the blood was leaving my cheeks and lips as I looked at him. And yet this boy Gretton was a person whom I had never spoken to in my life!

For the first time for nearly three months, I felt a deadly chill run through me again, just as when Little Yeogh Wough had first gone out to the Front.

"Do you know, I can't help feeling troubled about this?" I heard myself saying in a strange whisper. "It is very silly of me, but I can't help feeling that—that Gretton may be calling to him to follow."

It was not so mad a thing as it seemed, this fear that had just come to me that the boy Gretton, killed five days ago, might be calling to the boy of my heart.

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Their lives had been linked together in a most curious way. They had never had any particular liking for each other—indeed, it must have been almost the other way about, for Little Yeogh Wough had never brought him to us or gone to his home—and yet in their careers they had been as brother spirits.

They had both opened their eyes on life in the same year and month, and within a stone's throw of each other in London. They had both been given the Christian name of Roland, spelt without a "w."

They met by going to the same preparatory school, and from the hour of this first meeting their

lives had run side by side. They had not run quite neck and neck, for Little Yeogh Wough was always ahead. He got a seventy-pound scholarship for a certain great Public School, when Gretton won a fifty-pound one.

It was the same with Oxford, for which they both gained classical scholarships. Little Yeogh Wough was always well ahead. Yet, still, they were always together.

When the war had come, they had got their commissions at the same time. But Gretton had got out to the Front first.

"I shall get out soon now that Gretton's out there," Little Yeogh Wough had said to me confidently. [Pg 70]

And he had gone soon, and they had fought the Germans side by side, as they had fought for honours at school. And now Gretton had been killed, and my husband had dreamed that he saw him walking with our Roland, arm linked in arm, holding on to him closely and refusing to let him go.

"I am a fool to think anything of a dream," I told myself angrily, trying to thrust away from me the grey spectre of Fear that had risen up before me suddenly in the pale winter sunlight. "After all, what is a dream? It's a thing that never comes to a person in perfect health—except once in a way, when one happens to be awakened about half an hour before one's proper time and then goes off into a doze. And then, there is Little Yeogh Wough's lucky white lock. That will keep him from being killed. He will get badly wounded, I dare say, but not killed—no, certainly, not killed."

I have not mentioned the boy's lucky white lock of hair before. It was a queer little white patch in among the gold, just over his left ear.

It was Gretton who, when they went to school first, had called Little Yeogh Wough a sixpenny-halfpenny Golliwog.

"That comes of doin' things by 'alves with Master Roland's 'air," Old Nurse had ventured to air her opinions. "What I do say is, if you've got to cut a boy's curls off, why, you'd better cut 'em off, and not 'ave bits of 'em left 'anging. Of course, it's a shame, but boys 'as got to be boys, and you can't 'ave 'em goin' to school lookin' like them little Cupids in the pictures." [Pg 71]

"It's true that an aureole of golden curls doesn't look very well coming out from under a bowler hat," I said to myself. Have you ever noticed that there's hardly one grown-up man in a hundred that can ever look decent in a bowler? A man has either to be very neat-featured or else very ugly to carry off that sort of hat.

"Them there bowlers is all the go for little boys of Master Roland's age, and 'is suits 'im right enough, only 'e chooses to think as it don't, and you listens to 'im," went on the worthy old woman. "'Pon my word, that there boy's vanity do beat anything I ever come across in all my life. Every time that I makes 'im put that bowler on, 'e gets into such a temper as you never saw. 'E thinks as people laughs at 'im for it, but if they does laugh, it's at 'is fatness, not at his 'at."

"That's because all the rest of them are such skeletons," I rejoined. "Any boy with any flesh on his bones at all would look fat compared with them. People are so silly about thinness and fatness. They always think of what they look like dressed, and never of what they look like undressed. Why, half the women who go about with a reputation for slimness and elegance would give one a start if one saw their blade bones uncovered! And it's the same with children." [Pg 72]

"That may be, ma'am, but it don't do away with the fact that these children is all so enormous that people opens their eyes wide whenever they sees 'em a-comin'. As for Master Roland, I've given 'im up. 'E 'ad the coolness to say to me to-day as my 'air was going greyer. I told 'im that at my time of life people 'as either to 'ave their 'air go grey or else come off, and they aren't given their choice."

"I suppose you'd rather have your hair absent and black than present and grey," I answered her without thinking what I was saying.

"Little Yeogh Wough, you're a very small child still; but I think you'll understand me when I tell you that you've got to a time in your life when you'll have to be very careful about holding on to beauty," I said to the Boy that night when I went in to see him and to have the talk which was as regular as the coming of the night itself. "A girl can keep her ideas of beauty always, but a boy is supposed to drop his when he begins going to school. It's not only the cutting off of yellow curls that I'm thinking of, but other things, too. You'll have to hide your great love for flowers and colour and poetry."

He looked puzzled.

"Mustn't I bring you flowers any more, Big Yeogh Wough?" he laughed then. [Pg 73]

"Oh, yes, of course! You can show your love for beautiful things just as much at home as ever. That's the best side of you. But you must not talk about it to the boys, because they wouldn't understand. I'll show you what I mean by telling you of something that your father and I saw when we were in Paris last. We happened to go into a fashionable tea-shop, and there we saw, sitting with his mother, a boy who must have been eleven or twelve years old, in a white satin

suit complete and with hair as long as a girl's hanging down his back, tied in with white satin ribbon. Now, you know, we English believe that a boy had better be dead than be like that. Even I think so. Of course, he was like a little prince in a fairy tale, but everyday life isn't a fairy tale, and we don't consider white satin and long hair manly. So it's in order to prevent anybody from thinking that you've got any taint of unmanliness about you that you must make up your mind now to give up pretty things for yourself and go in for boyish plainness, and cricket and football. No one must ever think you soft and flabby."

"I don't think anybody will ever do that," he laughed again. "I knocked one of the boys down today for being impudent to me. He was a good deal bigger than I am; so it's done me a lot of good with the others."

I took one of his small, strong hands and clasped it in mine and held it against my breast.

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"Was this the little hand that did it?" I laughed. "Because, if so, that is splendid. Those boys must have seen that golden curls and big soft brown eyes can have a good deal of manly strength behind them; and people will always respect your brains, and even your longings for the pretty things of life, as long as they know you're strong enough to knock them down if you want to. But you must only use your strength against others who are just as strong. You must never use it against your little sister and brother. Nurse says you have been behaving badly in the nursery this evening—interfering with the others instead of doing your home-work. Why haven't you done your preparation?"

"Why, because the master that's got to see my home-work won't be at school to-morrow, so it would have been all a waste. The other boys said they weren't going to do theirs."

"And what difference does it make to you whether they do theirs or not? How does it alter your duty? Why should you cheat yourself because they are silly enough to cheat themselves?"

The big brown eyes looked at me blankly. I went on:

"Don't you see, Little Yeogh Wough, that it's only yourself that you cheat when you don't do your work? It's not your master. It doesn't matter to him. He doesn't lose anything. It's you who lose. You've cheated yourself this evening of something that you might have had. And you haven't been thorough. If you neglect your work often like this, you'll get to slurring it over when you do it, so long as you think nobody will notice the slurring; and that won't do. That will make you grow up just like most of the other men you see around you, and not the great, strong, wonderful man that I want you to be."

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He patted my face and neck with the hand that I had left free, as I knelt by the bedside.

"You funny Big Yeogh Wough! Nobody would expect anyone who looks like you to talk like that," he said mischievously.

"You wise little boy!" I laughed. "No, I suppose they wouldn't. People always make mistakes like that, you know. One day the world will come to see that preachers may look very bright and easy-going—just as motherly women with mob caps and three chins are not necessarily the best persons to trust to for seeing that sheets are properly aired. Now, good night. You must go to sleep."

I went to the window and opened it, placed the screen by his bed just where it would shield him from the draught and from the light, and went towards the door. As I reached it, he called me back.

"Mother, do you think we shall ever have a war with Germany?"

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"A war with Germany? Why, yes, I suppose we are pretty sure to have one some day. But whatever makes you ask that now?"

"Oh, it was only because I heard one of the masters talking about it!"

"Well, I don't think you need trouble about it just yet, anyhow. The best thing you can do is to sleep well and eat well and work well, so as to grow up a fine man and be able to do something worth doing in that war when it comes—if it ever does come."

When I had left him I stood for some minutes shaking the door gently to make sure that it was properly shut and that he would not be in a draught all night.

I've always had this curious difficulty in realising actual things, such as whether I have shut a door or not, or whether I have put a jewel away in its case properly. It has always been quite easy for me to realise unseen things—such as a death or a fire that has not yet occurred, or any sort of scene at which I have not been present. I am sure that I sometimes see these more vividly than people who have actually witnessed them with their bodily eyes. But when it comes to ordinary everyday facts—why, I have stood irresolutely by a trunk ten or fifteen minutes many and many a time, lifting the lid up and down in order to make absolutely sure that something that I had put away in under the lid was actually there and had not jumped out again.

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It was in this pernicky way (the word is beautifully expressive) that I always guarded Little Yeogh Wough.

People accused me of only loving him so desperately because he was good-looking. I dare say his looks went some little way with me. I have never pretended that I should devote myself to a

person with a hare lip as well as to a person without one; and certainly the boy of my heart, besides being glorious to look at, had a knack of making people surround him with attractive things that added to his own attractiveness. Whenever he went into a shop to have some plain and practical article bought for him, he managed to choose for himself an idealised example of the same thing, at quite double the suggested price, and have it sent in. Prices meant nothing to him, and at the age of seven he was not half so good a financier as his sister of four.

"That there boy 'ull never 'ave a penny in 'is pocket in all 'is life, not even if he gets thousands a year," Old Nurse was accustomed to say to my secretary, who was a willing listener. "Money burns 'oles with 'im, wherever he carries it."

"Oh yes, Nurse. But he always spends it on his mother. Look at the flowers he buys her—violets and carnations, all through the winter, and even roses! That's really wonderful, you know, Nurse, in the present day, when children are so selfish." [Pg 78]

"M'yes," rejoined Old Nurse doubtfully. "But what do 'e do it for? It's just jealousy; that's what it is, just jealousy, so as nobody else shan't give 'is mother anything. Why, there was Miss Clare yesterday, she spent 'er week's pocket money buyin' some roses for 'er mother, and 'e 'appened to meet us comin' home with 'em when he was walkin' up the road with a schoolboy, and what did he do, d'you think? Why, he ran as 'ard as he could and bought some carnations and got 'ome with them first and gave them to 'is mother; and when the poor little girl got in with 'er roses, she was thanked for 'em, of course, but they wasn't worn or put on the study table. They was just put away in the back drawing-room, where nobody never goes."

"Ah, that's it, you see!" said Miss Torry. "But, of course, Nurse, the little girl ought to have told exactly what had happened."

"That's what I said to 'er, but she wouldn't do it. She's shy. And that there Master Roland, 'e do override everything and everybody. He's that spoiled that there's no——"

"Oh, come now, Nurse, you're as bad as everybody else with him! You always say he's charming."

"Well, so 'e is. I will say this for 'im—that he never gives me a back answer. That there Miss Clare, she could 'old 'er own so far as tongue goes with an East-End street child. Master Roland, 'e corrects her for it. 'E says: 'Now, Clare, you mustn't speak like that to Nurse.' Then he told 'er as somebody called George Meredith, that their mother thinks a lot of, said he wanted 'em all to be polite above all things." [Pg 79]

"That's it, you see," said Miss Torry again. She was a delightful creature, but she always felt rather uncomfortable under Old Nurse's severe eye.

It has always been a mystery to me why I am supposed to have spoiled Little Yeogh Wough. My hand was always over him, invisibly keeping him down. He had more punishments than the others had. But he had a charm that took the sternness out of discipline and a wonderful knack of knowing the right thing to say, and when to say it. And he knew how to give way with a quite princely grace.

"Roland," I said to him one day, rejoining him in the car in which he had been waiting for me outside a house where I had been paying a formal call. "I have just heard someone say a very silly thing. She—it was a woman—said how much more right and proper it would be if the words under the Prince of Wales's feathers were: '*I rule*,' instead of '*I serve*.' You can see the silliness of that, can't you?"

He nodded. "You told me one day that '*I serve*' is much grander." [Pg 80]

"Of course it is. Any empty-headed cock on a dirt heap can crow out '*I rule*,' and it doesn't mean anything much; but it takes a great man to say '*I serve*,' and when a great man does say it you feel that he's a king. You know, Little Yeogh Wough, empty show doesn't mean much. We're very fond of beautiful things, you and I, but——"

"Oh, yes!" he put in. "That's why I asked you to let me come with you to-day, because it was the first time you were wearing your new hat."

"Yes. Beautiful things are very nice indeed, but they don't mean much. You don't remember, do you, when we took you to the South of France and we saw Queen Victoria arrive at Nice? We were in a crowd of French people and they were talking about the Queen and saying what a mighty woman she was—Empress of India, and all the rest of it. And then she came—a little figure in a plain, ugly black dress, and with what you would have called a plain, ugly old black bonnet on. She wasn't helped by her clothes a bit; and yet there was something about her that was so great and so masterful that a hush went through that French crowd, and I knew that every man and woman in it felt what I felt myself—that here was a human creature so truly queenly and so truly grand, that laces and furs and jewels would have spoiled her." [Pg 81]

I saw the big brown eyes that were fronting mine suddenly soften and glow.

"I like a queen better than a king," he said now. "I should like to fight for you if you were a queen."

CHAPTER VI PASSING SHADOWS

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It was considered to be a part of my steady spoiling of Little Yeogh Wough that, while he was still only seven years old, I sent for him to come over to us in Paris, where we were staying for three months at the Hôtel Meurice.

As a matter of fact, it was in order that he might not be utterly spoiled that I sent for him. I had very strong doubts as to the discipline that was being kept up at the London house by the old Nurse, under the supervision of my sweet-natured, but too gentle and yielding, aunt.

"I don't suppose we shall know him for the same boy when he gets out here," I said to Miss Torry, who was with us. "My aunt, you know, is one of those dear women who always let in thin ends of wedges all round them, and she will have had time in a fortnight to let in a good many in his daily life."

My secretary looked grieved.

"Oh, but you must have more confidence in him than that! He's so fine a character, even though he is only seven years old, that I don't think he will have changed just because he may have been differently handled. Besides, he does worship you so much. He wouldn't do anything to vex you for the world."

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"I don't know. I think it was a little dangerous of me yesterday to tell those French people what a wonderful boy he is. For one thing, it's always silly to praise one's own children; and secondly, it's a mistake to praise anything or anybody to people who haven't seen them yet. You must not even give praise that is solidly true, because, if you do, something always happens to make it false. You say your child has a skin as clear as the may-flower, and by the time you show him up he's developed pimples. It's the law of Compensation again. It acts in little things just as in big ones. Anyhow, the boy is sure to have sincere eyes and a sincere walk, and these two things will go a long way. So very few people have sincere movements! You've only to look around this hotel to see that."

"I only hope he'll get here safely!" breathed Miss Torry, who was always on the look out for disasters. "He's coming over with an irresponsible sort of man, and accidents do happen so easily that in the present day one can't be too careful. A precious child like that ought to be looked after by somebody that can be trusted. Mr. P— can't be trusted. Why, don't you remember, he took his own two-year-old child for a drive somewhere on the East Coast last summer and it fell out of the old victoria without his knowing it, and he'd left it on the roadside quite a mile behind him before he missed it?"

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Yes, this was true. I had forgotten this incident, and her recalling it to my mind made me anxious. Still, this Mr. P— had happened to be coming over to Paris on purpose to see me on some business matter, and the temptation to let him bring out the boy of my heart had been too strong to resist.

Besides, the sight of Paris would do much to help forward Little Yeogh Wough's education.

"How sorry he'll be to find you so ill and unlike yourself!" went on Miss Torry. (I had a cold so bad that it had practically become bronchitis, which, for some mysterious reason, usually happens to me in Paris.) "But how delighted he'll be with your new black and white frock, and with the hat with violets!"

Yes. Even at that early age he loved my clothes. He loved them so much that I used sometimes to wonder if all his devotion to myself would go if I were shabby and lived in sordid surroundings. As it is, I ask myself now, in these later days, whom I should dress for if he should be killed in the war.

His father has the kind of devotion that is not exacting about clothes, and would burn with as steady a flame if its idol were in sacking as if she wore the most marvellous confections of the French man-dressmakers.

My racking fits of coughing would not let me go to the station to meet my treasure; but I dressed myself with as much care to be beheld by him as if he had been a grown man. I wonder how many mothers put themselves out to cultivate beauty for the satisfaction of sons of not yet eight years old?

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But the beauty cultivation was all on my side this time. For when he appeared, marshalled by his father and by the friend who had brought him over, he wore his little bowler and a badly cut, dark overcoat that he disliked, and his face was so sullen that the sight of him gave me a shock.

"Nurse said I must wear this coat, and Auntie said so, too," he complained, as he struggled out of the objectionable garment after duly removing his still more objectionable headgear. "I've got a cap in my pocket that I wore coming over in the boat, but they told me I must put the bowler on again when I got to the station here. And I nearly didn't get here at all. I nearly fell out of the train."

"Nearly fell out of the train?"

"Lor'!" exclaimed Miss Torry, throwing up her hands. "I knew something was going to happen."

Whatever was it?"

The friend who had brought the boy began to explain, with a miserable sense of guilt. He had dropped asleep in the train on the way to Paris, and Little Yeogh Wough, wanting to explore the corridor, had opened a door which he thought led out into it, but which was really on the opposite side and only led out on to the railway track and into the void of the night. He had been in the very act of stepping down out of the train, which was going at seventy-five miles an hour, when a Frenchman sitting in the compartment jumped up and sprang forward and clutched at him—saving him by a second's space only from what must have been certain death!

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Strange! To think as I look back now that, by this act of saving an English child, that unknown Frenchman saved a soldier who was to help to defend France against the next great onslaught of the Germans!

"I told you so," said Miss Torry to my husband and me, when our unlucky friend had retired to get ready for dinner. "I told you that man wasn't a fit person to have the charge of a child—and such a child as that. What a mercy that Frenchman had his wits about him! One can't be too careful whom one trusts children with in the present day."

"And I told you that the boy would be changed," I said to her in a low voice, so that Little Yeogh Wough, who had run into the next room, might not hear. "He's not my boy at all. The difference is perfectly amazing."

Miss Torry threw up her hands again.

"That's it, you see. I knew how it would be directly he got under your aunt's influence. I knew she'd let him have his way in everything. And Old Nurse, too! I always did feel that it's never any good trusting anybody who's got a long upper lip. Well, now I'll go and see that he washes his face and hands properly. He actually hasn't said yet that he's sorry you've got such a dreadful cold. I'll tell him what I think of him."

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And she whisked into the inner room.

"I believe a good deal of his disagreeableness comes from that overcoat," I said to my husband. "He feels that he's looking his worst in it, and he can't be himself when he feels that. It's all Old Nurse's fault. She said he'd better not have a fawn cloth one, because his vanity must be checked at any cost."

Ah! The dear boy! How vain he was when he first put on his khaki eleven years afterwards!

When his bedtime came, on this his first evening in Paris, he did not get up to say good night when told to do so.

"Roland, I told you to go to bed. Did you hear me? Put your things away at once."

He lifted his big brown eyes with rebellion showing in them for the first time in his life.

"Auntie doesn't mind whether I go to bed when she tells me to or not."

"Oh, doesn't she? I see it was time I had you brought over here. You will put your things away instantly and go to bed."

Clearly he knew the something in my voice which told him that obedience would be enforced at once and to the uttermost. And he rose and went.

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And yet people have always accused me of spoiling him!

"You see, Little Yeogh Wough," I explained to him in one of our good-night talks more than a week later. "I want you to grow up to be a real man, and not a sham one. That is why you must obey. Suppose, when you grow up, you became a soldier—an officer—and you were ordered to take your men to a certain spot on a battlefield by a certain time, and you said to yourself in a slouchy way that a minute late in starting or arriving wouldn't matter. Well, then, do you know what would happen? Things would go wrong in that battle, and very likely your men would be shot down by the guns of your own people; because, you see, the order would have been given to fire just when you were due to have cleared out of a certain place—and if you haven't cleared out you yourself are to blame for any mischief that is done. And it's the same in life. There's a plan in everything, if you look for it, and if we are disobedient and don't keep time, we put that plan all wrong."

But that first night I did not have a good-night talk with him at all. He did not ask me to come and see him in bed, though before I left home he had been heartbroken at the prospect of my nightly talks with him being interrupted. For a further and shocking proof of his new naughtiness had come to light.

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Miss Torry, searching in the pockets of his inelegant and despised overcoat, had pulled forth something which drew from her a louder "Lor!" than ever I had heard her utter before. She held the something up and revealed a long thick tress of coppery brown hair.

"Roland!" I exclaimed. "What is that?"

"It's a piece of Clare's hair," he told us, at once and quite frankly. Even in his worst moods I never knew him tell an untruth. "I cut it off just before I came away from home, so I hadn't time to put

it anywhere but in my pocket. I did it because she wouldn't let me do cooking on her toy kitchen range, that works with methylated spirit. I just got my scissors quickly and cut it. Nobody knew I did it, though I dare say Nurse has found out by now."

"Oh, Roland!"

My reproachful exclamation was accompanied by a stream of reproaches from the horrified Miss Torry. I remembered then that all through his few short years hitherto Little Yeogh Wough had shown a great interest in cooking. And he had never even seen the kitchen, or any part of the basement, of his London home yet. He had called the basement "Griffiths's Dark," when he was two and a half, because Griffiths was the name of the cook who reigned there at that time; and the name had stuck. We had all spoken of the basement ever since as "Griffiths's Dark."

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And so his curious leanings towards cooking had led him to such a breach of good conduct as the cutting off of a goodly portion of his four-and-a-half-year-old sister's hair because she would not let him use her toy range with methylated spirit!

In very deed he had fallen from grace during this fortnight of lax discipline.

"Roland," I said, "I would give you a whipping for this if I had actually caught you doing it, or had been told of it at once. But, as things are, I will punish you in another way. I will not come and see you in bed for a whole week. I am very much hurt indeed. I did not think you could ever behave so badly."

He said nothing. But his lips quivered and his eyes filled with tears.

He was to sleep in a little room opening out of mine and his father's. I meant at first not to go in there at all, but on second thoughts I simply went in and saw that his bedclothes were properly arranged. I did not say a second good night to him, but came away as if the person in the bed were a total stranger to me.

"Are you going so soon?" His voice came after me rather piteously. "Aren't you going to talk to me?"

"Not to-night, Roland. You know that, because I said so. You must go to sleep now."

"Won't you call me Little Yeogh Wough?" he persisted wistfully.

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"No. You're not Little Yeogh Wough to-night. You're not the same boy that I left when I came away from home. You're only Roland. I don't know how it is. You used to keep your true self when you went away from me, but this time you've lost it. I suppose a fortnight has been too long. Now go to sleep!"

"They've taken all the romance out of him," I said to Miss Torry, when I got back to the sitting-room.

"Lor!" she exclaimed. And up went her hands again until she looked like a surprised angel. "The things that are going on in that house! They've got the puppies all indoors, messing up the whole place; and the cook's given notice, because Roland has been up into her room and made her window so that it won't shut—in this weather, too!—because he wanted to rig up a toy telephone between there and one of the servants' room windows in the next house. He says the boy next door is allowed to do what he likes, so he doesn't see why he himself shouldn't be. Did you ever hear of such a thing?"

"Well, you'll have to take him out of my way to-morrow, Miss Torry. Take him round and show him Paris. I'll work by myself. Strange, that he should have altered so much in a fortnight! But that's just because he's not commonplace. Commonplace people can't rise, but they can't sink, either. It takes a person with something great in him to get down low."

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So Little Yeogh Wough was taken by Miss Torry round Paris, and he also went with me into shops and to do business in post offices, and quite learned the ways of the place and of the people. But it made my cold worse.

"Never mind," I said. "My having a bad cold like this means that my new photographs will be good. I always pay for a good photograph with an illness. I know I should pay for a good oil-painting portrait with my death."

Little Yeogh Wough wrote and told my dear friend Mrs. Croy how he was getting on. And Mrs. Croy responded by sending coals to Newcastle in the shape of an enormous box of chocolates.

Mrs. Croy was a really darling creature of eighty-nine who dressed with a view to looking nineteen, and she had a high opinion of Little Yeogh Wough because, as she said, he was the only child living who had been nice to her.

The fact of the matter was, that she was a difficult person for a child to be "nice" to, for the reason that she apparently did her making-up without looking in the glass, and so was often to be found with an eyebrow coming down one side of her cheek and some rouge on her chin or on her forehead. Irreverent children had been accustomed to make remarks on these peculiarities, as also on the fact that the colour of her wig changed every day; but the boy of my heart, who liked her, would not have appeared to notice the matter if she had come before him without her head. And for this she was so grateful that she loved him passionately.

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I loved her, too. It is astonishing how lovable women who make up badly usually are.

It was astonishing, too, how much Little Yeogh Wough loved women. He loved everybody and everything, for that matter, with a great and deep love and sympathy; such a love and sympathy as led him, for instance, to get out of his warm little bed one gloomy and bone-chilling morning of a London winter and labour for hours in the sodden garden to get into shelter some newly born puppies who were exposed to the icy rain. But most of all he loved women.

He loved them in a tender, caressing, worshipping way, and he loved everything connected with them; frocks, hats, dainty shoes and long suède gloves, beautiful furs and scents, and pots of powder and sweet-smelling soaps and creams. He could never understand how the ordinary boy did not care for these things. He liked to go out shopping with me more than almost anything else in the world, and he hated it when his regular day-school life prevented him from doing so.

"He won't be one of the men who are not interesting to talk to until they are thirty," I said to Miss Torry many a time as the months passed and I saw his character shaping itself. "If he goes on as he's doing now he'll be a most fascinating man with women, even in his early twenties."

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"That's what I'm always telling people," replied my secretary. "And he'll be very manly with it. I can't understand how it is some people can't think a boy manly unless he's always stumping about in the thickest boots and talking about cricket and football."

"Oh, they're all manly!" I said. "But I always think the refined and clever ones are really the manliest and bravest. Just as it is always the people brought up in luxury that can live a rough life most successfully. A man came to me the other day and said he wanted to marry, but he didn't want to choose a lady because he was going out to Canada and he wanted to rough it; and I told him that he was making a mistake and that if he really wanted somebody who would do hard and even degrading work he must get a lady above all things, and that the more softly brought up she'd been the better she'd do the nastiest jobs. You can never get a servant to clean up after a dog, but you'll see duchesses doing it by the dozen at fashionable dog shows. And boys and men are like that. It isn't always the hulking footballer who will volunteer first to lead a forlorn hope."

The night on which, at the Paris hotel, I said Yes once more to Little Yeogh Wough's cry of: "Come and see me in bed, mother!" is a night which I shall never forget.

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There was gaiety all round us in the great building, from whose courtyard there came up to us sounds of voices and laughter mingling with the roll of carriages and the clatter of cars. But we were too happy to be gay. Our heads were resting on the same pillow and the boy of my heart was patting my cheek with one small, but very strong and brown hand.

"It's so nice to have you come in and talk to me again, Big Yeogh Wough," he said a little tremblingly.

"Yes. It is very nice," I agreed. "You won't drive me away from you again, will you?"

"No. I'll be good. It's been perfectly beastly having you angry with me. And to-morrow you'll let me buy you some flowers, won't you? I've got enough of my pocket money to buy some tulips. Oh, it's very early for them, I know, and they'll cost a lot; but it pays to get them, because they die so prettily. Other flowers look ugly when they're dying, but tulips don't."

"That's their Compensation for looking vulgar when they're alive," thought I. But I did not say so.

And then we began to sing together, very low, a little song of the French navy, which I had taught him a few months before.

Oh, the joyous freedom and swing that he put into that song—he, a small child, lying there in bed and singing!

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Two or three months later, when we had left Paris and were at home again in London, I got an example of his courage.

Ever since he had been going to school and so had been out of reach of the care of nurses, he had had cold after cold. Much good did it do for me to live a life of perpetual watchfulness in the house, taking care that he should get continual fresh air without any draughts, when at his school there was no watch kept and he was allowed to sit for hours between two open windows, or between an open window and an open door! So the colds went on into tonsillitis, and at last he was very ill and had to have a serious operation.

The anæsthetist who came from one of the London hospitals to administer the chloroform was a man with one of the gentlest and kindest of faces, and yet somehow Little Yeogh Wough, though he had been told nothing, knew from the first that this man's coming boded him no good. He ran to me to protect him, showing an infinite trust in me that in a way was heart-breaking. And then I realised that for the first time a situation had come about in which I could not help him, but in which he had to face whatever there might be of pain and risk quite alone and unhelped, like a grown man.

I told him this, and for a moment his brown wistful eyes met mine with a look in them which I shall never forget. Then he turned and went over to the table that had been made ready for the operation, and lay down upon it, saying quietly:

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"I'm quite ready."

That is the way in which he will meet torture and death if they come to him before his part in this war is over. He will steady the shrinking of his sensitive nerves and will look at the danger and measure it and then say bravely: "Now let come what has to come. *I am quite ready.*"

Oh, if I could have foreseen in those days how much of pain and terror would face him in the years to come that I could not save him from!

It happened often just then that the children made railway journeys on which I did not accompany them. I ought to have felt a sense of domestic freedom at their going—for I am a person who hates a home to be an establishment, full of children and servants and expenses—but instead of this, tremors used to seize upon me as to what might happen. For Little Yeogh Wough in particular I was afraid, as he was the sensitive one. The idea of his being at the mercy of horses or motor-cars or the mechanism of a train was horrible to me.

His sister, aged five, always gave people the impression that she could look after herself in any circumstances. His younger brother, aged two, was a baby still. But Little Yeogh Wough himself, all wistfulness and appealing grace, with the haunting sadness always in his brown eyes—what would his sufferings be if any accident brought harm to him and I was not there?

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I used at these times to go to the piano and play to myself in order to drive away my fears. I played dance music and coon songs, though I ought to have known that these are the saddest things in the world—far sadder than any Dead Marches in Saul. I can hear myself now singing: "The Lonesome Coon":

"Dancing, I'll pass de time away,
Fluttering my nimble toes,
While I'm waiting, weary waiting,
For de sossiest little girl I knows...."

Then I stopped, with my fingers on the keys of the piano, and thought:

"What if indeed there were a railway accident and he were killed? How should I bear it?"

And then I found myself singing something else:

"Fear no more the heat of the sun nor the furious winter's rages."

"Yes," I went on thinking, "after all, if he were killed in a railway accident or in some other sudden way, I should at least never have to feel afraid of anything for him again. I should not have to wonder how he would front the world if anything were to happen to his father and to me. I should know that the brave little heart and the joyous little soul behind the sad brown eyes were safe."

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But what was the use of giving myself over like this to the worship of a child?

It was a good thing for me that just about this time he began to get more matter-of-fact. Anyhow, he was less of a picture and more of an ordinary rascal of a boy when, soon after his thirteenth birthday, we took him with us on a little journey by sea to Russia.

CHAPTER VII A MOTTO TO STEER BY

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The reason for his looking less like a picture was that for two or three months he had to wear glasses. The beautiful brown velvet eyes, with their curling dark lashes, were not strong.

I wonder why it is that spectacles spoil the look of ninety-nine faces out of a hundred, whereas pince-nez give an air of style and importance?

Pince-nez make a poor man look well off, while spectacles, even with gold rims, can always be thoroughly depended on to make a multi-millionaire look poor. On the other hand, spectacles are honest, while eye-glasses suggest sharpness in the ways of the world and much toughness of conscience. Nothing could ever make me believe that a man who wears pince-nez has really repented of his sins.

With women, of course, it is not quite the same. No woman, however big a fool she might be, would ever take even to pince-nez with a view to improving her personal appearance.

It was partly to comfort Little Yeogh Wough for his mortification at having to wear spectacles for a time that we yielded to his appeal that he might be taken with us to Russia.

"He might be left at home. He's sensible enough now to manage the servants and the house and the dogs and everything for us, instead of needing to be looked after himself," his father said.

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"Yes, in some moods," I agreed. "He is, of course, the best disciplined and most responsible boy at his school. He seems to be even better disciplined and more responsible than the all-Scotch

boys, which is saying a good deal. But he has times when he needs holding in. After that day last week, for instance, you can't say that he is entirely trustworthy."

This mention of the "day last week" had to do with an unforgettable incident. The day had been a lovely one of blue sky and blue sea and high shining sun, and yet all through the long and glorious hours Little Yeogh Wough had sat in the house copying page after page out of a history book. For, thirteen years old though he was, he yet had so far forgotten himself as, in a fit of anger, to shake pepper out of a large pepper-pot over his sister's head and face at the very great risk of blinding her.

I had been doubtful at first between the respective advantages of a whipping and the writing out of these pages of history; but I decided at last on history because he was backward in this particular subject, and also because the sitting still for hours would be the greater punishment to him.

"You know, Roland, this would not have happened if I had been at home," I said to him. "Why did it happen because I was out?" [Pg 102]

"They aggravate me," he said simply.

I knew how it had been. Old Nurse, devoted though she was, was of no use whatever for a child with a temperament, and had not perceived the psychic moment when it was necessary to send him out of the nursery. I should have felt it in my blood if I had been there, and the whole ugly affair would not have happened.

"You see the justness of your punishment, don't you, Roland?"

"You're always just, Big Yeogh Wough. I've never known you unjust yet."

So he had set himself to his pages of history, all through the long and lovely summer day.

He said once, later on, that I had never broken a promise to him, either. I had always been careful never to make one which I was not humanly sure of being able to keep. For promises broken to children are greater crimes than many that are punished at the Old Bailey.

So we had not been sure in any case about leaving Little Yeogh Wough at home; and when he pleaded to go with us on board the Peninsular and Oriental liner that was to take us and certain others on her maiden trip in the Baltic, we gave way far more easily than he might have expected.

"Would you have been very miserable if we had said No to you, Roland?" I asked him.

"No. I should have been sorry, but I should have remembered that text that you're always saying." [Pg 103]

"Text?" I lifted my eyes in surprise.

"Yes. You know, that one: 'Blessed are they that expect nothing, for they shall not be disappointed.'"

"That's not a text. It ought to be, but it isn't. But it's a very good motto to steer through life by. The thing to do is always to expect nothing, but to try for everything."

And so it came about that on a certain Friday morning in August the brave little feet of the boy of my heart walked for the first time on the deck of a big ship.

I am superstitious—nearly as superstitious as Napoleon was. Little Yeogh Wough has always known this well, for all through his life, from two years old, he has been careful never to bring any hawthorn, ivy, or peacock's feathers into the house, and has always made the flower-women selling snowdrops strip the ivy from the bunches he had bought for me. I will not sing before breakfast, and I will not have three candles burning in the room, and I would not, under any pressure, have a new house built for me or even have an old house considerably altered. For this I know is true, whatever else in superstition may be nonsense—that whoever builds a new home for himself and takes a pride in it, shall have something terrible happen to him which will prevent him from enjoying his life in that home, even if he should ever get so far as to live in it. For, even in the days when I had not been stricken to the earth and did not believe in the Bible, I had always believed in the truth of the words:

"Fools build houses and wise men live in them."

One only has to read about the lives of the great millionaires to have proof that this is so.

But I am quite open-minded about Fridays. If anything, I think Friday is a luckier day for me than any other day. I also have a fixed conviction that neither I, nor any of those nearest to me, is born to die by the quite easy and pleasant method of drowning. So we started on a Friday without a qualm.

And I did not dream that, even as he ran about this deck and began to live this new life, he was starting on another stage of his training for a soldier!

"What a lot of portraits of the Kaiser we've seen!" he said to me one day, when his feet had covered most of the cubic space of Amsterdam, Christiania, Copenhagen, and Stockholm.

I laughed. "We really have seen a good many, haven't we? But you don't mind that, do you? I thought you rather liked his personal appearance."

"Well, he did look very fine at the funeral of Queen Victoria. I always remember that. But I don't see why he should be all over the place in these countries that don't belong to him." [Pg 105]

In a palace in Stockholm his inevitable picture occupied an especially conspicuous position on the wall of a certain room. At the same time, the arrangement of the furniture of that room struck us as quite surprisingly ugly and unsuitable.

"What a pity to have the piano where it is!" I remarked to our guide. "It would be so much better over at the other side of the room."

"It used to be over at the other side, but the Kaiser came here on a visit a little while ago and had it moved. He's had nearly all the furniture in the room altered."

Little Yeogh Wough opened his brown eyes very wide.

"You wouldn't expect a man like him to take such an interest in little things," he said.

"It's only by taking an interest in little things that you can get big ones to come right," I told him. "Remember what I told you about Kitchener and the rails for the new line in the Soudan."

"Do you think we shall ever really have a war with Germany, Big Yeogh Wough?"

"Yes, dear, very surely. If it comes in my lifetime, I hope it will come before I am old, because there will be dreadful things happen which old people will not be able to face. It might mean almost a going back to savage life—even at home in England."

He looked at me as if he thought I could not mean what I was saying. He knows better now. [Pg 106]

On the ship they called him the "Encyclopædia Britannica," and said he might be safely referred to when any information on any subject was required.

"If I'm still in the position I'm in now when that boy gets old enough to think of making a start in the world, I hope you'll let me be of some use to him," said a high Government official who was among the passengers. "You and his father are not thinking of the Army for him, of course. His eyes not being right puts soldiering out of court."

"His eyes will be all right in a few months," I replied. "But we should not think of the Army for him, in any case. By the way, there isn't a single soldier among the people on this ship."

No, there was not a single soldier on board. And yet, since then, I have shed tears for five of the men who were before me as I talked that day, and who have given up their lives for their country. Many others whom I did not know so well have gone over the awful border, too, and the rest are in khaki; all the rest, that is, who had something of youth still in their blood.

"Aren't the Russians splendid?" the boy cried to me a few days later. "They're just right, you see, because they've got the two sorts of men in them both at the same time—the football-playing, hard-hitting sort, and the other sort that loves poetry and likes beautiful things." [Pg 107]

"Yes, you are right. That is just what makes Russians so fascinating," I said.

There was cholera in Petrograd—and we had told Little Yeogh Wough that he would only be allowed to go there once or twice and would have to spend most of his time waiting on the ship off Cronstadt, while we went to the capital, and thence on to Moscow.

But we had reckoned without Little Yeogh Wough himself.

Coming back from Moscow to Petrograd, we were thunderstruck to see, just outside the Empress Mother's palace, in the magnificent Nevski Prospect, a fine-built, boyish figure, that stepped out very gaily and held its head very high.

"Surely that can't be Roland!" I exclaimed in amazement.

"It certainly is Roland," declared his father grimly.

Little Yeogh Wough—wandering through Petrograd alone!

He was looking at a carriage drawn by four long-tailed, coal-black, fiery-eyed horses, and at the dazzling uniform of an officer who sat in the carriage. Then he hurried into a side-street and we got out of the droshky we were in and followed him on foot.

How much at home he was! how gaily he walked here alone in this city where the very letters of the alphabet over the shop fronts were strange and mysterious! [Pg 108]

A man and woman who looked like Americans were walking in front of him and, just as these two passed the door of the largest house in the street, a man came out and accosted them. He seemed to be making a mistake as to their identity, and a babel of questions and answers began in Russian and English, neither side knowing what the other said. Then Little Yeogh Wough reached the group and stopped and began to talk.

"He must have been spending his time learning Russian!" my husband cried in astonishment. "He is actually putting the matter right."

We had come near enough to catch the boy's words—halting, jerky words, and yet clearly decent Russian, since they were understood. We seized him by the arm.

"What are you doing here alone?" we wanted to know.

"Oh, I'm all right! I've been teaching myself a bit of Russian. I know now what that word means that you noticed over the shop the other day and that you said looked like 'photograph.' It's 'restaurant.'"

"You enterprising little wretch!" I said, laughing.

PART II

THE TWO GERMAN GIFTS

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CHAPTER VIII

THE FIRST GERMAN GIFT—A ROSE

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I went in earlier than he expected one evening in answer to his never-failing appeal: "Come and see me in bed, mother!" and found him sitting up in his berth with a scrap of pencil and a crumpled pocket notebook and his eyes glued on something that he saw through his open porthole.

He had the top inner berth, on the corridor side of the cabin, and by looking across the corridor he could get a complete view of nearly the whole of the dining-room of the liner. He thrust his pencil and paper out of sight under his blankets as I drew near; but he had done this too late, and he knew it as he met my look with one of his delightful smiles.

"Whatever are you doing, Little Yeogh Wough? Show me that notebook."

He drew forth the crumpled little pad of paper, and I found scribbled on it the following entries:

"Mr. B——, four whiskies and sodas, with the whisky more than half-way up the glass each time.

"Mrs. Delaplaine Waterton—three glasses of sherry and bitters.

"Mr. Pinkerby—a Kümmel and three whiskies.

"Lord ——, five whiskies and sodas, making eight since two o'clock this afternoon."

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"Oh, Roland! How naughty of you! Whatever put it into your head to spy on people like this?"

The laugh that was on his lips was now dancing in his big brown eyes.

"It doesn't do them any harm, and it's very funny," he said. "I can hear a good deal of what they say. I don't want to listen, you know, but I can't help hearing. Still, it doesn't matter, because I would not tell anybody for anything in the world.... Just fancy, Big Yeogh Wough, we're going to be in Kiel to-morrow! I shall see father in a tobacconist's shop again."

"Is there anything so very wonderful in that?"

"Of course there is. He's a different man directly he gets into a tobacconist's. You really wouldn't know he was father. It's so funny to watch him."

"Oh! Men are always like that, dear. You'll be like it yourself when you're a grown man. No matter how much a man loves a woman he gets free from her somehow inside a tobacco shop. But I hope you want to see Kiel for better reasons than that."

He nodded as he patted my hand.

"I know. It's the Kaiser's jewel of a port, where he hugs up the beginnings of his navy."

"Yes—his navy which he thinks will one day beat ours. I hope we shall be able to see one or two of his ships—yet I don't expect we shall. He believes in the old saying that children and fools—especially British fools—shouldn't see half-done work."

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"If you don't mind, Big Yeogh Wough, I'm not going to wear my glasses when we go ashore there to-morrow. I don't really need them to see with, you know, and I don't want to look as if I'd got anything wrong with me when I'm going through a German town."

"All right, you dear boy. And we'll try to get a look at Wilhelm's ships. But what does it matter what they are like? We'll drum them up the North Sea as we drummed others before them. We've nothing to fear from outsiders as long as we don't let any dry rot get into us at home."

"Kitchener and others like him will see to that."

"Kitchener can't see to everything. It would take scores of great men to make a breakwater

against a whole flood of dull stupidity. We've all got to help. You'll have to help a lot. You'll have to learn to be very strong—but without being hard. If you are hard you're like a hyacinth in a March gale as compared with a daffodil. The hyacinth stands up stiffly and thinks it's strong, but the wind snaps it in a minute, while the bending daffodil comes out all right. It's always like that with men who try to kill their softer side, and who don't understand women and don't trust them. And now you must go to sleep."

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"Will you promise to wake me up when you come to bed and want your dress undone? I'm so much easier to wake than father."

"Yes, I'll wake you. You see, your knowing how to undo my dress will make you a better magistrate one day, or a better governor of an Indian province. There are people who wouldn't see how this is so, but it's true."

Kiel looked quite gay when we opened our eyes upon it next morning. It would have looked gayer still if the ships in the harbour had not been of such a hideous dull grey colour—exactly that of an insect that I have always detested, known as the slater.

The Kaiser's private pleasure yacht, the *Hohenzollern*, was there and was certainly white; but it was a white that looked as if it ought to have been grey.

I have no doubt that the *Hohenzollern* was a miracle of luxury inside, with her silver bath for the Kaiser's daughter and other sybaritic appointments; but outside she was not a dream of loveliness. Neither were the two warships that we saw anything like as handsome to behold as our own battleships.

"What funny tin-pot things they look!" said Little Yeogh Wough. "Now I know why all the toy ships we have that are made in Germany never look a bit like ours. They don't look so professional, somehow. Perhaps it's because we're not used to them. I hope they'll let us go on board them."

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"Perhaps they will, as there are five or six members of Parliament among us and the head of the Criminal Investigation Department of Scotland Yard," I said quite confidently.

But it was notified to us early by the Kiel authorities that the two warships were, as one might say, in *déshabille*, and not tidy enough and trim enough to be inspected. So we had to content ourselves with walking about the town.

Little Yeogh Wough took a snapshot of the *Hohenzollern* from the jetty, and then walked along with pride and satisfaction on his handsome face because he had managed to do this without attracting anybody's notice. Then we turned up the long main street and saw a good many pretty villas that were charming enough to make one feel one could live in them quite comfortably for two or three months of the summer.

"It is a very nice place," I said, as we passed the last of these tree-embowered villas and began to walk up the hilly main street where the shops begin. "Here's your tobacco shop, by the way."

I stayed outside on the pavement while Little Yeogh Wough went in with his father. When they came out a German officer came out also, treated me to a long, close look and swung on his way.

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"He stared hard at me in the shop and then said: 'You're English, are you?'" the boy of my heart informed me. "I told him I was, and he looked hard at me all over again. I felt quite glad that I'd come out without my glasses on."

I felt glad, too, as I looked at his bright face.

How queerly white his lucky lock showed in the sunshine! Surely nothing very bad could ever happen to him in life when he had a lock like that!

"I'm sorry to have to say it, but this old watchmaker fellow here has put my watch right twice as well as an ordinary watchmaker in this sort of town at home in England would do it, and has done it in half the time, into the bargain," his father said presently, emerging from another little shop. "It's astonishing how capable these Germans are. It's a pity they aren't a little better at sanitation. What awful smells there are all over this town!"

This was true. We had been worried by stench ever since we had begun to walk up the hilly street.

On the way back two small incidents occurred. The first was that Little Yeogh Wough nearly got into serious trouble by taking a photograph of half a dozen street urchins, and the second was that we passed a battalion of soldiers marching with such regularity that the whole mass of them was like one huge moving machine. We stopped and watched them go by, never dreaming of what was coming to us and to them in the very near future.

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Ah, Heaven! If we could have foreseen the thing that was coming!

That afternoon the brightness of the day had gone and heavy showers of rain made me give up the idea of going ashore again. Little Yeogh Wough went, however, with his father, and when they came back two hours later he gave me one of the most perfect dark red roses that I have ever seen in my life.

"A German girl gave it to me," he told me. "I asked her for it, right straight out. We were

sheltering from one of the showers under the wall of one of those villa gardens, and I saw the rose and it looked so lovely that I told father that I wished I could get it for you. Then, just as the rain was leaving off, the girl came out of the villa into the garden and I asked father to tell me what words to say in German to ask for the rose. And he told me, and I asked her. I couldn't have done it for myself. I only did it because I wanted the rose for you so badly. And she actually said: 'Ja' and gave it to me. Then she smiled and said: 'Auf wiedersehen.' I asked father what that meant, and he said it was the same as the French *au revoir*, or 'To our next meeting.' But I don't suppose I shall ever see that German girl again."

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"No. I don't suppose you ever will."

And so he got his first German gift.

That night I wore the rose.

We had to wait about in the Kiel Canal because a ship had got stuck across one of the narrow parts of it. And the boy said:

"The Kaiser must have felt very much shut in before this canal was made. How funny it is to be on board a ship on a strip of water that's sometimes so narrow that you could have a talk with the people on the banks on either side—just as if you were on the Regent's Canal at home in London!"

It was a joyous occasion for Little Yeogh Wough when he lay in his bed again for his good-night talk with me, and not in a berth.

"It's nice to come home and be welcomed by the children and the dogs. What a pity it is that dogs can't welcome us when we go to Heaven! I've been thinking this ever since Miss Torry told me that Tita didn't eat anything for four days after we'd gone and was so cross with her puppies that she gave them smacks with her paw every time they came near her—all because her heart was breaking. And just because she's got four legs and fur instead of two legs and a bare skin she isn't supposed to have a soul."

His eyes were looking full into mine as our faces rested against the pillow, close to each other.

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I had returned to the house an hour in front of him and I knew in what a wonderful way the place seemed to get richer directly he appeared inside its walls. Everything took on a new value the moment he got near it. It is a fine thing not to be an impoverisher, but it is a finer thing still to be an enricher. It is a particularly valuable quality to young people starting in life on small incomes. He himself knew it when he saw it in others.

"I say, Big Yeogh Wough, how is it that you always look quite expensively dressed in hats and coats that most people would throw away if they saw them off you?" he asked me one day.

"I don't know, dear. I only know that there are people like that, while there are other people who could walk through the East End on a Bank Holiday in a fifty-guinea musical-comedy hat without having a single person look at them twice. It hasn't anything to do with handsomeness. Some really beautiful people aren't worth looking at. It has to do with style. When you grow up you'll never need to envy a field-marshal his uniform. Just by being yourself you'll have a uniform more dazzling than any that was ever worn in Europe."

"Is that why you never envy women who can buy their clothes in Paris?"

"I'm too conceited to envy them," I answered him. "A woman who envies other women their things can't think very much of herself. Now, I think so much of myself that if I choose to go out with a hole in my stocking, then holes in stockings are the fashion. You must feel like that, too—within limits. Only, of course, a well-bred man always needs to be smarter than a well-bred woman. By the way, I met one of the great French man-dressmakers at a luncheon at the Mansion House one day and he taught me a lot of wisdom. It all came to this—that you can't dress the undressable person and that the dressable person doesn't need dressing. He said that the struggle to dress royal women and millionaires' wives who were not dressable had turned his hair prematurely grey."

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"I suppose it comes to this, too—that we must cultivate ourselves and trust to luck for the rest?"

"Of course," I nodded. "Whatever happens to you—I mean, whatever things you may have to do without—take care that you keep yourself in good condition, body and mind. You can always get new clothes when you want them, so long as the figure they're going to be hung on is all right. Keep your bloom and your graces and your style. Why, even if people went about naked, like savages, there would still be some among them well dressed and some not!"

To-night, as I knelt by his bed with my head resting on the pillow beside his, his mind was on graver things.

"I've been thinking a lot about souls and that sort of thing since Miss Torry told me just now that the colonel along the road here is supposed to be dying. I saw the vicar go in there. I don't want that kind of man coming about me when I'm dying. I couldn't tell my feelings then to a man I'd been playing tennis with a month or two before. Asking a man like that to help you in your last minutes would seem more like a joke than anything else."

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"You strange boy! Why, the vicar is a very good man."

"I know he is; but that doesn't make any difference. I'd rather have a worse man who kept to his own calling more."

This was the first time for a long while that the boy of my heart had spoken to me about religion. It prepared me for what I came upon accidentally next day in a private drawer which he had happened to leave not only unlocked, but yawning open—an ivory crucifix.

I stood and looked at the sacred thing, as it lay partly hidden and partly revealed among a few boyish treasures that included a few letters that I had written him at the rare times when we had been separated.

That crucifix hidden away in his drawer meant more, far more, than even I could guess. It told a story of strange workings in the deeps of his soul. I knew better than to say a word to him about it. But that night, when I went to see him in bed, my kiss was warmer and my arm under his head tenderer even than usual.

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"Dear Big Yeogh Wough! Dear Big Yeogh Wough!" he murmured caressingly.

"How is it, Roland, that you never say 'darling'? I don't think I've ever heard you say it in your life, any more than I've ever heard you talk slang."

"I don't know. I don't want to say it, somehow. You know, you yourself say it's cheap."

"It's cheap when a woman says it, because women generally say it too easily; but it can be a grand word when a man speaks it—or a boy. Still, I am quite satisfied that you should call me just Big Yeogh Wough. I know I am dearer to you than anyone else in the world can ever be—at least, until you grow up and fall in love."

I had spoken with a laugh, but he answered me gravely.

"I shall have to find a very special sort of girl before I leave you for her."

A few minutes later, when I had risen from beside his bed and was opening his window, he said:

"Did you see those Territorials coming along just as we turned in at the gate here? Did you see how well they marched? Of course, they were only Territorials and people always laugh at them, but there's something so splendid in the sound of marching feet that I can't get it out of my head. It made me feel for the first time almost sorry that I'm never going to be a soldier."

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Oh, that splendid sound of marching feet, so grand, so gay, and yet so heartbreaking! He was to hear it often enough in a very few years to come!

CHAPTER IX

THE WAY OF A BROTHER

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There was one thing which more than any other had power to rouse whatever demon of Temper lurked far down under the sweetness of Little Yeogh Wough's nature; and that was Croquet.

It is no wonder that a well-known judge said a year or two ago in his court that from personal experience he knew croquet to be more trying to the temper than anything else in the world. And the objectionable game was at the root of a good deal of trouble that arose at this time between the Boy and me.

He never could bear to be beaten at anything. This feeling has been his driving power in all his life. Even Old Nurse knew of it, for one day when I had said to her that he never told a lie, she answered me:

"No. That's true; he don't tell no lies. But that isn't from loving the truth. It's only because 'e won't be beaten at it. 'E's that full of pride and vanity, he don't know what to do with himself. All these children is full of pride and vanity. When they goes out, if you please, they don't want to go where other people goes, so when we're in the country we 'ides behind a bush so as we can't see nobody and nobody can't see us, and when we're up 'ere in London we goes down back streets where there's nobody else goes but dustmen and cats. And it's all Master Roland's teaching of 'em. He've been making Miss Clare think she's an artist now, and you ought to see our Macademy up on the nursery walls. She've been in a temper all this day because I won't sit with nothing on for 'er to make a picture of Venus rising from the sea."

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Meanwhile, Little Yeogh Wough played croquet desperately on the lawn between the banks of marguerites.

(Dear marguerites! I remember how, whenever he was near them, they all took on a Frenchy gaiety and distinction that lent a new charm to their English prettiness and purity.)

He was not allowed to play with his little sister and brother, because he thought too much of himself and too little of them. He was then told off to play with any friends of the family who happened to be on a visit at the house, and the end of this usually was that when in the evening

he came to say good night and made his unfailing appeal: "Come and see me in bed, mother," I answered him severely: "No, Roland. You behaved too badly at croquet to-day."

He stood and looked at me wistfully. He always did this when I rebuked him. He never asked questions in words, but only with his big brown eyes. [Pg 126]

"I happened to be upstairs at the open nursery window and I saw you and heard you," I went on. "You were most rude to Mr. ——. If you ever play croquet with him again you will have the goodness to remember that he is a married man of fifty-five and not another boy of fourteen, like yourself, and you will treat him with respect."

"But he got my ball at the beginning of the game and put it through all the hoops and I couldn't get it back!"

"Don't make excuses. Leave those to weak characters. An excuse is always worse than the thing it tries to cover up. You lost your temper and forgot your manners, and you will not play croquet again for a fortnight."

This meant a fortnight of proud, dignified unhappiness. And it was while this fit of quiet bitterness was still on him that he did a dreadful thing.

One day, when I came home after having been out two or three hours, I found an ominous grimness in the atmosphere of the house, and everybody I met seemed to have a longer upper lip than usual.

"What's the matter?" I asked Miss Torry, who had a horror-stricken look.

"It's Roland. He has been up in the nursery and knocked his sister down and trampled on her. It's a wonder that he hasn't broken any of her ribs." [Pg 127]

And I had been out buying pretty clothes in order the better to live up to this boy's ideal of me!

I found him sitting in the dining-room, waiting for his tea, which he always had with us.

"Roland, is it true that you have been upstairs and knocked your sister down and trampled upon her?"

"Yes, mother, it's quite true." His eyes met mine unflinchingly.

"And you have done this unmanly thing ... you, my boy, that I worship so much!"

"Yes." He answered me very low, but very steadily. "She made me angry because she hadn't got any imagination. I asked her to imagine the nursery door was red and she said she couldn't because it was white. That made me so angry that I couldn't help knocking her down."

"You little coward!" I said to him very quietly. "You little coward!"

I saw his eyes flinch then and fill with tears and his face grow first very red and then deadly white, while his mouth began to quiver and twitch.

And I went out in search of a cane.

That was the last whipping he ever had; and the last occasion on which he could ever be accused of acting unchivalrously towards any feminine person. [Pg 128]

"Little Yeogh Wough, why do you do these things and lower my grand ideas of you?" I asked him when I went to see him in bed the next night. "And, apart from that, why do you put it into the power of Old Nurse and other people to say that I am a fool for worshipping you as I do? You are not kind to me when you do that. You see, I know in spite of everything that you are good and great; but they don't know because they are blind, and so they think me wrong and believe you to be a brutal little coward. Why do you give them the chance?"

"It's Clare. She aggravates me. She precipitates."

"Precipitates?" I looked at him wonderingly.

"Yes. She always rushes headlong at the wrong thing. Yesterday afternoon I was beginning to tell Nurse that there was something wrong with my eiderdown, and I'd just got out the first syllable ei when Clare broke in: 'Oh, yes, Roland, I knew there was something wrong with your eye. I saw it directly you came in.' That was what began to get my temper up. Then I said something sharp to her and she answered me back. She said that when she grew up she'd take a cottage on Dartmoor to receive me in when I came out of the convict prison. What do you think of that for a girl of eleven?"

"Rather bright. And in any case she is a girl and you are bound to honour girls and women all the days of your life. A sister should be a very holy and lovely thing to a brother, Little Yeogh Wough, as you will know some day." [Pg 129]

Now that he has grown big and is a soldier, he has in very deed come to know this, as is shown by something he said in a letter which he sent to his sister from the Front only a few days ago:

"MY DEAR BYSTANDER,

"I wonder what makes you a Bystander?"

"I don't know; but I do know that I haven't got the stuff in me of which Bystanders are made. I must be the Principal Player or nothing. I know, too, that a Bystander knows more and understands more than a Principal Player. I often think that if anyone wanted a concise description of myself I should do better to send them to you than to anyone else. It is no longer a case of 'dear little sister and baby brother,' as it used to be once when I said my prayers; but for a boy the milestones are whiter and more evident than for a girl. The Public School and Osborne and Oxford are landmarks which you have nothing equivalent to set against.

"And yet this big brother ... autocratic, meteoric, inconsiderate ... who writes to you often as if you were the Stores, sees more and knows more and thinks more than even Bystanders give him credit for. The three years between us were once a very great deal of difference, but that time has passed. Let it rather be, as I once wrote on a photograph for you, *Frater sorori; amicus amico*. Someone remarked to me the other day: 'All your family are such dears ... all of them.'

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"Yes."

Looking back again, I remember that it was in the time of the coming out of the almond blossom that Little Yeogh Wough tried for a scholarship at Winchester and failed, as he had known beforehand that he would fail, because never once in his life had he succeeded in getting anything at the first time of trying for it. And it was not very long afterwards that he came out triumphantly in an even harder examination and so won his way into another great Public School.

He signalled his triumph by asking that evening with quite unusual boldness and assurance: "Father, can I have the first hot water in the bath?"

And his father, who usually defended that first hot water as a tigress defends her cubs, answered him with almost boisterous goodwill:

"Certainly, my boy, certainly. Tell the cook to pile on the coal and make it hotter than ever." And this was the dear, delightful man who, if he saw a light in the bathroom window when he was coming home in the evening, would take to running along the street like a creature possessed, and if asked what was the matter, would reply distractedly as he ran:

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"Somebody's in the bathroom! Somebody's having a bath ... taking all the hot water! I must get home and stop it. I must get home and stop it."

CHAPTER X THE FEEDING OF LOVE

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There was another evening on which the boy of my heart was allowed to take the first bloom off the hot-water supply in the bathroom, instead of having to indulge his love of a hot bath at some other and more inconvenient time of the day; and this was the evening before he set out for the first time for the Public School on the Tableland.

He was a very shy and nervous boy when he went, though he was to be prince-like in his pride when he came back.

"That there Master Roland 'ull have a bilious attack when he gets to that there School," Old Nurse declared, as she watched him go. "'E always feels it in the inside when his nerves is upset. It was just the same when 'e was learning to ride. He would keep on with that there dangerous 'orse, just because he wouldn't be beaten, and it was a wonder to me as he didn't get yellow jaundice. If he don't end up with a bilious attack to-day, he'll be lucky."

There was a curious weight of gloom upon the house after his cab had driven away. The little sister moped in a corner and the still smaller brother sobbed silently behind the door of a room in which he was not expected to be.

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I knew that destiny was working, but I did not know how resolutely or how pitilessly. I did not know it even when, at the beginning of the second term, we were asked to give our permission for the boy to join the Officers' Training Corps.

"Of course he must join it," we agreed. "It will do him all the good in the world, both in body and in character. He's not likely ever to have to practise what he will learn there; but every male child born in the British Empire ought to know how to be a soldier in case of need."

So he took the first step; the step which has led after only a few years to my being here where I am to-night—waiting for him to come home on his second leave from the Front, where he has been fighting in the great war that darkens the whole world.

His first holidays were such amazing days of joy! They were the winter holidays, too, and that made them better. The house in London had been in full swing, seeming to brim over with children and dogs and high spirits; and, within due limits of discipline, Little Yeogh Wough had

been master of it all.

He had had a fairly hard time during the term, though we did not know it until long afterwards. A secret society of slackers had tried to baulk his energy and blunt his ability by threatening him with ghastly penalties if he got to the top of his form. Five of them had met him one day on his way from his house to his class-room and had thrown him over a gate into a field. He had got up and dealt with them one after another, and after that the threatening letters with death heads and cross-bones drawn in blood had ceased to come and he had had peace.

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The bodily strength of him had developed enormously in the three months, and yet, directly he had come home, the tender, irresistibly fascinating side of him had sprung to the fore again. The gracious boyish dignity and charm of him filled the whole atmosphere on those afternoons when wind and rain and sleet made the London that he loved a bad place to be out in, and in the comfortable study he made his small toy gramophone give out a sweeter music than I have ever heard from the large and expensive instrument that now holds the place of honour in the home.

"But I wonder why everything sounds so sad," Miss Torry asked suddenly one day. "It's always the same, whatever record he puts on. There's always a sound of heartbreak in it, even if it's a comic song."

"That's like his character and his eyes," I laughed. "All gaiety and joy in living, but with throbs of heartbreak underneath."

Then there were happier hours still when I was going out to dinner and he would superintend my dressing and be particular about the flowers I was going to wear, or throw himself across the foot of the bed and read me French books or old French plays while I brushed my hair.

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"It's so lovely to get back to London and to you, Big Yeogh Wough. When I've done with school and Oxford, you'll let me live near you always, won't you?"

"You won't be able to live near me if you go in for the Indian Civil Service," I reminded him. "And that's more suited to you than anything else, you know."

"Then I shall try to be literary and not have anything to do with the Indian Civil Service," he declared, half angrily. "Oh, by the way, as soon as I get back to school I'm going to get rooms for you and father for our Speech Day. They've got to be secured early, or you mayn't get any. Sometimes people take them a year in advance."

That first Speech Day, when it did arrive, was a marvellous occasion. He had urged me in half a dozen letters to make great efforts in the direction of clothes, and most of all in the matter of a hat, and as soon as I arrived he anxiously inspected my outfit.

"Yes, that's all right," he pronounced, tenderly touching the new lilac frock which I had lifted out of my trunk, and looking admiringly at the plumed black hat that was to be worn with it. "You'll look splendid and I shall be very proud of you."

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"But you ought to be just as proud of me if I were a frump," I said.

"You couldn't be a frump and be my mother," he returned. And to this day I don't know whether this remark was more of a compliment to himself or to me.

Just as dance music is sadder than any Dead March ever composed, so youth and gaiety make one think of death more than ever old age does.

Really, most of the old people that one knows, and particularly the old men, make one think of anything rather than the grave. They are skittish, frivolous, doing their best to dance upon their crutches and holding on to the good things of this world with a desperate grip which youth never has.

That is why youth goes out to fight so readily.

But a great Public School, with its army of eager-faced boys and its echoing stones and its clamour of gay voices, not only makes me think of death, but makes even the past ages of the world pass in procession before my terrified eyes. I can see Death walking in the boyish ranks always, mocking at their pink youth with the grisly horror of his grey decay.

I don't know whether I have a special kind of vision for this horror. I only know that I see it where other people don't seem to see it. In the same way I always find Paris the saddest city in the world, because it is the brightest. I love Paris, but I am never able to breathe in it. When I get back to London the choking feeling goes; for in London, under superficial gloom, there is peace for the nerves and solid happiness.

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The choking feeling was in my throat all through that Speech Day. It gripped me first early in the morning when I went to the beautiful chapel and saw recorded on the walls the names of the sons of the School who had given their lives for their country. There were many of them even then. (Ah, Heaven! I dread to think how many there are now!) And I could have kissed the wall where they are recorded in my passion of gratitude and admiration and reverence.

If it comes to that, I should like to drag myself on my hands and knees over the stones of such a place as this in that very passion of reverence. Is it any wonder that these boys died so bravely when they came from a place where chivalry, knightliness, graciousness and the truest manliness have come down as a heritage through hundreds of years?

It is strange how the stalking shape of Death seemed to be clanking his dry bones everywhere for me that day! It seemed to grin at me when I smiled in pride at seeing Little Yeogh Wough in the khaki of the Officers' Training Corps. It grinned, too, at the other women, who were there in hundreds—mothers, sisters, aunts, or cousins of the boys—all looking like butterflies in frocks of the "confection" kind and hats from Paris or from the Maison Lewis.

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What a mockery clothes are when the great things of life come along!

"Roland, are you satisfied with my dress and hat?" I asked him in a whisper, when I got a chance.

"Of course I am. They look better than anybody else's here."

"But they wouldn't look half so nice laid out on a bed as most of these other people's things would."

"No. I don't suppose they would. That's just why they look so much better on."

"You clever boy! Then you've found out already that there are two different kinds of love of dress—the false kind, which thinks it's all right when it buys pretty things and hangs them on itself, and the true kind, which carefully chooses every shade of colour and every bit of material to be a frame and set-off for the wearer's particular sort of good looks. You've got the insight to see that what looks like a bit of brown holland when laid on a bed or hung on a peg may make a woman lovely enough to turn men's heads, while a confection that has cost a hundred guineas may leave everybody cold. You've only got to look around here to see that it is not the clothes that matter, but the human flesh and blood inside them. Why, one of our greatest society beauties once went through a London season with only two frocks to her name—one for day, one for evening, and both black. And yet she outshone everybody else."

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We were going into the concert hall and there the figure of Death seemed to me more hideously clear than anywhere else. But I said nothing to Little Yeogh Wough of this curious oppression that was upon me. He was shyly proud of having had many prizes, and I went on talking lightly, very low, as we waited for the concert to begin.

"I think you'll know enough about women to be able to judge them well for yourself when you grow up. Look at that girl in the front row of seats with all sorts of bits of chiffon and odd ribbons about her. She has changed her position five times since we came in, trying to put herself so that everybody coming up the middle of the hall shall take notice of her. And do you see how she keeps on touching her bits of ribbon and chiffon—pulling them out or patting them down? Well, that's the kind of girl you must avoid when you're grown up. She's a prinker, and a prinker is horrible. You see, you can be quite sure even before looking at her face that she isn't very pretty, because a very pretty woman doesn't need to prink in order to try to attract notice. She attracts it too much. She would rather escape it if she could. So, when you grow up, Little Yeogh Wough, you must find a girl whose lovely head and full throat rise best from out a plain linen collar. You must avoid prinkers, just as a woman looking for a husband ought to avoid a doxer."

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"Whatever is a doxer?"

"A doxer's generally a man—a man who smiles too agreeably and moves his head and body about in a funny way directly he gets among strangers. But never mind the doxers or the prinkers, either. I want to listen to this piece by Sibelius."

The strange fear of the future clutched at my throat more and more. It got to be almost more than I could bear when a little later the most spirited of the school songs swelled into the air, sung by scores of voices:

"Jolly, oh, jolly at eve...."

A sob rose up within me and it was only with difficulty that I forced it back.

"What's the matter, Big Yeogh Wough?" whispered the boy beside me.

"It's that song. It's a lovely school song, but it's the saddest thing I've ever heard in my life. It seems to me that I can see generation after generation of boys rising and passing along—passing along to doom."

Under cover of the music Little Yeogh Wough spoke in a whisper again:

"It's a grand doom, anyhow—if you mean dying for one's country. Don't you think it's better to have your name on the walls of that chapel as having died fighting than to live a long, smooth life at home?"

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"Yes, of course it is." I pulled myself together and spoke the truth as I knew it. "They've got the best of it, all right—those boys who died. But still—it's doom."

"No! No! It's glory."

The boy used to say that the only hard thing for him in his life at the big Public School was the doing without my half-hours by his bedside at night.

We were never quite so completely in touch with each other when we did not get these talks.

This may seem a strange thing to say, but it is the truth.

It is astonishing how much sympathy the right of entrance into another's sleeping-room means. It is all very well for people like George Bernard Shaw to declare that the custom of married persons sleeping together is an outrageous one and interferes with the liberty of the individual, but if in days to come people of his sort get their way there will be far fewer happy marriages. In the sitting-rooms of the home, as well as in the outside world, there are always things happening and influences at work that interfere with the smooth flowing of the magical current of love and sweetness between husband and wife; and if there is no privacy of the same bedroom to put this disturbance right every evening, what is to become of their happiness?

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Some people seem to think that between a husband and a wife, or a mother and son, tenderness and devotion are a matter of course. But this is not so.

Nothing is got in this world without trouble. You cannot get a plant to thrive in your window unless you give it attention and show it plainly that you want it to thrive. Then do you suppose people are going to love you tenderly unless you cultivate that love as if it were a tomato in a greenhouse?

Not a bit of it; not even if you are the most perfect man or woman in the world.

I have an aunt who is devoted to me when we occupy the same bedroom, as we did nearly all through my childhood, but thinks me a hateful person when we only see each other casually. And I used to think of her when, owing to Little Yeogh Wough's absence at school, my nightly visits to his room to see him in bed, as he called it, were interrupted for long weeks at a time.

I knew that these breaks in our sacred and sweet night talks would have been dangerous if our love had been less strong. For in both of us, just as the electric current is tremendously strong when it flows, so it is entirely cut off and dead if anything interferes with it at all. When I am not burning hot with people that I love I am usually icily cold, even to the point of wondering whether I really love them at all. I have no dribblings of mild affection. So, knowing that Little Yeogh Wough had this same peculiarity, I used to be afraid when he had been away from me for a whole term.

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But I need not have been afraid.

I have come to know since that there are loves which are strong enough to stand any test. And the love between him and me is one of these. Yet he had so much worship when he came home for his holidays that he ought to have been able to do without mine.

His father quickened up. The children quickened up. Miss Torry quickened up. The servants quickened up. The very dogs understood and showed a new energy.

But he got a good deal of blame, too, when Old Nurse came to deal with his things.

"Now I just asks you, mum, if you thinks as these 'ere myganas are the sort of thing that a schoolboy ought to get for hisself," said she indignantly. "'E've never got a thought except for getting what 'e wants and when 'e wants it, cost what it may. And you that devoted to 'im as you sits up till past two o'clock every morning a thinkin' about 'im and a writin' of 'im letters as would cover miles, as m'say!"

She was holding out the most bewitching suit of pyjamas that I have ever seen in my life: cream-coloured ones, soft and delicate, with cherry-coloured turned-out collar and cuffs and frogs. Really, I quite coveted the jacket to wear as a coat over a cream linen skirt.

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"And there's another one in light and dark blue, just as bad," went on the worthy old creature confronting me, more indignant still. "I calls it disgraceful extravagance. I can't think what they've got such things in boys' shops for. Myganas made of sacking would be good enough for any boy living while he was in his teens, even if he was the Prince of Wales. And his socks! 'E've got dozens of pairs more than he took away with 'im—mauve and blue and green and all with clogs."

"Clogs?"

"Yes." Then, seeing that my face still looked blank, she lifted her own short white piqué skirt and exhibited one of her sturdy pillar-box legs, while she pointed to the clock up the side of her black stocking.

"Oh, clocks? Oh, I see! Oh, well, Nurse, never mind! There are so many worse things he might do than go in for a few extravagances."

"Extravagances! 'E've got no more idea of money than that there dog have."

She nodded towards the black Skye terrier. And I laughed to myself as I thought how true had been an opinion passed on him by his sharp little sister when she had said, a few days earlier:

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"If I had to depend on either of my brothers, I would rather it were Evelyn. He would only take a very tiny cottage for me to live in, but he would pay for it always; whereas Roland would find me a palace, saying nothing else was good enough for me, and then would forget to give me any money to keep it up."

That was Little Yeogh Wough all over.

We did not always talk at the times when I went in to see him in bed. Sometimes we stayed quite quiet all the time that I was there, having only our hands clasped. Sometimes we sang songs together, English and French, very softly, so that people passing on the landing outside might not think us lunatics. He, who was often so shy with others, was as free from self-consciousness with me as if he had been alone. I had taught him to be so, ever since he was two years old. The wonderful chord of love and sympathy between us was so strong that in these precious half-hours at the end of the day he could not feel any constraint with me, but only a double freedom.

Once we were even so childish as to try who could do the better cat-calling. But whether we talked or sang or cat-called, we got to love each other more with every moment that we passed there in the darkness, he in the bed with his big lion-cub head on the pillow and I kneeling beside it, with my face close to his.

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Whenever he came back from school it was with honours. He was learning, growing, developing in every way. He was learning to govern himself and through this to govern others. And to this end, and this end only, he had become a good cricketer and footballer.

"You see, Big Yeogh Wough, I had to do it," he explained. "Boys at a public school don't respect brains unless the boy that's got the brains is good at games. That's why a letter was written to you asking you to encourage me to put my heart in cricket and football."

"Well, I did encourage you," I laughed. "For, though I can't endure the man who's a cricketer or football player and nothing more, yet, on the other hand, I don't like the man who can't play games at all. There's always something wrong about him, as there is about a man who never smokes. Cricket and football are manure for the character just as Greek and Latin are manure for the mind. Only one doesn't want all manure and nothing else."

When I went away from him and left him to go to sleep I always felt as if a piece of living radium had had its activities turned off for a few hours. And then, night after night, my superstition would get hold of me and my strong belief in the law of Compensation would make me ask myself the question over and over again:

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"Am I paying enough to Providence for the joy of having him? Am I suffering enough to deserve him? If not, where is the payment to come in? Because it's got to come in somewhere. He's so much more alive than most other people. Will anything happen to him? Will he be taken away from me?"

CHAPTER XI THE ANGER OF LOVE

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Only once in all his life has Little Yeogh Wough's love ever seemed to fail me, and that was at just about the time when his Public School career was coming to a close.

I had done a thing that I hardly ever do. I had defied one of my superstitions. And I had been punished for doing it.

My husband had asked me to let him paint my portrait. He had been asking me the same thing for years past, and I had always refused, remembering the injunction that: "Thou shalt not make to thyself the likeness of anything that is in the heavens above or the earth beneath or in the waters under the earth."

Of course I know there are sophisticated people who make a point of mixing this commandment up with the sentence that follows it and pretending that it's only the bowing down and worshipping that are forbidden. But I know better. I have seen times without number the fate that has followed the person who, not being a royal personage or an actor or an actress, or a Lord Mayor, has indulged in the arrogant joy of having his portrait painted.

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These exceptions that I have made are safe enough, because it is, as it were, a part of their business in life to have their portraits painted, as well as their photographs taken.

"It is really such an absurd idea of yours," my husband said to me. "It's all the purest nonsense. Of course a lot of people die directly they have had their portraits painted, but that's mainly because they're usually getting on for a hundred before they can afford to pay anybody to do them."

"There may certainly be something in that," I agreed. "And I will admit this much—that I don't think this superstition applies completely to people who don't believe in it. But unluckily I do believe in it. Still, your not being a professional artist may make a difference. If you'll promise to do the thing very badly, so that fate may not know it's meant for me, I'll let you do it."

I don't think there was any particular reason why fate should have known that the picture was meant for me. Indeed, one of our friends, a well-known novelist, cried out directly he caught sight of the first sketch and before he knew whom it was meant to be, that it was the best portrait he'd ever seen of his dear and lifelong companion the late Henry Irving. Anyhow, as the painting

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progressed, I did what was for me an extraordinary thing—I caught influenza. And, as the picture grew and grew, I got worse and worse, until I very nearly died of œdema of the lungs.

Little Yeogh Wough was written to and told all about it. His reply was a telegram to his father in the following words:

"Pray convey my deepest sympathy.—ROLAND."

"Pray convey my deepest sympathy.—ROLAND!"

He has never forgotten that telegram from that day to this. He has prayed to forget it, and has never been able to.

It did me more good than twenty doctors could have done. I sat up in bed and threw a dressing-gown round my shoulders and surveyed the blank faces of the other occupants of the room.

"Well, Miss Torry, I should like to know what you think of that?"

"What I think?" answered Miss Torry, shaking her head hopelessly. "What I think is—well, he must be mad."

"I'll tell you what *I* think," ventured Old Nurse, not looking at me but hurling her words like bombs at my secretary. "And that is that he've forgot for once to play his part and 'e's showing the selfishness that's all through and through him. When you come to think of all that his mother have done for 'im—and 'ow she've made a god of him and knelt down and worshipped 'im, as m'say, and put everything and everybody else to one side for 'im—well, if I was 'er I'd never take the trouble to turn my head to look at him again. No, that I wouldn't. I'm only glad as she can see him in 'is true light at last." [Pg 151]

"That telegram is like a message from a Mayor and Corporation to condole with royalty on the death of a distant cousin," I said bitterly. "Miss Torry, will you go downstairs and tell them to get me a mutton chop and to send it up as soon as possible? I see it doesn't pay me to be ill. I'm going to get well, portrait or no portrait, and stand up against that boy."

"I don't really think he can know how very ill you've been," said Miss Torry gently. "If he does know, I'm ashamed of him for a heartless wretch. But, you must remember, he's not accustomed to your ever having anything the matter with you and he may think the news sent him was exaggerated. But, anyhow, I'm cancelling the order I was sending to the Stores for him. He shall have no cake, no biscuits and no meat tabloids—and I only hope he's got no pocket money to get them on the spot for himself."

After this, for the first time since he had been born, I fought against my great and too-forgiving love for him and tried to cast it down. And when he came home for the holidays and on the first evening said to me, as always:

"Come and see me in bed, mother."

I answered him very coldly:

"No."

There is no anger in the world like the anger of a great love that is hurt.

I saw a shadow come into his deep and very sad eyes.

"I shan't be able to sleep unless you come and see me in bed," he said, with something very like a break in his voice.

I did not speak. I felt as if I were choking. He slid one hand to a bowl of flowers, took a piece of pink hyacinth and held it out to me.

"Come—and wear that."

Still I did not answer. Then a knock came at the door and Old Nurse walked into the room.

"If you please, 'm, when I asked you if I might go out for two hours this afternoon, it was so as I might go and see the doctor. I 'aven't been feeling at all well lately. So I went and 'e kept me an hour in 'is insulting-room, making an examination. An' 'e says I must leave here and go into 'ospital and 'ave an operation."

The Boy and I looked at each other with laughter in our eyes, in spite of the gravity of her announcement. It was her phrase "insulting-room" that had done it.

He knew now that I should come and see him in bed. And his glad, rich voice rang out with a gladder, richer tone than ever as he called to his father from the other side of a locked door:

"Father, can I have a bath?" [Pg 153]

"I don't think as you'll 'ave much chance of one this evening, Master Roland, unless you wants a cold one," broke in Old Nurse, speaking from the nursery. "Your father 'ave put his visiting-card on the 'ot-water tap and I can't venture to take a drop of the 'ot, not even for the children."

"It will be all right, Roland," I said, running upstairs and proceeding to smooth matters for him.

For a long while that evening I knelt by his bed without either of us saying a word. Then at last

he spoke:

"It won't matter much what things go wrong with me in life if only I can always have you to say good night to me."

"You might easily never have had me to say good night to you again, Little Yeogh Wough. I very nearly died about a month ago. You didn't believe it, of course, because I am so strong. But it was very cruel of you to send that telegram."

"I didn't send it. Another boy sent it. That doesn't make things any better, I know, but it happened that something went wrong at the house just then and I couldn't leave, and yet I wanted to send the telegram at once, and so I asked a boy who was going into the town to send it. He said he could remember it and didn't want it written out, and then he forgot it and put words of his own. There, now you know how it was."

"Why didn't you tell me this before, Little Yeogh Wough? It would have saved me so much suffering. You see, when a selfish woman, such as I've always been, loves unselfishly, it isn't a joy but a pain—one long aching pain all the time——" [Pg 154]

I broke off and he patted my cheek with one of his hands that were now so big and strong.

"This doesn't look very promising for my going into the Indian Civil Service," he said, half playfully. "Oh, by the way, a week before I came away from school a fellow who had been studying up palmistry looked at my hands and told me I'm going to die a violent death by a bullet or the explosion of a shell. So that looks like India, doesn't it?"

"Yes. It looks like sedition. If you gave your life like that for your country, it would be terrible, but I should be proud. Oh, if only I could one day see you another John Nicholson!"

"I believe you'd rather have me another Nicholson or Rhodes than another Shakespeare."

"Yes, I would. I don't know why. I don't understand it myself. But I believe that every woman, even the brainiest, carries a man of Action hidden away somewhere within her. I can't help feeling that it's a greater thing to have given your name to Rhodesia than to have written 'Hamlet.' But what I love in you is that you've got the book brain and the other brain, too. You've learnt all that the University fogies know without letting yourself become a foggy in doing it. Do you know, your classical master told somebody the other day that you were meteoric and that nobody could be compared with you? And he didn't know that the remark would ever be repeated to me." [Pg 155]

"I don't like Latin and Greek a bit, really," he smiled. "I'm only good at them because I made up my mind that I would be. But I shouldn't like a life of mere bodily exercise only, like a soldier's. I don't know yet what I want. You know, Big Yeogh Wough, old proverbs are very silly. There's that one about a contented mind being a continual feast. It ought to be altered to 'A contented mind is a continual beast,' because nobody that's got one can ever do anything in the world, either for himself or anybody else. But, of course, the discontent must be good-tempered. I don't mean that silly people ought to say they won't sweep the roads because they're waiting to get up some day to the throne. But I think everybody ought to do a little striving after something higher."

After a few minutes I said:

"It will be a dreadful thing for me to have to say good-bye to you if you ever do go out to India, Little Yeogh Wough."

His arm stole round my neck. And as he held me like this I found myself saying over, half to him and half to myself, some lines that I had taught him long before from the 'Children's Song': [Pg 156]

"Land of our Birth, we pledge to thee
Our love and toil in the years to be;
When we are grown and take our place,
As men and women with our race.

Father in Heaven who lovest all,
Oh, help Thy children when they call!

Teach us to bear the yoke in youth,
With steadfastness and careful truth;
That, in our time, Thy Grace may give
The Truth whereby the Nations live.

Teach us to rule ourselves alway,
Controlled and cleanly night and day;
That we may bring, if need arise,
No maimed and worthless sacrifice.'

"Good night, boy of my heart!"

"Good night, Big Yeogh Wough."

At his room door I looked back to say lightly:

"Anyhow, even if there is any truth in your friend's prophecy, I daresay I shall be dead and buried before that bullet or that shell hits you in India."

"Oh, it's not to happen till I'm sixty! So, you see, whatever I may do, I shall be quite safe till then."

CHAPTER XII IN THE DANGER ZONE

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"Dew on the pink-flushed petals;
Roseate wings unfurled:
What can, I thought, be fairer
In all the world?"

Steps that were fain, but faltered,
(What could she else have done?)
Passed from the arbour's shadow
Into the sun.

Noon and a scented glory,
Golden and pink and red:
What, after all, are roses
To me? I said."
Little Yeogh Wough.

He was at Aldershot with the Officers' Training Corps of his school on that Fourth of August on which the world looked in the face of the fact that Great Britain had declared war against Germany.

One never knows one has been living through happy days until they have gone. Then, looking back, one sees that the way of life that one had thought quite grey and ordinary was all aglow with heavenly light.

A good many things had happened since the night when the Boy and I had patched up the little trouble between us over his telegram. And one of these things was that he had finished his last term at his school in a blaze of honours.

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He had been, perhaps, rather too brilliant a meteor there, so that the sky was likely to seem grey after he had vanished from it. He had won a scholarship for a great Oxford college, and he looked into a future so gloriously golden that he himself had almost turned his eyes from it, dazzled and half afraid.

Some months before this he had brought home once on a week's visit one of his two best friends, a very tall and straight and serious boy called Edward Brennan. My first ideas of Edward were that he did not greatly care for womankind and that, considering that he was so young, he had an astonishing worship of the music of Beethoven.

"I can't understand it," I had said to him once. "Oh, of course I recognise that Beethoven is very great, and all that, and I like his music about twice a year when I feel ecclesiastical; but on the whole he always strikes me as a composer who was born an old man and who made music for old men."

"Why, mother always worships old men!" put in Little Yeogh Wough mischievously.

"Yes, but not as musical composers," I retorted. "You see, I've got a mind that always has what you may call the apple-blossom feeling in it, and anything fusty always repels me. I would run miles bare-foot to avoid seeing Stonehenge or any ruins. It's good that those things should be in the world in order to give the dry-as-dust people something to do to write about them; but in general I agree with Emerson that it's not the business of the rose that blooms to-day to worry itself into wrinkles about the roses that bloomed even yesterday—much less two thousand years ago."

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And then the rather cold Edward had quite warmed up and had done a thing that I liked. He had actually had the boldness to hold back my arm when I was putting a modern French serenade record on the gramophone, and insist on substituting for it a part of "Leonora."

"All right, Edward. I'll make a bargain with you. If you'll try to talk French a little every day and to read George Meredith, I'll try to like Beethoven."

But the most important fact about Edward, so far as I personally was concerned, was one which I did not take properly into account till afterwards. And that was the fact that he had a sister.

I had heard that he had one, of course. I knew that already, before Roland went to Edward's people on a visit. But then—so many boys have sisters!

My first suspicions had been aroused when the Boy had come back, and began writing letters.

It seems a funny thing to say, but I can always tell what is in people's minds when I see them write letters. [Pg 160]

To begin with, I never feel quite comfortable when people are writing letters in the same room with me. Of course, this is really laughably childish and quite unjustifiable, but I am not by any means the only person who has the feeling. There are some people who have to get up and go out of rooms where their relatives are writing letters, lest they should deal them mortal blows over the head.

This doesn't apply to offices, of course, or to people who write business letters. I myself feel quite unperturbed when a business letter is getting written; and I always know that it's a business letter, though a guest in our house may be writing it at the opposite end of the room to where I am sitting. There is something in the air of the writer which seems to say: "I'm only writing this because I've got to. I wouldn't do it else."

But when a lot of ordinary persons sit down to write futile screeds that are not wanted, to other ordinary people who, in nine cases out of ten, couldn't tell you if they tried how the postal system is worked, they do it with an air of defiant importance which says as plainly as possible:

"Of course, you think *you're* the only person in the world whose correspondence matters. But you're quite mistaken. We have friends, too—most valuable friends—who absolutely insist on getting letters from us as frequently as possible. Miss Violet Smithers wrote to me yesterday—we were at a boarding-school together in Lower Norwood for three years—and I must answer her to-day. I can't help it if you want the only stamp in the house for a legal document which will become invalid if not sent to-day, and every post office within ten miles is shut under some new closing regulation. Miss Violet Smithers must have her letter." [Pg 161]

I knew an old gentleman once who went absolutely off his head because of the immense volume of his servants' correspondence. He danced with fury on his gouty feet when he met his domestics "just going to the post, sir," and in the end he announced to me his intention of retiring to a cottage where only one servant would be necessary and he was going to advertise for her, offering fancy wages if she answered the following description:

"Orphan who has lost both parents; absolutely friendless; no sweetheart and totally unable either to read or to write."

I never knew whether he found his treasure or not.

After which, I will go back to Little Yeogh Wough and to the fact that when I saw him spending two or three hours sitting quite still at a table with his fine shoulders and his lion-cub head bent over a lengthy epistle, I began to think that there must be something a little wrong somewhere.

And when he followed this up by spending an entire morning, from breakfast to luncheon, making up one small parcel, my doubts became certainties. [Pg 162]

"Is that parcel intended for the King or Queen, Roland?" I asked him when he had finished and had carefully conveyed the package away to his own room, in order, I guessed, that nobody might see the address on it.

He looked at me and laughed.

"What do you mean, Big Yeogh Wough?"

"Why, you've sent out for some new brown paper because all the pieces in the house are crumpled, and you've been most particular about getting a smooth piece of string without any knots in it, and I heard you remarking to your sister that it is a pity that labels are not made more artistic."

He laughed again, but said nothing more. And I did not say anything more, either. I waited until his second friend, whom he called "The Father Confessor," came down to us on a visit in the house on the East Coast, and I put a few discreet questions to him as we sat together talking on the Chesterfield in the dining-room, late at night.

"I was so sorry that we could not get to the last Speech Day, Victor. It was lawyers' business that kept me away. Nothing else should have done so. I simply could not go that day, nor Roland's father either. I am afraid Roland was very much disappointed. He seemed to hold on to our being there this last time." [Pg 163]

"Yes. He did hold on to it, I know. He'd been wanting you to come particularly. It was such a triumph for him! And he'd deserved it, too. He'd gone without sleep for three or four nights a week to get those prizes and those honours."

"Had he?"

"Yes. Of course, even a wonderful fellow like Roland can't do everything, and what with his school præpositorship and his school magazine work and his debating and his looking after the house and his cooking and his running everything and everybody he ever came across, he hadn't time in the hours of the day to win examinations. So he used to go to bed at eleven and then be down in his study again on the quiet at one o'clock and work from then till the ordinary time to get up."

I caught my breath. Oh, my Little Yeogh Wough! It was reckless and dangerous, but it was just what I should have expected of you. You're not the boy to look at the clock to see if he's worked long enough and leave a precious job unfinished because the hour for "Down tools!" has struck.

But I returned to the business I had in hand.

"Of course, we knew that Roland wouldn't be lonely, even though we couldn't get down for that day," I went on. "He had so many friends there."

"Oh, no, he wasn't lonely! He was with Edward and his people most of the day."

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"Oh, yes, of course! Was Edward's father there?"

"No, not his father. His mother and sister came. I don't think they'd meant to come, only they wanted to see you."

I laughed. "I remember, Roland told me they wanted to see me. I am sure I don't know why. Is Edward's sister like Edward—very tall and straight and rather formal?"

"Oh, no! She's not a bit like Edward. She's not like anybody else that ever I knew. She's quite little and very clever. I dare say you'd like her awfully."

I laughed again.

"You are funny, Victor. You're quite undoing my ideas of Edward's sister. Does she wear long-bodied blouses, with very high necks—at the back, anyhow—bought ready made from the drapers that advertise in the daily papers?"

He looked puzzled. I went on:

"Does she wear a wrist watch and keep on jerking her arm up at an angle to see the time by it? Does she have little bits of tulle bows tied under her ears and little frills and odds and ends of ribbon wherever they can be put, and a very ornamental waist-belt, and a general look as if her highest idea of good style were to sit in the dress circle of a theatre at a matinée?"

Poor Victor! It was no wonder that he looked at me in more and more perplexity. Yet he did grasp something of what I meant, for he answered gravely:

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"I don't think she's that sort, a bit. She had a very pretty dress on on Speech Day, and I think it was quite a Frenchy sort—the kind of thing that Roland likes. And she doesn't wear bits of tulle and frills. She's quite plain about the neck."

"Then she must be good-looking!" I exclaimed. And I added to myself: "She must be a girl of fascination—a girl to be reckoned with!—and not a mere stick to hang drapers' advertised wares upon."

The next day The Bystander slipped close to my side in the garden and said:

"Mother, I've found out what book it is that Roland has sent to Edward's sister. You see, the people in the shop where he got it asked me just now if I thought he wanted to pay for it separately or if they should put it down on the account. It's 'The Story of an African Farm.'"

I had a feeling as if something were clutching at my heart. I said a few words in answer and then I went to the back drive and walked up and down there by myself.

I was glad Little Yeogh Wough was out. I wanted to be apart from him and to think.

"If he has sent Vera Brennan 'The Story of an African Farm,' then she can't be the ordinary sort of girl," I thought. "She can't be of the great army of those who play games and are always taking bodily exercise, yet never by any chance do anything more useful than arrange cut flowers. He could have passed on his way among thousands of these without taking any notice of them. She must be a personality—one of the few girls who can think and are not afraid to do it; one of the few who know what real romance is and who, because they know this, will always be able to marry as often as they like, no matter how small the number of marriageable men may be, while other women stand around and gasp for a husband in vain. And if she is this—then he is not wholly and only mine now as he was a few weeks ago. He will never be wholly mine any more."

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"So we are in it. We are in the European Soup," I wrote to Little Yeogh Wough in his Officers' Training Corps camp at Aldershot, when war had been declared.

But he was beside me before my letter could have reached him.

"The War Office broke us up," he explained. "There was no room there any more for boys who were only playing at soldiering. But I'm going to do the real thing. I'm going to set about it to-morrow."

"Yes," I told him, "you must go. It is the right thing for you to do."

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He looked at his father and heard from him again the same words, more emphatically repeated: "Yes. It's the right thing for you to do."

He was very silent that evening, but it was very gaily and proudly that he set out next morning to

fling himself into the sudden feverish activity of a certain garrison town not far away.

"He won't be long getting his commission," his father said. "His five years in the Officers' Training Corps have taught him his work already."

But at the end of that day, and at the end of many another day that followed, the Boy came back with a wistful disappointment written upon his handsome face.

He always had the same story to tell—a story of having been welcomed and encouraged when he had first presented himself and promised all that his heart desired, so that only he passed the doctor's requirements.

He had laughed at first at the bare idea of meeting with any difficulty in connection with the doctor. Those who had made him the promises had been quite confident, too, on this point. What could there be wrong with a splendid physique such as his?

"And then I failed in the eyesight test," he finished up. "It is ridiculous, of course, that they should reject me for so little, because I don't have to wear glasses now for anything, and no ordinary person would know there was anything wrong with my eyes at all. I wonder if this sort of thing is going to keep on repeating itself? One or two of the officers suggested another doctor, but I suppose that as long as that wretched test board is put up and they find I can't read the small type on it at a given distance, one doctor will be the same as another."

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He was walking up and down the room restlessly. His fine dark eyes—so much too beautiful to have an eagle's sight—were sadder than ever in their wistful mortification.

"You poor boy! You've always had everything so much your own way in life that you can't understand being beaten back anywhere. But, you know, you always say that you've never got anything important yet the very first time you've tried for it."

"Oh, but this is different! And if I can't get into the Army, what am I going to do? I can't go to Oxford. There'll be nobody there except cripples. I should feel it a disgrace to be seen there. Just fancy my walking about there, looking as fit as I do, when every other decent fellow is fighting! What do you think people would think of me—yes, and even say to me? Nobody would ever believe I've got anything the matter with me, eyes or anything else, unless I wore a label round my neck. Oh, Big Yeogh Wough, what am I going to do? You've no idea what it felt like to-day to have to go out from among them—those officers who'd been quite eager to have me with them."

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He flung himself down heavily into a chair. He had not yet taken off his overcoat and I could see that he was very tired. I bent over him and kissed him.

"You dear big boy! I suppose it's just because of your strength that you're always so piteous when anything doesn't go quite right with you. You can always move mountains yourself and so it breaks you down to find a mountain in your path that you haven't the right to try to move. Never mind. Things will work themselves out all right."

"And to think that Edward has been passed!" he burst out. "He's sure of his commission now. He's only got to wait for it. And I—! Look here, I'll go and have another try to-morrow at a different place and if I'm rejected again I'll go over and join the French army."

"Better offer to help Colonel Crompton here with the recruiting," put in his father, quietly. "You'd be wearing your O.T.C. uniform and doing useful work and through it you might get your chance."

It was a good idea, and the Boy saw it.

"Yes, I think I'll do that. I'll have a try at Bury St. Edmunds to-morrow, and if the doctor there doesn't slip me through the eyesight test I'll go round and help the dear old colonel and work my way in sideways. After all, if I'm a good soldier and strong and healthy, what on earth does it matter that I can't see the enemy coming behind bushes five miles off? When it comes to that, one uses field glasses."

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"That's the right way to look at it," I told him. "The bright side of everything is really the truest side. That's why I'm sorry Miss Torry isn't here now. She'd only have to cry out: 'Lor!' You've only got to try twenty-three and three-quarter times more and you're sure to get what you want.' That irrepressible sort of person is so helpful in life—so different from Old Nurse's sort. Old Nurse would have said to you: 'Well, Master Roland, I don't see how you can expect them to take you, seein' as I've always told you as you've got an 'undredth part of an inch more toe-nail on your right big toe than on your left.'"

The reference to toe-nails must have made him glance at my feet, for his face suddenly brightened as he said:

"Oh, you've got my scarlet silk stockings on—the pair I gave you for a birthday present when I was ten years old! They do look lovely. I'm so glad you've put them on. Only just seeing them has taken all my tiredness and bitterness away. They make life worth living again."

"You funny boy! How many people, do you think, would know what you mean by that?"

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"Not many, I dare say, but that's their fault, not mine. I always feel so sorry for them—for the people who can't understand why the sight of such things as scarlet silk stockings, and Parma violets, and black fox fur, and blue hyacinths, and pink carnations, helps one to live."

"Sulphur carnations," I put in. "Sulphur yellow is the adored colour of my womanhood, just as salmon pink was the adored colour of my childhood. For years of my little girlhood I spent all my pocket money on either salmon-pink ribbon or white narcissi. I would have gone without food or clothes to get either of these things. Of course, I shouldn't say this if anybody were here but ourselves. The servants would think me mad if they heard me—just as they would think you either mad, or bad, or both, for your joy in my scarlet silk stockings. I remember Old Nurse's amazement when you bought them for me. She would have thought it more natural for you to have bought me a satchel or a bottle of cheap lavender water or something else quite ordinary and respectable.... But, anyhow, I'm afraid the time for beautiful things is over for two or three years. The war is going to grind us down very low before it's done with."

He was so much brightened up that his failure to pass the eyesight test again next day did not dismay him in the least. He offered his help to the lovable colonel who was the recruiting officer for the district and who was sorely overworked already, and was soon throwing his whole heart into the business of bundling into His Majesty's Forces as many young men as he could get hold of.

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He began with our cook, who had always had a weakness for him.

"Joanna, your young man ought to enlist. He's such a splendid fellow. The Army can't do without him."

"Oh, Master Roland!"

She began a string of objections and excuses. But Little Yeogh Wough got his way, as he always did when there was no red tape to come up against.

"You seem to have quite forgotten that you want a commission for yourself, Roland," I said to him after he had done a fortnight of indefatigable recruiting work.

"Oh, no, I haven't. But I've found out that the best way to get the thing you want is to work hard at something else, and then the other thing falls into your lap. There was a Lord Chief Justice once—I forget which one—who, when he was a boy, drove his father to despair because he wouldn't study law but would go on the stage. But he ended up as Lord Chief Justice a good deal quicker than if he had taken to the law at first. I'm going to do that with my soldiering. I've got an idea. You wait a bit. I'm going down to Doctor S— to ask him to give me a certificate of physical fitness. I shan't say a word about eyesight, and he won't think of it. He's never heard a whisper of there being anything wrong with mine. But he does know that I'm as tough as a young horse, and he'll be glad enough to write down that he knows it."

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Armed with this document, which was given him in all good faith, he went to yet another garrison town, where he had come to know a major who was going to be put in command of a new battalion. This major had taken a great fancy to him; and the result was that one evening Little Yeogh Wough came home and announced that at last he had got his heart's desire.

"It's a certainty, Big Yeogh Wough. It can't go wrong now. It was that certificate that did it. They never put me through any eyesight test at all. Now I can look Edward Brennan in the face. Let us have him here for a week."

I told him how glad I was. And it was true that I was glad, for his whole look had changed.

But deep down in my heart I felt as if an iron hand were clutching at me.

"Once I get the commission, I'll soon manage to get out to the Front," he laughed confidently.

"Yes," I said, and laughed too. But the iron clutch at my heart came again.

"I must see about my outfit at once. And then I shall have to go into rooms at Norwich to be with my battalion. I shall have to change out of it later on if I find it's only going to be a Home Service one."

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Even with all his energy about his outfit, his name was in the gazette before his new uniform was ready. Yet it was not long before a Sunday morning came when he made his first public appearance in the neighbourhood as a second lieutenant, going to church with his sister to show how the best quality cloth, the best cut, the best shade of khaki, the best Sam Browne belt and all the other accessories could increase the attractiveness of a boy with a fine figure and with that "dignity of the watch-chain" sort of fascination about him which I have tried to explain already.

"I don't agree with the people who say that khaki is not becoming," I said to his father after he had gone. "It must be becoming, because, since the war broke out, I've had a stronger and stronger impression every day that England is full of good-looking men."

"I must see what Edward Brennan looks like in his khaki," I thought.

But Edward was still waiting for his commission and so was in his ordinary clothes. But the thrill of the war was in him and it was a new Edward who was with us now and sat at the piano, and with his long fingers brought from the keys music that had a strange new meaning in it.

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"Edward, in a way I am sorry that you are going soldiering, too. It will be a great pity if anything happens to you—because, if you live, you'll be a great musician one day, when you wake up."

"When I wake up?"

"Yes. You're as cold as marble now. You want to thaw. But you're beginning to thaw already. What is that sad, sweet thing you've been playing over and over again this morning?"

"Oh, don't you know? It's my setting of Roland's poem, 'L'Envoi.'"

"Roland's poem? I didn't know he wrote any poems."

"No. He's afraid to show them to you, because he says they're not good enough yet. But I liked this one so much that I couldn't help setting it to music."

And he played the music over again, singing the words as he did so:

"Only a turn of head,
A good-bye lightly said,
And you set out to tread
Your manlier road.

But our youth's paths once met,
And think not we forget
How great a brother's debt
To you is owed.

Sweep onward! and though fame
Shall aureole your name,
Remember whence you came
In boyhood's days.

And in Life's wider years
Look back on hopes and fears,
Sweetened with Memory's tears,
And blame and praise."

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When he had finished I had a lump in my throat and a mist before my eyes, so that I could hardly see him as he sat at the piano.

A few minutes later I thought I heard Little Yeogh Wough come in. I went to his room, but he was not there. There was a sheet from an exercise book on the floor, which the wind that came in at the open window had evidently blown off the table. I picked it up and looked at it, and saw that the writing on it was a poem which the Boy had copied from a recent number of the "Westminster Gazette."

I read the lines through carelessly at first; but when I came to the third or fourth line I knew that if he was to get out to the Front and get killed this poem would haunt me always. I found myself murmuring the words over:

"I shall remember miraculous things you said
My whole life through;
Things to go unforgotten till I am dead;
But the hundredfold, adorable ways of you,
The tilt of your chin for laughter, the turn of your head,
That I loved, that I knew——
Oh, while I fed on the dreams of them, these have fled!
Words which no time can touch are my life's refrain;
But each picture flies——
All that was left to hold till I meet you again!
Your mouth's deep curve, your brows where the shadow lies,
These are the things I strive to capture in vain,
And I have forgotten your eyes——"

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Another blinding mist of tears blotted out the last line, even as just now in the drawing-room tears had blotted out the figure of Little Yeogh Wough's friend sitting at the piano.

That night, after midnight, as I sat on the big sofa with the Boy and his friend, I said suddenly:

"I didn't know you wrote poems, Roland. Why don't you let me see some of them?"

"They're not good enough to show you. I suppose Edward has been telling you I've written them. He oughtn't to have told you."

They were sitting one on either side of me. Edward laughed.

"Don't mind what he says. I'll send them to you to read," he said to me.

Then a demon of anger leapt up in the eyes of Little Yeogh Wough. He looked dangerous as he flung himself across me and defied his friend.

"No, you won't send them. I don't mean mother to see them. They're not good enough. They're not to be shown her. You understand?"

"Roland!" I exclaimed reproachfully.

When his friend had gone to bed he walked fiercely up and down the room in which he was now alone with me. [Pg 178]

"You can see what I feel, Big Yeogh Wough. I don't want you to see work that I think is bad. And you know that home and you are something quite apart from everything else with me. My best self is always here, but I've had to bring out another self in my school life, or I couldn't have got on in that life at all. And I don't want you to hear about that other self. Any boy that comes here must come on condition that he doesn't tell you."

"You ought to be very grateful to this particular boy who is here now, for he has told me of all sorts of goodnesses in you—of your kindness in helping other fellows less clever than yourself—helping them even to compete against you—and of your great sense of justice. You have learnt to rule, and I am glad, for now you will have to put your ability to the test; and I am very proud to know that last Speech Day the Head thanked you for the change for the better that you had worked in your house since you had been an important boy there."

He came and sat down on the big couch beside me and leaned his head against mine.

"Are you particularly fond of Edward's sister, Roland?"

"Of Vera Brennan? No, not particularly fond of her. I like her tremendously. You would, too, if you knew her. She's not like other girls. She's brilliant and can think for herself. She wants to be a writer some day. But first she's going to Oxford. If it hadn't been for this war we should have been there at the same time." [Pg 179]

"Going to Oxford isn't the way for a woman to be a writer—except of treatises. But that's beside the point. Are you getting to be fond of her? Do you think you will ever be as fond of her as you are of me?"

"What are you talking about, Big Yeogh Wough? I'm only a boy yet and am not likely to get fond of any woman, except in a comradely way. You know that when the time comes for me to love a woman and think of marrying her, I should like to find one like you if I could. But I'm not likely to be able to do that. Yet, whether the woman be Vera or anybody else, there won't be any question of whether I love you or her the better. You and I have lived so much in each other's life that we're like one person, and the woman I love will have to have you for a lover as well as me, while she'll have to love you if she wants me."

"Does Vera Brennan know that I call you Little Yeogh Wough and that you call me Big Yeogh Wough?"

"No. She knows a lot about me, but she doesn't know things like that."

"That's right. And now it's time you went to bed, or you will make me so very late in coming to say good night to you." [Pg 180]

"All right." He got up at once. "But you're not going to sit up working, are you? I don't think you ought to in this East Coast house. What's the good of their putting out the lighthouse light if you keep the light in your turret blazing away? You see, we're as nearly opposite Germany as we can be."

"Very well. I'll be good and go to bed by a candle hidden away behind a curtain. It will be all the better for your father. There won't be any fear of the light waking him up. He says he would have been in his grave long ago if he kept the hours I keep. That may be, but I never find that the people who go to bed at nine and get up at half-past eight are any the healthier for it. I rather agree with that old financier who used to see a good deal of us and used to say sometimes in the morning: 'I feel quite out of sorts to-day. I always do whenever I go to bed earlier than usual.'"

I went to his room half an hour later to say good night to him. He was already in bed. Before I switched off his light I saw something in his eyes which made me say:

"Roland, what are you thinking of? Is this the last time I shall come and say good night to you before you go out to the Front—if you succeed in getting out there?"

"Yes." He answered me in a very tender voice which no one else knew. "You see, if you come up with me to London to-morrow we shall be sleeping in different places—you at the hotel and I at Uncle Jack's—and after that I shall be going straight to my rooms at Norwich. And even if my battalion gets accidentally ordered to this town, I shall have to sleep at headquarters. This place would be too far off. And I don't suppose there'll be much leave going, because the battalion is so raw and wants such a lot of training." [Pg 181]

"What a splendid thing your five years' O.T.C. training has been for you!"

"Yes. The O.T.C. major has written to the commanding officer of my battalion and told him what he thinks of me as a trained soldier already, and it seems to have been a pretty good opinion, so I don't expect I shall be long getting out to the Front. I don't mean to be long. I'll move heaven and earth to get out there. I know you won't try to keep me back. You know, you said to me once, not very long ago, that every man has two mothers, his flesh-and-blood mother and his country, and he owes as much to the one as to the other. That's what makes that American song: 'I didn't raise my son to be a soldier,' all wrong."

I had knelt down by his bedside again and was smoothing the mass of his hair. We were silent for a long while and then I suddenly found myself saying:

"I wonder if a mother's love is really all gold, as people say it is, Little Yeogh Wough, or whether there isn't a good deal of the dross of pride in it! Now, I would take off my skin and sit in my bones to keep you from feeling cold, but, after all, that's because you are mine, and I suppose I am selfish enough to think, though it's wrong to do so, that what is mine is more precious than what is anybody else's. Of course, if much of this pride comes in, it takes the holiness away from the love." [Pg 182]

"I don't think you need trouble about that, when it's a question of you and me," he returned.

I was still stroking his hair. And then something, though I could not have told what, made me whisper to him:

"Say: 'Our Father, Which art in Heaven,' with me, Little Yeogh Wough."

I did not know then what he felt lately about these things. So much had happened that might have changed him since I had caught a glimpse of the ivory crucifix half hidden under other things in his drawer.

But, with his lips close to my face, he repeated the prayer with me.

I had left him about half an hour when a loud knocking came at the front door. Without disturbing my husband I slipped some clothes on and went downstairs, but could find no trace of either Little Yeogh Wough or Edward. [Pg 183]

Presently they both came in, in dressing-gowns and bedroom slippers, and I learned that they had been guiding down to the sea some coast patrols, new-comers to the locality, who had lost their way.

"What? Do you mean that you have been all the way down to the sea on this bitterly cold and stormy night with nothing on but dressing-gowns over your pyjamas and bedroom slippers on your bare feet?"

They laughed, and then I knew that nothing would hold either of them back from the Front five minutes longer than was absolutely inevitable.

But the next day was a different kind of day for Little Yeogh Wough. For he spent it in London—that London which he always loved, as I love it, with a deep and undying devotion; and he found himself in the company of men whose strength was in their brains, rather than in their bodies.

He began, directly I left him, by mischievously telegraphing to an eminent novelist, who was fond of him, to meet him at a given spot in town. It was the eminent novelist's busiest day of the week, on which he never left home, but he obeyed the summons of the telegram, which bore the sender's surname only, imagining, perhaps, that something had gone very wrong. Anyhow, he was irate when he discovered that nothing more important had required him than Little Yeogh Wough, desirous of showing off his uniform. [Pg 184]

He gave his admiration, none the less. Another and another, whom the boy of my heart went to see, charmed him by their brilliance in return for the quicker life which the mere sight and voice of him put into their veins. He passed the afternoon at the Stores, doing as much in helping the sale of military outfits for other people as in buying what he himself needed. And he passed the evening with me at my hotel, with friends of whom one, Mr. Clement Shorter, had known him by daily sight and greeting since the bright years of his earliest boyhood.

He sat and drank in the eager talk of books. And at twelve o'clock, when the never to be forgotten little party had broken up and he was due at his uncle's flat, he came and planted himself in front of me and said:

"Big Yeogh Wough, when this war is over, I'm not going in for the Indian Civil Service. I'm not going in for anything that will take me away from London and you and the life that you live. London and the brain force of London have got into my blood to-day. When I come back I'm going to stop here and use here in this city all the powers that I've got. You will see."

When he was leaving me he turned back and said with sudden wistfulness:

"I've got to go down to-morrow, but you could stop in London till Friday, couldn't you? You see, Edward's going to bring his sister up to town on Friday and I should like you to meet her. I dare say I could get up again for a few hours and we might have a little tea-party somewhere—perhaps at the Criterion." [Pg 185]

He spoke quite lightly, as if my refusal would not matter in the very least. But I looked at his sad, deep eyes and at the grace of his figure in its new khaki, and I did not refuse.

"Very well," I agreed. "I will stay over until Friday. I am really quite curious to see this Vera Brennan who is so utterly unlike all other girls."

"That's good of you. It's settled, then. I'll manage to come up."

And so it came about that a quarter-past four on the next Friday afternoon found me in the vestibule of the Criterion, looking at the moving throngs of men, nearly all in khaki, and of women who were already for the most part in black. And I wondered again, as I have wondered all my life, why these so-called bright scenes are sadder far than any funeral, and why black does succeed in looking pathetic on the young, whereas it only looks dismal on the old.

It is only a mild sympathy that stirs in one when one sees a very old woman in widow's crape. One feels that the fitness of things is not outraged. But when one sees a young widow—oh, then, one knows that there is a story of romance and horror and anguish lurking behind the black, and first a pang of pity goes through one's heart, and then a flood of tenderness rises in one's soul for the girl who could only just have gained her womanhood's best joys when she lost them.

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Little Yeogh Wough, who had been shopping for himself, was by this time crossing the floor towards me, his face aglow, his step strong, his whole air vital and electric. At the same moment little Miss Torry, whom I had notified of our intention to be here, appeared like a small whirlwind and grasped first my hand and then the Boy's, as if she meant to wrench them from our wrists and carry them away with her as trophies.

"Oh, you dear boy! Let me look at you. What a size you are! And how the khaki does suit you! And what a lovely shade of khaki it is—a greeny shade! Some people do have such horrid, mustardy things. Oh, dear me! I wish there weren't so many people here, so that I could get a better look at you. I shall hug you in a minute before everybody—and then, what will people say? And your moustache, too! Why, it's quite golden! and I always did expect it to come out black and make you look like a conspirator."

She was so very tiny and the boy was, in comparison, so very big that it was amusing to see them together. But there was a great softness in his eyes as he looked at her, for he had had Miss Torry guiding him in the way he should go for nearly thirteen years of his life, and every scolding she'd given him, and every extra extravagance she had denied him when he had been at school had endeared her to him unutterably.

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And then there entered the girl whom I had come to meet—the girl to whom he had sent letters that had taken hours to write, and a parcel containing one book which had required a whole morning for its making-up and addressing.

I saw someone very small, very slight, very delicate-faced and yet very resolute, with amethyst-like eyes that looked straight into my eyes, asking me mute questions concerning the soul of the boy who had been mine only till now, but was not likely to be mine only for ever.

She was accompanied by an aunt, and the little tea-party went off very successfully, with Little Yeogh Wough glowing with pride and happiness, and his sister, who had come with me, taking things all in, as she always did. Not one of us breathed a word as to what we had really come there for—namely, to examine each other and see how we liked each other; but the verdict was an all-round satisfactory one, and in the end we all got into a taxicab together and Miss Vera Brennan sat on my knee.

"How tiny you are!" I said playfully.

"Yes. I was saying to Roland once how sorry I am that I'm so small, and he said he liked small women."

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She was going to buy a hat, and I set her and her aunt down at the hat shop. Little Yeogh Wough went with them to help her in making her choice—or, rather, to show her how well he could choose a hat for her even this first time.

I did not watch him go into the shop, because at that moment there came along a marching phalanx of new recruits, most of whom had not yet got their uniforms; men of London, who had given themselves up to strive and suffer for their country and who came along without panoply or music, and with no need of either because of the music that was in their hearts, and that made their eyes glow and their steps ring firm and true.

If I had been a man I should have bared my head to them as they passed. I honoured them, I revered them, I loved them, with an honour and a reverence and a love that half choked me.

That evening, when Little Yeogh Wough came back to me at the hotel, he asked me in a quite careless tone how I liked Miss Brennan.

"Oh, I like her very much!" I answered him. "She is good-looking and sincere—and good looks and sincerity go a very long way. I hope you let her know that it was I who had trained you to be a good judge of hats and of most other articles of the feminine wardrobe?"

"Oh, of course I've told her all about that!" he said with a laugh.

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He had worn khaki five months and a half, and had worked hard, and become a full lieutenant and been entrusted at nineteen with difficult Home Service jobs that would not have been given

to many a man of thirty, when one day he came to us in the East Coast house with such a glow on his face as I had never seen there before.

"I believe I am going to get out to the Front at last," he announced. "Lady Geraldine Desmer and Captain Jarvice both know influential people at the War Office, and it will be very surprising if between them I don't get what I want. Captain Jarvice is going to take me up to the War Office with him to-morrow. He says he isn't going to wait about here in England much longer, and at the same time he's promised me that he won't go unless I go with him. And he really does seem to have influence, so I believe I'm all right now. Besides, Gretton's got out there, so I'm bound to go. There's a fate in it."

So, two days later, the brave young feet ran up the steps of the house eagerly again, and the fine young figure met me in the hall with a leaner figure beside it.

He waited for Captain Jarvice to tell me what there was to tell. And that charming cavalry officer did tell me, while he held out both his hands to me, looking at me with eyes that had a mist of moisture in them. [Pg 190]

"I've got them to take him. We're both going out with the 7th Melchesters in five days' time. I've been wondering whether you'll bless me for this or curse me."

"Roland, go and tell your father."

When they had gone, an hour later, his father and I and his sister sat and looked at each other and were very silent.

The next day the Boy came again, this time bringing his luggage—all the extra things which he had had in his Norwich rooms and could not take to the Front. There were things to be locked in his trunks and things to be packed on his wardrobe shelves, and certain especially precious treasures which he poured in a heap into his private drawer in that same capacious piece of furniture.

"I've lost the key of this drawer, so I can't lock it separately from the whole wardrobe, but you'll see that nobody goes to it, won't you, Big Yeogh Wough?" he said wistfully as he pressed down a few unimportant articles of clothing on the top of the little piles of letters and notebooks which he had just heaped up.

"Yes," I promised him. "I shall not go to it and your father will not, and Clare will not. And there's no one else."

I was tenderly wrapping up his sword in folds of silk as I spoke; his sword, that had been used for show and was not wanted for the hard and bitter work of fighting in earnest. [Pg 191]

He went on talking as he went on packing in things on the top of the letters:

"I've told Vera Brennan that you won't mind her writing to you sometimes. You won't, will you?"

"No. Of course I shan't mind. I shall be glad."

I felt suddenly grateful to fate for the other woman who loved him, too.

He finished his packing and we went into the dining-room for tea.

"I shan't be able to stay all through tea. I've got to leave in ten minutes, to catch the train back to Norwich and clear out of my rooms there, so as to go to the Melchesters at Maldon. I shall feel a stranger among them, and no mistake. But I like the colonel, and that's something."

He spoke quite bravely and with an attempt at his usual gaiety, but it was easy to see that there was something not quite right about him. Eagerly though he had striven to go, he yet was not going without a pang.

But it was not the coward's pang—Heaven be thanked! There was nothing of fear in it.

Downstairs in the kitchen department of the house there was a great and unwonted silence that made itself felt even in our rooms. The servants knew and were sorry. One of them had known him for eight years, another for four and yet another for two; and their unnatural silence and stillness had a meaning which struck a chill to my heart. [Pg 192]

Then, the ten minutes being over, he got up and kissed us good-bye all round. A curious look came on his face as he saw the tears in his father's eyes brim over. He went out very suddenly, walking a little blindly.

He would have no one go to the station with him. For one thing, he was not going there immediately, and, secondly, he always hated being seen off by anyone that he loved.

And six days later, at eight o'clock in the morning, a telegram came to us, sent by him from Folkestone:

"Am crossing to-night."

As I have said before, I buried my face in the pillow and sobbed and sobbed and sobbed.

For it is in the beginning that the great Fear comes and grips and chills.

I was glad Old Nurse was dead, and also Tita, the black Skye terrier. The dog had loved him so! She had always been haggard and wretched when she had seen his luggage packed for going back to school at the beginning of each term, and now she would surely have known somehow that he had gone to the war.

"Oh, Little Yeogh Wough!" I cried out in my heart. "I have guarded you so much always—so much!—and now I can't guard you any more. Now already your glad young feet are marching over French ground, carrying you on—on—perhaps to your death."

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And then began for us all a different life; a life of heart hunger. We hungered to hear the Boy's laugh, to hear the peculiar call he gave when he wanted his younger brother to help him with his dressing, or his half-mischievous, half-playfully tender inquiry of his father as to whether he could have the first supply of the hot bath water. We wandered about like lost souls until his first letter came. And one vivid sentence in it showed us that he had reached the danger zone:

"It has given me a thrill to-night to see the German flares go up like a truncated dawn."

CHAPTER XIII THE SECOND GERMAN GIFT

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"There's a sob on the sea,
And the Old Year is dying:
Borne on night-wings to me
There's a sob on the sea.
And for what could not be
The deep world's heart is sighing.
There's a sob on the sea,
And the Old Year is dying."

Little Yeogh Wough.

Sometimes in the midst of my aching, tearing anxiety I found myself laughing out suddenly at the remembrance of some of the Boy's delightful extravagances; at how, for instance, one night when his battalion was stationed about three and a half miles away from us, he had driven up all that distance and back in a taxicab at midnight in order to get eighteenpence in ready money for a tip for the cab driver. He had been a short journey in the cab already, but the cost of that was going to be put down on an account. He wanted, however, to give a good tip, and, having no small change, he took the cab another seven miles to do it.

Then there had been an occasion when, needing a piece of stout wire, he had secretly but relentlessly removed it from the inside of the handsome and nearly new piano, substituting a stout bootlace to act in its place. For one who had always been responsible far beyond his years—more responsible than most elderly men—he had astonishing little fits of gay irresponsibility in which he fell foul of the authority of everybody except his Big Yeogh Wough.

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Perhaps it was these very gleams of wildness that won for him the devotion of the servants in the house.

Once a week everything else in the household routine had to give way to the making of his cake. The cook kneaded her heart's love into it in spite of his having robbed her of her young man for the benefit of the Army, and the others looked on at the making with sorrow and fear in their honest eyes. They might not agree with each other on all points at all times, but they always agreed about him; and so the family cake and the kitchen cake became poor and anæmic in order that the cake destined for the Front might be rich enough to put any young officer into a state of bilious inefficiency.

Our anxiety to obey official instructions as to describing the contents of parcels led him to write a protest to his sister as Chief Commissariat Officer:

"MY DEAR BYSTANDER,

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"I wish you wouldn't apologise all over the outside of my parcels for what is inside them. Why put 'Only six buns and two dried haddocks'? Or: 'Merely a little dill water'? Can't you put 'Provisions' only? Won't that satisfy the regulations?"

The sending out of his silver identity disc and chain was an agonising experience. On the face of it there is nothing very tragic about a flat bit of silver with a man's name and regiment engraved on it. But what it stands for! Oh, heaven, what it stands for!

I knew what it stood for as I looked at it. It stood first and foremost for the fact that the boy who in himself was all earth and all heaven to me was in the army only one among many thousands—perhaps among many hundreds of thousands. It stood for a fearful confusion in which masses of men might get inextricably mixed up so that none could know who his fellow was; and it stood for a field on which there were many dead lying, and for grim figures walking about among those

dead and depending for their identifications on some token worn by the still shapes whose lips would speak no more.

All this passed through my mind while I packed up the little disc and chain. I had had to order a very long chain so that it might slip easily over the Boy's big lion-cub head.

"After all, I'm making too much of it," I told myself. "What is the identity disc but a mere convenience? Haven't I hung one of my own cards on to a button of my dress sometimes in Paris, when I was going to drive about alone in their dangerous cabs?" [Pg 197]

And I laughed and went to look for something vulgar to put on the gramophone to cheer myself up.

Since he had gone away we had had no music. We had all been too restless to play the piano and any of the ordinary gramophone records would have brought us memories of him too keen for us to bear. But now suddenly I remembered a dozen records hidden away under a sofa because I had judged them on a first trial to be uninteresting. The Boy had known nothing of them, so they would not torture me with thoughts of him.

With some difficulty I pulled out the uppermost one of the dozen, dusted it and put it on the gramophone.

It was Henschel's "Morning Hymn," sung by Gervase Elwes.

Hurriedly trying the thing in a gay mood many months ago, I had thought it commonplace and dull. I had never taken the trouble even to hear it a second time. The name of the singer had meant nothing to me, because I am too deeply a lover of music ever willingly to go to a concert. I had heard him once or twice in love songs on the gramophone and had been struck in some odd way by the fact that in those love songs it was a gentleman who was pleading and adoring. There is such a difference between a bounder's love song and a gentleman's, even though the bounder may have the best voice that ever came from a masculine throat. [Pg 198]

For, just as a man has to be better turned out in personal appearance than a woman in order to look all right, so he has to be better dressed and finished off inside in order not to do things in a shoddy way. For the bounderishness of a bounder betrays itself in every little thing he does—in the way he smiles, the way he comes into a room, the way he takes his overcoat off and puts it on, the way he touches a piano, the very way he breathes and speaks.

So, now, remembering that I had heard Gervase Elwes sing a love song as if the man really cared and not as if he were a florid windbag who would throw the woman off at the first convenient opportunity, I sat down patiently to listen to the "Morning Hymn."

But after the first few moments I started up, amazed and thrilled.

It was not the singer that mattered. It was the music.

I did not know what the words were. I do not know now what they are. But the music was the music of this war.

The room in which I stood faded from before my eyes and in its place I saw a battlefield in the grey dawn light, with the dead lying in hundreds upon it, most of them with their clear-featured, boyish faces upturned to that pitiless daybreak. And among those upturned faces was the face of Little Yeogh Wough—very white, very set, very calm. And over in the east, where the sun would rise, there was a radiance that was not yet of the sun and yet was warmer than the chill grim greyness of the dawn. It was a light shed by the presence of a great Archangel, whose arms, outspread, as it were, upon the clouds, enfolded and blessed the dead as they lay beneath, while his face, uplifted to a higher heaven, besought the pity of the great God of the Universe for the agonies of the nations passing through the awful purgative ordeal of War. [Pg 199]

And over all there brooded such an adoration as forced one to one's knees with one's forehead bowed to the ground. And I knew as I looked—I knew even in my own agony—that the things which those boys had suffered and the other things which they had given up had not been suffered and given up in vain.

Oh, what is the use of trying to put the thought of him out of my mind?

It is impossible. Everything I do—everything I touch or look at—reminds me of him.

I took up a casual book of poems and the first lines that I saw brought fresh tears to my heart, if not to my eyes: [Pg 200]

"Four ducks on a pond,
A grass-bank beyond,
A blue sky of spring,
White clouds on the wing:
What a little thing
To remember for years ...
To remember with tears!"

"It's no use," I said to myself. "The fear meets me everywhere. It's no good my trying to shirk it.

I'll go in and see Mrs. Orme."

Mrs. Orme was an unhappy mother of an only son, who had heard on the night of last Christmas Day the news that her treasure had been taken from her. She had been expecting him home, just as we are expecting Little Yeogh Wough now, and had kept the Christmas dinner waiting until ten o'clock. Then they had gone on with the feast—a veritable feast, prepared for the hero who was expected—and, simply by way of a pretty thought, had lifted their champagne glasses and drunk to the soldiers who had fallen in the war.

Little had they thought that they were drinking to their own idol!

I had not been to the house in all the months that had passed since. I had contented myself with writing a letter of sympathy, not having the courage to go and offer to that poor father and mother comfort that could be no comfort. But now I went and heard the whole pitiful story and was shown the still more pitiful clothes with the bullet holes in them, and the identity disc and the wrist watch and the cigarette case and the periscope and all the other things that the War Office kindly sends back to the homes of fallen officers.

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I got away as soon as I could, promising to come again soon and bring the lonely-hearted mother a photograph of my Little Yeogh Wough. I went round with the photograph five days later and told the servant that she need not announce me to Mrs. Orme, as I would go up and find her by myself if, as they said, she was alone in her own sitting-room.

I went very softly along the corridor. The door of the sitting-room looked shut, but yielded to a touch and slipped open. I heard a sound of low sobbing, and looked in.

Mrs. Orme was sitting by a table with her arms flung out across it and her head bowed upon them, with her face hidden. In between the sobs half-smothered words were breaking from her and I caught them:

"Oh, Harry, I'm so poor without you! I'm so poor without you! What's the good of anything, now that you're gone? Oh, Harry, come back to me! Come back to me!"

I went back along the corridor and down the stairs and home.

I would send the photograph by post or by a messenger. Not for the whole world would I have let her know that I had seen her in an hour like this.

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But people take their grief differently. One young widow that I knew attacked hers with a fountain pen and got the better of it valiantly by writing screed after screed, not only to her relatives and friends, but even to her remotest acquaintances.

I don't myself think that any letter with deep feeling in it should ever be written with a fountain pen. Love letters should certainly never be written with one. Fountain pens and passion are mutually contradictory.

At just about this time there came a bright gleam in the darkness of our suspense. Captain Jarvice, who had been sent home with a slight shoulder wound three or four weeks before, appeared suddenly in our midst.

"You'll have the Boy home soon on his first leave," he told us. "He's getting on finely out there. He's a born soldier, that boy is, as I've always said. I'm not the only person that says so, either. The colonel says so, too. He's got great brains and great courage both together, and his men know it and will follow him anywhere. You can trust the men to know what an officer is worth."

"I hope he will never get the V.C.," I said with a shiver.

"What?" The dear captain stared at me.

"Oh, you know what I mean! Nobody honours the Victoria Cross more than I do, but it is the military form of Extreme Unction. I want him to do things that deserve it, but not to get it. Only about one man out of every hundred who get it ever lives on safely afterwards. If he doesn't die in the actual winning of it, then the Law of Compensation strikes him a little later, as in the case of Warneford. No! Dearly though I love bravery, I myself am not brave enough to want my Boy to win the Victoria Cross."

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"Well, even if he doesn't happen to win it himself, he's pretty sure to be the cause of some other fellow's winning it. I tell you, he's the best soldier in the whole battalion, and if he were to be killed to-morrow without having had the chance to show all the grit that's in him—the chance to hold his trench single-handed against a horde of Germans—he'd still have done so much by his wonderful influence to stiffen up his men that they'd stand like lions, months after he was in his grave, just because of the memory of him. That's the stuff he's made of. As soon as he gets into the trench, with his gay laugh and the Life, sheer Life, breaking out of every pore of him, all the discomforts and difficulties seem to vanish."

"Hasn't he sometimes given way himself?" I asked. "Hasn't he sometimes been very tired and almost broken up?"

"Oh, yes—sometimes! But he never minds being tired himself. It was having to urge the tired men on that hurt him, and having to make them work in the trenches when they ought to have rested. He would like to do half their work for them, if he could; but as he can't, he does the next best thing—he puts heart into them to do it. Oh, he loves his men as much as they love him!"

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"He's Mess President, isn't he?"

"I should think he was! And such a cook! He says he's always been fond of cooking, though he's never had much chance to do it. The day before I got hit he made some lovely caper sauce with half a bottle of capers and my tooth-powder. He's a regular schoolboy still; even a troublesome one sometimes."

I laughed.

"I expect you find that he wants to put things to all sorts of uses they were never meant for, don't you?"

"I should just think he does. If a new trench mortar comes along, you'd think it would be just a new trench mortar and there would be an end of it; but that's not so with him. He wants to take it to bits and see if it can't be used for something quite different. But his ideas are sometimes quite good. Two or three months ago, after we'd had a particularly dirty time, he went and got some factory vats and arranged them as baths, and it just happened that the Prime Minister came along unexpectedly when he and two other subalterns were in the vats with nothing whatever on but their identity discs."

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I laughed again. Oh, if I could only hear him call out here in this house now, as he had done so often before:

"Father, can I have a hot bath?"

"You've no idea what a comfort a good wash is when you're thoroughly tired out and caked with filthy mud from head to foot," Captain Jarvice went on.

Yes, I had an idea. I was thinking how tenderly I would bathe the tired feet of Little Yeogh Wough if I were near him now after his long marches; those feet that I had kissed so often when they were the feet of a small child.

And again I feel so glad that he had such a happy childhood. My own people used to say that it was a waste to buy the children the extravagantly costly toys they had. But I'm glad now—very glad.

"He'll be adjutant presently, you'll see," said Captain Jarvice, keeping on his own line.

I laid my hand very softly against his wounded shoulder.

"Captain Jarvice, can't you see that in spite of all its horror this war has done some good? It has made men and women of us all. You don't hear people complaining of pin-pricks now, as they used to do. And it has given us all hearts, instead of only a gizzard in the heart's place."

A week or two later Little Yeogh Wough himself came home on that first leave to which his father and his sister and his naval cadet brother and I had been looking forward with such panting eagerness.

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"Why, you look like a German, Roland!" was the frank greeting of that younger brother, standing up in the hall to welcome him with all the self-confidence of one who wore the dark blue of the premier Service.

"I do, do I? That's because I've got my hair cropped, I suppose. And I expect you think a lot of yourself because you've got into the Navy. But anyhow, here I am, and I'm not a German, whatever I may look like."

With his arm round me and mine round him, he moved across the hall, giving his gay little greetings that had a catch in the throat behind them. There was an answering catch in his father's throat, and a little tremble in all our voices. Then we noticed at last how deadly tired out he looked. He laughed when we told him of it.

"I've been on my feet for forty-eight hours—and in any case I never manage to get more than four hours' sleep a night, even in billets. But a good sleep here to-night will soon put me right. I think I'll have a hot bath now and go to bed directly after dinner. You'll come and see me in bed, mother?"

We had dinner early, for his sake, and it was hardly more than half-past nine when he called me and told me he was ready for me to come in.

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He was not in bed yet, however, but only sitting down, half undressed, in the midst of all the disturbed treasures of his room. The doors and drawers of his wardrobe stood open, as did also the drawers under his toilet glass, and one or two trunks which he had pulled out from beneath the bed.

"It's very good to be back again and see all the dear old things." He nodded at the general confusion. "You don't know how I think of them when I'm out there."

"But you don't hate being out there?"

"No. Because I'm in the right place. It's my duty to be there. I should hate myself if I were not there. You wouldn't have me anywhere else, would you?"

"No, Little Yeogh Wough, I wouldn't have you anywhere else. I couldn't have the boy who has

been the pride of my life anywhere else now but in the fighting line. I am so proud of you, because I know you are a splendid soldier. To be adjutant at your age—why, it's wonderful!"

He glanced half backward at me, smiling. Something in his eye startled me.

"Roland! Do you know that you looked almost wild at that moment?"

"Did I? I'm sorry. I'm afraid I've unlearned a lot of civilisation. I've thrown over a lot of prejudices, too. I've come to have a great respect for the Colonials. I always did think a heap of the Canadians, but still not enough. And I used to think the Australians a touchy people, but now I know they're not. Oh, I'm a different boy in some ways from the boy who went out, Big Yeogh Wough!... What have you been writing out those lines of Laurence Binyon's for?" [Pg 208]

He had caught sight of my large black handwriting on a sheet of paper lying on his table.

"Oh, those lines from the 'Dirge for the Dead'? I copied them out of your book this morning to send in to Mrs. Orme, to comfort her about poor Harry. I forgot them."

Little Yeogh Wough read the lines aloud, very softly:

"They shall not grow old, as we that are left grow old,
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.
At the going down of the sun and in the morning
We will remember them——"

I slipped to my knees beside him and laid my head against his shoulder.

"Would they comfort you if I were to be killed?" he asked.

"Yes, they would—as much as anything could."

His eyes looked into mine curiously.

"What will you think in the years to come if I go down in this war, Big Yeogh Wough?"

"What shall I think? Well, first of all, I shall be proud. I shall honour you very much—more than if you had lived to make yourself a king. But, just because you are you, I shall think it is a waste unless you get your death in doing a little more than an ordinary man would do. Look at your muscular body! I've thought of the wonder of it ever since the day when I first saw you boxing. What's the good of it in this war? It's no more good to resist flying bullets or shell splinters than an old tottering man's body. That's where I should feel bitter. These times are women's times and this war of machinery might as well be carried on by women, for all the good that male muscle can do in it. And yet they go and take the pick of the boys and let a stray bit of shell finish off in a second a splendid human creature whose mind might have been the driving force of the nation in a few years to come! That's where the pity of it would be if anything happened to you." [Pg 209]

"But nothing is going to happen to me. You forget my lucky lock."

He lifted my hand and guided it to the curious little white patch at the side of his cropped head.

"You forget, too, that the fellow at school who knew all about palmistry told me he was sure I was not going to get killed till I was close on sixty. So, you see, I shall be quite safe in this war. They're not likely to add one more to the noonday strokes of the old School bell for me."

"The strokes of the old School bell? What do you mean?" [Pg 210]

"Oh! Haven't you heard? The School bell tolls once at noon every day for every Old Boy who has lost his life in this war. They've got up to fifty-two strokes already and it's sure to go mounting up now by leaps and bounds. There are so many of us out there fighting."

Again I was struck by his tired-out look. I drew myself from his hold and got up from my knees.

"You must go to bed now," I told him. "I will go away for ten minutes and when I come back I must find you in bed."

He obeyed me as he had obeyed me when he was a child. I heard a great noise of shutting doors and drawers and box lids, and when I went in, exactly at the end of the ten minutes, he was lying between the sheets, luxuriously stretched out.

"Oh, the joy of being in a real bed again! I expect I shall sleep till eleven or twelve o'clock to-morrow. Then I shall have the rest of the day with you and shall go up to town and meet Vera Brennan next day; that is, if she can come up from her home. I want to buy a dagger, too, for hand-to-hand work in the trenches, and a few other things."

"Oughtn't you to have sent Vera a telegram to-night?"

"No. To-morrow will do. Oh, by the way, Big Yeogh Wough, have you got any new clothes to show me?" [Pg 211]

"No." I laughed as I shook my head. "I couldn't have afforded them now in war time, even if I'd wanted them—and I haven't felt I wanted them with you away and in danger."

He drew my hand into his, and I stayed beside him with my head resting on his pillow, until he had fallen into a heavy sleep.

How boyish his face looked as he slept! and as I drew my hand from his and moved away from his bedside, turning off the electric light and leaving him in a full flood of August moon radiance, I could have fancied that I heard voices singing softly in the air around me:

"They shall not grow old, as we that are left grow old"—

I stole back and kissed his hair. Oh, human love! why must it be always pain—pain—pain?

He was his old bright self again next day, when, having walked with us all, he lay across my bed and laughed as he read me little French fairy stories while I put things straight in the room.

"It's like the old days, isn't it, when you used to lie across my bed and I taught you French while I brushed my hair? That reminds me that I met an officer last week who said he'd heard you were amazingly good at getting what you wanted out of the French farmer people round about you. He was a man of quite thirty-five, by the way, and I asked him if he didn't think he ought to marry before he went back to the Front. And what do you think he answered me? He rubbed his fingers through his hair, and reddened and said: 'Well, I've always been fonder of outdoor amusements.' So, you see, falling in love and getting married are indoor amusements. I suppose they are, really—only it sounded very funny."

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"Oh, by the way, Big Yeogh Wough, can't you telephone up North to Vera Brennan's people tomorrow and ask them to let her come here till Monday? Say you'll be going up yourself with her and me on Monday."

"Are you getting fonder of her?"

"I don't know. I shan't know till I see her again. There's only one thing I do know and that is that absence never makes the heart grow fonder. I should like to ram that proverb down the throat of the man who invented it."

So the girl with the amethyst eyes came down to our house by the eastern sea.

There was only Sunday for her, since she came late on Saturday evening and we were all going up to London on Monday morning. But that Sunday was enjoyed to the uttermost.

It was so strange to see Little Yeogh Wough with her! No wonder his sister and his young brother looked on in frank bewilderment, remembering that he had been simply a masterful schoolboy until the time of his putting on together of khaki and a moustache!

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What a forcing power this war is! It changes people's ages as it changes their addresses, and that is saying a great deal.

At twelve o'clock that night I rose from the big old sofa where I had been sitting with the Boy and Vera Brennan, and said to them both:

"It is time we all went to bed now. That early train in the morning is really very inconveniently early, as you will find out."

The two of them looked at me and then at each other. Then the Boy laughed.

"You know, Vera, it's not a bit late for us in this house. Two o'clock is more like our time. But I'll go to bed, anyhow, and you can stay here and say what you want to say."

He was gone before I could say a word. And I was left alone with the girl with the amethyst eyes.

I got up from the sofa and walked up and down the room. It was a handsome room, large, many-windowed and high, but strangely gloomy. The electric light was so heavily shaded that there were grim corners. One might have thought that the wings of the Dark Angel hovered in the recesses, as he waited—waited—waited. And, though the month was August, there came up from the sea, hardly more than a stone's-throw away, a sobbing that had something so much like human grief in it that it made one understand how it was that in the ominous spring of 1914 the village people of Russia kept on saying that they heard the earth crying and that there would be war.

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Vera Brennan's small head had sunk lower and lower. She spoke to me without looking at me:

"You know I love Roland, don't you?"

"Yes," I answered her. "I know you love him."

"I can't help it," she said almost piteously. "I never loved anyone before. I never thought I should love anyone at all. My mind was all on other things. But he woke me up. I loved him directly I saw him and heard him speak. Of course, I know he's very young, but with him age doesn't seem to matter. He's a grown man in his mind and heart. He's everything to me now—everything."

I said nothing, but kept on walking up and down the room. She went on, more and more

appealingly:

"He knows I'm saying all this to you. You see, he's told me all about you. He said that if I loved him I must love you, too, because you and he were like one life. And that is why I want to say this to you—that I love him so very much that I want to think of him more than of myself—that, if you think it would be better for him that I should give him up and all my own life's happiness with him, I can do it and I will do it. Yes, I will find strength to do it—if you say I must."

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She had stretched out her arms towards me from the deeper gloom in which she sat. And suddenly I realised, that, small and flowerlike and fragile though she was, she was not a girl who was going to take my treasure from me, but a woman who was asking me to let her share with me the pride and the anguish of living under the black shadow of Fear that had darkened my life for four months past.

I turned and went to her quickly and sat down on the sofa beside her and took her into my arms. We did not speak a word, but we stayed there like that for a long, long time—until the Boy's voice suddenly startled us:

"What are you doing here all this time? It's three o'clock. You will both be ill."

"Roland! I thought you were in bed and asleep."

"No. I tried to lie down, but I couldn't. I've been walking up and down the corridor."

He was stooping over us both, drawing us up. His boyish face had become suddenly the face of a man, his voice was the voice of a man, and his touch and his manner had a man's power and a man's dignity.

It was nearly four o'clock when I went to say good-night to him.

The next day in London was like a dream in which things happened with the speed of flashes. It was only at midnight that the Boy and I got any private talk together. His room adjoined mine at the hotel where we were staying for the night, and he came in to me to bring me an offering of sulphur carnations and to show me the dagger he had bought and his miraculously tiny medical outfit.

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"Why were you so late for the dinner?" I asked him. For he and I had had a dinner engagement and he had kept dinner waiting for at least an hour.

"I didn't feel I could go anywhere and smile and talk to people who didn't understand, just after seeing Vera off at Euston. I should have liked to come straight back to you and talk to you quietly all the evening. Look here, let me fasten these carnations on you where I want you to wear them, just as I used to do before the war!"

"But I shall be going to bed in half an hour!"

"That doesn't matter. It's worth while for you to wear them for half an hour. Tell me what you think of the dagger. It's for hand-to-hand work in the trenches, where there isn't room to use a bayonet."

"Ah!" I took the newly bought thing in my hand and looked at it. "When it's done its work bring it back to me without cleaning it. I shall want to keep it always like that."

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"And here's my little medicine chest. Don't they make things up splendidly? Here's some morphia. You see, many a fellow that's not very badly wounded does himself a lot of harm by wriggling about in his pain before he's picked up. Now, if you've got morphia, you can make the pain bearable and keep quiet."

"Yes," I said quite brightly. But I felt curiously sick at heart.

"Do you still feel you would rather I did not come to Victoria to see you off to-morrow?" I asked him when we said good-night.

"Yes. I don't feel I could stand it. You know, I've always been like that. I've never wanted people who really mattered to see me off at a station. Other people don't count. They can come in crowds. But not you. It'll be hard enough to go, anyhow."

"Very well, then, we'll have lunch at Almond's, with that dear Russian friend I want to show you off to, and then you can do the rest of your shopping while I go and keep a business appointment in Farringdon Street. I shall be back here to say good-bye to you at four o'clock."

But the business appointment next day in Farringdon Street kept me longer than I had expected it would do and when I came out I could not get a taxicab easily. Agitated, desperate, I had almost run well on to the Embankment before I picked one up and then I dashed up to the hotel steps to find the boy jumping in and out of his own cab with a harassed look on his face.

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"If I stay another minute I shall be too late," he said.

There was no time for me to explain. One moment's clasp of hands—one quick, yet clinging, kiss—and he was gone!

Gone from me again—back to fight in France!

I stood looking straight before me with an odd feeling as if I were turning to stone. Why had I not thought of getting into the cab and driving to Victoria with him, without going on to the platform?

What a miserable good-bye I had had—I, who should have had the tenderest!

Yesterday morning, when we had left home, his good-bye to his sister and to the naval cadet had been sweet. He had leaned out of the railway carriage window looking with misty eyes at his father still standing on the platform of the East Coast town station, and had said to Vera and to me:

"Dear father! I haven't been half good enough to him."

And I—I had had to part from him, through no fault of his or mine, as if we were going to meet again in a few hours!

It is strange how vividly all these pictures of his whole past life have flashed across my mind again as I have been sitting here waiting for him! [Pg 219]

It is four months since he went away that day after only that quick, unsatisfying kiss.

"I will take care to have a better good-bye when this second leave is over," I told myself aloud. "Only six days, including the travelling! But I don't suppose they can spare the officers for any longer."

He is certainly very late. It is beginning to look as if he will not come till to-morrow morning. The weather may be bad in the Channel. Anyhow, we shall have to go on with dinner.

I hear a noise of the opening and shutting of doors.

I start to my feet.

This is he! This must be he!

But two or three moments pass and he does not come into the room. And something new and strange and heavy has come into the air of the house; or so, at least, I fancy.

My husband comes along. There is something very odd about his step. And his face looks changed, somehow; sharpened in feature and greyish white.

"How true it is that electric light sometimes makes people look a dreadful colour!" I think as he comes nearer to me. [Pg 220]

I ran forward then to meet him.

"Where is Roland? Isn't he here? I thought I heard him come."

And then for the first time I noticed that the boy's father had a bit of pinkish paper crushed up in his hand.

"Is that a telegram?" I cried eagerly, putting out my own hand. "Oh, give it to me! What does it say? Isn't he coming to-night?"

One of my husband's arms was put quietly around me.

"No. It's no good our waiting for him any longer. He'll never come any more. He's dead. He was badly wounded on Wednesday at midnight, and he died on Thursday."

For minutes that were like years the world became to me a shapeless horror of greyness in which there was no beginning and no end, no light and no sound. I did not know anything except that I had to put out my hand and catch at something, with an animal instinct to steady myself so that I might not fall. And then, through the rolling, blinding waves of mist, there came to me suddenly the old childish cry:

"Come and see me in bed, mother!"

And I heard myself answering aloud:

"Yes, boy of my heart, I will come. As soon as the war is over I will come and see you in bed—in your bed under French grass. And I will say good-night to you—there—kneeling by your side—as I've always done." [Pg 221]

"Good-night!
Though Life and all take flight,
Never Good-bye!"

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK BOY OF MY HEART ***

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