PREFACE

Upsurge (first published, 1934) was once described as Australia's most forgotten novel. The story of the book, however, is far from forgettable. It is one of the most fascinating in modern Australian literature. The novel scored a number of firsts: it was the first Australian novel to employ the literary technique of socialist realism, the first to be banned under the guidelines of the Commonwealth Book Censorship Board and the first to be the subject of police prosecution.

The search to find out about J. M. Harcourt and his novel began for me in late 1981 while I was a student of history at the University of Western Australia, contemplating a topic for an honors dissertation. I had already worked on the fiction of Katharine Susannah Prichard and was interested in literary responses to the 1930s depression in Western Australia. Prichard's *Intimate Strangers* (1937) led me to the lesser known author and *Upsurge* which had been collecting dust for almost fifty years. Since 1981 the search has taken me to Sydney, Melbourne, Canberra and back to Perth.

Through Stephen Murray Smith in Melbourne, I was able to trace Harcourt's movements after he left Perth in 1934. In late 1984 I contacted Harcourt's widow, Mrs Diana Harcourt, at Whale Beach in New South Wales. Through her, I was able to negotiate the re-issue of *Upsurge*. Although Mrs Harcourt was unable to provide any information about Harcourt's early life in Western Australia or, indeed, about the novel, she was able to point me in the right direction. Through the

Battye Library in Western Australia I was able to find relevant newspaper clippings about the book and the author. In Canberra, Mr Robert Darby helped enormously with material he had collected on Harcourt. At the Australian National Library and the Australian Archives at Canberra I was able to stitch together many of the details about the novel. A great deal more needs to be researched about Harcourt and *Upsurge* but it is hoped this re-issue will go part the way towards establishing author and novel to their rightful place in Australian literature and cultural history.

RICHARD A. NILE

INTRODUCTION

John Harcourt was born in Melbourne in 1902. His Methodist parents were from Western Australia where he grew up and spent much of his early adult life. For a time Harcourt attended Wesley College at Melbourne but a combination of homesickness and the desire to live adventurously resulted in him running away in 1916 to hump a bluey through Victoria and New South Wales, later joining his father on the Western Australian goldfields. While working as an assistant surveyor at Kalgoorlie, the notion of becoming an author occurred to the young Harcourt. He left the security of his job in the early twenties to pursue a writing career in the city. Perth, however, like other Australian cities was in the midst of a crippling post-war recession and there was little work, if plenty to write about, for an aspiring author.

With rapidly diminishing funds, Harcourt decided to leave Perth for Broome in the hope of making enough money as a pearler to later support his writing. After two years' as a shell opener, with little return for his efforts, his fortune changed when he found a pearl valued at thirteen thousand pounds. Harcourt's share of this windfall was two thousand pounds. His pockets swollen and confidence sufficiently boosted by the recent publication of two of his short stories in the Sydney *Triad*, Harcourt was tempted back to the city. Almost immediately he began working as a journalist, writing fiction part-time.

With the publication of his first novel, *The Pearlers*,

in 1933 Harcourt established a reputation for himself as a radical and angry young man. *The Pearlers* shocked many readers who thought it followed too closely a 'modern' literary tendency of reflecting the sordid side of the human condition. A 1933 review remarked that *The Pearlers* was 'dangerously credible', a label applied with equal vigour to Harcourt's next novel, *Upsurge*, billed as a 'story of the world crisis'. *Upsurge* caused an immediate sensation when it first appeared in March 1934. A review in the *West Australian* commented:

> It would be hard to imagine a more thoroughly unpleasant set of people than are found in the pages of Mr Harcourt's immature narrative of 'petting parties', shop girls' strikes, street-rioting—where the police are made to behave like a lot of Bashi-Bazooks—Communist agitators, crude caricatures of magistrates and business magnates—the whole extraordinary conglomeration being liberally spiced with frankly erotic situations.

Rolley Hoffmann, a journalist and former colleague from the author's days on *The Daily News*, wrote that he 'almost suspected' Harcourt had written *Upsurge* 'cherishing the fond hope of so many young authors' that it would be banned. The comment pre-empted the ultimate fate of *Upsurge* and minimized the seriousness with which Harcourt approached the task of writing his second novel. Hoffmann's review disregarded Harcourt's political and social commentary, alluded to by the *West Australian*, and his intention of writing a novel about the state of flux in Western Australia during the years of the great depression:

> *Upsurge*, by J.M. Harcourt (John Long Ltd., price 7s 6d), the Western Australian novelist whose first book *The Pearlers* was published last year, brings forward primarily, the question of the relationship of pornography to art. Mr Harcourt is a young writer, a new writer. He is it might be added, a good writer with such qualities of promise that look well for his future. But his two books—in *Upsurge* particular—he has taken the misguidedly bold course of giving his story an overpowering taint of the sexual—a course that has often reacted unfavourably for the future of other young novelists.
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> The sort of stuff in *Upsurge* may have provided excitement of some sort to the author in the writing of it: it may provide excitement for some of his readers— those who carry prohibited Parisian picture cards in their pocket wallets and scribble on walls ... Assuming that the literary and social customs of this age demand something rather more exciting than they did twenty years ago there are still limits to sexual emphasis to which a writer may go, and I hardly think that any reader of *Upsurge* will disagree with me when I say that Mr Harcourt has here exceeded them.

Harcourt's questioning of the political and social situation in Australia during the 1930s, his manifest sympathy with the huge numbers of unemployed and his support for a worker-based revolution delighted Australia's best known novelist and communist of the period, Katharine Susannah Prichard, who immediately proclaimed *Upsurge* Australia's first truly proletarian novel. Her claim on behalf of *Upsurge*, though a little extravagant, has some merit. *Upsurge* preceded other great 1930s depression novels including Kylie Tennant's *Tiburon* (1935) and *Foveaux* (1938), and Prichard's own *Intimate Strangers* (1937). Prichard's praise for *Upsurge* stemmed from the fact that it was the first Australian novel to be written in the style of socialist realism which she first learned about in 1933 during a tour of the Soviet Union. In 1934 *Upsurge*

introduced socialist realism as a new point of departure in Australian literature and joined a growing tradition of working-class novels which dated back to the 1890s and William Lane's *Working Man's Paradise*.

The manifesto of socialist realism was first proclaimed in the U.S.S.R. in 1934 at the first All-Soviet Congress of Writers but its precept of using literature as a vehicle for encouraging the 'ideological transformation and education of working people in the spirit of socialism', had been widely acknowledged since about 1932. Socialist realism required writers inside the Soviet Union to write in a mood and manner befitting the 1917 revolution and the subsequent achievements of communism. Outside the U.S.S.R., writers were called upon to be 'fellow travellers' with the soviet cause while helping to prepare a revolutionary sensibility in their own countries. In an article written just before his death Harcourt described *Upsurge* as socialist realist and himself as a fellow-traveller.

Harcourt believed that *Upsurge* recorded a side of the depression in Western Australia which was ignored by the tabloid press. He even went as far as to suggest that the popular press falsified the depression's experience by deliberately under estimating the extent and degree of genuine hardship it caused. His intention in writing *Upsurge* was to redress the imbalance he saw inherent in the existing records. He felt that fiction freed him from the editorial and ideological constraints of newspaper journalism. It provided him with the intellectual and emotional range to record what he felt to be true.

Harcourt's claim that the papers fostered a false view of the depression has far reaching implications for historians who have written about the period. For example, Geoffrey Bolton's *A Fine Country to Starve In* (1972) constructed a picture of the 1930s by relying

heavily on the authenticity of newspaper reports. *Upsurge* offsets such widely accepted images as those found in *A Fine Country to Starve In*. Taken as a serious account of the depression experience in Western Australia, *Upsurge* challenges what Tom Stannage in 1978 called the 'authorized version of *our* past'. Given Harcourt's political bias, his account is to be anticipated but *Upsurge* should not be dismissed because it was polemical or because the author's observations were couched in fiction. As a contemporary account of the depression it is made all the more valuable by these factors. In 1935 Harcourt wrote that, although *Upsurge* was 'not to be regarded as an historical record' it was, nonetheless, 'more than merely founded upon fact':

> Most of the main incidents and many of the minor ones actually occurred, and neither the conditions the unemployed put up with in relief camps, nor the treatment metered out to the demonstrators, have been in any way exaggerated. In some cases details of actual happenings have been altered for the purposes of the story; that is all. For instance the strike of shop assistants that occurs in the book was actually a strike of catering employees, and did not develop along quite the line the strike develops in *Upsurge*. The relief workers' strike is a composite picture of two actual strikes. The men in the relief camp I have described struck for the reasons stated, but after a few days they went back to work. At another camp however, Franklin River—where the men were engaged in clearing timber, they struck and marched out en-masse as they do in the book. From that point onwards the story and actual fact walk hand in hand.

Thirty-five years later Harcourt reiterated the point: 'In conclusion, I may say of *Upsurge* that, despite its literary shortcomings, and God knows they were

many, it was an honest fictional account of the Western Australian State of Denmark at the time'.

Upsurge concerns itself primarily with the experiences of three characters: Theodora Luddon, a nineteen-year-old daughter of a Collie coalminer recently moved to the city in search of work; Peter Groom, an idler who loses his twenty thousand pound inheritance and later finds himself on 'susso' in a relief-workers' camp and; James Riddle, the city magistrate. The novel opens as Theodora stands before the magistrate charged with infracting a city by-law which required bathers to wear bathing costumes extending from the neck to the knees. The law clearly is archaic, a suggestion by Harcourt of the rapidity of social change in Western Australia, particularly since the 1914–18 war and, in the fiction at least, since the 1917 revolution in Russia. The by-law was antiquated, wrote Harcourt, 'It had lain in the statute books ... like a forgotten bomb. The only bathing costumes which could have complied with it were in the historical museums'.

Harcourt believed that the increased rate of change in general societal attitudes and the concomitant expectation created by that change could not be accommodated by existing social structures: '... so the bomb was brought up from the cellar and tossed in the magistrate's lap where it exploded silently'. Harcourt's humour here sharpens an implied discontinuity in the novel between law and reality; between lawmakers/administrators and reality. It is suggestive of a more severe discontinuity between what the author saw as the expectations of working-class women and men and the inability of the crisis-stricken capitalist society to fulfil them. The discontinuity is taken up by a communist friend of the magistrate. Significantly, the communist is also a chemist and belongs to the same class as the magistrate:

> We're rapidly approaching the time when the rabble as you call it will be the class in power ... You'd naturally regard it as nonsense, but that's because *your* affiliations make it impossible for you to properly interpret what you see. Every social and economic phenomenon of the day points to it ... the girl you fined—even she is one of the straws in the revolutionary wind my friend. You saw the moving and you had sense to know that it wasn't moving without cause, so you came to the conclusion that modesty was disintegrating. But you didn't go far enough; you neglected to ask yourself *why* it was disintegrating.

Theodora's defence, that everyone at the beach infracted the law by rolling down their swimming costumes, is invalid in the official judgement of the patriarchal magistrate who is, nonetheless, aware that she is right. The magistrate finds himself extremely attracted to the lithe Theodora and two sides of his nature, that of his sexual desires and his desire to be respected and respectable as an authority figure, are seen to come into conflict. The incident satirically suggests that legal institutions are the most concrete example of a powerful ideology looking after the interests of the ruling class at the expense of the working class.

As a result of her court appearance, Theodora loses her job as a receptionist at the Brazilian Consulate and is forced to seek employment selling stockings at Kronen's Ltd, a large drapery store in the centre of Perth. Her changed position is accompanied by a reduction in wages from four pound a week to two pound seven pence. As a receptionist Theodora was deluded into believing that her opportunities for upward social mobility were far better than the majority of working-class people. Harcourt has her wrongly believing that

she is higher on the social ladder than she actually is. The loss of her job over a trivial incident eventually convinces her that she will never be free from the heavy load of ideology which bears down on her unless she joins the struggle against oppression and injustice. Her acknowledgement that she is without any real wealth, power or status and, like other working-class people, subject to the laws and whims of the bosses begins her on the path of revolutionary struggle. When her already precarious economic situation is further threatened by the Financial Emergency act of 1931, giving employers the right to lower wages by 10%, her education in working-class politics is accelerated. It is completed when she becomes party to strike action after being dismissed along with thirty other employees working at Kronen's.

Like the 19th century Luddites, Theodora Luddon (metaphorically) begins smashing the machinery of capitalism by refusing to adhere to one of its central tenets of worker submission to ruling class authority. At the conclusion of the novel she is martyred under the whirling baton of a mounted policeman during a demonstration of unemployed. The spilling of working-class blood is suggestive of the historical potential of the period and the inevitability of class war.

Theodora's story is balanced by that of the working-class Rumble family. Colin Rumble's decision to murder all members of his family before taking his own life at a small ramshackle house in the working-class suburb of Maylands highlights Harcourt's belief in the absolute necessity of worker solidarity. Rumble's decision is prompted by the sacking of his daughter. With the removal of her wage all money ceases to come into the Rumble household. The Rumble family are the

most violated victims of capitalism. They live in a half world of despair which results in senseless waste. Colin Rumble blames himself because of his family's impoverished and worsening conditions. Unlike Theodora he cannot find renewed vigour in a fight against inequality. He fears the future:

> *When a man's got no hope* [Colin Rumble wrote], *its no good him going on living, and its no good to my wife and girls to go on living either, so they are going with me. I don't want people to think that I was mad. This isn't the first time I've thought about it, and I've had a sort of peace since I made up my mind. If my daughter hadn't lost her job I mightn't have woke up to what a fool a man is to go on living when he's certain his life is going to be just like it was before . . . and I don't like to think of my girls getting desperate—Ethel going on the streets or into a brothel because she can't get a job, and Clarry, I suppose on the state. I've tried to be a good father to them, but I reckon this is the most sensible thing I ever done.*

Because of its senselessness this scene is the most brutally violent in the book.

Peter Groom is a member of the effete bourgeoisie. As a result of his continual philanderings and infidelities his wife leaves him and takes the inheritance with her. Groom is untrained for anything but leisure. The depression compounds his problems: 'A cold sweat of fear broke out on him when he realized what it would mean. He had never worked in his life. What work could he do in an age when one in three of all who normally worked were unemployed.' Groom is forced to go on the 'susso'. With a change in his situation comes a change in attitude. He becomes aware of injustice and inequality for the first time. He begins to resent the city and capital but, unlike the increasingly class conscious Theodora, his resentment is couched in personal terms:

> As he gazed upon the wealth there he hated the city. It was like his friends with their secret smiles, like his perfidious wife, like the insolent clerk behind the counters of the Labour Bureau.
>
> He retraced his way slowly
>
> Ten days later the erstwhile idler, Peter Groom, with twenty two other men, was drafted to Brides way River relief works in the district of Wilmott, about a hundred miles south of the capital.

When Groom reaches the relief camp at Brides way River he feels a sense of belonging with his newly acquired compeers and an affinity with their struggle. Although the men at the camp initially regard him with suspicion, calling him a silvertail and a lounge-lizard, they welcome him when he joins their plans for strike action. He joins the 'rebellious outcasts' in their plan to take their grievances to the city, singing 'songs of revolution' as they march. However, Groom is more impressed by the pageantry and spectacle of the protest, particularly the number of red flags which seemingly appear from nowhere, than the cause itself. His symbolic wedding with a social conscience (Groom/Brides way River) is short lived. It is plagued by infidelity in a manner reminiscent of his actual marriage. At the end of the novel he is reunited with his wife and the money. We sense that his experiences at the camp will become a conversation piece related as part of a personal adventure.

In his depictions of Theodora and Groom, Harcourt was implying that there were clear class distinctions in the so-called homogenous society of Western Australia and that they were exacerbated by the depression. He contended that, although the depression was general, its real victims were the working-class. (Perhaps he was

ridiculing the federal government's 1931 call for 'equality of sacrifice'.) His depictions of the working-class are particularly enlightening in terms of unemployment in Australia which ran at about ten per cent before 1929. Harcourt seemed to be saying that the working-class are always in fear of losing their jobs and that before the depression set in in earnest in 1930, many had directly and indirectly (through their families, etc.) experienced its rancour; families were broken up, people went hungry and domestic violence was endemic. The working-class in *Upsurge* are shown to be thrown onto the scrap-heap of industrial capitalism once the system begins to malfunction.

Upsurge depicts characters who, because of their depression experiences, are forced to accept living standards below those which they had come to expect. The exception is James Riddle who has a moral reassessment rather than a financial one. In many ways the action in the novel centres around decisions made by Riddle as the city magistrate. This is significant because of the implied discontinuity between law and reality alluded to in the opening scenes. Although Riddle acknowledges the need for particular changes in society, he regards capitalism resilient enough to overcome its own problems. For example, he is unable to understand Theodora when she tells him that they are on different sides and that the chasm which separates them is impossible to bridge as long as he continues to be a custodian and protector of existing legal and social structures and she one of its victims.

Riddle presides over law as well as justice but, as the communist has already told him, he doesn't go far enough. In many ways the magistrate suffers derision, reinforced in the fiction by his nick-name 'Jimmy Riddle, Lord of the Urinal'. Riddle has an appreciation

for history and sees that changes to existing social orders in the past were necessary in bringing forward better systems. For example, he is aware of the postulated change between feudalism and capitalism and explains:

> 'Mont's my servant ... His real name is Thomas Edward Charles Montmorency and he is, I understand, a member of one of the oldest families in England. I dare say my forebears waited on his. But he waits on me, none the worse for that.'

As a member of the petite bourgeoisie, Riddle belongs to the class which displaced the old aristocratic families in the transition to capitalism. He is as reluctant to see his class authority eroded as the old feudal lords were in their time. However, Harcourt suggests that another upheaval of the social order is as inevitable as the previous change. At the conclusion of the novel, Harcourt added a postscript:

> Later in the same year, at Berne, an international conference of peasant and proletarian organizations took place. A revolutionary upsurge in every industrial country of the world was remarked. The Australian delegates observed that that even in Western Australia, the least advanced of the Austral States, there was a definite revolutionary upsurge.

The upsurge to which Harcourt referred was the strike by men at the Franklin River relief works in 1932 and a strike of catering staff organised by Celia Shelley.

Harcourt's attitude to history was both cyclical and linear. In one sense he depicted the depression as a break with the developments of the 1920s. It was part

of the cycle of boom and bust which characterizes capitalism, a result of over-production and increased competition for markets. The term 'depression', for example, as it is used in the novel, is synonymous with 'crisis' and the two terms are used interchangeably. On a larger scale the depression is depicted as part of the overall crisis of capitalism. An allegorical play written by the journalist, Noel Manning, a fictional projection of Harcourt, traces developments leading up to and culminating in the 1914–18 war. It lays the blame for war squarely at the feet of those who produce goods for profit. Harcourt compared the 1890s depression with the current economic downturn and warned that the world may be on the brink of another, more sinister, conflict. His target was the rise of fascism in Europe. Fascism, he maintained, was the most dangerous manifestation yet of industrial capitalism and an extreme expression of worker false consciousness. Harcourt's postscript affirms the revolutionary potential of the working-class while simultaneously warning it against fascism.

Harcourt's unrepentant and consistent plea on behalf of a workers' revolution made *Upsurge* one of the most radical Australian books written during the interwar period. The novel was of grave concern for commonwealth and state censors because it challenged almost every established social more of the period from the status of the judicial system and existing legal practices through to industrial and sexual relations. After controversy raged for several months in the press *Upsurge* was banned under Section 52(c) of the Trades and Customs Act prohibiting the importation of 'blasphemous, indecent or obscene' publications, making it only the second Australian novel to incur the wrath of the censor, the first to be banned by the Commonwealth

Book Censorship Board which was set up in 1933. *Upsurge* was the first Australian novel to be the subject of police prosecutions. Before being prohibited federally, state detectives in both Western Australia and New South Wales seized copies of the book under local legislation prohibiting the sale of 'indecent' publications.

The banning of *Upsurge* sent tremors running through Australian literary circles on both sides of the continent. A direct result was the formation in Melbourne of the Book Censorship Abolition League in early 1935 and the election of Harcourt as its first president. Earlier Harcourt had fled from his home in Perth amidst fears that he was to be prosecuted for slander by a prominent Western Australian businessman who was convinced he had been used libelously as a prototype for one of the characters in *Upsurge*. Katharine Prichard followed Harcourt to Melbourne and established him there as the president of the short-lived 'Revolutionary Writers' League', a group of left-wing authors preparing to welcome the Czech communist and writer, Egon Kisch, to Australia. Kisch had been dispatched by the Third International to tour, lecturing and advising socialist writers on the techniques of socialist realism. The controversy surrounding the proposed tour, Kisch's dramatic leap from his ship after being refused entry to Australia and his subsequent deportation are now legendary in Australian history. The writing and banning of *Upsurge* belong to the same legend.

Upsurge was banned during a period of severe repression of all sorts of literature, but particularly that from the left. Before 1928 only four books were banned in Australia. In April 1929, beginning with James Joyce's *Ulysses*, the Trades and Customs Department launched itself into a campaign which resulted in the prohibition of an estimated 2,000 publications within ten years.

Seditious pamphlets were seized at the rate of about one per week at various ports around the country and an unprecedented number of novels were banned under Section 52(c) including Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, Ernest Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* and D.H. Lawrence's *Lady Chatterley's Lover*. These classics were prohibited along with others sporting such salacious titles as *Rowena Goes too Far*, *Replenishing Jessica* and *The Spanking Diary of Rose Evans*. The banning of Daniel Defoe's *Moll Flanders* (first published in 1722) and a ministerial decision rejecting a 1936 Censorship Board recommendation to free the book for sale is a poignant example of the ironical and anomalous state of censorship in Australia in the 1930s.

Upsurge was allegedly banned because of its explicit use of sexual details. However, it does not appear to treat sexual matters more explicitly than, for example, Brian Penton's *The Landtakers* or Eleanor Dark's *Prelude to Christopher*, two prize-winning Australian novels published in the same year. It seems likely that *Upsurge* was banned because of its support for a radical political programme and its marxian analysis of the depression. Its style was aimed at a working-class audience which may have proved alienating for middle-class readers. *The Landtakers* and *Prelude to Christopher* were intended for an educated middle-class audience and did not question directly the underlying basis of capitalism. *Upsurge* was considered extremely dangerous because it encouraged rebellion against authority during a period when there were unprecedented levels of unemployment. The combination of sex and subversion in the same book was too politically potent to allow *Upsurge* to pass uncensored.

The saga of the banning of *Upsurge* began in July 1934 when a group of Western Australian detectives re-

moved eight copies of the book from leading Perth booksellers and asked that five other copies held in lending libraries be handed in. In the same month, the Investigation Branch of the Federal Attorney-General's Department, the forerunner of A.S.I.O., opened a file on Harcourt. (The file is listed in the Federal Archives in Canberra under A.S.I.O. but is unavailable, presumed lost. My enquiries with the Federal Police led to a similar dead end.) Until this time *Upsurge* had been freely available and was selling quite well. Following the July raid, the secretary of the Western Australian police, Inspector C. Treadgold, phoned the Commonwealth Customs and Excise Office at Fremantle, requesting the novel be placed on the prohibitive imports list. (The move is significant because the Trades and Customs Department only had juristiction over what was officially termed 'Blasphemous, Indecent or Obscene' literature. The Attorney-General's Office was responsible for seditious literature.) Acting on the request, the Controller of Customs asked the Clerk in Charge of Correspondence and Records, C.J. Carne, for a preliminary report on the novel. On 14 July Carne purchased a copy of *Upsurge* from the Booklovers' Library in Perth.

Presumably independent of the Trades and Customs Department, Western Australian detectives again visited Perth booksellers on 15 August and removed remaining copies of the novel, effectively banning it from sale in Western Australia. Harcourt, who had by this time moved to Melbourne, was furious at the police action which pre-empted any decision by the Book Censorship Board. It is not known whether Harcourt knew that the book had been forwarded to the Censorship Board. It had recently been passed by the Customs authority in Melbourne and Adelaide. Harcourt appeared in a defiant mood when interviewed in Melbourne on 17th August: 'While I did not expect the West Australian police to take action it is not really surprising. The theme of the novel is the modern economic crisis with its accompanying decay in the manners and morals of society.' Harcourt defended his novel saying that it dealt with the contemporary situation in a 'realistic way'. His suspicion that *Upsurge* was being treated unfairly in Australia was tested the following day when news arrived that the novel had been banned in Ireland.

In Sydney on August 31 *Upsurge* became the subject of a court case in which action was brought against Dymock's for selling an indecent publication. No defence was offered and the case was settled with the defendants paying costs. Accordingly the police offered no evidence that the novel was indecent or obscene. The prosecuting sergeant merely held up a copy in court and stated: 'It is grossly indecent. If people of the younger generation get hold of this book it will have a bad effect on their minds.' Dymock's forwarded all remaining copies of *Upsurge* in their possession to the police. As in Western Australia, *Upsurge* was now effectively banned in New South Wales.

Meanwhile in Perth, Carne had prepared his report for the Controller of Customs. He was of the opinion that *Upsurge* was 'indecent'. In particular he drew attention to pages: 64, 66, 68, 101, 106, 110, 111, 112, 184, 189, 190. These pages included a threat by a communist to ram a 'plug of gelignite' up the 'arse' of the city magistrate and blow him 'to hell'; a love scene between Riddle and Theodora; a beach scene where sexual vagaries and infidelities are played out; the predatory gaze of Paul Kronen fixed on a female secretary in his company, his desire to 'slip his hand up under her skirts and

pat her firm thighs'; a description of the boss's 'girl-friend' as a 'little wanton' with a slim 'boy-girl's body'; the seduction of Ethel Rumble and Theodora by Kronen and Groom at the beach one night; a meeting between Theodora and a young communist, his sexual frustration concluding with a resolve to visit the city's brothels to rid himself of the thought of her.

Carne also believed that *Upsurge* contravened the Commonwealth's Literature Proclamation of 1932 concerning seditious literature. This is significant for no novel had ever been banned in Australia because it was considered seditious. The 1932 proclamation defined seditious literature as that which advocated:

> (a) the overthrow by force or violence of the established government of the Commonwealth or any state *or any other civilized country*;
> (b) the overthrow by force or violence of all forms of law;
> (c) *the abolition of organized government*;
> (d) the assassination of public officials;
> (e) the unlawful destruction of property;
> (f) *wherein a seditious intention is expressed or a seditious enterprise is expressed or a seditious enterprise is advocated.*

According to a report from the Attorney-General's Department, paragraphs (b), (c) and (d) had been originally aimed at anarchism, (e) at I.W.W.ism which was rife in Australia at the end of the First World War. By 1934 the department believed that the anarchists and the 'wobblies' had been 'superseded by Communism'. Although there was a fear that the Industrial Workers of the World might regroup the Attorney-General identified Communism and 'Communistic literature' as the principle source of sedition in Australia.

Carne believed that *Upsurge* was '... thinly disguised propaganda on behalf of Communism and social revolution'. He perceived, rightly, a link in the fiction between sexual promiscuity and the inevitable decay of capitalism. Carne wrote that, apart from two 'avowed communists' all characters in *Upsurge* led 'immoral lives'. He protested that parliament was held up for 'contempt and ridicule' and that the police were depicted as acting 'with wanton brutality': 'Practically all the women in the book are wantons,' he continued and 'the state is depicted as possessing thousands of unemployed who are rife for revolution'. For Carne, and possibly others in the Trades and Customs Department, there was much to be feared by a lack of sexual morality given its political potential as rebellion against the broader social mores.

On 30 August heavy pressure was brought to bear on the Trades and Customs Department in the form of the elitist National Council of Women of Australia, whose patrons were Lady Isaacs and Mrs J. A. Lyons. The Council of Women asked that *Upsurge* and *The Pearlers* be 'banned' because both were 'extremely objectionable'. The Minister for Customs Colonel, T. W. White, replied that he would look into the matter. He sent a memo to the Comptroller of Customs at Canberra who forwarded a copy of *The Pearlers* to the Censorship Board which was already reviewing *Upsurge*.

On November 14 and 19 two reports by members of the Censorship Board were handed to the chairman. The first judged *Upsurge* 'A crude book of "revolutionary upsurge"' and drew attention to 'disfigured' and 'gross passages' including the brothel scene and a reference to the city magistrate, 'Jimmy Riddle', as 'Lord of the Urinal'. The report concluded that the novel had brought the banning upon itself: 'If a writer chooses to

introduce obscenities like these, I should ban'. The second report suggested that *Upsurge* was 'not without good points' but should be banned because it was obscene. It went on to add that Harcourt was 'manifestly in sympathy with certain acts of lawlessness' and displayed a 'marked tendency to hold up established authority to contempt and ridicule'. On 20 November 1934 *Upsurge* was banned federally. Significantly, the chairman's report made no mention of the book's political programme or the fact that Harcourt had written in the style of socialist realism. It concluded:

> This book is not without merit, though somewhat crude. But it is disfigured by some grossly indecent passages, without any excuse of being necessary to the story. A book cannot be 'cut' like a film; and if an author chooses to offend in this way, he must take the consequences. The Board recommends that the book be prohibited on the grounds of indecency.

Upsurge was banned because of its mix of sexual and social descriptions and the author's intention of using both as a political weapon against accepted social values. Although some readers were genuinely offended by what they considered 'indecent', the authorities were equally concerned at the radical political programme espoused by Harcourt. In the turbulent thirties when one in three of Australia's workforce was unemployed, *Upsurge* presumed to question existing social mores. Harcourt's message cut too close to the sensitive nerve of social responsibility and social control. Four months after *Upsurge* was banned, in February 1935, the Censorship Board voted on *The Pearlers*, recommending that, although the book had some objectionable passages, it be passed. In one of the reports there was a

suggestion that many of the copies had now been sold and a ban would be ineffective.

After the banning of *Upsurge* Harcourt seemed to decide to abandon earlier ambitions of being an author. In 1937, he wrote a romantic novel entitled, *It Never Fails*. It was a monumental failure with none of the social commentary that characterized his first two novels. In the early forties Harcourt wrote a half completed draft of a biography of J. Jorgensen and the artistic community at Monsalvat near Melbourne. In 1946 he retired to build mud-brick houses in the outer-Melbourne suburb of Eltham during the post-war housing shortage. He later shifted to Whale Beach in New South Wales where he died in 1971.

RICHARD A. NILE
School of History
The University of New South Wales
November 1985.

UPSURGE

As was shown in his first novel, "The Pearlers", Mr. Harcourt has the gift of telling dramatic stories full of strong atmosphere. "The Pearlers" gave us a fine picture of life in a Western Australian Pearling station.

In "Upsurge" the Author takes us to Perth, the capital of Western Australia, and paints for us a powerful picture of post-war conditions. There are strikes, lock-outs, riots, and sudden death, for a change is taking place—in fact, "Upsurge".

He shows us the undermining of morals, loose-living and so forth among the upper and middle classes, and the retribution which follows in their wake.

The characters are boldly drawn, and include an eminent judge, a Communist agitator, an ever-forgiving wife whose patience was tried too far, a big business man eaten up with conceit, and a score of others.

There is tragedy and comedy, and the book grips from start to finish.

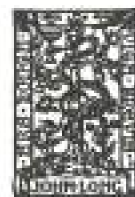
UPSURGE

A Novel

By

J. M. HARCOURT

Author of "The Pearlers"



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UPSURGE

CHAPTER ONE

IN Perth, the capital city of the state of Western Australia, on the 13th day of February, 193–, a young civil-servant named Herbert Knight, and a girl of twenty named Theodora Luddon, who was employed as a confidential secretary by the Brazilian Consul, were charged in the Police Court, before the magistrate, James Riddle—"the Lord of the Urinal" —with a breach of a City Council by-law which required bathers on beaches under the control of the Council to wear costumes extending from their necks to their knees.

This by-law was antiquated. It had lain for decades in the statute-books of the Council, accumulating dust like a forgotten bomb in a cellar. The only bathing costumes in Australia which would have complied with it were in the historical museums. But the perturbed city fathers could find no other by-law under which to prosecute, so the bomb was brought up from the cellar and tossed into the lap of the magistrate, James Riddle, where it exploded silently. . . .

Riddle had not been so perturbed in eight years. He wondered if he showed it, and thinking grimly that he probably did, shot a furtive glance at his colleagues on the Bench—Justices of the Peace who sat from sheer vanity—the Jew, Meyer, on his right, the Prohibitionist, Lalor, on his left.

Since the felicitous death of his wife eight years ago,

Riddle had gone little into society, preferring the solicitude of his villa in the hills, and the companionship of the philosophers and poets on his shelves, and an occasional gay little lady, to promiscuous social contacts other than those imposed upon him by his work. He had believed that his work kept him sufficiently in touch with the changing temper of the times, but this case made him doubt, made him wonder if he had not lost contact.

Surely the bathing-suits of the day—he had seen them depicted on the advertisement hoardings—gaily coloured, closely fitting, backless and legless; surely they exposed enough of their wearers without it being necessary to roll them down to the waist! There was not much wrong with a man stripped to the buff, of course, but when it came to a girl . . . For the girl the charge amounted to one of indecent exposure! She had been holding up the front of her costume to conceal her breasts, to be sure, but . . .

Her face fascinated him. It was strong and definitely beautiful. It was tanned an even golden brown by the sun but was otherwise colourless. Her brow was low and broad above wide-open grey eyes. Her nose was short and straight, her lips full and definite. She caught him watching her and lowered her eyes, and the magistrate noticed that her lids were deeper in colour than the smooth surrounding skin. There was a strange quality of serenity about her—nothing at all of the wanton. How could a girl like that shame herself on a public beach? And how could she sit there in the dock as unmoved as if she were attending a curate's tea-party?

"Well?" he asked her when the inspector prosecuting had finished. "Haven't you anything to say?"

The man charged with her began to speak, but Riddle checked him.

"I don't want to hear you. I may say that in your case I don't regard this case as very serious. There is nothing indecent about a man stripped to the buff. But I want to hear what the girl has to say. Why did she do it?"

The girl said: "Simply because . . . well, the sun is nice on your skin." Her voice was a rich contralto. She added as if it were an afterthought: "Besides, if you don't slip off the shoulder-straps you have white marks where they keep the sun off and . . . and it looks unsightly in evening dress. And everybody does it."

"Everybody?"

"Well, lots, anyhow."

"That's hardly true, your worship," began the inspector. "There are a few, but . . ."

"Never mind," said Riddle.

True. Of course it was true. It had to be true to account for this girl and her conduct. Modesty was not an instinct, he reflected, as he supposed he was expected to believe, but a taboo which drew its strength from popular sentiment. That sentiment was weakening or the girl would never have dared . . . She was not a trollop!

The inspector said that he was instructed to ask for the maximum penalty the law provided to deter others from similar conduct. It was becoming far too prevalent.

"So lots of people *do* do it?" Riddle asked him.

"Er . . . no, your worship, not lots. But a few. It's becoming increasingly common."

"All right. That will do."

Riddle conferred with his colleagues. The maximum

penalty the archaic by-law provided was a fine of two pounds.

"Two pounds is all right for the man," the prohibitionist Lalor whispered. "But the woman—she ought to be imprisoned."

"She can't be," Riddle said curtly, then raised his voice and addressed the delinquents: "You are each fined in the sum of two pounds, with three shillings costs. The court will adjourn for five minutes."

He rose abruptly, pushing back his heavy chair, and left the court by the door which led into his chambers. He was annoyed with himself for his own obscure feelings, and for the absurd physiological weakness which made it necessary for him to relieve himself after any strong accession of emotion.

His chambers had their own privy. . . .

Yes, he was out of touch. His poets and philosophers were dead. That girl . . .

An image of her hung in his mind and would not be dismissed.

CHAPTER TWO

I

IT was only a short walk from Riddle's villa to the black bitumen highway along which the buses ran to Perth. The magistrate reflected as he waited at the roadside that this was the first occasion for a very long time that he had left the hills on a Sunday. He wondered how long he would have to wait for a bus. He had neglected to look up a time-table before setting out. On week-mornings he caught a bus at nine-thirty, reaching his chambers at ten-fifteen, which was only fifteen minutes after the first case was supposed to be called in court; or if he missed that bus he caught another at ten-thirty—they ran every hour on week-days. But they ran differently on Sundays and holidays.

The morning sun was hot. The magistrate was beginning to feel uncomfortable, standing at the roadside waiting for the bus. For occasions like this, he thought, a car would be useful. He had not owned a car since the death of his wife. In the possession of a car it was less easy to escape from social obligations. James Riddle did not visit his friends; his friends visited him. So satisfactory an arrangement would not have been possible if he had had a car.

The bus came at last.

The bus drew up in St. George's Terrace by a green oasis of gardens. Riddle got out and gazed about him

at the unfamiliar city. The city he knew was a city at work, living, significant: a city of two hundred thousand souls; with crowded narrow footpaths, and wide busy streets; with clanging electric trams, painted a dull grey-green and decorated with advertisements, with red diamonds painted on either end from which the head-lamps looked out like Cyclopean eyes; with a morning, and evening, and four important weekly newspapers; with fine public buildings; with bronze and stone and marble memorials to the War and others of the great and noble deeds of men; with green parks and public gardens; with Chambers of Commerce and of Industry; with wealth amounting to hundreds of millions of pounds sterling deposited in bills and deeds and currency in a dozen banks; and with thousands of unemployed who huddled in the shade of the trees in the parks, their shabby clothes and drawn, want-marked faces spoiling the pleasant prospects for the more fortunate.

But the city lay now in an exhausted sleep, empty and meaningless, sprawling like a dead monster among green living things. A few leisurely pedestrians, clad in loose, comfortable garments, passed to and fro over the pavements. The clangor of a tram, two blocks away, was the death-rattle of a robot. Under the trees in the parks the unemployed lay gasping in their sweat-soaked rags: the ordure of the city. In the hot Sabbath sun the city slept amidst its ordure, amidst the excrement passed from its concrete bowels; and the church-bells pealed slowly, echoing meaninglessly through the empty streets.

Riddle walked several blocks to the point from which the Scarborough buses departed. A bus was waiting. He entered and sat down on the shady side. The bus filled up slowly. The passengers were chiefly young men in blazers and open shirts and flannel trousers, their feet thrust into canvas shoes, and girls in light loose frocks. A party of four, wearing only wrappers over bathing suits, came running as the vehicle began to move, and clambered aboard with much gasping and giggling. Only two seats were vacant, so the girls of the party sat upon the knees of the men. The magistrate noticed that they did so without self-consciousness or coyness.

The bus gathered speed and left the city and ran through smiling garden suburbs for several miles. Then the pretty cottages with their lawns and shrubs and flower-beds gave place to primal bushland. The bus lumbered on over the narrow black road, followed by a little cloud of grey dust.

2

Clad in the dull grey-green of eucalypt and banksia, this antipodean terrain fell in slow undulations of limestone hills to the sea. The fall was checked by a tumbled ridge of dunes, then the land spilled itself in a spate of shining white sand into the Indian Ocean.

For a space the dunes were levelled into a broad esplanade. The bus turned into the esplanade and stopped. The passengers poured out, and the magistrate James Riddle stood for a moment blinking in the incandescent glare of the sun, and absorbing details of a scene more animated than any in his memory. Across the wide bitumen expanse of the esplanade a score of little shops and cafés, gay beneath roofs of multi-coloured tiles, looked out upon a sea of turquoise and sapphire. Shops and cafés were thronged with half-naked customers, young men and girls in bright, scanty bathing-suits, in loose gay gowns, in

jazz-patterned pyjamas. Up and down the wide flights of steps which led down from the esplanade through a wall of yellow sandstone to the beach, and across the esplanade itself, was a coming and going that was vital with colour.

The magistrate descended to the beach. From the white sand great umbrellas of red, green, blue, yellow, rose like a crop of gigantic toadstools. Bathers crowded in their shade. Others lay in the full glare of the sun, stretched supine upon the sand, drunk with the fierce heat. The crowds ebbed and flowed. The ocean laved the sands with three rolling white lines of surf. Half-naked bathers rode upon the breakers on their painted boards, or laughed and shouted in the clear green water, their cries merging with the slow, ceaseless roar of the surf.

The beach stretched away to the north till it was lost in a rocky outcrop behind which rose low, black cliffs, and to the south in a curving white line that grew smudged with distance, to City Beach, Ocean Beach, Cottesloe, Buckland Hill, Leighton, to where, very dimly through the heat-haze, could be seen the stone mole which guarded the harbour of Fremantle, and the masts and funnels of the ships in the port.

In the public dressing-shed Riddle changed into a new sky-blue bathing-suit, and emerged feeling conscious of the whiteness of his limbs, grotesquely naked in the presence of the people about him in their coats of tan. Stepping over the bodies of sun-drunken bathers he reached the water and plunged into the surf.

The water surged about his waist and he dived, coming up refreshed, washed clean of discomfort and self-consciousness and incipient bad temper. Dodging

the plunging surf-boards he struggled out beyond the surf, luxuriating in the cool caress of the water.

In a while, however, it grew chill, and he returned to the beach to get his towel from the dressing-shed, dry his arms and shoulders and face, and drop down on the hot sand.

Then he heard someone hailing him by name, and gazed about him in surprise, for he had not expected to encounter anyone he knew on the beach. At last he espied his friend the chemist John Graham, beckoning to him from under a sunshade. He moved over gladly. Graham was a man after his own kind, a man of intellect and intelligence, for all that he sometimes kept dubious company. Riddle had not seen him for more than two months. Bending from his erect height he shook hands with the big thick-set man who wore always the same still smile on his broad serene countenance. Graham greeted the magistrate with friendly irony :

"Has your soul rebelled against your poets and philosophers at last, James, that you should join this orgy of sensuality ?"

"Sensuality ?" Riddle repeated questioningly. "Is that what it is ?"

"Simon pure sensuality," said the chemist. "Look at it—a pagan bacchanal !" He made a gesture which embraced the whole beach. "They're drunk with the wind and the surf and the sun—especially the sun. A thousand half-nude men and women luxuriating in pure sensation. Bare backs, bare shoulders, bare thighs. And half of them not content with costumes cut away almost to the waist must slip off the shoulder-straps and roll them wholly down. Even the women. Look at them, half of them concealing their breasts

only with their cupped hands, making barely a pretence at holding up their costumes. . . ."

Startled, the magistrate looked about him, remembering suddenly the primary purpose of this unwanted excursion of his. He thought again of the girl, Theodora Luddon, sitting in the dock on a charge that amounted to one of indecent exposure, yet seemingly unembarrassed and serene. She had told the truth, of course she had! Here it was written in warm, sun-tanned flesh upon the beach. . . .

The chemist went on: "Next year, perhaps, they won't even bother to make a pretence." He paused for a moment, then added with relish: "This cult of the beaches and the sun, James, is sabotaging the idea of modesty."

"That's my impression," observed Riddle. "There was a case in court last week—a young man and a girl. The council inspector caught them with their costumes rolled down. The girl . . . remarkable! What amazed me most was her self-possession. In my ignorance of all this . . ." He gestured as a moment before Graham had gestured. ". . . it seemed to me that the charge amounted to one of indecent exposure. Yet she was wholly unaffected. I fined her two pounds. This . . . makes me feel rather foolish. I came . . . to see for myself."

"And you've seen!" Graham chuckled. "I take it she was a good-looking girl?"

"She was," the magistrate admitted. "Extremely good-looking. An altogether remarkable girl."

Chuckling again, the chemist observed: "Her charms, it seems, impressed you as much as her self-possession. I suppose it wasn't, by any chance, the hope of *seeing* her that brought you out to-day?"

"No," Riddle said brusquely, "it wasn't."

Yet even as he spoke he was conscious of a stirring of hope that he would see her, and his glance began to wander unobtrusively about the beach, searching group after group of the bathers.

3

On the edge of a group a few feet away a young woman lay upon her stomach with her head buried in her arms. About the straight black hair, drawn back from her small head in two plaits and coiled low behind each ear, and the slim, firm, olive-white limbs that seemed impervious to the sun, there was something which impressed the magistrate as vaguely familiar. The shoulder-straps of her costume had been slipped off, and against the sand her young breast swelled deliciously. A fair-haired young man lay with his head pillowed on her thighs.

"I seem to know that girl," Riddle said in a puzzled way. "I can't see her face, but . . ."

Graham answered lazily: "That's my wife and her latest admirer. Of course you seemed to know her." He called to her: "Gerda!"

She raised her head in a dazed way.

"Here's a friend of yours," Graham said to her.

Pushing the young man's head off her legs, Gerda Graham sat up, the dazed expression still on her face. But in a moment she appeared to recognize the magistrate, and smiled, shooting him a languishing glance from her yellow eyes. Slipping her arms into the loops of her costume, she crawled over. Riddle said that he had been trying to recognize her.

"Had you forgotten me?" she inquired reproachfully.

He shook his head. "You are much too striking a

person to forget. But your face was hidden in your arms."

She rewarded him with another long glance, and they began to chat of unimportant matters: the last occasion they had met, a play, a divorce case then before the Supreme Court of the State. At last she said:

"Come and meet the others. Afterwards we are all going to the Grooms' at Cottesloe to have a party. You must come too."

"But I don't know your Grooms."

"I'm going to introduce you. Come on."

She took his hand and led him somewhat against his inclination to the group she had left.

They acknowledged the introductions vaguely, too subtly conscious of the sensuous air, the hot white sand, the hazy symphony of heat and colour and movement of which they were part, to strain their manners. The young columnist and paragraphist, Noel Manning, whom Riddle already knew slightly, leaned against the recumbent body of his fiancée, Joyce Mealing. Paul Kronen, the young managing director of the great drapery firm of Kronen's Limited, was slowly burying the long slim legs of Fanchon Follower, the daughter of a wealthy timber-merchant, under a pile of sand. The handsome young idler, Peter Groom, disturbed when Gerda went to greet the magistrate, now supported his head upon his hand. In the centre of the group his pretty, brown-haired, young wife Cynthia squatted on her heels and accused him of infidelities. Her clear voice flowed on resentfully like a thread through the vital harmony:

"And only yesterday—Joyce and Noel had come to tea—Peter and Noel went out to get some bread, and just when we were beginning to think they'd had an

accident, or gone to the hotel and got drunk, they came back with two girls. . . ."

Groom interrupted his wife: "How could we know they'd come. We picked them up for a lark, and drove them round in the car for a while, and couldn't think of any polite way of getting rid of them. So I asked them to come along home with us and meet our wives. How could we know they'd accept an invitation like that?"

"That doesn't explain why you stopped out till four o'clock in the morning," said Cynthia.

Joyce Mealing sat up suddenly and said: "Noel didn't."

"But Peter did—after he'd taken them home. Joyce and I refused to meet them—we simply left the flat. They sat down and ate the meal we'd got ready, while we had to go to the hotel. I choke when I think of it—those raddled little hussies sitting down to our tea with Peter and Noel. And when we came back the lights in the flat were out. They were lying in the bedroom with them—Noel, too—he was just as bad as Peter up to that time."

Joyce Mealing bit her lip.

"Noel wouldn't have done a thing like that if it hadn't been for Peter." Noel Manning smiled dreamily, but his fiancée went on unnoticing: "I don't know why you put up with it."

"He . . . he . . . always gets round me," Cynthia said, throwing the young scapegrace she had married a look of angry adoration. "Some day I'll leave him and take his money with me. You could have driven those creatures home in half or three-quarters of an hour," she declared addressing her husband directly. "But you didn't get home till four in the morning. I don't know what you did. . . ."

"I told you," Groom said. "One of them was an interesting girl. We sat talking and didn't notice the time going."

"What did you talk about?"

"Oh, Lord! About a hundred and one things!"

"How do I know you're telling the truth?"

"Have I ever lied to you, Cynthia darling?"

His voice was laughing and tender, and his wife made no answer.

Paul Kronen said: "Ha, ha, ha!"

Joyce Mealing protested: "You don't believe him, do you?"

"I don't know," said Cynthia. "I don't know what to believe."

"Why, he even makes love to your friends!"

"They encourage me," said Groom, rising easily to his feet.

Six feet high, he stood for a moment gazing at the welter of youth about him; youth supine upon the sand; revelling in the surf; the gay colours of bathing suits and pyjamas, coatees, tall beach sombreros rioting like a jazz harmony in the shimmering heat; young men and women as beautiful as gods, as thoughtless and care-free as monkeys. The young idler shook the sand from his limbs like a dog, and the long, lithe muscles rippled under the sun-tanned skin. Watching him with reluctant admiration, the magistrate saw his glance wander from one to another of the group at his feet, resting for an instant on Gerda Graham with her almost-yellow eyes, her olive-white skin and black hair; on the slim Fanchon Follower, half buried in the sand, who might have been a boy but for the little twin apples that pressed out her bathing suit, and lips so reddened with salve that her mouth looked like a bleeding gash; on his wife with her charming, sun-

tinted face in its frame of brown hair; on the classic, dark-brown beauty of Joyce Mealing. Bending, the young idler caught hold of Joyce, and, ignoring her protests, swung her to her feet with easy strength; and calling to Cynthia to bring the surf-boards, hustled her shrieking into the surf.

4

The group broke up. Fanchon Follower erupted from her mound of sand, crying that she was tired of sun-bathing. Seizing their surf-boards, she and Paul Kronen dashed into the water. The others followed leisurely, with the magistrate and the chemist and his wife bringing up the rear.

Gerda moved languidly, lethargically, as though the sun had drained the vitality from her. But the swirl of the water about her knees revived her.

She cried out: "Wait for me!"—and pushed out after those ahead.

But they failed to hear her or ignored her and she fell back again to Riddle and her husband.

Joyce Mealing and Peter Groom came in fast on a breaker, riding their boards in a smother of foam. They would have passed ten yards away, but they altered the course of their shoreward flight slightly and came straight for Gerda and Riddle and Graham. Riddle braced himself nervously, expecting to be struck. Gerda cried out in alarm. At the last moment the two swung their boards broadside to the surf and found their feet beside the others. They were laughing.

"Come on out where they're breaking," Groom shouted to Gerda.

She snubbed him with a look, and turned to the magistrate.

"You take me out, Mr. Riddle."

Riddle remembered that his friend, Graham, had referred to the young idler as his wife's latest admirer. He suspected that he was being played off against Groom, but he did not mind. He smiled assent, and he and the chemist's wife pressed out together.

A breaker surged towards them and they went under to come up in the bubbling wake. They thrust out till the water was shoulder-high and they had to struggle desperately to make headway against the onslaught of the surf. Breakers reared green and sheer above them. They dived under the toppling crests and at last won their way to the clear deep water beyond the surf.

A strong swimmer in his youth, the magistrate was yet unused to such violent exertion, and trod water, gasping. The woman watched him in a calculating provocative way though she, too, was a little out of breath. Looking back at the shore, they seemed to be a long way out.

The magistrate remarked on the distance.

Gerda smiled: "We're only about sixty yards out."

"More than that, surely?"

She shook her wet head, still smiling.

"You don't want to go back already, do you?"

"No," he said, answering her smile.

As she trod water she moved close to him, so that now and then their legs touched.

Riddle thought: "The minx!"—but the contact excited him a little, and he wondered if he should suggest to Graham that he bring his wife out to his villa in the hills one day.

"Let's dive together to the bottom," Gerda suggested. "Put your arm round me."

The warmth of her body reached the magistrate

through the cool film of water that was all that seemed to separate her from him, and he bit his lip gently from pleasure and excitement. Gerda smiled at him in an intimate way.

Then the smile faded and was replaced by a frown. Riddle observed that she was gazing at something over his shoulder, and he turned his head to see the young idler, Peter Groom, swimming towards them.

The young man called out: "Eh, Gerda!"

The chemist's wife did not reply. With an ostentatious gesture she drew Riddle's arm more closely around her and said: "Come on. Let's dive."

They dived till they were groping on the white bottom.

Then, simultaneously, they saw, approaching them out of the green depths, a dark moving shape.

With a single desperate movement the woman released the man, and they shot separately to the surface.

Gerda screamed: "A shark! Oh, God, a shark!"—and fainted.

An icy chill of fear passed through Riddle. Six feet away the young idler, Peter Groom, gazed about him with a look of frank and hopeless terror on his face.

5

A shrill whistle sounded from the watch-tower on the beach. A tenseness ran through the crowd on the sands like an electric current. Like a wave they rose and crowded to the water's edge to mix in confusion with the bathers struggling out from the surf. A solid wall of humanity stood on the edge of the surf and gazed out beyond the breakers to where two men supported between them an unconscious girl.

Close beside them something black came up out of the water and sank again: a fin.

"It's Gerda and Riddle," John Graham said in a curiously impassive voice, "—and young Groom, I think."

He had become slightly pale, and his eyes were fixed intently on the sea.

Cynthia Groom screamed and dropped to her knees on the edge of the surf in a fit of wild weeping. Fanchon Follower gazed with the fascinated expression of a bird hypnotized by a snake. Joyce Mealing suddenly hid her face on the shoulder of Noel Manning. Paul Kronen, very pale, looked steadily out to sea.

Another fin, and another, then one, two, three shining black backs . . . . a school of porpoises. . . .

From the crowd on the beach came a gasp of relief that sounded like a newly-awakened wind sighing through trees.

"Cynthia! Cynthia darling!" Joyce Mealing cried hysterically, throwing herself down beside Cynthia. "Cynthia, look, look! It's not a shark, it's porpoises!" She dashed some tears from her eyes. "Cynthia, they're safe. It's nothing. Look!"

Cynthia looked up vacantly. "What?"

"Cynthia, it's not a shark, only porpoises."

"Porpoises?" echoed Cynthia. "Porpoises?"

"Yes, porpoises."

Cynthia stopped crying and rose to her feet. She looked out to where her husband and the magistrate still supported Gerda Graham. Twenty yards from them the rolling black backs broke the water again and disappeared. Porpoises! Cynthia began to laugh. She laughed while the tears still streamed from her eyes and continued as though she could not stop.

She clutched at her side, at her throat, but the hysterical laughter went on. She laughed till the others became frightened for her, then stopped as suddenly as she had begun. She sank down on her haunches on the sand, and a queer sob rose out of her throat.

"There, there!" Joyce Mealing was crooning. "There, there! There, there, darling, they're going out for them. They're going out for them with the life-line."

People crowded round asking questions.

A brown young athlete in the skull-cap and costume of the Scarborough Surf Life Saving Club was making his way out through the surf. A life-belt with a line attached was fastened round his waist. Behind him the life-savers paid out the line above their heads with the precision of machines.

The belt-man dived through the last line of surf and swam out to where Groom and the magistrate trod water, supporting the unconscious girl. With one hand the young idler clung to his surf-board.

"Take her," Groom said, thrusting the chemist's wife into the hands of the belt-man. "I'm all right. Got a bit of a scare, that's all. Are you all right?" he inquired of Riddle.

"Yes."

The belt-man began to abuse them: "Bloody fools . . ."—but his comrades on the beach began to haul in the line and his abuse ended in an angry splutter as his head dipped under.

Riddle and Groom struck out for the shore, and in a few strokes were in the breaking surf. Shouting to the magistrate to get on behind, Groom caught a breaker with his surf-board, and they reached the shore not long after the belt-man.

As they waded through the last few yards of surf,

Cynthia Groom came running to meet them. She clutched her young husband's hand, crying :

"Peter, oh, Peter, you don't know what a relief it was ! . . ."

There were tears in her eyes.

The young man replied gaily : "Why, you've been crying ! Did you think your faithless husband had gone then, Cinny ?"

He put an arm round her shoulders and shook her gently. She said nothing but squeezed his hand and looked up at him through her wet lashes in a humble, dog-like way.

The magistrate James Riddle hung behind as they mounted the wet slope to the beach. He was touched. So pitiful and so charming in her love, he thought. Were the women who came before him on Friday mornings, seeking separations from their husbands, once like that ?

When he reached the beach he hurried along to where Graham's wife had been brought ashore by the life-savers. She had recovered consciousness on the way-in in the arms of the belt-man and had swallowed no water, but they had laid her face downwards on the sand notwithstanding, and were applying resuscitation methods. Gerda protested weakly, but they would not desist till Graham and Riddle interfered.

The husband and his friend supported Gerda back to the sunshades. They put her down in the shade, and Paul Kronen made a pillow of beach-coats and slipped it under her head.

"She's all right," Riddle said. "A little fright, that's all."

One of her coiled plaits had come undone in the surf and hung from her head now like a dead black snake.

She said weakly : "Oh, I feel so *ashamed* !"

"Nothing to feel ashamed about," the magistrate said cheerfully, and the others chorused : "Nonsense ! Ashamed, indeed !"

"Nevertheless," said Gerda, "I'm ashamed. To faint like a schoolgirl at the sight of a porpoise ! But coming through the water as it did, it *did* look like a shark."

She recovered quickly, and in a little the scare was forgotten.

6

An orgy of sensuality. . . . Riddle lay inert on the sand with his face buried in his arms. His flesh was in the grip of a tingling lethargy. Even his thoughts flowed slowly. He thought of the phrase of his friend the chemist : an orgy of sensuality. The enervating, vitalizing heat of the sun, and the cool effervescence of the surf . . . then the sun again and the surf again —a sort of multi-layered sensual sandwich. Slices of sand with sea between, fierce heat and bubbling cold. . . .

The sun, the magistrate reflected, was a drug and an intoxicant, and was becoming unpleasantly hot again on his back and legs. It was time to cool off again in the surf. He sat up.

The sun had sunken half-way down the western sky and was reflected in splashes of incandescence from the waves, which were rising under the influence of a breeze from the west.

Groom and Gerda Graham came up from the surf with water dripping from them. The young idler grinned cheerfully at the magistrate.

"We're thinking of going," he said. "It's less pleasant when the sea breeze gets up. You're coming with us, of course ?"

"Well . . ."

"Of course he's coming," Gerda said.

"That settles it," Groom remarked, grinning again.

A little surprised at himself, Riddle said: "I'd be glad to come. I'll have a dip first though. Where's John?"

He looked round for the chemist but could not see him.

Gerda said: "I think he's in the water. Hurry up. You've got to dress. We came like this."

She approached close to Riddle and wrung the water from the bottom of her costume so that it dripped over him. He flinched from the cold contact and scrambled to his feet while she smiled at him with her yellow eyes.

As he made his way down the wet slope to the water he was still surprised at himself. He had met these people that morning—all save John Graham and his wife, perhaps—with a sense of detachment, of belonging to a sphere and a life apart from them. Now he seemed to be of them. It was as though the fright he had shared with the young idler, Peter Groom, and Gerda Graham had admitted him to intimacy with them without his own volition. He was prone to avoid new acquaintanceships, being unwilling to accept the obligations they imposed; he was jealous of his own self-sufficiency; yet he had acquiesced in the evening's arrangements without reluctance and almost with pleasure. . . .

The surf roared in his ears as he dived. The roots of his being seemed to bathe in a sensation of effervescent coolness. . . . This elemental sensuality, he thought, was a philosophy; it made him remember that he was an animal. . . .

He saw John Graham and struggled over to him.

"Hullo," said the chemist. "I thought you were asleep in the sun."

"I think I must have been."

"It's touched you up a bit," observed Graham, regarding Riddle's shoulders, no longer white but a deep pink. "You should have kept in the shade with that livid hide of yours. You get burnt quite enough even in the shade."

He slapped his friend lightly on the shoulder and the magistrate flinched.

"I expect you're right," he said ruefully.

"You'll be taking it out of the poor devils in the dock to-morrow."

"H'm. I'll have to make allowances by imposing lighter penalties than I think are warranted."

"Dear old James! You take your job seriously, don't you?"

"I do," said Riddle gravely.

A breaking wave interrupted their talk. They plunged about together in the surf till they were chilled then returned to the beach. The others were gathering up their belongings, their rubber beach-bags and caps, their cloaks and sunshades.

Gerda Graham said reproachfully to the magistrate: "Oh, I asked you to hurry. We want to get away before we get hot again."

Her husband said: "You go on then. I'll bring Riddle with me."

As they mounted the wide flight of steps to the esplanade, Joyce Mealing said to her fiancé:

"Riddle's the police magistrate, isn't he?"

"Yes," replied Noel Manning.

"Why do they call him the Lord of the Urinal?"

"Because of his name—Jimmy Riddle."

"But I don't see how that . . . ?"

"Rhyming slang. Jimmy Riddle means . . . er . . . to make water. They call his court the Urinal."

"Oh! How . . . ribald!"

"Yes. They also say he suffers from some bladder trouble, but I don't know how true that is."

7

In the crowded dressing-shed the magistrate donned his clothes and ascended to the esplanade, where Graham awaited him in his battered little two-seater car.

"Here endeth the orgy," remarked the chemist. "I don't know what you're to expect to-night, James. Something in the nature of a party I imagine."

The little car moved off with a jerk.

"What sort of party?"

"Oh . . . a gramophone, too much liquor, a little huddled dancing as a preliminary to copulation on the beach at three o'clock in the morning."

"Oh!" said the magistrate.

"Doesn't it appeal to you, James?"

Riddle could not have said whether it appealed to him or not. He did not understand himself. He was unsettled; he had a sense of having been jolted out of a rut. He felt as though he were standing at the edge of a forest of new experiences and was free to wander therein. It was feeling at once pleasurable and disturbing.

"Tell me something about these people," he said. "I find it a little difficult to imagine them as your friends."

The chemist shrugged. "They're not my friends; they're Gerda's. They don't altogether approve of me."

"Why? Because of your political affiliations?"

"Yes. I'm not a right-thinking citizen. They consider many of my associations are unbecoming to a gentleman."

"Well, I don't blame them for that," said the magistrate. "If you must side openly with the rabble in politics you must take the consequences."

The bulky chemist smiled. "We're rapidly approaching the time when the rabble, as you call it, will be the class in power," he said equably.

"Nonsense!"

You'd naturally regard it as nonsense, but that's because *your* affiliations make it impossible for you properly to interpret what you see. Every social and economic phenomenon of the day points to it. That girl who impressed you so much, for instance—the girl you fined—even she was one of the straws in the revolutionary wind, my friend. You saw the moving straw and you had sense enough to know that it wasn't moving without cause, so you came to the conclusion that modesty was disintegrating. But you didn't go far enough; you neglected to ask yourself *why* it was disintegrating."

"Well, are you going to tell me that it's because a revolution's approaching?"

"Yes," said Graham.

"In all my life," declared the magistrate, "I've never heard a greater piece of absurdity!"

"No?"

"No."

"The morality of a civilization," said Graham, "is an ethical reflection of the economic organization of that civilization. A breakdown of morality necessarily implies a breakdown of the economic machinery behind it."

The magistrate shook his head irritably. "Sometimes you annoy me, John," he said. "You attempt to solve every problem you encounter by reference to Karl Marx. His theories dominate your whole outlook."

"Marx made the obvious discovery that the first task of the human species is earning a living," Graham observed, "and that that task is sufficiently important to colour all our other activities, our art, morality, philosophy, religion and all the rest, and he went on to draw the necessary conclusion that the forms these other activities take depends upon the manner in which we earn a living, that is to say, upon our economic organization."

"If he'd stopped there . . ." began Riddle.

The chemist interrupted: "For the purpose of our argument he does stop there. But you won't accept the logical implications of the theory."

The magistrate snorted. "I'll accept them when they *are* logical; but when I'm asked to regard a few youthful irresponsibles peeling off their bathing suits as foreshadowing a revolution! . . ."

"You'd be willing enough to regard a small cloud on the horizon as presaging a storm," said the other.

"If there were other indications as well, perhaps."

"And are there no other indications? They are not difficult to find. Art forms are changing, architectural forms are changing, philosophy is falling in to disrepute, the churches cry aloud of empty pews and none hear, the sacred institutions of marriage and the home are threatened by the rising tide of immorality, crime is increasing, and commerce and industry are floundering in an economic crisis that is without parallel in history! Or as a magistrate are you officially unaware of these indications?"

"No. Naturally I'm aware of them, but I don't regard them as indications of an impending revolution."

"Perhaps you regard them as meaningless? How are they to be interpreted if not as reflections of an impending change in the organization of society?"

"I don't know," said Riddle, "but I'm not prepared to attach that interpretation to them."

The chemist shrugged. "All right, all right! If you *won't* be convinced . . ."

For a while they drove on in silence. The magistrate felt tired; the day on the beach had drained him of energy. The jolting of the little car over the irregularities of the road was causing him to chafe where the sun had burned him.

"In any case," he said, "when I asked you to tell me about these friends of yours it was not in anticipation of an argument in which neither of us has the least hope of convincing the other. What does young Groom do, for instance?"

"He's an idler," said Graham. "His mother left him twenty thousand pounds, I understand. I'm also informed that he made a present of it to his wife—when some get-rich-quick scheme in which he was interested threatened to go wrong. My wife finds him peculiarly attractive."

"H'm, yes, so I've noticed!"

"She makes no secret of it. The conventions, as we have observed, are changing. I think you know Noel Manning, don't you?"

"I've met him."

"Paul Kronen is the son of old James Kronen—Kronen's Limited. A member of the council of the Chamber of Commerce, the Council of Industries, the Rotary Club, and half a dozen other institutions—an

important young man. In fact, he's one of those higher products of civilization that we revolutionaries shall have such great pleasure in shooting when the time comes."

"You don't like him?"

"I do not! I doubt if he's ever yielded to a disinterested impulse in his life!"

"Isn't he the head of the business? He must have ability."

"Oh, he has ability! The type always has. Do you know, James, sometimes I wonder if that type's quite sane. When I talk to Kronen I get the impression of a fine mind bound in infancy, as it were, like the feet of a Chinese woman—swathed in bandages of prejudice and tradition so that it grew up crippled and twisted and deformed. His vanity is inordinate."

"Prejudice and tradition?" repeated Riddle curiously. "I should not have thought he had very much tradition behind him. I understand that his father was the son of a convict."

"I don't think old James is responsible; I think it's his mother."

"Queer that a woman like that should marry the son of a convict."

Graham laughed. James was presumably a wealthy man. His origin was probably forgotten. It doesn't do to inquire too closely into the origins of any of our great commercial families."

"H'm, no. I suppose not."

Again a silence fell upon them. Presently they entered the suburbs of the city.

"Where are we going?" the magistrate asked.

"To Cottesloe. Absurd that we should have to go right back to town to get there! There should be a road along the coast."

"Yes. I'd like a wash, John. I feel damnably hot and dry."

"You can get one when you get there. You'll find they don't stand on ceremony. Incidentally, when I've dropped you, I'll have to get back to the shop; I have to open between six and eight on Sundays. But Gerda will look after you, and I'll be back later."

CHAPTER THREE

I

THE chemist turned his shabby little car into a street which was a magnificent avenue of pines. The street ran over the crest of a hill and down towards the sea ; and so great were the pines that their branches almost met overhead, so that one looked westward at waves, golden in the lowering sun, as through a dark tunnel.

The flat in which the young idler, Peter Groom, lived with his wife was in a single-storied block on the crest of the hill. The windows opened beneath the great branches of the pines. Now, as John Graham stopped his car by the narrow, gravelled footpath, jazz strains floated through the open windows of the flat, and Riddle caught a glimpse of Paul Kronen and the girl, Fanchon Follower, still in their bathing suits, dancing to the music.

Following Graham, he entered the tiny square hall of the flat and passed under an arch into the room where they were dancing. It was a long room with a floor of oiled jarrah, bare save for a rug or two, and comfortably furnished with deep chairs and lounges. At the far end a door was open upon a narrow hallway, and through it came the sound of a running shower and the voices of Cynthia Groom, and Gerda Graham and Joyce Mealing, mingled with the clatter of spoons and dishes in the kitchen.

The dancers stopped as Graham and Riddle entered and greeted them without warmth. Riddle allowed

himself to sink down upon one of the lounges, sighing gratefully as the soft upholstery yielded to his weight. He was tired.

"You have to change, too, do you ?" Kronen remarked to Graham, observing that the latter was still in his bathing suit. "Noel's a long time with the shower. You'll have to wait your turn. Fanchon's next, then me. There's not room for more than one at a time in that cupboard of a bathroom."

Graham answered curtly : "Thanks for warning me, but I've no time for a shower. I'll get into my clothes in Groom's bedroom. I've got to get back to my shop."

With a shrug Kronen turned his back on the chemist and began to talk to Fanchon. Then the sound of the shower ceased, and a little later Manning appeared in the hall doorway and said that the bathroom was vacant.

Fanchon said : "Thank goodness !"—and hurried out.

Kronen seated himself on the lounge beside the magistrate.

"Sun touched you up a bit, did it ?" he remarked, looking at Riddle's burning face. "Well, it won't last more than three or four days. I always have a hell of a time myself at the beginning of a season."

The record on the gramophone came to an end and Kronen got up to stop it. Returning, he said :

"We've been glad to see shoplifters getting heavier sentences in your court lately, Mr. Riddle. Shoplifting's one of the biggest difficulties we have to contend with. If I told you how much Kronen's Limited lose annually through shoplifting you'd hardly believe it."

He smiled. His smile was intelligent and merry,

but it failed to expose his teeth; his lips opened like a gash in his smooth face.

"As a matter of fact," answered the magistrate, "heavy sentences have been imposed only in a few special cases—where the position was uncomplicated. Shoplifters belong to a class of offenders which has always been something of a problem. Many of them can't pay fines, and when they've small children and homes to take care of, as so many of them have, to send them to gaol is to punish not only them but their dependants."

"But that's not *your* look-out, surely?"

The magistrate felt suddenly that he disliked Paul Kronen.

He said suavely: "I am under the unfortunate necessity of administering justice as well as the law."

"But is it necessary to concern yourself with their private lives?"

"It is necessary to take all circumstances into consideration," replied Riddle. "Justice is a commodity that cannot be dispensed as easily as silk or butter, Mr. Kronen."

Kronen laughed in a contemptuous way.

"No, I suppose not. You've got to disentangle it from governmental red tape, eh? Well, it's only natural. I think it's generally admitted that all state enterprises suffer from red tape. If the enforcement of the law was placed in the hands of responsible private enterprise it could be freed from red tape and sentimentality. Shoplifters and others would be taught a proper respect for property, and everybody would get justice at about half the cost to the state."

Riddle did not know whether to be angry or amused. Glancing up, he caught the concerned gaze of Peter Groom, who had entered the room while they were

talking. Out of deference to his host, he decided to seem amused, and uttered a short laugh.

"Don't you think so?" exclaimed Kronen in surprise.

The unquenched spark of anger in the magistrate flared up. This young oligarch was either a fool or he was trying to make a fool of him, Riddle.

"I don't appreciate your joke, Mr. Kronen," he said coldly.

"I was not joking," retorted Kronen, his face becoming expressionless.

"I laughed in error then. It did not occur to me that anyone could make such a ridiculous statement seriously!"

Kronen's eyes flashed, but he did not reply. He rose slowly to his feet. In a curiously indifferent voice he said to Groom:

"I'm going, Peter. I'm not going to stay here to be insulted."

"Good Lord, Paul!" Groom exclaimed. "You haven't been insulted!"

"I prefer to be the judge of that."

"But . . . Good God, man! You brought it on yourself. If anyone has grounds for complaint it's Mr. Riddle . . ."

Kronen did not reply directly. He said: "Tell Fanchon I'll be waiting for her in the car, will you?"

"Don't be so bloody childish!" cried Groom.

"When I said I wouldn't stay here to be insulted," said Kronen coldly, "that went for you, too, Peter."

He stalked out of the flat as he spoke.

Groom spread his hands in a despairing way. "I'm sorry, Mr. Riddle. I . . . I don't know what to say. Paul . . . he's such a queer swine. You never know how to take him."

"His manners," remarked the magistrate, who was still angry, "certainly leave room for improvement!"

"I think it's because he was spoiled as a kid," the young idler said apologetically. "And he's never had a chance to get it knocked out of him."

Hot and uncomfortable and angry, the magistrate grunted. He was remembering a remark of his friend, the chemist, that had seemed merely rhetorical at the time: that sometimes he wondered if men like Kronen were sane. . . . Kronen's inordinate vanity. . . .

The sea-salt was still stiff and sticky in his greying hair, and powdered dryly on his face. He was thirsty and uncomfortable. He wished he had not come.

"Here's the tea," Groom said with relief.

Cynthia handed Riddle a cup of tea, smiling at him charmingly, and he began to feel better. He drank the tea thirstily. When he had washed, his annoyance and incipient depression were gone.

Returning to the living-room he was conscious again of a pleasant sense of anticipation. Manning engaged him in conversation.

The women seemed to resent their clothes after their day in bathing-suits. Gerda Graham alone wore stockings. They sat about carelessly, frequently exposing their legs to mid-thigh without coquetry or self-consciousness. They talked together in a haphazard, careless fashion, rising now and then to dance to the music of the gramophone.

As the rich yellow light of late afternoon changed to twilight, Cynthia and Joyce busied themselves again in the kitchen, and, as the grey light faded, served a meal of crayfish, and salads, and omelettes.

When the meal was over the aimless chatter and dancing began again, but was enlivened now by drinking. They drank avidly. Temperate by long

habit, Riddle became a little perturbed. The last bus by which he could reach his home in the hills left the city at nine o'clock. It was too late now to catch it. He was glad when Graham arrived again.

The bulky chemist threw himself willingly enough into the spirit of the party, but in his usual, ironical fashion. Riddle watched him dancing—gracefully despite his bulk—with Joyce Mealing, and envied him his apparent faculty of participating without, as it were, surrendering himself. Graham possessed a quality that he, Riddle, found impossible to analyse, difficult even to define: a strange quality of inviolability, of serenity, of cold yet unrepellent detachment. He could not imagine Graham in a state of anger, or being swayed by any emotion. Yet the man was sensitive to all those things which were commonly supposed to appeal to the emotions, to visual beauty, to music, to poetry, to sculpture—particularly to sculpture. The magistrate had seen his friend run his fingers over a small marble Venus as though the very touch induced an ecstasy. . . .

Gerda Graham was dancing with Peter Groom, and they were whispering together in an intimate way.

That affair didn't appear to worry Graham, Riddle thought, perhaps he was too sure of his wife; what young Groom's wife thought about it was another matter, however.

Cynthia and the journalist, Manning, stood close by the chair in which the magistrate was seated. He glanced up at her.

No, she was not as complacent as Graham. Her face revealed nothing, but her eyes followed her graceless young husband. And she was charming, charming, he thought. That air of innocence and naïveté! . . . It was a shame!

The record on the gramophone came to an end, and Cynthia moved to replace it. In the momentary silence a slight commotion sounded outside: the crunching of feet on gravel, and a woman's voice raised suddenly on a note of dismay: "Oh! Is *this* where we're going!"

The voice was a rich contralto to which some submerged memory in the magistrate responded imperfectly but instantly.

2

A moment later several people appeared in the hall archway; two men and three girls. With a cry of surprise and pleasure, Cynthia hurried to meet them, cutting off the magistrate's view.

"Why, Sylvia! And Gwen! Tom Rogers! Stanley Bell! Oh, how do you *do*!" she cried.

Riddle watched with interest, but from his chair he could see the faces only of the two men. Cynthia stood between him and the rest of the party.

One of the girls said: "We've brought a friend, Cynthia. She didn't want to come but we told her you wouldn't mind."

"Of course not," Cynthia began, then added hesitantly: "But . . . have we? . . ."

"We . . . we didn't really have a chance to." Again the rich contralto angled in the memory of the magistrate. "When your husband brought us in, you . . . you didn't wait . . ."

Riddle heard Noel Manning say softly: "Good God!"

"Oh!" exclaimed Cynthia. "You're one of the girls Peter and Noel! . . ."

"Cynthia! Theo! Whatever is the matter?" cried one of the newcomers. "Do you know each other?"

The girl with the contralto voice answered: "In . . . yes, in a sort of a way. But I didn't know we were coming here. You see, I didn't know your name. Your husband . . ."

"For heaven's sake! Theo, what? . . ."

"I'll explain. It's so ridiculous. . . . Olive Porchess and I met two men. The fools! They invited us to their flat to meet their wives. . . . Oh, we thought they were joking, and . . . and . . . Well, they brought us here. . . ."

"It was Peter and Noel Manning," said Cynthia briefly.

An interval of silence was broken suddenly by shrieks of laughter.

"What a joke!" they cried.

"What a gorgeous joke!"

"Peter and Noel!"

"But Cynthia, you don't bear any grudge? There are no ill-feelings, are there, Cynthia?"

"No," said Cynthia shyly. She, too, had joined in the laughter.

"Then let me introduce you: this is Theo Luddon."

Theo Luddon? Theo Luddon? Cynthia stepped aside, and in stupefaction Riddle recognized the girl whose face and bearing had made so profound an impression on him in court!

The recognition was mutual! The smile faded from Theodora's face. The magistrate was appalled! Had he not been involved in enough ridiculous situations that day without enduring another? He had been used as a foil by the wife of a friend in her side-play with a probable lover; he had been scared out of his wits by a school of porpoises; he had been reduced to physical torment by the sun; he had been involved in an embarrassing scene by the imbecile vanity of Paul Kronen; was there yet another impossible scene

to face? And the girl, too—had not she endured enough?

With a swift, careless gesture, he pressed a finger to his lips. He did not dare to make the action too obvious lest it be overseen. But she understood. The dismay in her grey eyes was replaced by an impersonal, friendly look. A moment later, in the train of her companions, she followed Cynthia out of the room.

3

"I suppose you don't often meet your . . . your what do you call them—clients? . . . meet them socially after they've appeared before you in court, do you?"

Theodora sat upright on the lounge beside the magistrate—as upright as the yielding upholstery permitted—and yet contrived to convey an impression of utter relaxation. She sipped slowly at a glass of sweet wine.

"Not often," Riddle admitted with a smile.

"You were a little . . . unfair."

"In the administration of justice one is sometimes more than a little unfair."

"That's what's called a paradox, isn't it?"

In the low, rich, contralto voice there was no suggestion of reproach, nor in the calm gaze of her grey eyes. She spoke as if she were simply stating a fact.

"Perhaps," said Riddle carefully, "the word 'justice' should not be used in connection with our courts. It is too ambiguous a term. The justice I administer is the law."

"Do even magistrates recognize a difference between justice and the law?" she asked in a surprised way.

Riddle looked at her sharply.

"It may interest you to know, young lady," he observed, "that if justice had resided in the discretion of the Bench, you'd have received about three months' hard labour as a result of a majority decision. Apparently you've no idea how you shocked my colleagues."

Theodora laughed.

"Fortunately for you," Riddle went on, "the by-law under which you were charged provided for a maximum penalty of two pounds."

In a puzzled way she said: "But that only means, doesn't it, that the law isn't quite so unjust as it might have been?"

The Lord of the Urinal was startled. He gazed at her in surprise. Was this girl who had inveigled him into a debate on justice now going to turn the Socratic dialectic upon him?—going to force upon him the defence of a notion whose only strength lay in offence: the identity of law and justice? Was there more in her than her curious serene charm, her flawless, golden-brown beauty?

"My dear young lady, surely you realize the necessity for law?"

"I suppose so," she said slowly. "Everybody says so. . . . But . . . it wasn't only the fine, you see. I lost my job, too. I had a job at the Brazilian consulate. I was paid four pounds a week, and I had hardly anything to do. But I lost it because of that case, and now I have to sell stockings and things at Kronen's. I have to work from nine to six, and I only get two pounds and sevenpence a week."

Riddle exclaimed: "Oh! I'm sorry! . . ." He added gently: "But you don't blame me for that, do you?"

"For a little I did," the girl admitted. "Not now."

"Why not now?"

"Oh . . . I realized . . . that you couldn't have done anything else. It was simply that silly regulation. . . . And the council inspector—the beast !"

"But he, too, had his duty to do."

"I suppose so. But it all seems so . . . so silly. Why should it be anyone's duty to do silly things ? Everything that is called duty seems to be silly."

To the magistrate's annoyance, at this point in their conversation Peter Groom approached and asked Theodora to dance. Setting down her half-finished glass of wine she rose and surrendered herself to the young idler's arms. Watching her dance, Riddle remarked the strange grace of her movements. She was like a cat, he thought, in her curious self-containedness, in her slow, effortless grace. Impatiently he waited for her to return.

But when she returned she seemed to have receded from him in some indefinable way. She finished her wine. Groom pressed more upon her. She protested that more than one glass went to her head, but when he persisted she accepted it.

"That's foolish, if you don't want it," Riddle said.

She did not answer, but smiled at him, and began sipping the wine. Groom settled himself on the arm of the lounge and divided her attention.

The wine brought a flush to her cheeks and an unreal brightness to her eyes. A voluptuous note appeared in her low-pitched laughter.

Presently Gerda Graham claimed the young idler, but Riddle found that Theodora now baffled him as she had when he first saw her. Though she was manifestly getting drunk, the quality of serenity, of acquiescence, persisted. She no longer supported his efforts at conversation, but seemed content to sit in smiling silence while he talked. Like a cat ! Unapproachable.

Her personality eluded him, seemed to retreat the further into that mist of serenity the nearer his understanding approached. At last, in despair, he asked her to dance.

In his arms she was warm and yielding, and . . . heavy. He was surprised. His eyes questioned her.

"I'm . . . drunk !" she said, laughing quietly. "If I have more than one glass it always goes to my head."

He resisted an impulse to laugh himself, feeling again on firm ground. If it were simply the fumes of wine behind which she had been hiding . . .

"Would you like to go home ?" he asked her.

"Oh, I can't. No. . . . The others . . . they're enjoying themselves."

"I'll take you if you'd like to go."

"I couldn't. No. . . ."

He felt that she wanted to go, that there was really no more inclination in her to resist his proposal than there had been to the wine young Groom pressed upon her.

"Of course you can," he said. "Have you anything to get ? A coat ?"

She acquiesced.

"Yes, a coat."

He stopped dancing and released her.

"Go and get it then. I'll make apologies for you."

Both Groom and Cynthia protested.

"I say, you can't go yet !" the young idler exclaimed reproachfully. "Why, we've hardly got to know you. And after nearly being eaten by sharks together . . ."

"Porpoises," said Cynthia.

Groom chuckled. "Yes, porpoises. Can't help wondering what I'd be feeling like now if they'd really been sharks !"

"Certainly not wondering what you'd have been feeling like if they'd been porpoises," said Riddle.

"No," agreed Groom a little vacantly. "No. . . . But I say, don't go. Have another drink. It's not twelve yet. It's early."

"For you, perhaps," said the magistrate smiling, "but not for me. At my age one must temper one's dissipations with a little discretion. And I live in the hills. I've a long way to go."

"Oh, well, if you must. . . ."

Theodora appeared with her coat.

"Good-bye," said Riddle.

Half drunk, they all insisted on shaking his hand. John Graham said in a mocking undertone: "Good luck!" Confound the fellow!

Riddle and Theodora walked down the hill beneath the branches of the pines. The esplanade was flooded with light. The wind had fallen away. Under the beach floodlights a few people still lingered in the slow, short surf.

They found a taxi. The magistrate gave the address Theodora told him.

While he lay back against the upholstery she sat upright as she had on the lounge in Groom's flat, conveying still that uncanny impression of utter ease. In a fatherly way he put his arm round her shoulders and drew her back beside him, and thus, in silence, they covered most of the distance to Perth.

In an unobtrusive way the magistrate began to question her about herself. She answered him briefly, easily, seeming to withhold nothing, yet volunteering nothing. He discovered that she was the daughter of a Collie coal-miner; that she had been born in a cottage on the coalfields. Incredible! She had two younger brothers and one younger sister. One of her

brothers—the elder—was a miner like her father; or he had been; now he was out of work. The other was not yet old enough to work. Her sister still went to school—she was only thirteen, her sister. She, Theodora, had grown tired of her habitat, of the dreary routine of housework. So she had come away, and when she reached Perth one of the directors of the colliery company which employed her father found her a job in the company's office, and, later, her post at the Brazilian consulate.

What she told Riddle served merely to whet his curiosity in her, but he was reluctant to question her too closely. Becoming silent, he was content to watch her in the changing darkness.

The taxi swung in to the kerb between the boles of two plane trees, and stopped before a brick and concrete residential.

"This is where I live," she informed him.

Riddle laughed.

"That," he remarked, "is the first voluntary statement you've made since we left Cottesloe." He hesitated for a moment, then said: "Will you show me your quarters?"

She nodded, and he followed her out of the taxi. He hoped that her personal surroundings would afford some clue to the enigma of her personality, and he was warmed by a pleasant feeling of anticipation.

"We'll have to be quiet," she warned him.

The warning was unnecessary. The hush of sleep lay upon the house, and he moved quietly involuntarily.

4

She led him up a narrow, dimly-lit stair to a square landing, and unlocked a door and switched on a light,

and Riddle beheld a spacious, uncrowded room. A threadbare carpet covered the floor, and a broad stretcher bed, beneath a brocade coverlet and cushions, disguised itself as a couch. The mantel over the wide fireplace was loaded with books, and Riddle, examining the titles, experienced a shock of surprise.

Between novels by Henri Barbusse, Romain Rolland, John dos Passos, Jack London, Upton Sinclair, were sandwiched such works as the "Capital" of Karl Marx, the "Socialism" of Engels, the "State and Revolution" of Lenin, the "Communist Programme" of Bucharin. The mantel was loaded with the literature of class-war and revolution!

"Is this the sort of stuff you read?" Riddle demanded in astonishment.

She answered evasively: "They belong to a friend of mine—I used to go to school with him. He comes here when he wants to be quiet."

"Then I'm afraid your friend doesn't show very much concern for you," said the magistrate quietly. "Don't you know that it's dangerous, particularly at a time like this, to have books like this in your possession? Half of them are actually illegal publications. Their circulation is forbidden. You could get into serious trouble for having them in your room. Did your friend tell you that?"

She nodded, smiling.

"That's why he keeps them here. He was afraid of them being confiscated if he kept them in his own room. You see, the police know all the Communists. They watch him."

"Are *you* a Communist?"

Theodora shook her head slowly.

"I don't know. Sometimes I think it's something I don't understand. Some of the others come here

with him sometimes, and they talk. But they seem to . . . their point of view . . . I hardly know how to explain . . . it's as though they were on the other side of everything. . . ."

The magistrate did not pursue the subject. He felt, somehow, that it would be better not to.

Theodora offered him coffee, and went behind a Japanese screen in a corner of the room to make it. Riddle took the "Communist Manifesto" from its place on the mantel, and dropped with it on to a couch by the fireplace, opening it at random.

"*In every historical epoch,*" [he read], "*the prevailing mode of economic production and exchange, and the social organisation necessarily following from it, form the basis upon which is built up, and from which alone can be explained, the political and intellectual history of that epoch. . . .*"

Curious, he thought, that the first passage to catch his eye should be the proposition from which John Graham had been arguing that afternoon. Graham saw its implications. He read it again. It was obscure, he thought. He was not sure that Graham didn't draw more far-reaching conclusions from it than were justified. Did it necessarily imply that morality, religion, art, philosophy, were all simply products of the prevailing mode of production and exchange, as Graham believed?—that great leaders, great intellects, were not the causes of social movements, but the effects? . . .

With a shock the magistrate realized that his reflections were based on the assumption that the proposition was true!

It was nonsense, of course. The amazing thing was that men like Graham could take it seriously. The

mass of those who subscribed to it didn't understand it . . . accepted it with a sort of blind, religious faith, as some people still accepted Christianity. . . . Communism was not a philosophy, or a political creed, but a religion. . . .

That, thought Riddle, was what the Archbishop had said. The Archbishop had been indiscreet. In the course of a sermon he had observed that the Communist doctrine might conceivably be a new revelation from on high. The magistrate chuckled. What the Archbishop had said was probably not what he meant, but the papers had reported what he said, and a hundred thousand people had been shocked out of their breakfast appetites. A storm in a Holy Communion wine cup! . . . If the Archbishop was ever again so unfortunate in his choice of words, there would be those who asked themselves whether it was not time that his high office was filled by one who had no doubts of the right-mindedness of God. . . .

5

Theodora came from behind the Japanese screen bearing on a tray two cups of hot water in which lumps of condensed coffee and milk and sugar dissolved muddily. Riddle took his cup dubiously, but when he had stirred in the thick compost found it palatable enough. Theodora seated herself beside him on the couch, sipping at her cup in silence.

The silence irked him, baffled him. As though acknowledging defeat, imperceptibly his interest in her underwent a change. His consciousness of her physical desirability increased.

How many men had made love to her? How had they fared?

A little, excited pulse began to beat in his throat. By way of experiment, he covered one of her hands with his, and when she did not withdraw it, took it up and began to fondle it.

She looked at him, smiling faintly.

Releasing her hand, he took her by the shoulders and turned her slowly till she faced him. Her grey eyes seemed darker. Was it the light, or desire awakening in her? He approached her mouth with his own. An expression blent of reluctance and hunger passed over her face like a shadow, then she parted her lips for his kiss, and he felt her body grow limp and heavy as she leaned against him. . . .

When he began to fumble with her clothes, she whispered: "No! No! No!"—but made no move to check him, and presently surrendered herself with a little shudder of ecstasy.

. . . . .

It was two o'clock when Riddle left her. The driver of the taxi had fallen asleep. He shook the man awake, and told him to drive fast.

The car lurched and jolted as it sped over the uneven roads but the magistrate was not conscious of discomfort. His mind was still preoccupied with the enigma of the personality of Theodora Luddon, and still ravished by the memory of an ecstasy.

. . . . .

Theodora sank into sleep through a misty aftermath of pleasure. The events of the evening, and the other events out of which they were born, passed before her again as in a dream. The young man, Peter Groom, with his fair hair and his irresistible, boyish smile . . . he and his companion . . . and the absurd manner of

their meeting. She had not believed that he had a wife—not even when they reached the flat, and Cynthia and Joyce had fled in outrage. She had thought it just another summer *ménage* to which he had wished to put an end. . . . Cynthia was sweet to have taken it so, but Cynthia could not know the whole of it. . . . Peter Groom . . . and the man who had sat in judgment on her, the magistrate, James Riddle. How different on the Bench and in her arms: cold-eyed and stern, then smiling rarely, murmuring that she was adorable. . . . She could never resist. Ah, she was weak, weak, when desire importuned her! There was no resistance in her. Her will went out of her and her reluctant flesh responded with flutes and viols. . . .

CHAPTER FOUR

I

THE iron grille which guarded the portals of the Treasury Building was drawn-to and locked, and the deputation of unemployed herded against it like baffled animals, some of them shaking the metal laths of the grille and cursing in their rage. Behind them a crowd spread across the street, blocking all traffic.

The crowd talked together in little groups, most of them in low, indifferent voices, but some with fury and gesticulation. The faces of most of them were drawn with under-nourishment and lax with apathy, but some were angry and threatening.

To and fro between the groups moved police in uniform, with batons swinging idly in their hands. The police were discreet and courteous. Even the troopers on their gentle, magnificently trained horses, who edged into the large and angry groups, gently breaking them up, preventing anything in the way of concerted action, were equable and courteous. They ignored the occasional insults hurled at them. They were waiting for reinforcements.

Swelled by curious newcomers, the crowd seethed like a slow whirlpool in the stream of the city's traffic. The occasional shouts of the unemployed and the low murmur of their talk mingled with the clamour of scores of impatient motor-horns.

The deputation was trying to see the Premier, but neither in the hearts or minds of the twelve men who composed it, nor in the thousands they represented,

was real hope or real purpose. The deputation was a gesture of rebellion against the Juggernaut which crushed them, against the system which lay dying, choked by its own plenty. The people starved while the wealth of the land rotted in the glutted warehouses. Of the workers who lived beneath the Southern Cross, more than one in three were unemployed. There were over four hundred thousand unemployed, and the number increased daily. They lived on the meagre unemployment dole, or on the charity of their relatives and friends. And in the warehouses of the land the wealth these four hundred thousand had created by their past labours lay rotting. . . .

An official from the Premier's Department appeared on the other side of the grille with a message from his chief. The Premier, he said, would see the deputation provided that certain of its members were excluded. He read three names from a slip of paper. The Premier, he said curtly, had every sympathy with the unemployed, and was prepared to do everything in his power to assist them, but he would have no dealings with Communists.

The deputation held a low-voiced consultation.

"Tell the Premier the unemployed appointed this deputation," said the leader at last. "Tell him he can see the lot of us or none of us. And tell him we'll bloody well camp on his door-step until he does!"

The official returned to the Premier with the answer of the deputation. The Premier, Alexander Campbell, the head of a Labour Government, and an ex-trades-union secretary, set down his empty teacup on his vast, polished desk, and shrugged his heavy shoulders.

"Get in touch with the police, then," he said abruptly.

If he had been the leader of a Nationalist government, he reflected, he could have seen them; but the Press pretended to believe that the Labour party had radical sympathies, and he couldn't afford to provide his political opponents with ammunition by seeing a deputation which included known Communists. . . .

On the edges of the crowd the traffic grew impatient. A pretty girl in a smart two-seater began to edge her car into the slowly-seething crowd, sounding her horn almost continuously. The crowd would not make way. A slatternly woman against whose knees the bumper-bar of the car pressed uncomfortably, spat and swore at her for a pampered doll. A voice in the crowd began to sing the "International", and presently a hundred voices took it up. The girl in the car frowned with impatient rage and said sharply to her male companion:

"All these lazy, unemployable brutes! Where are the police?"

"No good getting impatient," her companion returned, but she continued to sound her horn.

The crowd grew steadily larger.

At last came the clatter of iron-shod horses' hoofs, and the tramp of marching feet. The police reinforcements ran in amongst the crowd, their batons whirling above their heads. The "International" chorus ceased suddenly. Little eddies of panic ran through the mass of humanity wedged in the street. The edges of it began to disintegrate. Thud, thud, thud went the batons. Men went down. The troopers rode over them. The air was filled with the sound of blows, and cries of fear and pain and rage.

In front of the girl in the car a trooper struck a man in the face with his baton. The man's mouth disappeared in a bloody pulp through which the jagged

edges of broken teeth gleamed whitely. The girl blanched and covered her face with her hands.

There was no resistance in this half-starved mob of unemployed. In five minutes the crowd was dispersed. The great black police van arrived, and the heavily breathing police hustled in half a dozen captives, and lifted in two more who were too hurt to climb the steps. A moment later the street was clear. The interrupted traffic flowed on, erasing the blood from the black, tyre-polished pavement.

2

In the morning six of the arrested men were brought before the magistrate, James Riddle, in the Police Court, charged with creating a disturbance, with hindering the police in the execution of their duty, with resisting arrest. The other two were in hospital.

Their comrades had come to court to see how they fared, and were packed in the public enclosure at the back of the court as tightly as sheep in a shearing-pen. They talked together in barely audible whispers, which echoed throughout the court-room till it seemed filled with a caged wind. A sour, dank smell arose from them and spread through the court—a smell of unwashed bodies, of carious teeth, of filthy, sweat-soaked clothing.

The nostrils of the magistrate twitched, and his thin lips curled back in a fixed expression of disgust. He surveyed the packed enclosure with distaste. Intent, sullen faces looked back at him, in which the eyes gleamed dully with misery or despair, or sparkled brightly with hate. The whispering went on: eddies of sibilant sound swirled about among the recesses of the ceiling.

"Silence!" exclaimed Riddle coldly.

The court usher repeated the order and the whispering ceased.

There was a slight movement in the enclosure as a late-comer thrust his way forward. Then the front rank parted and Riddle beheld his friend John Graham. He stared for a moment, then shrugged. The chemist would be there to go bond for the men in case the cases were adjourned. That seemed to be his official position with the Communist party: bail bondsman.

Riddle read the charges.

"Well, how do you plead?" he said to the men in the dock.

"Not guilty."

That meant, confound it, that the court wouldn't rise before half-past twelve!

One after another policemen took the witness stand. Riddle took down their evidence resentfully. One of them had a black eye. He had lost his feet in the crowd, he said, and had been trampled under. As he struggled to regain his feet the man Steven Riley, one of the accused, had kicked him in the eye. Riley was the ring-leader of the trouble-makers. All the way back to the police station he had abused the police obscenely. From his note-book the constable extracted a grubby scrap of paper. A sample of the abuse was written on it, he said.

Riddle glanced at the slip indifferently and passed it on to the man Riley.

"Did you use this language to the witness?"

"I used worse than that," said the accused man harshly.

The court usher made a threatening movement towards the dock. The lips of the man Riley curled back in a snarl. He muttered something beneath his breath.

The case dragged on.

At last the police evidence was finished.

"Do you want to give evidence on oath?" Riddle asked the men in the dock.

Riley spoke for them: "Yes!"

He was a wiry man in his early thirties, with a strong, sharp face, and thick, blond hair. His clothes were ill-fitting but fairly new. In his gait, as he crossed the court from the dock to the witness stand, was a springy, feline grace. A man who might be dangerous, the magistrate thought. He addressed him:

"Hold up your hand and repeat after me: 'I swear by almighty God . . .'"

The other answered with a snarl: "I've no use for almighty God! I affirm that I will speak the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth!"

"All right," said Riddle impatiently. "If you're an atheist, that will do. Now, what have you got to say?"

His voice harsh with anger, the man gave his evidence, flatly contradicting everything the police had said, accusing them of wanton and unnecessary brutality.

The prosecuting sergeant began to cross-examine him.

"You're a Communist, aren't you?"

"What does it matter whether he's a Communist or not, sergeant?" Riddle said irritably. "He's not charged with being a Communist."

The sergeant replied patiently: "I want to show the character this man bears, your worship."

"The court can see what character he bears. Confine yourself to his evidence."

Swallowing his anger the sergeant asked a few questions and sat down. Riddle arranged his notes, thinking quickly.

"There is only one aspect of this case which appears to me to call for comment," he said at last. "In times like the present, the police, the appointed custodians of law and order, are faced with a more than ordinarily difficult task. It is not remarkable that under the stress of provocation they are sometimes a little rough in the discharge of their duty. If I believed the evidence of the accused in this case, however, I should be forced to the conclusion that the constables and troopers who affected these arrests were not fit to be in the force. Such a conclusion would be palpably absurd. I cannot therefore place any credence in the statements of the accused. I find the charges proved. Have these men any records?"

A low, threatening murmur rose from the back of the court.

"Silence!"

"There's a record in Riley's case, your worship."

The prosecuting sergeant passed up a card.

Riddle named five of the men in the dock. "On the charge of creating a disturbance, you will each of you be fined in the sum of one pound, with sixpence costs, in default or distress three days' imprisonment. On the charge of hindering the police in the execution of their duty you will be fined in the sum of two pounds, with sixpence costs, in default or distress six days' imprisonment. On the charge of resisting arrest you will be fined in the sum of two pounds, with sixpence costs, in default or distress six days' imprisonment. Steven Riley, you have a record. You have two previous convictions for similar offences. You will be sentenced to six weeks' imprisonment with hard labour!"

"That," said Riley in a hard, jeering voice, "is what is called 'justice', comrades!"

"Take them away," said Riddle to the usher.

"As for you!" Riley snarled, shaking his fist at the magistrate, "as for you, Mr. Lord of the bloody Urinal, the day'll come when we judge you! Then one of us'll have the pleasure of ramming a plug of gelignite up your arse and blowing you to hell! You and others like you!"

In the court-room for a moment there was a silence broken only by the frenzied scratching of the reporters' pens. Then a gasp escaped from the packed enclosure, and someone raised a feeble cheer.

"Silence!"

"Would you like six *months'* imprisonment instead of six weeks?" Riddle inquired coldly of Riley.

"Twelve if you like, damn you!" the Communist retorted through his clenched teeth.

"Yes," said Riddle, "I suppose you would. But I've no intention of making a martyr of you." He motioned to the usher: "Take 'em away."

Then he rose. The day's court was over.

3

In the street outside the court were gathered the hundreds who had been unable to find room in the public enclosure. Now those who had been inside streamed out to join the crowd in the street. Questions were shouted at them. In an alley-way between the court-house and the lock-up a cordon of mounted troopers was drawn up, and foot police moved through the crowd. From the shoulders of one of his fellows a man attempted to make a speech.

"There are thousands of us," he shouted, "and there are only five hundred police in the whole State. Let's rescue our comrades! We can if we will!"

Two policemen pulled him down and hustled him into the station.

There was some angry shouting, but the crowd was unorganized and leaderless. Two more men were arrested.

"Move on! Move on!" the police kept urging, shouldering men along the footpaths.

Once a movement was started the crowd streamed away through the city to the open reserve on the bank of the river—the Esplanade—where it was permissible to congregate. The cruel sun beat down upon the reserve, withering the grass, but they crowded in one corner under the shade of giant Moreton Bay fig trees. Lacking a stump, their orators spoke from the great, spreading branches, making angry, futile speeches.

The crowd, which had seemed large in the street, seemed small in the great reserve which would have held all the people in Perth. Slowly the immensity of the reserve insinuated itself into their consciousness, reducing them to insignificance.

On three sides the Moreton Bays spread their shade. Their bark was the colour and texture of elephant's skin, and in the forks of the branches were folds of grey bark, like folds of skin. On the fourth side the estuary shone through the cotton palms which raised their tall fronds in front of the wooden premises of the yacht clubs, with their slips for launches and yachts and dinghies. For a hundred yards from the shore the blue waters were dotted with small white pleasure craft at anchor. Beyond lay South Perth, its banks of lawn and trees and its red-tiled roofs rising from the further bank of the estuary. Land and water drowsed in the hot sun . . .

Touched by the sun or perhaps maddened by despair, a man broke from the crowd of unemployed and reeled

away, pressing his clenched fists to his temples and crying:

"Futile! Futile! Oh, God! Oh, God!"

A sudden light breeze from the north bore the roar of the city's traffic to the ears of the unemployed. Through the roar the voices of their orators sounded as thin cries. . . .

4

In Riddle's chambers the chemist, John Graham, was seated comfortably before the magistrate's desk. He was saying:

"Your judgment, James, was one of the finest pieces of sophistry I've ever listened to. I congratulate you. Not only the evidence those poor devils gave, but the admissions of the police themselves, went to show that your forces of law and order behaved themselves like wild beasts. The evidence against the police was so strong that a Supreme Court judge would have been hard put to it to explain it away, yet you managed it in a few words. As you know, I distrust emotion, but when I heard you give judgment, James, I almost gave way to it. For a moment, in fact, I did. For a moment I wished you the fate Riley proposed for you; I could have taken pleasure in shoving a stick of dynamite up your arse myself. . . ."

Riddle glared impatiently: it was twenty minutes past noon; at one he was to meet Theodora. When the chemist fell silent he said:

"Are you sure that's all you've got to say?"

"That's all," said Graham.

"Well, I've got little time to spare, so I'll say all *I've* got to say, and I'll say it quickly. The windows of my court-room are plain, but some of those in the supreme

court are of stained glass and depict Justice with her eyes bandaged, with a sword in one hand and scales in the other. And above the altars of some of our churches Christ hangs on a cross. If the church taught and practised the precepts of Christ, my friend, it would not be long before it ceased to exist in any form recognizable as a church. And if magistrates and judges dispensed justice as you and a few other dreamers understand it, our civilization would topple about our ears like a house of cards. Both religion and justice must be subservient to the ends of civilization and the well-being of the state."

"Well," retorted the chemist, rising, "it's some consolation to know that you don't deceive yourself. That's the first time I've heard you logically define your position."

CHAPTER FIVE

I

SWINGING his stick the magistrate James Riddle walked leisurely into the city. There was yet some time to kill before he called for Theodora. None of the Perth shops closed before one o'clock on Saturdays, and it would take her ten minutes or so to reach her room from Kronen's Limited. If he went there before she arrived he would have to hang about on the pavement, and that would look bad. He needed some ties and socks. He might call in at his mercer's shop and get them now as well as later, he reflected.

He was halted for a moment at an intersection while vehicular traffic passed, and noticed that the constable on point duty was one of those who had given evidence in the unemployed cases.

A living bomb! . . . As he continued on his way he reflected idly on the tirade of the man Riley. Dangerous! Yes, any man whose lust for revenge on society expressed itself in visions of such appalling ferocity as that was dangerous! . . . But was he? It was curious that the idea of simple violence should sometimes seem more shocking than the idea of torture. It wouldn't stand examination. Swift, annihilating violence. Instantaneous oblivion. Nothing very shocking about that when one thought about it, yet . . . Riddle remembered the queer chill that had passed through him. Was a notion that arose from feeling the less valid because reason seemed to contradict it? John Graham would say: "Yes". He,

Riddle, was dubious. One reasoned about it and reduced the notion to absurdity, yet failed to dissipate the uneasy feeling it induced. The mentality that could accept the idea of violence without uneasiness was not the ordinary mentality. A new ideology was required, a new consciousness almost. . . . Was that what these Marxists were breeding?—actually a new consciousness? It occurred to the magistrate suddenly that Marxism induced the same feeling of uneasiness as the idea of instantaneously annihilating violence. But that, he reflected, was probably the result of a simple association of ideas, revolutionaries and bombs, and lacked objective significance. Well, it was of no importance.

His attention was attracted to a jeweller's window in which was a display of seed pearl necklets, white and softly luminous against their background of black velvet. He stopped and looked at them. The jeweller was having a "sale". The necklets were marked with tiny tickets, fifteen, twenty, thirty pounds. Pretty, silly, expensive baubles, yet capable, incredibly, of giving pleasure commensurate with their cost, or none would ever buy them. What was the value of pleasure? If the pleasure those necklets would give was worth fifteen, twenty, thirty pounds, what was the value, for instance, of the pleasure Theodora gave to him? Impulsively he entered the shop. Theodora should have a string of pearls, not in payment for the pleasure she gave him, but in recognition of it.

There seemed little difference between the strings apart from their price, but he lingered over his choice, chatting with the obsequious shopman. It was as pleasant to kill time in the selection of pearls as in strolling through the streets. He made a choice at last, and wrote a cheque in payment with the thought that

it was fortunate he did not depend wholly on his salary for the gratification of his impulses. Then it was time to call for Theodora. With the pearls in a black-velvet-lined case in his pocket, he set out for her room, leisurely swinging his stick, and humming, beneath his breath, a tune.

He knocked on her door and she bade him enter. She was clad in a kimono and was standing in front of her dressing-table with a powder puff in her hand. She smiled slowly in greeting, then turned back to the mirror, resuming her toilet.

Laying down his hat and stick, Riddle went and stood beside her.

The mirror threw back its reflection of her golden-brown face, without wrinkle, without blemish. She did not need powder. He took the pearls from his pocket and laid them on the dressing-table beside her.

"I've brought you a present."

Theodora gave him a swift glance of surprise.

"Oh, you shouldn't have!" she exclaimed.

"Open it," he suggested.

She stripped off the wrapping and opened the case, then exclaimed again—and, to Riddle's astonishment, in tones of dismay:

"Oh, you shouldn't have bought them! Oh, they're lovely, but they must have cost . . ."—she broke off.

"Don't you like them?" he asked gently.

"They're lovely, but . . ."

"Take them, my dear," Riddle said more gently still. "I shouldn't have bought them if I hadn't been able to afford it. And if they'd cost ten times what they did I should still be as far from discharging the debt I owe to your unspoiled youth and beauty as I am now."

"But that's foolish," Theodora protested. "How can you owe me anything?"

"Every man with whom you've ever come in contact owes you a debt of gratitude for simply existing," said Riddle, and felt that he was speaking the literal truth. "And I have been privileged to *know* you."

She laughed. "That's nice, but it's foolish, too. . . ."

"Wear them," he pleaded.

He took the pearls from her fingers and clasped them round her neck.

She pulled down his head and kissed him.

"All right. Though you shouldn't have bought them. *How* can I thank you?"

"By hurrying up with your unnecessary powdering so that we shan't miss the bus," he retorted gaily. "Have you packed your case?"

She nodded. "I packed it this morning before I went to the shop. I only have to put on a frock."

She slipped off her kimono and folded it and stuffed it into her case. Riddle sighed as he watched her moving about in her brief under-garments. She moved as though she were unconscious of an audience. That, he thought, was the half of her beauty—her utter unself-consciousness. She put on a linen frock, pulled on a hat, and was ready.

2

The bus bore them away from the city, jolting them up and down in their seats. Used to his companion's easy silences now, the magistrate did not struggle to make conversation.

As they reached the hills the heat increased. Untempered by the thinner air, the sun's rays poured down upon parched fields and sweating forest. The

bus groaned on in a lower gear. Sweat broke from the faces of the passengers.

After the oven-like heat of the bus the inferno of sunshine into which Riddle and Theodora descended was cool and sweet. The air was laden with the odours of the bush. The path which led from the road to the magistrate's villa wandered down a hillside which commanded a view of the coastal plain, stretching away from the vine-clad foothills to the sea. The city and its environs, smudged by a thin pall of smoke, was merged in the level immensity. The magistrate's villa was built on the hillside, surrounded by an acre of original bush-land, patches of which, here and there, were cleared to make room for lawns and flower-beds. A wide veranda ran round the villa.

"From here, on a clear day," said Riddle, "you can see the sea, and Garden Island, and Rottnest. To-day the heat-haze conceals everything."

He put his arm round her shoulders, and for a moment they stood gazing out over the plain.

"How level it looks," said Theodora.

He laughed. "We are nearly a thousand feet above it. From a 'plane a couple of thousand feet higher even these hills would look level."

An old man, dressed in a khaki shirt and trousers, came out on to the veranda and said:

"Your lunch is ready, Mr. Riddle, in the library."

"All right, Mont. This is Miss Luddon."

The old man inclined his head without speaking, and, taking Theodora's case, went inside with it.

"Mont's my servant," Riddle explained. "His real name is Thomas Edward Charles Montmorency, and he is, I understand, a member of one of the oldest feudal families in England. I dare say my forbears

waited on his. But he waits on me none the worse for that."

Taking her arm, he conducted her into his library. The spacious, low-ceilinged room gave her pleasure. Save where they were pierced by rows of casement windows, the walls, for six feet from the floor, were concealed by shelves laden with books. Jarrah pedestals upheld small statues of marble or bronze. A glass cabinet contained rolls of parchment, and miniatures painted on ivory. There were Persian rugs, and deep leather chairs, and in a corner which was itself a casement, a small table was spread with white damask, and laid with silver and glass.

The old servant waited on them unobtrusively, bringing them food cooled on ice brought from the city by the bus. Riddle began to talk of his books, naming his favourites amongst philosophers and poets, and singing their praises. To Theodora they were as remote as myths.

"Don't you read at all?" he asked her, puzzled.

"Not your sort of books."

"What sort of books *do* you read?"

"Books that . . . give information . . . when I read at all."

"Don't you read fiction?"

"I have, but . . . all the stories I've read seem unreal, somehow. I don't know how to explain. The people in books never . . . seem to be real . . . as though they never had anything to concern themselves with but the things they think and feel."

"But people *do* think and feel, you know," said Riddle.

"Yes, I know. But not all the time. Most of the time they're earning their livings."

"H'm," he said, interested. "It's true that not many

writers have found inspiration in work. There's a reason, I suppose. A book that dealt as largely with the business of earning a living as life does would be no more interesting than life itself, and there would be no incentive to anyone to read it."

"But life's not always uninteresting," Theodora protested.

"Of course not! But the pleasant moments in life are transient, while in literature they are captured, as it were, and fixed, so that they can be enjoyed vicariously."

She laughed, perplexed.

"I can't argue with you."

"It wasn't fair of me, a jurist, to make you," Riddle said, smiling. "But if you don't care for fiction you might like poetry—the imagery, the rhythm of it, and the rhyme."

Theodora shook her head.

"Or essays—ideas?"

"No, not those either. Somehow they always seem either obvious or silly. It doesn't give me any pleasure to read them."

"Amazing!" exclaimed the magistrate. "What *does* give you pleasure?"

"Facts," Theodora answered, "and . . . oh! . . . *real* things. All sorts of things: bathing, lying in the sun, eating, sleeping—or falling to sleep, rather."

In a word, thought the magistrate, an animal! For all her beauty, for all her charm, just an animal! But with the natural, unaffected manners of an animal, carnal and unspoiled.

The long, hot afternoon passed more quickly than he could have wished. In the cooling twilight they dined on the veranda which overlooked the panorama of city and plain, stretched beneath the paling yellow

canopy of the afterglow. The short twilight dissolved. The stars appeared, and on the plain below appeared points of light as the electric switches were turned. As the last effulgence faded the plain shone back at the sky like a vast mirror, reflecting muddily the remote stars.

They sat smoking, Theodora a cigarette and the magistrate a cigar, on the darkening veranda. The old servant came out and switched on the lights. He carried a tray.

He said: "Is there anything more you want, Mr. Riddle?"

"No, Mont."

The scattered dishes were gathered on to the tray and the servant departed. For a while they heard him moving about inside, then, save for the faint droning of insects, there was silence.

At last, as though animated by a mutual impulse, a consciousness of appetites yet unappeased, they rose and went indoors.

Riddle was not old, but this girl renewed the ardours of an earlier youth. An animal, he thought; an unaffected animal. . . .

3

In the morning they rose early, and while the air was yet cool, set out, on Riddle's suggestion, on a ramble through the hills to the river, two miles away. The way was rough and devious, and when they reached their destination the sun was half-way up the sky, bathing the hills with heat. They were hot and tired. The river was a series of pools in the rocks, shaded by trees. They sat for a while in the shade by a pool, then Riddle suggested that they bathe.

Theodora protested that they had no bathing costumes.

"Does it matter?" he inquired.

She gazed at him curiously for a moment, then said thoughtfully: "No, it doesn't matter"—and proceeded to take off her clothes.

A little later, as she stood in the pool like a naiad, with the water laving her young breasts and dripping from her face and hair, she began suddenly to laugh.

"What are you laughing at?"

She continued to laugh for a while without replying, then answered:

"Less than a month ago you fined me two pounds and made me lose my job for slipping off the shoulder-straps of my bathers. Now! . . ."

The magistrate was embarrassed.

"I had hoped," he said, "that you'd forgotten that."

"How could I forget?"

"I hoped at least that you'd forgiven me."

"Oh, I've forgiven you. I suppose you couldn't do anything else."

He came to her over the slippery rocks of the river bed.

"Really, Theodora?"

"Yes."

She laughed, and putting her hands on his shoulders, leaned forward and kissed him.

"I didn't mean to rub it in," she said.

He was touched, and for the first time genuinely remorseful for the part his magisterial duty had compelled him to play.

And the cool contact with her naked body thrilled him. Despite the exhausting ardours of the previous night, desire welled up in him again. The girl became aware of the emotion he was unable to conceal, and

smiling a little, yielded herself to his arms and kissed him. Her own flesh responded. They climbed out of the pool and took their pleasure on the carpet of dead leaves and grass at its bank, while flies and ants crawled over them unnoticed.

When the short tumult of their passion was over, they continued to lie for a little. But a growing sense of discomfort pierced the pleasant lethargy, and presently they scrambled to their feet, scratching at the insect bites and laughing ruefully. They plunged again into the pool, and when, for the second time the cool water had assuaged their discomfort, donned their clothes and returned slowly to the villa.

They lunched again in the casement corner of the library, drinking iced beer with their food. The magistrate smiled at the girl's good appetite.

"You said it was one of your pleasures—eating—didn't you?"

The telephone bell rang in the hall. It was answered by the old servant, who presently came and whispered in his master's ear.

Riddle shot an embarrassed glance at his companion.

"If you will excuse me? . . ."

She heard him speaking in the hall: "Ah, yes? . . . Yes? . . . What? No, no! My dear lady, no! You mustn't. I have people here. . . . Yes, people who know your husband. It's quite impossible! . . . Yes . . . Of course! . . . How can you doubt it? . . . Yes . . . Good-bye!"

She smiled at him quizzically as he returned.

"I suppose I'm the people?"

"Yes. I told a lie in the interests of peace," he assured her. "What the consequences would have been had I confessed to entertaining a charming young woman I hate to think!"

"Oh!"

"She also is a charming woman," he explained, "but her charm's tempered by a disposition to jealousy."

Theodora said hesitantly: "That . . . sounds like a warning. You needn't worry. I'm not . . . jealous."

Riddle regarded her thoughtfully.

"Aren't you? Are you sure?"

"I'm not . . . jealous," she said again.

"It distresses me," he informed her. "Yet . . . somehow, my dear, I don't know that I should find it very distressing in you."

The girl was silent, and he went on: "I'm no saint, my dear. I never have been a saint. A life of austerity doesn't suit me. I've loved many women in the past, but will you believe me if I tell you that since I've known you I've had no inclination towards any other woman?"

"No," she retorted smiling, "I won't."

"Nevertheless, it's true."

She looked at him curiously, and the smile faded from her face.

"You say that because you think it will please me," she said at last, seriously. "Even if it's true . . . you say it for that reason. It . . . it doesn't please me, really. If it's true it's . . . silly. I think I must be different from other girls. When I'm with you I . . . love you. You're a dear! . . . But not when I'm not with you. And I'd rather you . . . didn't feel any differently about me."

"Is that true?" asked the magistrate wonderingly.

She said: "Yes"—nodding gravely.

Riddle laughed.

"Very well! You can trust me not to fall in love with you!"

But he was conscious of a vague, emotional dissatisfaction in himself. He attributed it to his inability to understand this girl; the more he knew of her the less he seemed to understand. She seemed to retreat within herself as he approached. Her personality eluded him. Only her sensuality seemed real. With a sigh and a smile he shook his head.

"Well," he said, "at least we understand each other."

So the week-end passed.

Early on Monday morning the old servant brought them tea and thin bread-and-butter and fruit to eat as they still lay in bed, for Theodora had to be at work by nine. With their breakfast Mont also brought the morning paper.

Finishing his tea quickly, Riddle swung himself out of bed and went to the bathroom to shave, leaving Theodora the paper to read as she still sipped at her tea and bit into her fruit.

When he returned she gazed at him in a queer way, and he noticed tears in her eyes and the marks of them down her cheeks.

"You're crying!" he exclaimed. "What's the matter?"

For answer she extended the paper to him, indicating an item. He took it and read:

UNEMPLOYED DEMONSTRATORS
SCENE IN COURT
MAGISTRATE'S FORBEARANCE

In the letter-press below was an account of the wild outburst of the man Riley, set forth briefly; then Riddle's own remarks and the sentences imposed. It was a Conservative report, such as was to be expected in the Conservative paper in which it appeared.

Puzzled, Riddle looked from the paper to Theodora. She had dried her tears with a handkerchief which she still held in her hand, and her grey eyes looked hard.

"That man you sent to gaol was my friend," she said.

"Riley !" he exclaimed, remembering suddenly the books on the mantel in her room.

She nodded.

"But, my dear girl . . ."

She interrupted him : "I know what you're going to say—that you only did what you had to do, that Steve had broken the law and had to be punished. I know. But it seemed strange that I . . . when I'm his friend . . . that I should be friendly with you . . . who sent him to gaol."

"Does that mean," he asked quietly, "that we can't be friends any longer ?"

"No, I don't mean that," she answered in a low voice. "But . . . perhaps I'm being silly, but it seems so unjust . . . that you should send him to gaol and I should be your friend when . . ."

Riddle was thinking : this man Riley is her friend ; is he also her lover ? And the magistrate James Riddle, whom jealousy distressed, was too afraid of what the answer might be to ask !

CHAPTER SIX

ON the beach a few miles from the watering-place of Rockingham lay the wreck of the *Kwinana*. The rusty iron shell served as a landmark for motorists passing to and fro along the road to the watering-place, and as a playground for holiday-makers who, in summer time, came to camp on the nearby reserve.

An iron ship of about six thousand tons, the *Kwinana* had been a prize of war. She was captured from the enemy during the Imperialist war of 1914-1919, and under her new articles, plied for a time between Fremantle and the north-west ports and Batavia and Singapore, carrying passengers and freight. Then a violent storm piled her up on a sandbank in the narrows between Garden Island and the mainland, and she was sold for a song to a firm of scrap-iron merchants who disposed of the coal in her bunkers for five times the amount they had paid for her, and her brass fittings for as much more, and let her lie.

A year or so later the Commonwealth Naval Department served notice upon her owners to remove her from the passage, as she constituted a danger to passing shipping, that was to say, to the several scores of sixteen and twenty-foot yachts which sometimes beat out to the island for week-ends.

The scrap-iron merchants were in a dilemma. To have obeyed the instructions of the Naval Department would certainly have swallowed up all the profit they had made on their transaction, and would probably have involved them in a loss. But their problem was solved for them by another storm. A gale from the

north-west lifted the wreck from the sand-bar and deposited it in shallow water against the mainland beach.

Against the beach she lay for half a dozen years, her tall masts, which the storms had failed to unship, pointing forlornly to the sky. The action of the tides formed a spit of sand between her iron side and the beach. Campers from the nearby reserve cut into her woodwork with axes to obtain firewood. Vandals lit a fire in her innards and gutted her. Gulls and shags covered her with their droppings, and rust ate into her plates.

The young idler Peter Groom had motored past the *Kwinana* a dozen times, and had bathed as often in the calm, clear sea which lapped at her iron sides before it occurred to him that commercial possibilities lay, with the soilure of shags and gulls, and the sand, in her gaping holds.

Groom was wealthy, and he was also impulsive. At this time, too, he was fired to a spirit of commercial Napoleonism by the success of his friend Paul Kronen who, since his recent appointment to the managing-directorship of the great retail firm of Kronen's Limited had, it was said, increased the turnover by half despite the crisis, the arrival of which had more or less coincided with his appointment. Bathing in company with a number of friends beside the *Kwinana* one day, Peter Groom was seized suddenly by inspiration. At one moment his mind was filled with a mild and envious admiration for his friend Paul Kronen, and at the next with a vision of the *Kwinana* as she might be.

Torches flared at the mast-heads of the *Kwinana* and in her rigging, and the whole vessel was ruddy with their dim, smoky light. Jazz music oozed out of

her into the night. High up in the sides square gun-ports were cut, and, peeping through the gun-ports, the muzzles of painted wooden replicas of seventeenth century cannon. Within her, covering her iron decking, was a floor of polished wood with stains upon it as though it had known mutinies and battle, and had drunken human blood. Around the floor were low tables and green wicker chairs, piled with gay cushions, set here and there between huge rum-casks and the painted wooden cannon. Stag-horn ferns grew upon the rum-casks. A gay crowd sat at the tables, waited upon expertly by attendants clad in ragged shirts and breeches, with bright kerchiefs tied round their heads and pistols and cutlasses stuck in their waist-bands. The Captain Kidd Cabaret!

Outside on the calm surface of the ocean, Groom saw torch-lit gondolas rocking gently at anchor. The torches burned smokily, splashes of flame in the darkness. In the gondolas amorous couples were making love. . . .

He saw the successful opening night of the Captain Kidd Cabaret. . . . The music grew wilder and wilder, louder and louder . . . then the clock struck midnight! On the instant a volley of pistol shots rang out, and a band of shouting pirates, with flashing knives and whirling cutlasses, charged in upon the dancers. The dancers screamed and cowered back. A few looked indignant and angry, but they were taken captive and hurried below, where their relieved and delighted eyes beheld a magnificent supper spread before them. . . .

That was the inspiration of the young idler Peter Groom, and he did not allow the grass to grow under his feet. It was the second year of the crisis. Wages were being forced down and unemployment was

increasing. Thousands were already out of work, and each day added hundreds to their number. The national income had already fallen by a quarter, from 600 to 450 millions, and was still falling. Even the intimates of Peter Groom were affected. Some of them had had their incomes halved, and the young idler himself drew less from his stocks than had been his wont. So pleasing and vivid was his vision of the Captain Kidd Cabaret, however, that he could not believe that the crisis would affect its success, and, approaching the owners, he took an option of purchase over the wreck.

He never exercised the option. He set a score of men at work cleaning out the hulk. He ordered a hundred torches from a firm of indent agents. He allowed his friend Paul Kronen to sell him two hundred yards of black velvet with which to make cushions for the gondolas. It was not until he had spent, or had committed himself to spend, over a thousand pounds that the scepticism of his friends made any impression upon him. Once the seeds of doubt were planted in his mind, however, he became frightened and immediately abandoned the whole project. Doubt took possession of his mind as absolutely as had the inspiration. It became a doubt of himself; then a panic distrust of himself. He had lost a thousand pounds: how much might he not lose if another such inspiration seized him, another such Napoleonic impulse? Bankruptcy loomed before him as a serious and likely contingency, and while the mood of panic was still upon him he executed a deed of gift of all he possessed to his wife Cynthia. Only when he had done that did his old, irresponsible gaiety of soul return to him.

CHAPTER SEVEN

I

ALMOST every Sunday throughout the summer young Groom and Cynthia, Joyce Mealing, Fanchon Follower, Noel Manning, Paul Kronen, John Graham and Gerda found themselves together on one of the beaches. When they arrived, singly or together, they found a hundred friends to whom to cry greetings, a score of other groups to which they might attach themselves for a little while; but sooner or later they drifted together as in obedience to a habit, like the other groups within the same class.

Only one of them was not a member of that class: the chemist John Graham. He put himself outside it by his associations and by his beliefs. But they accepted him on account of his wife, and treated him with reluctant respect.

Fanchon was not amongst them on this day. Fanchon had her "pains"; it made her feel ill to bathe in that condition, and she could not lie in the sun and enjoy it unless she could also bathe.

In Fanchon's absence Paul Kronen was prey to a vague discontent. He had no deep regard for her, but the plain admiration with which she regarded him nourished his colossal vanity. There were other women who admired him, and he scrutinized group after group on the sands in hope of discovering one of them. Every attractive girl he knew seemed to have a man with her. His gaze returned morosely to his own companions.

Groom and Gerda Graham lay on their bellies on the sand, with their heads together, whispering. Graham had surrendered himself to the benison of the sun. Joyce Mealing nursed Noel Manning's head on her lap while she chatted with Cynthia.

It had occurred to Kronen before that Cynthia Groom was a very attractive woman. Now his gaze wandered from her warm, animated face to her young husband, who still whispered in Gerda's ear, and back again. He found a small shell and threw it at her to attract her attention to himself. She smiled at him. He raised his eyebrows significantly, glancing again at her husband. She followed the direction of his glance, and understood. He was asking her to take cognizance of her husband's preoccupation with another woman. The smile on her face wavered, but did not disappear. She would not give Paul Kronen that satisfaction! For his benefit she shrugged her shoulders.

Kronen beckoned to her and called: "Come over here!"

"What for?" she asked.

"I've got something to tell you."

She crawled over the intervening six or seven feet of sand, and said:

"What have you got to tell me?"

"Do you stand for that, Cynthia?" he inquired in a low, surprised tone, indicating her husband and Gerda Graham.

"He can't help it," she retorted. "Anyway, I can trust Gerda."

Kronen made a noncommittal sound.

"You know, I just can't imagine why any man should want to play round with anyone else when he's got a nice wife like you, Cynthia."

"Well, he does," said Cynthia.

"Listen, why shouldn't you and I get together, Cynthia?"

Cynthia laughed. "What about Fanchon?"

"You know Fanchon doesn't really cut any ice with me, Cynthia. But you're lovely. You know that, don't you?"

She cried, laughing, but flattered and pleased nevertheless: "You fool, Paul!"

"No, seriously, Cynthia."

"Don't be silly."

"Cynthia," he persisted, "let's go out and play one night. We'll drive out somewhere and have a good time. Maybe Peter would appreciate you a bit better if you did. Try his own medicine on him."

"You're only fooling," she said.

"I'm not. I'm dead serious, Cynthia. Will you?"

"No."

"Oh, come on!"

"No. I know you, Paul. You're like Peter."

He took her hand, but she disengaged it, saying:

"It's no good talking, Paul. I won't go. It wouldn't make Peter jealous. He isn't jealous."

"He says he isn't. But wouldn't you like to come *yourself*, Cynthia?"

"No, I wouldn't."

"All right!" He grimaced with simulated resignation. "Anyway, stay and talk to me."

He took her hand again and she did not withdraw it, as it did not now seem to commit her to anything.

Caressing her hand, the conviction of her charm grew upon Kronen. Again he glanced at her husband and Gerda Graham, and back to Cynthia. No woman had ever resisted Paul Kronen for long. He could

have Cynthia like the others if he went after her, he thought. Caressing her hand, he allowed his admiration for her to show plainly in his eyes.

2

Cynthia Groom's love for her husband was fierce and passionate and possessive. His gay irresponsibility humiliated and maddened her. She guessed that he was unfaithful to her, but if she taxed him with it his blithe cajolery always broke her certainty, always weakened her till she found herself in tears and in his arms. Several times she had left him, but she could only stay away as long as she was upheld by anger. When her anger left her, her will to stay away from him left her. She had to return. She was his slave, so completely did he dominate her heart.

"Some day," she told him, "I won't come back!"

Groom played the gallant as naturally as a moth flies to the light. He made love to one woman as readily as to the next. He made love to his wife's friends if they would let him, and most of them did, for few women were proof against his charm.

His wife's jealousy irked him, made him stubborn. He chafed against the barbaric possessiveness of Cynthia's love, feeling that he could yield to it only at the cost of some essential part of his own ego, and as her jealousy became more insistent, his philanderings became less inconsequential and more deliberate. Cynthia's life became an alternation of fierce delight, misery and despair. Nor with all his philanderings was Groom happy, for loving his wife unbeknown to himself, he shared her misery. He sought to reason with her.

"What harm does it do you if I play round a bit with other women?"

"You belong to me," she would retort, "not to them."

"I'm damned if I belong to you! Do you think because a damn fool with a collar turned the wrong way round muttered a few silly words over us you acquired a property right in me?"

"You promised to love me!"

"Well, I do love you."

"If you loved me," she would say, "you wouldn't *want* anyone else."

"But that's nonsense, Cynthia! I like beef better then I like mutton or pork, but if I had to live on beef alone I'd get tired of it. After a little mutton or pork I can go back to the beef liking it all the better."

"You compare me to mutton or pork! Oh!"

"No, you're the beef. Surely you see, Cynthia? The fact that I like to play round a bit doesn't mean that I don't love you. If you'd only be reasonable it'd probably make me love you more. If you only knew it, you're doing your best to kill my love for you with your silly jealousy!"

And then, as like as not, Cynthia would burst into tears, crying:

"Oh, it's not the same! It's not the same!"—and her husband would swallow his rising irritation and comfort her, telling her that she had got her idea of love and marriage out of romantic novels, that she thought of marriage as a sort of imprisonment instead of a comradeship.

"If you were living with another girl instead of with me," he argued, "you wouldn't think she was injuring you and humiliating you simply because she went out with a man now and then."

"But it's different, it's different!" Cynthia would protest, still sobbing.

"It shouldn't be, though. What difference does it make that I'm a man instead of a woman? You've been hypnotized by the romantic novels, darling. They say that if you catch a hen and draw an imaginary line from its beak to the ground and then release it, it will stay put, believing itself to be tied to the ground. That's the way you want me to be, Cinny. But, darling, I escaped being hypnotized, so I can't believe it myself."

So he would argue with her, and by and by she would dry her eyes and confess to being foolish, feeling for the moment indeed that she *was* foolish. They would exchange kisses and become reconciled. Finally she would ask him:

"Peter, *have* you ever been unfaithful to me?"

And he would reply with a laugh: "No, darling, I haven't!"

CHAPTER EIGHT

I

"SO *this* is where you are!" exclaimed Groom.

From behind the counter Theodora smiled at him in her serene way.

"This is where I am."

"Selling stockings in Kronen's!"

A woman customer approached the counter and the young idler kicked his heels while the girl attended to her. When the woman had gone he said untruthfully:

"I've been trying to find you everywhere."

"I've been here all the time," she assured him.

"Well, since I've found you at last, when are you coming out with me again?"

"Not again," she answered gravely, shaking her head.

Another customer interrupted. Excited by the memory of his first encounter with Theodora, Groom waited patiently. He did not doubt that he could persuade her if only he was not interrupted for a few minutes. But customer after customer came to the counter.

"Listen," he said to her in a moment of respite. "Where do you live?"

She smiled and shook her head. "I'm not going to tell you. I don't want to go out with you."

"But why? You didn't mind before!"

"I didn't know your wife then. It wouldn't be fair."

He was vexed.

"Oh, now, listen, Theodora! What harm would it be doing Cynthia?"

"It would hurt her."

She left him to drag down more boxes of goods from the shelves behind the counter, and spread out their contents before yet another buyer.

At his next opportunity Groom asked her again for her address, but again she refused.

"I'll find it out for myself, then."

The girl glanced round quickly to see if she could be overheard, then said:

"Oh, *why* must you be so persistent? I liked you so much before, but now . . . Don't you see that it wouldn't be fair?"

He grinned and retorted: "No, I don't. Won't you change your mind?"

"No."

"I'll find out where you live."

"If you can!"

She was thinking that she would have to get in touch with Sylvia and Gwen and ask them to withhold her address if Groom approached them. She could think of no other friends that she and Groom had in common, except perhaps James Riddle. But Groom would not ask the magistrate.

She smiled confidently.

"*Au revoir*," he said, grinning widely.

He doffed his hat and turned and walked away without a backward glance, leaving his grin impressed upon her mind like a light that still lingers after a room is plunged in darkness. His young charm was doubly evident when he grinned. It was almost in her to regret . . .

As Groom disappeared a shop-walker approached and said coldly:

"It's against the rules to talk to customers."

"I'm sorry," she answered. "But it wasn't my fault. I . . ."

"You know the rules and you know the penalty. You'll find the fine deducted from your next pay."

The shop-walker moved on. A customer rapped on the counter for attention. Theodora's wages were two pounds and sevenpence a week, and the fine was five shillings. Young Groom forgotten in the dull rage that filled her, she turned to serve the customer.

2

When she returned to her room after work that day she was puzzled to find the door ajar, though she had left it locked. She pushed it open and entered, and found Groom lying on her bed, grinning up at her gaily. She emitted an exclamation of startled dismay.

"You! How did you get here?"

"I got your address from your union secretary ten minutes after I left you," he told her coolly, "and I told your landlady that I was your brother from Collie, so she let me in."

"Oh!" she cried. "You're impossible!"

"Now you're not really annoyed," he said getting up from the bed. "Don't pretend now! Theodora . . ."

He took her shoulders and smiled into her face, and though her annoyance was genuine she was impelled to smile with him. He said:

"I know you're not. Confess now! You really wanted to see me again, didn't you?"

She answered: "No. I told you the truth. It's not fair to your wife"—but she knew as she spoke what the end would be. His smile turned her will to water.

It was always the same: she could not resist. What was the use of pretending?

"At least," he said, "you'll let me take you to dinner."

What was the use of pretending, of resisting? She wanted to go. She laughed.

"You will, Theodora?"

She nodded, saying helplessly: "It doesn't seem much use saying 'no', does it?"

"Not a bit!"

She went behind the screen in the corner to change the black frock that she wore during the working day—that Kronen's Limited required her to wear—for one of green voile.

Groom lay back on the bed. He wondered whether Cynthia would be very unpleasant as a consequence of his failure to return to dinner. Just now he was feeling too well pleased with himself to care very much. He planned the evening after their dinner: a motor run to one of the beaches, a bottle of wine in one of the sly-grog shanties, then erotics on the beach. Though summer was drawing to a close it was still warm enough to lie on the beach at night. . . .

As they sat at dinner Theodora shattered his hopes. She said:

"I forgot to tell you before; I've got to go to a meeting to-night."

She had herself forgotten until that moment.

"Oh, I say!" he protested. "You don't *have* to go, do you?"

"Yes, I do. It's a meeting of the union. There's talk of a strike."

"A strike! Good Lord, why?"

"Some of the girls say they can't live on their wages since the last cut, and there's going to be another."

"But to go on strike! With thousands out of work! I say, don't you be silly. I know Paul Kronen. If you went on strike you'd never get your jobs back again!"

"I was fined five shillings for talking to you to-day," Theodora answered irrelevantly.

"What! Five shillings just for talking to me!"—he was genuinely indignant.

"It's the rule. We're not allowed to talk to anyone except the other assistants when it's necessary, or to customers."

"Well, I say! If that's the way you're treated I don't wonder you want to go on strike!"

She did not reply.

"But, I say, if you can't come anywhere to-night, you'll come out some other night, won't you?" he asked her.

Theodora laughed. "I suppose it wouldn't be any use saying 'no'."

3

"That's the position," the secretary explained. "The proprietors haven't yet definitely decided whether there's to be another cut or not. To talk of threatening them with a strike is the height of stupidity! Thirty-five per cent of our members are already out of work. The proprietors would immediately call our bluff and fill our jobs with scabs—and you know as well as I do that most of the scabs would probably be our own unemployed members. It's no use deceiving yourselves; in times like this we can't afford to talk strikes. If there was a strike there'd be no strike pay; it'd be a case of everybody paddling their own canoe. Our strike fund has been swallowed up by current expenses since the depression began, and we haven't

been able to collect subscriptions from everybody. Still, you called this meeting, and called it for the purpose of the motion, and you've got to decide for yourselves. The motion is that the proprietors be informed that any further reduction in the wages of members of the Department Store Employees' Industrial Union of Workers will be opposed by direct action. To adopt it as a resolution is simply asking for trouble, but it's up to you!"

He sat down, mopping his face.

"Is there any more discussion?" the president of the union asked from behind the table on the platform. "If not, I'll put the motion. You all know what it is. Those in favour?"

With the memory of the fine still rankling in her mind, Theodora raised her hand. Other hands went up about her. Hands went up all over the hall. The chairman did not trouble to count them.

"Those against?"

Other hands were raised.

"I declare the motion lost," said the chairman, and added: "I think you're wise. We weren't ready for a strike which we should certainly have had on our hands . . ."

He was interrupted by a big, raw-boned girl named Olive Curnow, who worked in the haberdashery department at Kronen's Limited. In a loud, rough voice that was heard clearly all over the hall, she said:

"The vote looked too close to me to say off-hand whether the motion was lost or carried, Mr. President!"

"Count the votes!" a voice cried.

The cry was taken up at several points: "Yes, count the votes!"

"There could be no purpose in counting the votes," said the chairman.

"Defeatists!" a girl's voice screamed angrily. "That's what they are! I've told you our executive's no good! They're working hand in hand with the bosses! Take a count!"

A hundred voices cried: "We want a count!"—and the chairman gave way.

The count took a long time.

"Three hundred and twenty-six in favour, and four hundred and one against," the chairman announced at last. "As I said before, the motion is lost!"

Theodora walked home feeling queerly miserable. She was wishing she had not attended the meeting, wishing that she had gone out with young Groom.

When she got home she had a shower. She slipped a kimono over her cool flesh and lay down on her bed. A lethargy, an aftermath of resentment, settled on her. There had been many such aftermaths since she began working behind a counter at Kronen's Limited.

CHAPTER NINE

IN an intuitive way Cynthia Groom sensed that a new and stronger interest had taken possession of her husband, and a recklessness born of despair entered into her. She threatened to pay him out in his own coin, but he had laughed at her, and said:

"I wish to God you would! Then you'd find out that it doesn't matter!"

She had thought of doing so a score of times; now the thought was insistent. Paul Kronen was pestering her in an unobtrusive way, whispering to her that her husband's indifference was a pose, that put to the test he would prove as jealous as she. With a sure instinct Kronen saw that the way to Cynthia lay through her obsessing passion for her husband. In the past she had always been deterred by her own uncertainty of Groom's reaction. She would no sooner make up her mind to make the experiment than she would be stricken with a fear that he would see in it only an excuse for franker, more flagrant infidelities of his own. Now she did not care.

The party on the beach was gayer than usual. It was colder. The summer was drawing to an end; there was a stimulating chill in the wind and a milder sun shone down. Soon the season would be over for all save the few who plunged into the surf each morning, summer and winter. Coming out of the surf, Cynthia towelled herself vigorously. Kronen, wrapped in a towelling gown, lay on the sand at her feet, upraised on one elbow, smiling at her. She smiled back at him provocatively and continued so to smile

until he reached up and caught her hand and drew her down beside him.

"When are you going to come out and play, Cynthia?" he asked her.

She answered recklessly: "Any time you like. I've made up my mind."

In delight he exclaimed: "Cynthia! Do you mean it?"

"Yes. I've decided it's time Peter had a dose of his own medicine."

"You *have*! Cynthia, I never believed you'd have the sense!"

"Well, I have," said Cynthia.

He sat up and cried: "Splendid! Listen, I live with my people, but I've got a little private flat in town where we can go. What about Wednesday night? We'll have dinner in town, and then maybe go for a spin, or to a show, or anything we feel like. And we'll have supper at the flat afterwards. I'll drive you home in the early hours. What do you say?"

"All right," said Cynthia, and turned away from him abruptly.

On Tuesday she told her husband that on the following day she was going out in the afternoon and would not be home till late at night.

"Where are you going?" he asked her.

"You don't tell me where you go," she retorted. "Why should I tell you?"

"Well . . . there's no reason why you should if you don't want to," Groom said, a little taken aback.

He was not displeased. It gave him an evening to himself which would be free of all unpleasantness when he returned. When an opportunity occurred, he rang up Theodora, who, he discovered, had an engagement for Wednesday night with a girl who

worked with her at Kronen's Limited. They had intended to go to a picture show. Groom said that he would get another man and make a foursome of it. They would pick up Theodora and her friend at her room at seven-thirty.

"You won't insist on going to the pictures, will you?" he asked her.

"Probably not," she answered, laughing.

Noel Manning would come, Groom reflected. Manning's fiancée, Joyce Mealing, was a proprietorial little bitch, like Cynthia; Manning should be glad of an evening's change. He dialled the number of the journalist's apartment, and for a few moments listened to the burr-burr, burr-burr of the call signal. Manning was out. He tried the office of the newspaper for which Manning did most of his work, nor was the journalist there, and he replaced the ear-piece of the instrument with a mental resolve to ring up later. He forgot about it till the following morning, however, when he was on his way into town and his club. He might as well call on Manning as ring him up from the club, he thought.

Manning was at home, but he shook his head to Groom's proposal.

"I'd like to, Peter, but I've got to do a job to-night."

Whom else could he get, Groom wondered. He thought of Paul Kronen and grinned. It would be a lark to get Kronen out with a couple of his own shop girls!

CHAPTER TEN

I

THE managing director of Kronen's Limited dismissed his secretary and tilted back his comfortable office chair. The secretary was new. She had not been in the employ of Kronen's Limited for more than two months. She was young and competent and pretty, and had a good figure. Paul Kronen watched her appreciatively as she went through the office door. Her light dress moulded itself to her hips and thighs, and clung cleanly to her legs behind the knees. He would have liked to slip his hand up under her skirts and pat her firm buttocks. But it would not do. It did not pay to mix women with business, or to become too familiar with employees. They talked. One lost prestige and the power to make them cringe when the need arose.

The managing director of Kronen's Limited settled himself in his tilted office chair and folded his hands upon his stomach. He was only thirty-two but already he was beginning to develop a paunch. He would have to start going to the gymnasium of the wrestler, Rieslinger, again, he thought. But he felt fit. Business was good—considering the crisis.

His office was on a gallery overlooking the ground-floor counters of the great shop. Through the glass walls of the office he could see the counters stacked with merchandise, with tweeds and calicos, silks and cambrics, dress goods from every quarter of the earth. The counters were arranged in pairs, and black-clad

girls hurried to and fro between them. There were over an acre of counters. Customers swarmed in the wide aisles. . . .

That was what Paul Kronen liked to see: customers swarming in the wide aisles and the little black-clad girls dodging to and fro behind the counters. And there were three more floors like that above!

He smiled. Yes, business was good; the new advertising was pulling. He loved his advertising: a full page in the morning and a half-page in the evening paper each day. He read every advertisement from beginning to end, every word. He pored over them as fondly and carefully as if he had written them himself, as if they were great literature. The fame of Kronen's Limited leaped across the pages in great crescendos of superlatives . . . astounding . . . terrific . . . stupendous, and crawled down the sheets through the smaller type in wild orgies of euphuism. Woe betide the advertising writer who ran short of superlatives or euphuisms with which to proclaim the magnificence of Kronen's Limited. In the year before the crisis began the turnover of Kronen's Limited was little over a million, and the advertising expenditure twenty-two thousand pounds. But then old James Kronen had been in control. Last year the turnover was less than six hundred thousand and the advertising had cost thirty thousand.

No outsiders knew the turnover was down. People pointed to Kronen's Limited as a rock against which the seas of depression beat vainly. When the run on the State Savings Bank began and the whole city was whispering that the bank would close its doors, an old woman withdrew her life's savings from the head office of the bank and within the hour re-deposited it at the branch at Kronen's Limited. The state bank might fail, the Treasury itself might be engulfed, but the

great retail firm whose fame was blazoned forth in great black type from every news-sheet in the land, Kronen's Limited, would stand.

The advertising appropriation was greater still this year. And it was pulling. Customers were swarming in the wide aisles. . . . With a smile of self-satisfaction on his lips, Paul Kronen gazed out from his office on the gallery over the odd acre of counters within his field of vision. *He* was Kronen's Limited. It was *his* fame the advertisements trumpeted. The swarming customers and the little black-clad girls behind the counters made obeisance to him; the young Napoleon of commerce!

He might have to put off some girls at the end of the week. The money the firm would save in wages would help to offset the increased advertising expenditure. One had to look after the pennies! The rest of the staff would manage all right. It would be girls who had to go, of course. There weren't any more men employed now than were strictly necessary; men had to be paid higher wages than girls. The rest of the girls would have less time for polishing their nails and giggling. It would do them good. They worked better when they had to work hard. It kept their minds on their jobs.

This talk of a strike—piffle! . . wind! There would have been a strike after the last wage-cut if there was going to be one.

It was rather remarkable, when he came to think of it, how little trouble there had been over the several cuts that had been made under the Financial Emergency Act. Unemployment had taken the fight out of the unions. Union secretaries weren't cheeky any longer; they didn't stalk into employers' offices with their hats on these days, and they didn't have to be

bribed to avoid trouble. Anyway, the only union secretary with whom he, Kronen, was concerned, the secretary of the Department Store Employees' Union, Jim Creighton—Creighton knew where he stood. Still, the crisis had come at the right time if you looked at it from that angle. . . .

The little black-clad girls scurried to and fro between the counters and Paul Kronen smiled in his office on the gallery.

The night before he had been re-elected to the presidency of the Dramatic Society despite the machinations of his enemy, Ringer—Herbert Ringer, the estate-agent, who had begun life as a grease-boy in a garage, and now wore spats and played the gentleman. Ringer had accused him of using the Dramatic Society for his own ends, accused him of staging plays which required elaborate dressing and settings so that Kronen's Limited could dispose of some of their surplus stocks. As if the petty business of the Dramatic Society mattered twopence to Kronen's Limited! Ringer had come to the general meeting armed with statements setting forth amounts and details of the society's purchases from Kronen's Limited, and had read them out in his pseudo-cultured voice, item by item, price by price. The prices charged were cut rates, were they not?—made available to the society in a spirit of disinterested generosity by the president, Mr. Kronen? That was the case, was it not? Kronen, from his seat by the chairman, nodded curtly. Then Ringer produced other sheets and began to read quotations from one of Kronen's Limited's competitors for similar quantities of similar goods, the prices of which were all ten per cent to forty per cent lower than those charged by Kronen's Limited. Could the president explain that?

Certainly the president could explain! Paul Kronen rose to his feet. His eyes swept the assembly with a flashing, contemptuous glance and he spoke on a note of controlled indignation and passion. It went against the grain, he said, to remind the society of the time and energy and enthusiasm he had put into his work as president, but in face of the contemptible and malicious attack which had been made upon him that evening it had become necessary. Furthermore, it was necessary to make himself intelligible to Mr. Ringer who could not be expected to understand the usages of polite society. . . .

He chuckled now as he thought of it. The cur, Ringer, had gone red, then white! So much for the grease-boy who aped the gentleman! The meeting would have been carried away even if it had not been stacked with his friends in anticipation of Ringer's attack. . . . Yes, he had overplayed his hand, had Ringer; and it was Ringer, not he, Paul Kronen, who had left with his tail between his legs!

The managing director of Kronen's Limited took a cigarette from the brass box on his desk, lit it with a jewelled lighter and inhaled luxuriously.

Fanchon Follower was beginning to worry him a little. She was becoming possessive in her attitude, jealous. That was the worst of women in love with one; they became as observant as the devil, their senses all keyed up! The unobtrusive attentions he had been paying Cynthia Groom had escaped her husband, but Fanchon had noticed, the jealous little bitch! She seemed to imagine that she had established some sort of claim upon him by sleeping with him! He would have to take care that she did not manœuvre him into an ambiguous position; Fanchon was far from being simple. She was dangerous, that

girl; he ought to drop her. It was not as if he had seduced her; she'd lost her virginity before she left her convent, the little wanton! Yes, he ought to drop her, but . . . something impelling exuded from her slim, boy-girl's body, something that laid an aphrodisiacal spell upon him. He didn't want to drop her—not yet, at all events. But he wanted Cynthia. . . . Cynthia was sweet! Groom had noticed nothing. Anyway, Groom deserved it, playing round with other women the way he did!—neglecting a nice little wife like Cynthia! Mentally he conned over the arrangements he had made for Cynthia's entertainment that night. He'd make her promise to tell her husband nothing, make her see that the best way to play Groom was to get home in the early hours and say nothing, let him come to his own conclusions. Fanchon . . .

A tap sounded on the office door.

"Come in!" cried Kronen.

His pretty secretary entered and said: "There's a Mr. Groom waiting to see you, Mr. Kronen."

Groom! The managing director of Kronen's Limited was assailed by a premonition of evil! What did Groom want with him? Was it possible that he had misjudged Groom's temper? Did Groom know about his arrangements for to-night? Why was he here if he did not know?

"Show him in," he said, licking his lips.

Groom came in grinning in a sly way that intensified Kronen's suspicions. He said:

"What are you doing to-night, Paul? I want somebody to make up a foursome. If you've got anything else on you'd better put it off and come along. They're a couple of peaches."

Kronen's suspicions hardened into certainty. Groom knew that he had arranged to take Cynthia out! She

must have told him! The swine was making this proposal to him by way of offering him a graceful way out! He forced a smile to his lips.

"O.K., Peter. You can count me in."

When Groom had gone he sat behind his desk scowling. Customers swarmed in the wide aisles below, and the little black-clad girls scurried hither and thither, but he had no eyes for them. By and by he took up the telephone and called Cynthia.

"That arrangement of ours for to-night is off, Cynthia."

"Off?" she said. "Why?"

"I'm sorry. Some important business has cropped up. . . ."

He banged down the receiver.

Presently his pretty secretary came in to remind him that he was to attend a luncheon of the Rotary Club at one o'clock. He contemplated the prospect glumly: the meaningless clap-trap of "service" bored him to tears. It was useful and necessary as propaganda, of course; but it shouldn't be necessary. It *wouldn't* be necessary if it wasn't for the flood of damned subversive literature which came into the country unchecked, and the pusillanimous attitude of the government towards the Communists and the rest of the militant rabble! In New South Wales the big business interests were subsidizing a man who had organized an Australian fascisti under the name of the New Guard. It was time something of the sort was done in Western Australia. Then they could do without Rotary Clubs. . . .

He looked at the thin gold watch on his plump wrist! five minutes to one. Scowling, he put on his hat and went out to the Rotary Club luncheon.

2

Groom brought the car to a halt outside the house in which Theodora lived.

"You'd better wait," he said to Kronen. "I'll go up and fetch 'em."

He ran upstairs and knocked on Theodora's door. In a moment she opened it to him, smiling faintly. He squeezed her arm by way of greeting, then looked for her companion. A pretty fair girl with a powder-puff in her hand gazed at him from before the dressing-table.

"This is Ethel Rumble," said Theodora.

Groom smiled at the girl. "*Your* playmate for the evening's waiting for us down in the car," he said. "Are you ready?"

"Where are we going?" she asked.

He waved his arm. "Anywhere. Anywhere you like. Anywhere the wine runs!"

In a sprightly way the girl said to Theodora: "Can we trust them?"

Theodora shook her head.

The fair girl wiped the puff quickly over her face, smiled brightly at Groom, and said she was ready. They went downstairs and across the footpath to the car. Groom looked about and failed to see Kronen.

"Where are you, Paul?" he called.

"Here," answered Kronen from the darkness of the rear seat beneath the hood of the car.

The young idler effected introductions.

The girl, Ethel Rumble, gasped in a fish-like way, exclaiming: "Oh! Oh!" Theodora said nothing.

"How do you do?" said Kronen.

Ethel Rumble suddenly overcame her embarrassment and gushed over.

"Oh, how do you *do*, Mr. Kronen! How do you *do*!"

Kronen was wondering where he had seen these girls before. The faces of both of them seemed familiar, but he could not place them. They were pretty enough: peaches, indeed, as Groom had said. But where had he seen them before?

"Come on in," he said pleasantly to the girl, Ethel.

As she obeyed him Groom resumed his place behind the wheel of the car. Theodora got in beside him, and they drove off.

"What did Peter say your name was?" Kronen asked his companion.

"Ethel Rumble," she answered happily.

"Ethel Rumble? Ethel Rumble? What's your friend's name?"

"Theodora Luddon."

Kronen shook his head; the names meant nothing to him. There were nearly a thousand names on the pay-roll of Kronen's Limited. He slipped his arm round Ethel Rumble's waist, and drew her closer to him.

"Well, let's get together, kiddie."

"Oh, Mr. Kronen!" she said coyly.

"Paul," he corrected her.

"Oh! . . . Shall I call you Paul?"

"But why not?" he demanded in astonishment.

"Paul, then," she said.

"That's right! We're going to be pals, aren't we?" With his free hand he tilted up her chin. "Pals?"

She nodded, smiling.

"Then pucker up your lips, sweetness!"

Her lips were warm and soft.

After a while he slipped his hand in at the neck of her frock and began to fondle her breasts. She did not object. Groom was driving with one hand, with the other wrapped round Theodora.

Crossing the river by the long causeway, they drove through the southern suburbs, emerging upon a road that ran like a broad black ribbon through spaces of bushland. Blackboys, gum-saplings, banksias, and tall eucalypts loomed strangely distorted in the glare of the headlights. The black ribbon of the road rolled up beneath the wheels; white-painted posts, marking bends and culverts, flickered past eerily.

"Where are we going?" asked Kronen.

"Rockingham."

After a drive of an hour and a half they arrived at the Rockingham Hotel. For an hour they sat round a table in the lounge, drinking sparkling burgundy and becoming merry. Kronen had forgotten that he had intended this evening for the seduction of his friend's wife, and that he owed his friend a grudge. He jumped up suddenly, crying:

"Come on! I'm tired of this place. Let's take some bottles and go down on the beach."

They piled into the car again and drove back along the road towards Perth. Soon they came to the place where the hulk of the *Kwinana* loomed above the sand-dunes, in the light of the moon.

Groom laughed a little drunkenly and stopped the car.

"The old *Kwinana*!"

Kronen was whispering to Ethel Rumble, whose arms were wound tightly round his neck.

"Let's go down on the beach," said Groom to Theodora.

With a laugh she got out of the car, and arm in

arm they wandered down to the sands above which the bulk of the old iron vessel towered.

In the light of the moon, flakes of rust upon the plates, seen near at hand, were grey and luminous. The shadow of the wreck was spread upon the calm water, black streaked with silver. Groom paused, gazing up at the old *Kwinana*, and laughed again. Theodora asked him why he laughed. He said:

"Nothing! Just thinking of a time I made a fool of myself. I thought I'd turn that old wreck into a cabaret."

After a moment the girl replied: "Why, that was a good idea!"

"No it wasn't. It cost me a thousand pounds. If it had been any other time, perhaps. . . . But not with this depression. . . ."

She was curious; she made him tell her the whole of his vision of a pirate cabaret. When he had finished she repeated:

"You shouldn't have given it up. It was a good idea."

"I didn't bring you down here to talk about the *Kwinana*," he informed her.

He drew her to a spot where a sand-hummock cast a shadow and pulled her down beside him on the sand. Her low, contralto laugh made him feel self-conscious, and he bent kisses on her to stifle it, demanding whether she loved him. She would not answer him, and he forced her back on the sand and began to kiss her with passion. She laughed and sighed and submitted. Even if she had not wanted to she would have had to submit, she thought.

In the car Paul Kronen released the straps that held the squab of the front seat in position and lowered the squab back till it touched the rear seat and formed a

couch. As she allowed herself to be drawn back on the improvized couch, Ethel Rumble whispered:

"I'm afraid. They might come back, and what'll they think?"

"They won't come back. What do you think they've gone down on the beach for?"

She made the protestations and struggle that the conventions demanded of her.

Afterwards, as they lay quietly together, he began to question her, for the familiarity of her face still tantalized him. He said that he was sure he had met her somewhere before. Where was it?

She asked with a giggle: "Don't you know?"

"I can't think, but I know your face as well as . . . And your friend's, too. Where was it?"

In an intuitive way the girl felt that he would not be pleased to learn just now that she was an assistant at Kronen's Limited. She giggled again and said:

"Perhaps you've just seen me somewhere."

"Just seen you and wanted to know you, eh?" he queried thoughtfully. "Well, that's not impossible."

"Anyway, you know me now," she said in a low voice. "You know me as well as a man *can* know a girl!"

Sentimental bitch! he thought. But she slipped her hand inside his shirt and stirred a new ardour in him, and he forgot that he disliked that kind of sentiment.

3

With passionless kisses they dropped the two girls at their respective doors, and Kronen climbed into the front seat of the car with Groom.

"Well?" inquired the latter as they moved off again.

"Well?" rejoined Kronen.

"How did you get on?"

"O.K. But I've met those girls somewhere before!"

Groom chuckled. "I shouldn't be surprised if you had. They work in your shop!"

One of the things most dear to Paul Kronen was his personal prestige within the great business of which he was the head. He stood above and apart. He held himself aloof even from his most trusted lieutenants. He identified his aloofness with his power to command. To learn now that he had unwittingly embarked upon a casual love affair with an employee of so little consequence that he had failed to recognize her, filled him not only with anger, but with mortification too deep for utterance. For a moment his mind refused to accept Groom's statement; then he was overwhelmed by cold rage. His voice vibrant with his effort at control, he said:

"Stop the car!"

"What for?" inquired Groom in surprise.

"I'm getting out."

"But I'm driving you home!" his companion protested.

"I'll walk, thanks. Stop the car!"

"But . . . Lord, man, what's come over you?"

Kronen leaned forward and switched off the engine, and in astonishment Groom swung the vehicle in to the kerb.

"Now, what in hell? . . ." he began.

Kronen got out of the car. "Maybe this seems a joke to you," he said grimly, "but it isn't to me. Get that straight, Peter; it isn't to me. If it had been anyone but you who did this to me I'd have punched him on the bloody nose. And now I'm going before I slug you!"

He stalked away.

Groom gazed after him from the stationary car, and his astonishment changed to anger. The humour of the situation had gone. How the devil could he have known the fellow would take it like that? Well, be damned to him! He set his foot down viciously on the starter-switch. Eaten up by his blasted vanity, damn him! He let in the clutch with a jerk and the rear wheels squealed and spun on the bitumen.

So he drove home.

There were lights in the flat as he drove past to the garage and he went inside to discover Cynthia sitting in the living-room reading a magazine.

He said: "Hullo! I thought you were going to be out till late."

"I didn't go out," she said in a flat voice. "Where have you been?"

"You told me this morning you were going out," he retorted defensively. "And you said you wouldn't be back till late. I've been out with Paul Kronen."

Cynthia whispered: "With Paul Kronen?"

"Yes," answered Groom; then, noting something queer in her expression, demanded: "Is there anything strange about that? What are you looking so queer about? What the devil's the matter with everybody to-night, anyway? Paul Kronen behaves like a lunatic, and you look as if you've seen a ghost when I tell you I've been out with him! What's the matter with you?"

"You've been out with Paul Kronen!" she whispered again.

So Kronen had not had business, she was telling herself. He had put her off to go out with Peter—and with some other woman! Yes, some other woman! Ah, this was the last, the culminating

insult! It magnified her husband's offence a hundredfold. She was outraged. Men . . . beasts! . . . beasts! . . . with their lusts! Oh! . . .

"I suppose you don't believe me?" said Groom resentfully. "I'm damn' well fed up with trying to make you believe things! If you want the whole of it, I've been out with Paul Kronen and a couple of girls! Now, whether you believe it or not your bloody jealousy'll have something to feed on!"

Cynthia said dully: "Oh, I believe you. It's about the first time I've been able to believe you."

She stared at him in a hard, unwinking way for a moment, then dropped her eyes and a dry sob escaped her. Groom grunted angrily.

"You're going to cry, eh? Well, cry and be damned to you! You always did turn on the tears before you were through!"

"I'm not going to cry," she returned, raising her head. Her eyes were dry. She stood up, and the magazine dropped from her lap to the floor. "This is the end, Peter," she said quietly. "I've stood all I can stand of this. I'm going to leave you."

He laughed derisively. "Let me see?—will this be the fourth or the fifth time you've left me?"

"I mean it."

"You always mean it!"

"Can I take the car?"

"No, you can't!"

He felt in his pocket to make sure he had taken the ignition key from the car. He hadn't; it was not in his pocket. He hurried out to the garage to get it. Once before, when Cynthia had left him, she had taken the car. The memory of the inconvenience he had suffered still lingered with him. He had been without the car for three days.

When he returned to the flat she was in their bedroom, packing suit-cases on her bed.

He was less angry now. He said:

"Oh, Lord, Cynthia, what's the use of playing the fool?"

She retorted: "I'm going, Peter. I've rung up for a taxi since you won't let me take the car."

He swallowed the last of his anger and made a conciliatory gesture: "Don't be silly, Cynthia. Listen, darling . . ."

"Don't darling me! Don't you dare darling me!"

Her reply made his anger flare up again.

"All right, damn you!" he answered. "Play the fool if you want to. You'll be back inside a week, and in the meantime I'll have a holiday from your tantrums!"

He got undressed angrily, flinging his clothes into the open wardrobe. When he had donned his pyjamas he got into bed and watched Cynthia complete her packing. There was a ring at the front door, and she took her cases and went out without a backward glance. Groom heard her speaking to the taxi-driver at the door, and then the sound of the taxi moving off.

Well, that was that! he thought. Once more! . . .

"Thank Heaven!" he exclaimed.

He reached up and gave an angry tug to the cord which switched off the light.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

I

DURING the middle decades of the nineteenth century England was convulsed by a series of over-production crises. From time to time the stores of the wealth in the land became so great that they could not be consumed. Handicapped by their inability to eat more than one meal, wear more than one costume, or sleep in more than one bed at a time, the rich could make little impression on the abundance, and the poor were debarred by their poverty. Even the Army, ushering the British peace into a dozen savage lands, could not open up new markets as fast as the workers of England could produce wealth with which to glut them. The captains of industry were compelled to close down their factories lest the accumulating stores of wealth burst the walls of the warehouses and spill out into the streets. Hundreds of thousands were thrown out of work.

Soon starvation was rife in the land, and agitators and revolutionaries were inciting the workers to revolt. Through the starving multitudes the doctrine of Socialism spread like a plague. Sabotage and rioting began. Food shops were raided. Not even the rabbits running on the estates of the rich, though they were guarded with man-traps and spring-guns, were safe from the depredations of the poor.

In the cities the starving hordes gathered about the houses of the rich like packs of wolves, and captains of industry trembled in their beds for fear of the angry

workers. The forces of the State worked day and night suppressing the riots; and to make room in its prisons, the British government began again to send convicts overseas. From the year 1850 to the year 1868 it poured convicts into the Swan Settlement in Western Australia, and followed the convict ships with cargoes of unemployed women and girls to breed with the convicts and populate the vast empty spaces of the new land, and thus provide another market for the products of British industry.

James Kronen, the founder of the firm of Kronen's Limited, was the son of a convict and one of these half-starved immigrant girls. Before he was out of his childhood, his father, whose health, like that of most convicts, was broken by the rigours of imprisonment, contracted pneumonia from a chill and died, and his mother lived only long enough to see him placed, at the age of twelve, in apprenticeship to a merchant in the town of Perth.

The lad early revealed a flair for business. Before he was out of his 'teens he had resolved his experience into two principles. The first of these was that the interests of employer and employee are always opposed, and the second that no man achieves commercial success save at the expense of his fellows. He thereafter seemed to serve his employer's interests while in reality serving his own, and since he was sharper than his employer, in the course of a few years he succeeded in gathering together sufficient capital to start in business on his own account.

The discovery of gold in the interior of the state assisted him. He opened a store on the goldfields, and by dint of selling goods at four and five and six hundred per cent profit, and by carrying on a furtive side-business in illicit gold-buying, he soon turned his

hundreds into thousands. When the activity on the goldfields began to slacken he returned to Perth, and in a new brick shop in the young city, founded the House of Kronen.

The business grew with the city. When he was thirty-one, James Kronen was worth fifty thousand pounds and was able to acquire the daughter of a proud squatting family as a wife. Over a period of ten years his wife bore him two sons and two daughters, of whom the eldest was Paul; and over the same period he became vastly richer. Realizing the commercial advantages of civic responsibility and religious conformity, he became a city councillor and a pillar of the church. But he never attempted to deceive himself as so many of his confrères did, and this became the source of a certain perverse pride in him. With the acquisition of wealth he had acquired suavity and aplomb, and at Chamber of Commerce dinners and similar functions he was wont to voice the sentiments of business, patriotism, and Empire with a suave irony that revealed their emptiness. He took pleasure in the discomforture of his audience, chuckling inwardly at their furtive glances at the newspaper reporters who scribbled gleefully. The newspapers, he knew well enough, would serve up the sentiments without the irony. . . .

When he was sixty he had amassed more than a million pounds. This was invested in land, city property, industrial stocks, bank shares, and government bonds. His ambition was satisfied. He felt that he had earned a rest from strife and a right at last to the pleasures he had abjured during his struggle to power. He turned the management of the great department store over to his son Paul, who had entered the business when he was eighteen and had since

longed to control it, and proceeded to live what he regarded as a rational life.

He took a mistress, installed her in a flat in the city, and visited her openly. He refused to accompany his wife and daughters to church any longer, declaring blandly that since he had retired he had no further interests that could be served by Christianity. The suave perversity that had previously led him to discomfort his confrères at Chamber of Commerce dinners now prompted him to remember that he was the son of a convict. Many of the convicts were transported for poaching rabbits; James Kronen therefore proposed that the House of Kronen should adopt as a coat-of-arms a rabbit morte on a field of broad-arrows. In this he was guilty of plagiary; such a device had been proposed for half the great commercial families of Australia. But his family was none the less outraged.

In these and other ways James Kronen asserted the ego that he had for so long suppressed in the interests of riches and power. When, within a month or two of the time he relinquished control of the business he had built up to his son, the depression fell upon the land, he paid no heed to it. If his securities dwindled in value it did not matter; he still had more than he could conceivably spend in the years that were left to him. If the crisis, coupled with his son's incompetence, brought Kronen's Limited down in ruins, still it did not matter. Unlike so many business men, he was not sentimental. He had no affection for his business. It had never been more to him that a means to an end, and he had already achieved his end.

Nevertheless he watched the effect of his son's management with interest, and if he had been a lesser man he would have known qualms. In the years

during which his son had had control the business of Kronen's Limited had fallen off by nearly fifty per cent. The crisis which had the whole world in its grip accounted for much of that, but not all. In the past Kronen's Limited had made as much as a hundred and twenty thousand pounds profit in a year; the profits now were negligible. Next year, unless James Kronen was mistaken, there would be a loss. There was too much stock, and too much money was being spent on advertising. James Kronen had never permitted more than three per cent of turnover to be spent on advertising; Paul was spending five and six per cent, spending more as the volume of business declined. No business could stand that for long. Nor would the banks if they knew it! A call for a reduction in the overdraft of the firm would be made before long, James Kronen thought. Then Paul would have to show what he was made of. The banks had millions in idle money on their hands; one-third of the workers of the country were idle, and, as a direct consequence, one-third of the normal avenues of investment were closed; but idle funds or no idle funds, no bank would continue to finance a business after it was clear that that business was buying its trade.

But James Kronen could smile contentedly, reflecting that it was none of his business, and wander off to the river foreshore where his four hundred ton Deisel yacht was building.

From the days when, as an apprentice lad, he had watched the clipper ships sail into Fremantle harbour, he had always wanted a yacht. When the vessel was finished he proposed to take a few cronies and a cargo of young girls and set off on a prolonged cruise of the East Indies and the China Seas. Or, if the need

arose, he thought secretly, one might take refuge from a revolution on a yacht. . . .

2

Paul Kronen sat in his glass-walled office on the gallery overlooking the ground-floor counters and watched the customers swarming in the wide aisles and the little black-clad girls scurrying to and fro without his usual satisfaction in the sight. The humiliation of his excursion with Peter Groom on the previous night ate into his vanity like a wound. Some day, he told himself, he would get even with Groom. In the meantime . . .

On the desk before him was a list of names: employees selected by the various departmental managers for dismissal. Each month such a list was presented to him. The malcontents and inefficient workers were weeded out and replaced by others. This month the list contained twenty-nine names. Kronen glanced over them, then took up a pen and added two more: Ethel Rumble and Theodora Luddon . . . and scrawled his bold signature underneath.

At the end of the week all those whose names were on the list would find notices of dismissal in their pay envelopes; until then they would go in ignorance. It was part of the policy of Kronen's Limited to keep them in ignorance as long as possible. Employees under notice did not work well, but a law required that notice be given. Kronen ground his teeth. For a week, owing to that pusillanimous law, thirty-one employees would be impudent and careless, waiting upon customers with condescension and impatience, telling them that certain goods were not worth the

prices asked, undermining generally the goodwill of the firm. . . .

But the greater part of Kronen's anger was due to a sense of impotence that was like a knife turned in his wounded vanity; he was unable to find any plausible excuse for summarily dismissing two girls who had seen him with the authority and dignity of the employer laid aside.

CHAPTER TWELVE

WHEN for the second time within a month Theodora returned to her room to find her door unlocked, she thought to find the magistrate, James Riddle, ensconced within. She had not expected Riddle till about eight o'clock, but she had given him a key and thought he might have come early and let himself in with the intention of surprising her. Smiling, she flung open the door. But it was not the magistrate but the Communist, Steven Riley, whom she saw waiting for her. He was seated in her armchair facing the door with a book in his hand, and his appearance made her cry out in distress. Never fleshy, he had become thin. His clothes hung upon him as though made for a larger man. Beneath his prison-cropped blond hair his face was worn and his fierce eyes were dull and tired. He did not rise but his thin lips twitched into a smile.

"Steven!" she cried. "When did they let you out?"

"Yesterday."

"I didn't know. Oh! You look terrible! Was it very bad?"

"They don't intend it to be a pleasure," Riley answered grimly. "The food's not exactly plentiful for short-term prisoners, and the bugs . . . they come out at night, Theo, as soon as the lights are out. Thousands of them, millions of them. . . . They come out of every crack and cranny in the walls, and they crawl over you and suck your blood. You kill them, you kill them in hundreds, but that doesn't make any

difference; there are always more of them. Your cell is filled with the stench of them. By and by you get tired of killing them and just brush them off, but no matter what you do they keep on sucking at you. . . ."

Theodora listened to him with lips parted in horror, and into the room there seemed to creep the sickly, filthy stench of bugs! Riley broke off, grinning in a twisted way.

"How horrible!" Theodora whispered. "How horrible!"

"It wasn't pleasant," said Riley, "but it hasn't killed me. I can stand it—and that's just as well, because I'll get a longer stretch next time!"

For an instant his eyes flashed as they were used to flash. Theodora felt her own eyes fill with tears, as pity for him, and a deep resentment against those who had sent him to prison, against James Riddle, welled up in her. Then, as she remembered that the magistrate himself was coming to see her that evening, came an inclination to weep. She turned away that Riley might not see the moisture in her eyes, and crossed the room to her bed, throwing down her handbag and hat.

Riley stood up. "I suppose you haven't had anything to eat yet?"

She shook her head.

"Come on out with me, then."

"All right," she answered, still with her back to him. "I'll change my frock first. Sit . . . sit down till I'm ready, Steve."

He dropped back into the armchair wearily. Though he had been released from prison only the previous day, he was already back at his work gathering up the threads that had passed into other hands at his arrest.

He was tired. His imprisonment had sapped his strength. He would have to regain it as best he could, he told himself. Recently a number of workers' study classes had been formed, and to-night he was required to take one of these. It did not matter that his weakened body ached with fatigue. Sometimes, when the burden of the Party work lay too heavily upon him, he would regret that he had ever joined the Party, doubt the value of its work. Despite the crisis and the increasing pressure upon the proletariat, their emancipation loomed as a task so colossal that all that had been done in the past seemed insignificant. His work, the work of the Party itself, dwindled into insignificance, into futility, beside the overwhelming forces of oppression. Marx became a dreamer, Lenin a myth, the U.S.S.R. a fabled land. "A Communist must hate," he would tell himself. "Only hate can sustain him!" But in these moments the fires of his hate burned low beneath the ashes of exhaustion. The vast human pageant of pain was obscured by the grey ashes, the groans of a world in labour muted by the choking dust. . . .

Theodora said she was ready.

They went to a little eating-house which smelled stalely of grease and cabbage-water. Many of the tables were occupied by unemployed, for the place accepted relief tickets in payment. Theodora and the Communist found places at a table just vacated. The table was littered with dirty plates, cups, knives and forks, and scraps of food. On the week-old cloth were stains of tea and liquid condiments. A tired-looking waitress came and thrust a grubby menu-card into Theodora's hand, and began clearing away the litter while the girl scanned it.

Theodora lost appetite. When the food arrived she

was content to pick at it. But the hunger of prison was still on her companion, and he ate wolfishly. His tiredness abated a little as he filled his belly, and at length he leaned back in his chair and grinned at Theodora.

"Not hungry?"

She made a grimace that he understood.

"Don't like the taste of it, or the atmosphere, eh? Over ninety per cent of mankind have to feed like this, and most of them have never known anything better. The expropriated! I belong to the expropriated class and so do you. I brought you here in case you should forget it."

Theodora lowered her eyes and replied in a low voice: "Since I've been working at Kronen's I haven't forgotten it."

"Becoming class-conscious, eh?"

The waitress came and set before each of them a portion of sodden suet pudding. Riley fell to eating again. When he had finished they separated, Riley going to the Communist headquarters to prepare for his study-class, and Theodora back to her room.

When the magistrate arrived he found an intangible barrier erected against him, which, strive as he would, he could not break down. Not daring to make love to her he left early, puzzled and a little perturbed.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

DURING the period she had worked as secretary to the Brazilian consul, Theodora had saved money. Naturally thrifty, her tastes were simple, and each week there had been a surplus. When she lost her post at the consulate she had what was for her a considerable sum to her credit at the Savings Bank: some forty pounds. Since then the sum had dwindled. Her room, for which she paid a pound a week and which had been well within her resources while she worked at the Consulate, was too expensive for her on wages of two pounds and sevenpence a week at Kronen's Limited. The sum would not suffice to pay the rent of her room and feed and clothe her with any comfort, and each week she was compelled to draw a little from the bank.

She had often thought of getting cheaper lodgings; but she liked her room; it was shabby but spacious and comfortable, and she was loath to leave it. When the time came, she thought, she might be able to persuade the landlady to reduce the rent a little.

That she might lose her job at Kronen's Limited had never occurred to her. More often than not her sales topped the departmental list. The manager of the department regarded her with approval; never by so much as a frown had he intimated that her work was unsatisfactory; and she had suffered only one fine in the period she had worked in the shop.

Why then? . . . She gazed at the notice of dismissal in bewilderment and dismay. Every month, she knew, a few girls received such notices. Their

names were sent into the office by the departmental managers. Any girl who was careless or slipshod, who fell down on her sales, or against whom a manager conceived a grudge—a girl who invited amorous advances, perhaps, and then repelled them—any such girl might find her name on the black list. But she . . . There was no reason. . . . She bit her lip in perplexity and chagrin, and moved on to let the assistants behind her through to the pay-window.

After standing hesitantly for a moment she went back to her department. More than an hour had yet to pass before the shop closed for the day. Customers took her mind off her dismissal to some extent, but she felt deeply depressed. When an opportunity occurred she spoke to the departmental manager, asking him why she was dismissed. He was surprised.

"Dismissed!" he exclaimed. "You?"

She showed him her notice.

"It must be a mistake," he said. "You're one of the best girls in the department! Don't worry about it. I'll see the chief"—and he went away forthwith.

In ten minutes he was back, his face twisted into a grimace that expressed both irritation and sympathy.

"Your notice came direct from His Royal Highness," he told Theodora. "Have you any idea why Kronen should sack you?"

"No. I . . ."

"Neither have I. But you must have rubbed him up the wrong way in some way or other. Anyway, the notice'll have to stand. There's no appeal from *him*!"

At six o'clock the shops closed in the city of Perth.

For ten minutes after six the time-clocks in Kronen's Limited were ringing as hand after hand punched them. The assistants poured out into the street.

Nearly a thousand men and girls worked behind the counters of Kronen's Limited and they crowded the narrow footpaths as they swarmed out, mingling with others of their kind from other shops whose day was also done. By ten minutes past six as a rule the store was empty, and the cleaners had slammed shut the doors and had commenced their work. But to-day the crowd flowed sluggishly. The employees showed a tendency to hang about the doorways in groups. They blocked the way for others who, being unable to proceed, joined the groups and swelled their size. Within the groups there were complaints and angry mutterings. The "black list" had been unusually long. A man or girl had been dismissed from one in every four departments, and there was a rumour in the air of the imminence of the long expected wage cut. A girl from the office staff who was amongst those who had received notice had spread the rumour. The cut was to be announced on Monday; she had overheard the Crown Prince telling the manager.

There were cries of: "I told you so!" "It was only a matter of time!"

Someone asked angrily: "Is he going to cut his own bloody screw?"

In the centre of one group Ethel Rumble angrily waved her notice of dismissal.

"Why was I sacked? I asked the manager what he had against me and he said he hadn't anything to do with it, the lying hound!"

"Why should he say he hadn't if he had?"

"I don't know! How should I know? But only those sent in by the department heads are put on the black list."

Theodora said: "I got notice, too, but my name wasn't sent in by the department. The head inquired

about it. It was Paul Kronen who put me down. I don't know why. Perhaps . . ."

"Kronen!" exclaimed Ethel Rumble in bewilderment.

"That's what the head said."

"But he couldn't have put me down," the girl said, her voice little above a whisper. "Why! . . ." She broke off.

The cleaners were getting impatient. They wanted to shut the doors.

"Are you so fond of this place that you want to spend all night here as well as all day?" they asked, or: "Haven't you got any homes to go to?"

The groups broke up and the assistants, men and girls, went out to swell the crowds on the footpaths. For some of the girls, young men belonging to a different stratum of society were waiting with cars. The girls entered the cars ostentatiously, bidding good-bye to their less fortunate comrades in self-conscious, affected tones. Other girls paired with men from the shop. The bulk of them hurried away alone to board the clanging, grey-green trams which would carry them to the suburbs.

Many of them had to stand in the trams, clinging to overhead straps or to metal hand-holds on the backs of the seats. They smiled fixedly beneath their powder and rouge while the muscles of their legs ached and knotted into hard lumps on their calves.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

I

THE girl, Ethel Rumble, clung to a strap and gave herself up to an angry misery. She dreaded her return home. She could see in anticipation the frightened dismay on the face of her mother, and the resigned despair with which these days her father always received bad news. She could hear the cries with which her news would be greeted.

She was the mainstay of her family. Her father, a bricklayer's labourer, had not worked save at occasional odd jobs for over three years. He drew sustenance for himself and his wife and his younger daughter, Clarice, who was thirteen and had still to attend school. Twice he had been sent to relief works in the country where the men lived under canvas and their earnings were limited to a pound a week over the amount they would otherwise draw in sustenance. Tradesmen-contractors battened on them, charging them for food and tobacco and odd articles of clothing twice and thrice the prices they would have had to pay in town. The married men could never send enough from their earnings to keep their families in the city, and there were periods of bitter destitution for many families when their men were sent to relief works. For the Rumbles the pinch was sharp. The girl, Ethel, earned two pounds, seven shillings, and fivepence a week at Kronen's Limited —more than Theodora Luddon, for she was over twenty-one years of age—and there was her brother George who worked on a stud farm for ten shillings a

week and his keep. Sometimes he was able to send a postal note for five shillings to his parents. For the main part, however, Ethel kept the family going. Her wages, and the twenty-one shillings' worth of provisions they received weekly as sustenance, sufficed to buy food and clothing and pay the instalments on their house as they fell due.

They thought of it as their own house. . . .

The clamorous, crowded tram carried Ethel Rumble through the northern environs of the city; through streets lined with cheap lodging-houses, past dusty, green, tree-grown squares where, despite the hour, scores of unemployed still lounged; through the high and airy suburb of Mt. Lawley where, from the verandas and porches of their comfortable homes, people of wealth and substance looked across their well-kept gardens to the city. Beyond Mt. Lawley were districts where thousands of little brick or wooden cottages faced one another across wide, dusty streets. The streets were narrow ribbons of gravel or bitumen running through wastes of grey sand. The occupants of some of the cottages had planted grass in the sand-waste between their front fences and the roads, but the grass grew reluctantly for few of them could afford to lavish water on it.

In this and in similar suburbs lived the workers of Perth, each in his own neat brick or wooden cottage. Before the crisis began enterprising house and land speculators had made fortunes by selling homes to the workers of Perth. It was more profitable to sell houses on small deposits and long terms and charge high interest on the outstanding balance of the price, than to let them. Now many of them were empty, their "owners" having been ejected for failure to meet instalments.

Ethel Rumble got down from the tram. There was a damp chill in the air, a promise of winter, and darkness had fallen. At long intervals along her street were electric lights, and lights glowed in the windows of the houses on either side. In the glow of the street-lights the green of wild grass springing in the sand could be seen. That meant the water was rising. . . . Every winter the water rose and a hundred acres of the district which had been a sand-waste became a swamp. In wet years the water sometimes flowed over the floors of the more low-lying houses. Her father had not known that when he bought the house—a time when she had been yet at school.

They had been able to keep up the instalments so far. Ethel estimated that they had paid four hundred and twenty pounds in instalments, though only about a hundred and thirty pounds of that had been in reduction of their actual indebtedness; the rest represented interest. It would be another twenty years before the house really belonged to them. Still, the instalments were no more difficult to pay than rent. Now, perhaps, she thought miserably, they would not be able to pay. . . .

"You're late," her mother said querulously.

In the little living-room her parents and sister sat at table, their evening meal already begun.

"I've lost my job."

"Ethel!" her mother whispered fearfully, looking as though someone had struck her. "You've . . . Ethel!"

The girl said desperately: "For God's sake, mother, don't say anything about it now! I've lost my job. I know everything you can say."

"What are we going to *do*!"

"Please, mother!"

She looked at her father. Colin Rumble sat at the head of the table with his knife and fork poised in the air, and that look she had expected on his grey, unshaven face. He licked his lips.

Her sister, Clarice, cried suddenly in her shrill, childish voice: "And only the other day you went out with Mr. Kronen!"

"Shut up, you!"

"I was only . . ." the child began on a note of protest, but the fierce bright look in her sister's eyes checked her.

Dropping her eyes to her plate she attacked her food.

Resisting an impulse to speak, Mrs. Rumble suddenly clutched her apron to her face and rose hurriedly and went out of the room. When five minutes later she returned she was red-eyed.

The meal went on in silence save for the small sounds of knives and forks on plates, the creaking of chairs, the hoarse breathing of Colin. But the silence was charged and oppressive.

Ethel cried suddenly: "Oh, mother, I'm sorry!" Her voice sounded harsh and shrill in the silence. "I don't know why it happened. I didn't do anything. I've always done my work."

"It's happened," the mother returned. "Oh, Ethel! How could it have happened if you'd been doing your work properly?"

"I did my work. I did! I did!" the girl cried. "I tell you I don't know why it happened!"

She broke down and began to cry. Her mother got up from her seat and went round to her, trying to comfort her. "There, there! Don't take it too hardly. I didn't mean to be cruel. We'll manage somehow."

"Leave me alone," the girl said chokingly. She got up and glared round at them, her mother, her father, her sister. "I hate you! I hate you all!" she cried, stamping her foot. "You think it's my fault. To-morrow I'll see Mr. Kronen. . . ."

She fled to her bedroom to fling herself on the bed and smother her tears and mortification in her pillow. To-morrow she would see Paul Kronen. She would force her way in to him if necessary! He could not be responsible—not after what had passed between them. If she could see him he would set things right.

At eight o'clock the young plumber, Gerald Halsted, who hoped to marry her some day, called to take her to a shilling dance. She sent him away, and had no sooner done so than she wished him back again.

Her father and mother could not refrain from discussing her dismissal, reiterating in whispers the question: "What are we going to do?"

She could not endure it; she thought she would go mad. She dragged her sister's bed out of the room and locked the door, refusing to answer the family's knocks and beseechings. They desisted at last. Then she undressed and went to bed and cried herself to sleep.

2

Recollection of her troubles did not immediately assail her when she woke in the morning. She lay for a moment on the edge of sleep, recapturing a dream. Then she remembered and was overwhelmed by despair. She could see Paul Kronen, but she could no longer feel confident that what had passed between them would make any difference. She felt sick and weak.

At the breakfast-table the faces of her mother and father looked old and tired, but they said nothing.

Only when she was on the point of leaving for the shop did her mother voice the fear that hung over them, and then it was indirectly:

"You'll see Mr. Kronen, dear?"

"Yes," she answered. "I'll see him."

It was not easy for assistants to see Paul Kronen. There was a wall between them and the man who sat in the glass-walled office on the gallery. There was a form to be filled in. The form was passed on by an inquiry clerk to an office boy, who took it to Paul Kronen's secretary, who took it in to the presence. Ethel Rumble waited. The office boy came back.

"Mr. Kronen says he can't see you," said the inquiry clerk.

"But I must see him," the girl protested. "There's been a mistake."

"Well, he says he can't. He can, of course, but he likes to feel his importance, our Paul. Maybe if you come back later . . ."

"Listen," said Ethel. "Let me through. You don't know how important it is. I'll take the risk . . ."

The inquiry clerk cut her short with a shake of the head.

"Thanks, but I'm not anxious to lose my job! Try him after lunch—about ten past two. He mightn't feel so important then."

The girl went back to her department. He wouldn't see her, either now or after lunch. He would let any sort of injustice be done to preserve his sense of importance. Well, he *would* see her, she resolved angrily. He would see her if she had to waylay him. . . .

She took her time off for lunch between twelve and one. At a quarter to one she took up a station past which Kronen had to pass as he came out of his office for lunch, and waited patiently. At one o'clock the

door of his office opened and he came out. He looked pleased with himself. His grey lounge suit was immaculate. In one hand he carried his hat, stick, and gloves. The girl smiled timidly at him. He recognized her, and immediately his face became expressionless. He made to walk past, but she boldly laid a hand on his arm.

"Mr. Kronen . . ."

"What do you want?" he asked coldly.

"I tried to see you this morning," she said, trying to keep her voice from trembling. "I've been given notice. I know it's a mistake, but no one can do anything about it but you. I had to see you . . ."

"What do you expect me to do?"

"You could make it all right. Oh, you don't know what it means to me to lose my job! My father's out of work, and there's my mother and young sister who's got to go to school . . ."

"That's got nothing to do with me. If you've received notice you must have been neglecting your work."

"But I haven't!" she cried. "I haven't! I've always done my work. I've been working here for seven months now, and my figures have always been good. The manager of the department says he's satisfied with my work. He said he didn't know why I'd been given notice. Oh, please, Mr. Kronen. I thought . . . after the other night . . ."

"The other night?" Kronen repeated in the same cold voice. "What do you mean? I don't know what you're talking about."

"Oh!" cried the girl. "Oh!"

"I can't interfere," said Kronen, and made to move on.

It was then that Ethel Rumble realized that no appeal to Paul Kronen would be of any use, and her fear of him left him with her hope. She stood squarely in front of him and stared into his face in a sullen, threatening way.

"You know what I'm talking about! I'm talking about Rockingham. I gave you all a girl can give a man, and now I'm to be sacked!"

"I don't know what you're talking about," Kronen said again. "If it's your notice, I'm afraid your notice will have to stand. That's all I have to say. Now stand aside, please!"

"It's not all *I* have to say!" cried Ethel Rumble. Her voice was shrill and her eyes glowered at him, on fire with a sudden vicious inspiration. "I know why I'm being sacked! It's because I wouldn't let you seduce me! That's why!" She lowered her voice. "That's what I'm going to say if I'm sacked, Mr. Paul Kronen. Am I still going to be sacked?"

Kronen glared back at her, speechless with rage. For a moment he forgot his dignity, forgot his pretence.

"So that's it, is it!" he exclaimed when he could speak. "So that's it! Blackmail, eh? You think you can get away with that, do you! Now you understand this: you're not getting any notice; you're sacked now! Now, do you understand! You'd try blackmail, would you! You needn't bother to go back to work. You get out of this shop now!"

He turned and dashed back into his office. The slut! The bitch! The bloody little whore! She'd tell that story would she! He shouted for his secretary while he scribbled a note at his desk to the manager of the haberdashery department. . . .

3

In a rage as blind and insensate as that of Kronen himself, Ethel Rumble hurried back to her department.

"Do you know why I got notice ?" she said to the manager. "It was because I wouldn't let Paul Kronen seduce me !"

Her voice was audible for several yards around. A few customers pricked up their ears and listened. A shop-walker came hurrying forward with a frown on his face. The other girls in the department gazed at her in a startled, uncomprehending way.

"The other night I went to Rockingham with him. Theo Luddon was with us—she'll tell you !"

"Be quiet !" the manager hissed. "Be quiet ! Are you mad ?"

"Mad ? No, I'm not mad. It wasn't your fault I got notice, I know that ! It was Paul Kronen . . . because I wouldn't let him use my body when he wanted to . . ."

"For Heaven's sake ! . . ." began the shop-walker.

"Keep quiet, you !" she snapped at him. "I've been sacked. I don't work here now. You can't order me around any more. I'll say what I've got to say . . ."

After another ineffective protest the shop-walker hurried away to the office to throw responsibility for this unprecedented occurrence on the shoulders of somebody else.

"Shut up !" said the manager between his teeth.

He seized the girl by the shoulder and clapped one hand over her mouth.

Filled with excitement and consternation, other assistants crowded round. The business in several nearby departments had stopped. Ethel Rumble struggled furiously in the grip of the departmental manager, and, freeing herself, burst into tears. A voice cried : "Shame !" then a number of girls were clustering about her, comforting her.

After a brief lapse of time the floor-walker returned with the shop-manager and the shop-detective. They pushed their way through the crowd. The shop-detective began to break up the crowd, saying suavely :

"Move on, please ! Ladies and gentlemen, *if* you please ! The girl's only hysterical. Move on, please !"

"What's all this nonsense ?" demanded the manager. He had learned the tenor of the enraged girl's accusations from the floor-walker. "She's hysterical !" he said positively, and added in a low voice to Ethel Rumble : "Unless I'm mistaken, young lady, you'll find yourself in serious trouble over this !"

The sobbing girl took no notice.

The manager and shop-walker took her between them and led her away to the dressing-room, where they waited for her to recover her self-possession.

"Now," said the manager sternly, "get your hat if you have one and clear out !"

Drained of her strength by her rage and tears, and sick with hopelessness, Ethel Rumble obeyed. On her way home in the rattling tramcar she kept repeating mentally to herself : "What will they say ? What will they say ?" Yet she felt too miserable and weak really to care.

But this time her parents did not behave as she expected. When she had told them, she began to weep silently. Her mother took her in her arms, saying :

"Never mind, dear. We'll manage."

Colin Rumble smiled in a queer, resolute way, and

said: "Well, life's not worth living, anyway!"—and throughout the afternoon and evening and the following day was unusually serene.

4

When his wife rose from her chair in the sitting-room on Sunday night, saying that she was going to bed, and started to walk out of the room, Colin called her back, and to her surprise, kissed her! There were not many kisses between this ageing couple; that was a habit that had passed with their youth. She exclaimed in astonishment and pleasure:

"Well, I must say bad luck takes you in a queer way, dad!"

"I reckon I'm still fond of you . . . in a way," he said.

"I declare! You'll be wanting to come to bed with me next!"

Colin smiled greyly. "It's a long time since we did that, old girl, isn't it? D'you reckon you could stand me?"

"What nonsense!" she cried mantling, and left him lest he should persist to her greater embarrassment.

Ethel and Clarice were already in bed.

Colin Rumble sat on in the sitting-room. The queer, resolute smile was on his face, and his eyes shone strangely. When the house was quiet he took a writing-pad and envelopes and a stub of pencil from a drawer in the cheap sideboard, and, seating himself at the table, began to write.

When a man's got no hope left [Colin Rumble wrote], *it's no good him going on living, and it's no good to my wife and girls to go on living either, so they are going with me. I don't want people to think I was mad. This*

isn't the first time I've thought about it, and I've had a sort of peace since I made up my mind. If my daughter hadn't lost her job I mightn't have woke up to what a fool a man is to go on living when he's certain his life's going to be just like it was before. People make martyrs of themselves hoping. Well, I'm not making a martyr of myself any more, and I don't like to think of my wife and the girls getting desperate—Ethel going on the streets or into a brothel because she can't get a job, and Clarry, I suppose, on the state. I've tried to be a good father to them, but I reckon this is the most sensible thing I ever done.

Colin Rumble signed this note, put it in an envelope, sealed it, addressed it to *the Coroner or whoever it may concern*, and slipped it into his pocket. Then he tiptoed to the room in which Ethel and Clarice slept, opened the door gently, and listened. When he was satisfied that they were asleep he closed the door and moved softly across the passage to his own and his wife's room. As he moved he took a razor from his pocket and opened it.

His wife, too, was asleep. He switched on the light and went quickly to the bed and, covering her mouth with his left hand, cut her throat with the razor. She sat up, uttering a horrible, gurgling cry. But he dropped the razor on the bed, and seized her by the head and shoulders, and broke her neck as he had been used to break the necks of sheep after he had cut their throats when, as a boy, he had worked for a butcher. The body kicked convulsively beneath the bedclothes, while the blood ran from the great gash in the throat. The razor clattered to the floor.

Colin Rumble wiped his hands on the bedclothes, picked up the razor, and went to the room where his

daughters slept. On the threshold he listened again, then switched on the light and entered. Ethel lay on her side. He had to twist back her head and slash half a dozen times before he felt the edge touch the vertebrae. She made no cry, but her eyes seemed to regard him with blank bewilderment as he broke her neck, and her body kicked more than his wife's. The bed squeaked wildly, and woke up the younger girl, who sat up and stared in horror, and opened her mouth to scream. But he sprang upon her and clapped his hand over her mouth, and the scream he had obstructed seemed to escape from the severed windpipe as he cut her throat. . . .

Looking upon what he had done, Colin Rumble felt no horror. He wiped the razor carefully and put it back in his pocket. Then he went out into the back yard, and cut a length from a wire clothes-line, and brought it in and fastened it to one of the rafters on the back veranda, and hanged himself!

About ten o'clock on the following morning a neighbour, a kindly soul who knew that the Rumble family was impoverished, went round to the back door with a bowl of soup she had brought as a gift. She screamed at the sight of the dead man hanging, and fell in a faint amid the shattered fragments of the bowl. By and by she recovered and went for the police.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

THE afternoon newspaper-posters proclaimed a sensation:

TRIPLE MURDER
AND
SUICIDE!

"'Orrible tragedy!" shouted the newsvendors, waving their papers under the noses of people in the streets.

People bought papers and stopped to scan the headlines, to savour vicariously the smell of blood and death. The pockets of the newsboys were loaded down with pennies.

> . . . A shocking tragedy, involving the murder of a middle-aged woman and her two daughters aged 23 years and 13 years, and the subsequent suicide of her husband who perpetrated the crime, occurred late last night at 137 —th- avenue, Maylands. . . .

But there had been many such happenings since the crisis began. . . .

Behind the counters of the great department store of Kronen's Limited the assistants whispered together in frightened, excited tones. Not one of them but knew of Ethel Rumble's charges against Paul Kronen. They connected her dismissal and the tragedy: *If my daughter hadn't lost her job* . . . Colin Rumble had written. The papers had reproduced the letter. If it hadn't been for Paul Kronen, it was whispered, it wouldn't have happened. . . .

The tale escaped from the store with its customers, and was whispered abroad by women returning home

in the trams from their afternoon's shopping: Paul Kronen was responsible for the Maylands tragedy. . . .

The whisper reached James Kronen through his mistress whom he was visiting that night. When he returned home he went to his son's room and informed him. Paul sprang to his feet.

"They're saying that!" he exclaimed.

"Yes. How much truth in it is there?" his father demanded.

"None! Not a word! Not an iota!"

"H'm. Well, it doesn't matter whether it's true or not. That's the story. It must be all over Perth! And it's not the sort of thing that can be stopped. You'll have to arrange a counterblast. Drown it. It's impossible to say what harm a story like that might do. See to it, Paul."

"I'll see to it. I'll think of something. Great Scot!"

"Thought I'd give you the tip, that's all."

"Thanks!" Paul whispered. "Thanks!"

In the morning he sent his secretary with a cheque for a thousand pounds to the Council for the Relief of Unemployment.

> ". . . *I would ask you to treat this contribution to the solution of the most pressing Social evil of our day as anonymous if I did not feel that much of its value would be lost if it were not accorded the fullest publicity. Men of substance and standing in the community have responsibilities towards their less fortunate fellows which they must be induced to recognize, and I trust the publicity attaching to this gift will have that effect. My personal feelings are of no consequence. . . .*" So wrote Kronen in a covering note.

The secretary of the Council for the Relief of Unemployment immediately rang up the newspapers, and by noon reporters were interviewing the managing director of Kronen's Limited in his office on the gallery.

£1000 TO UNEMPLOYED!

CITY MAGNATE'S MAGNIFICENT GIFT!

By four in the afternoon the papers were on the streets. The streamer headings shouted the praises of Paul Kronen. His photo appeared on the front page above a photo of the cheque for a thousand pounds, and the cries of the newsboys were in praise of the philanthropy of Paul Kronen.

But on the front page, too, was a further report of the Maylands tragedy, so that the tragedy and the philanthropy of Paul Kronen were together on the lips of many, and those who had heard the whisper of Ethel Rumble's charges discounted the philanthropy and found ulterior motives for Paul Kronen's gift.

In the shop the assistants and some of the departmental managers spoke his name as though it were something evil.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

THE magistrate James Riddle knocked gently on Theodora's door and waited. He was not expected, and he waited a little diffidently because of the constraint that had been between them when he last visited her. Presently she opened the door.

"You!" she exclaimed in a low voice.

"May I come in?"

He had an impression that she hesitated before coming to a decision. But she said: "Yes, come in," and stood aside, and he entered to behold the man Steven Riley rising slowly from a chair.

In a flash the memories in which this man had a place passed before him. He felt again the sense of shock, the sense of subtle danger with which he had reacted the fellow's outburst in court, the unanalysable pain he had felt when he discovered Theodora in tears because he had sent the fellow to gaol. Why hadn't she let him know Riley was here? Was he fated to be for ever meeting those who came before him in court?—first Theodora, though that, he confessed, had been worth while, now a man who had threatened to turn him into a living bomb! It was in his mind to make some excuse and go, but some quality of his ego fought against it. Riley had risen fully to his feet. For a moment he stood gazing at the magistrate in a wolfish way, then he grinned, ran his fingers through his blond hair, and bowed ironically.

"My Lord of the Urinal!"

"Steven!" cried Theodora.

Riddle reassured her with a gesture. "Good even-

ing," he said, and, handing the girl his hat and stick, lowered himself into a chair.

"Damn it!" snarled the Communist. "Are you his servant as well as his mistress that he should hand his hat and stick over to you as if you were his housemaid?"

"If I took *your* hat you wouldn't object," Theodora said. "Sometimes you're silly, Steven!"

She put the hat and stick on her bed, then came back and sat on the arm of Riddle's chair. The fire went out of Riley's eyes.

"Yes, sometimes I am," he said gloomily.

The sight of the girl sitting on the arm of the other's chair distressed him. He was not her lover. He took pride in the fact that of all men who had enjoyed intimacy with Theodora, he alone had never been her lover. He was a Communist, and the Communist party imposed discipline upon its members. A Communist had no surplus energies to vitiate on women. If he burned he went to a brothel. There was no softening influence in that. But to love was to become weak. He steeled himself against love. Riley told himself that the distress he felt at the sight of Theodora poised on the arm of Riddle's chair arose from the hatred he felt for the class the magistrate stood for. Theodora belonged to the proletariat, Riddle to the bourgeoisie. The girl betrayed herself and her class by accepting the magistrate as a friend. . . .

He inquired offensively: "How *is* the Urinal?"

"If you refer to the Police Court, my friend," answered Riddle, "it's functioning very smoothly."

"That's a pity," said the other.

"I can understand your point of view."

Riley laughed harshly. "*You* understand? That's good! That *is* good!"

"Up to a certain point I can even sympathize with it," the magistrate added.

It was fortunate, he thought, that his dignity was not of the order that was easily upset. Most of his colleagues would have been outraged by the fellow's impudence.

"How can a man like you sympathize with *us*," demanded Riley, "when your point of view is as remote from ours as the earth is from the last star? In any case, we judge a man's sympathies by his actions."

"So mine stand condemned?"

"Of course."

"Which simply means," said Riddle, "that you resent being sent to prison."

"Do you expect us to like it?"

The magistrate shrugged. "You're under no obligation to break the law, you know."

"A long way we'd get if we didn't!" the other sneered.

"You don't seem to be getting very far as it is."

Riley seemed to lose his resentment. For several seconds he stared at the magistrate as though weighing him up.

"You're blind," he said at last. "You've got eyes but you can't see. On every side of you there are signs of change, but you can't see them. Lenin once said of the old Russia that it was pregnant with the revolution. So's this country. The revolution's kicking in the womb, and you think there's nothing there but wind!"

Riddle said: "Perhaps there isn't," and the other seemed to fly into a rage. He leaned forward in his chair and snarled:

"Then it's the sort of wind that blew through

Russia! The world to-day is in the state of final crisis that Marx predicted for it!"

"Marx! Marx!" jeered the magistrate. "You Communists are like Scots theologians. For an explanation of any sort of phenomenon they refer to the Scriptures. You refer to Marx. Vox Karl Marx vox Dei! Your Communism has ceased to be a political philosophy and become a religion!"

The Communist was taken aback. Biting his lip, he glared at the other. "A religion," he repeated as though to himself. "A religion. Yes . . . perhaps you're right. But if Communism's a religion it's given wage-slaves something no other religion ever gave them. It's given them hope. Christianity promised them redress in the hereafter. God, and they believed it! Redress in the hereafter! The meek shall inherit the earth! The colossal impudence of that piece of humbug! Oh, I'll hand it to the bosses for that! Redress in the hereafter. For nearly two thousand years they humbugged us with that! Pie in the sky when you die! In the meantime: God bless the squire and his relations, and keep us in our proper stations. We believed it, I suppose, because we had to have some sort of hope to enable us to endure. Without hope we'd have committed suicide like that poor devil Rumble who murdered his family and killed himself. But now it's over. Karl Marx gave us a hope to be realized on earth, not in heaven. Yes, Communism's a religion and Karl Marx is its prophet. We don't mind the sneers of the scribes and pharisees!"

"Neither did the early Christians," said Riddle. "And yet, you say, for nearly two thousand years Christianity has been used as a vehicle of oppression!"

"What do you mean?"

"Can you be sure, my friend, that your oppressors won't adapt your new religion to their needs as you say they adapted Christianity?"

Riley said surlily: "If you mean they'll try and twist Marx as they twisted Jesus: they've already tried. But the Communist religion doesn't depend on faith, so the twisting hasn't been much of a success."

Theodora got up from the arm of the magistrate's chair.

"Oh, please don't argue!" she pleaded. "What good does it do? It only makes you more bitter against each other. And you're both my friends. . . ."

"Tut, tut!" said Riddle gently. "We're just beginning to enjoy it, my dear."

Riley grinned suddenly, and the girl perceived that it was true. They were beginning to enjoy it: the Communist fresh from prison and the magistrate who had sent him there. As they argued, their consciousness of enmity, of their positions in the opposed forces of the class-war, seemed to fall from them. They argued as equals. The girl sensed a rising impulse of respect, of liking, in each for the other. At length she went behind the screen and made coffee for them. They continued to dispute as they drank it.

At eleven o'clock Riley rose abruptly. He glared at the magistrate, but his ferocity was only half real.

"Well," he remarked, "I must say I never expected to meet you outside a court."

Riddle laughed. "Not even in a hypothetical future?"

"What do you mean?"

"You promised to turn me into a living bomb!"

The Communist frowned. "I meant it!" he said grimly, compressing his thin lips. He seemed about to say more, but changed his mind. "Good night!"

he said abruptly. "Good night, Theo!"—and went out.

Riddle looked thoughtfully at Theodora. "There must be a good many like your friend, my dear," he said slowly: "A good many who wish me no good. If there *were* a revolution . . . if I escaped being blown into fragments I should probably be used to decorate a lamp-pole. It's not a pleasant thought. . . ."

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

THE club letter-rack was crowded with members' monthly accounts. Peter Groom took the envelope upon which his name was endorsed, and extracted the account: £7 4s. 3d. for a month's drinks. Replacing it in its envelope, he stuffed it into a pocket. The account reminded him that he needed money. He would have to cash a cheque at his bank. He had gone through over ten pounds since Cynthia left. Not that it mattered. . . .

It was great: being a bachelor again—no sense of restriction and confinement, no thought of a jealous wife at home to spoil the fun. What a fool a man was to get married! Why the devil had he ever got married? He had got married, really, because he knew Cynthia expected it of him and he had not wanted to hurt her feelings. Funny! It did seem funny that a man should get married for a reason like that, yet probably lots married for the same reason. He'd been fond of Cynthia, of course. And he'd warned her beforehand that he wasn't the domesticated type. She'd gone to the altar with him knowing he regarded marriage vows as so much humbug. She'd said she didn't mind, but she hadn't really believed him. Thought he'd settle down, resign himself to the yoke. Well, he couldn't. He didn't want to and he wasn't going to try. Women thought that when they married a man they acquired his soul. Hell! And he and Cynthia might have been happy if only she'd been reasonable. Jealousy was responsible for a lot of misery.

Groom knew better than anyone else the spirit of generosity which infused his young wife. He had a vision of her charming, sun-tinted face in its frame of brown hair. But for him her generosity and charm were spoiled by her jealousy. The generosity which would normally have shrunken from any kind of meanness, under the influence of a jealous love became a stick to beat him with. The cocktail warmed him. To Cynthia, he thought, that barbaric jealousy was not only justified by her love, but ennobled by it. Poor kid, she saw it as an essential ingredient of love itself. . . .

Despite his pleasure in his bachelor freedom, he was missing her, and the thought of her jealousy, which usually sufficed to anger him, now made him feel tender. It was not unlikely that when he returned to the flat he would find her back, he thought. She had never stayed away for more than four or five days. The cocktail warmed the young idler. When his wife came back he would treat her more kindly than of yore as a consequence of this brief spell of freedom. He ordered another cocktail.

Well, he would have to go to the bank to get that money. Had he his cheque-book? May as well give the steward a cheque for his chit account while he thought of it. Calling for a pen and ink, he wrote a cheque and gave it to the steward, then wrote another to cash at his bank.

His bank was only a few paces from his club. He said: "Good day" to the teller as he tendered the cheque. The teller smiled obsequiously and said: "Good morning, Mr. Groom," and passed the cheque through a grille behind him for initialling by the ledger-keeper.

While he waited Groom chatted with the teller. He

had to wait longer than usual. At last a youth appeared at the grille behind the teller and whispered something to him.

"The manager wants to see you, Mr. Groom," the teller said.

"Good Lord, what for ?"

"Don't know, Mr. Groom. Just said he'd like to see you."

A clerk conducted him to the office of the manager. On the official's desk was his cheque.

"What's the trouble ?" he inquired.

"This cheque," said the manager. "Don't you know your wife's withdrawn your power of attorney, Mr. Groom ?"

"What !"

"I see you don't. I'm afraid we can't cash this cheque, Mr. Groom."

"But . . . Great Scot, man ! Do you mean to say I can't operate on my own account ?"

"Your wife's account, Mr. Groom. You have been operating in the past under a power of attorney which has now been withdrawn."

The banker proceeded to explain the bank's obligations and responsibilities to its clients. He was sorry, very sorry, but he could not cash the cheque. No, he did not know why Mrs. Groom had withdrawn the power of attorney. Perhaps if Groom asked his wife he would be able to find out.

"She's cleared out !" said Groom. "She's cleared out and left me five days ago !"

The banker smiled tolerantly. A young couple's quarrel, eh ? Well, it would seem to be in Groom's interests to effect a reconciliation. And if friction were developing between his wife and himself it might be as well, when the present little trouble was settled,

to make provision for the future. With his wife's consent, the banker pointed out, the deed of gift might be annulled.

"I just gave a cheque for seven pounds odd to my club," said Groom. What about that ?"

The bank-manager raised his hands in a deprecating gesture. "If it's presented we'll have to return it marked 'no authority', Mr. Groom, that's all. You'd better see your club secretary and get it back."

The young idler sprang to his feet in anger. "Damn it !" he exclaimed. "I thought I'd been a customer of this bank long enough to receive better treatment than this ! When this business is fixed up I guess my account'll go to some other bank."

The manager shrugged. "That's a matter for your own determination, Mr. Groom. Now, if you will excuse me. . . ."

Groom went hurriedly back to his club. Cynthia ! To do a thing like that to him ! He would never have believed her capable ! He was almost broke. He would have to borrow some money from one of his friends. Noel Manning ? Noel mightn't have it : he had only what he earned as a journalist, and that frequently wasn't much. One of the chaps at the club there. But first that cheque. . . .

The steward looked at him curiously, but gave him back the cheque.

He couldn't find anyone he knew very well in the club, and thought of Paul Kronen. He got his car from the street where he had parked it and drove round to the great department store. The kerb outside the store was lined with cars ; there was no room to park. He found a space at last, but it was almost as far from the store as the place from which he had driven. He walked back in a bad temper, but there was a hotel

close to Kronen's Limited, so he went into the bar and had another cocktail, then sought out Paul Kronen.

The managing director of Kronen's Limited gazed impassively at the young idler as the latter recounted his tale.

"I didn't think Cynthia had it in her," he remarked, when Groom had finished.

"Neither did I," said Groom ruefully.

"And you're broke, eh ?"

"Yes. Let's have a tenner, will you, Paul."

Paul Kronen licked his lips. "I wouldn't lend you a tenner if it was to save your life !" he said slowly.

The young idler looked at his friend in astonishment. "What ? . . ." he began. Then he became angry and got abruptly to his feet. It had not occurred to him that Kronen would refuse or he would never have asked him. It had certainly not occurred to him that Kronen would still bear him a grudge from the other night as apparently he did. But Kronen was always carrying a grudge against someone. That was his damned vanity.

"I suppose that thousand to the unemployed ran you a bit short," he said ironically, and took his departure.

As he made his way back to his car the young idler reflected that he had not even enough money in his pocket to buy another cocktail. Well, he'd have something to say to Cynthia when she got back ! He began to wonder how many of the people he passed in the street had as little money in their pockets as he. He could not remember ever having been broke before. He laughed suddenly. It was rather funny when you came to think of it !

Reaching his car, he drove round to the office of the newspaper for which Noel Manning did most of his work. The journalist was there and proved to be sympathetic. Groom borrowed five pounds from him.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

I

ON Tuesday a reduction of a further five per cent in the wages of the employees of Kronen's Limited was announced. This action was in accordance with the law of the State, being sanctioned by the Financial Emergency Act, and was expected in all shops; but other proprietors had refrained, fearing the temper of their employees. Kronen's Limited acted alone.

Coming at this juncture, the announcement produced an emotional reaction of unexpected intensity. During the lunch-hour, indignation meetings were held in the men's and girls' luncheon-rooms, lavatories, and dressing-rooms. Many of the assistants were late in returning to their work, an offence punishable by fine. Such was their temper, however, that the departmental-managers and floor-walkers did not dare take action.

During the afternoon the secretary of the union appeared and wandered through the shop, talking here and there with those who were known to have influence with their fellows. The secretary urged them to do nothing precipitate. If any action were to be taken, he insisted, it could only be effective if it were taken by the union itself, and had the support of other organizations. Most of the men, many of whom had families to support on their small wages, and some of the girls, displayed a disposition to agree with him; but others laughed, and some were angry. The big, raw-boned girl in the haberdashery department, Olive

Curnow, who was bitter with hate of Paul Kronen, demanded:

"Have you come from His Royal Highness? How much did he pay you?"

On the following evening a meeting of the employees of Kronen's Limited was held in the Trades Hall, and their temper was angry and reckless. They were incensed by the wage-cut, but at the back of their minds was a picture of Ethel Rumble with her throat cut, and a shadow of a man hanging from a rope. There were few who did not believe that Paul Kronen had painted that picture and cast that shadow, and few in whose hearts there was not hate. The big room buzzed with angry chatter.

A little, middle-aged man moved unobtrusively into the big chair behind the table on the platform. By tacit consent the oldest employee always took the chair when officials of the union executive were absent, and James Johnston's twenty-nine years in the service of Kronen's Limited for him were a matter of pride. He did not want trouble; he would use what influence he possessed to prevent trouble. The secretary of the Department Store Employees' Union mounted the platform and placed a bundle of books and papers on the table by the chairman. He looked apprehensive and harassed.

"You'd better tell 'em this isn't a properly constituted meeting," he said to the chairman. "Nothing they do at this meeting can have any effect."

The chairman licked his lips and tapped gently on the table with a gavel. Only those close to the platform could hear him. The chattering went on. Johnston looked at the secretary in a helpless way.

"Order!" cried the secretary loudly. "Order!"

In a little he secured attention.

The chairman began : "Ladies and gentlemen . . ."

"Ladies and gentlemen, hell !" a girl's voice cried in anger, and added on a note of bitter sarcasm : "Ladies and gentlemen ! . . . on two quid a week !"

"Er . . . fellow-employees of Kronen's Limited, then," said the chairman doubtfully. "Fellow-employees, I have to warn you—before we start any discussion, I have to warn you that this meeting to-night is unconstitutional. My friend the secretary informs me that even if we do anything to-night it can't have any effect. It will have to be confirmed at a properly called meeting. This meeting's informal. . . ."

He paused, licking his lips, at a loss for further words.

For a moment there was silence while the import of his statement sank into the understanding of his hearers. Then uproar broke out, dominated by the angry, excited voices of girls. The secretary snatched the gavel from the hands of the chairman and pounded on the table.

"Order ! Order ! What the chairman has told you is right !"

His voice rang out above the hubbub, but he was answered by angry shouts.

"What's wrong with the meeting ?"

"What does it matter ?"

"Elect another chair !"

The girl Olive Curnow thrust her way to the front, shouting : "I move a vote of no confidence in the chair !"

"No confidence ! No confidence !" Her words were taken up. She climbed on to the platform and held up her hand. "Those in favour ? Those in favour ?"

"Aye !" they shouted, and a forest of hands was raised.

The chairman was on his feet, licking his lips and looking afraid.

"I've been in the service of Kronen's Limited for twenty-nine years," he began. "For twenty-nine years, and I've never . . ."

"And you've never done anything but crawl to the boss !" the girl said viciously. "Get out ! You're out !"

"This girl's simply a trouble-maker . . ."

"Get out !" she screamed, shaking a fist under his nose, and he vacated the chair hastily.

"Nominations for a new chair !" the girl cried.

"You ! You !" they shouted back. "Olly Curnow !"

"Those in favour of me taking the chair ?"

Again there was a shout of : "Aye !" and a raising aloft of hands. The voices of those who objected were lost in the clamour.

"Well, then," said Olive Curnow, "we'll get down to business," and she seated herself behind the table.

The secretary looked wary, but ventured a civil protest. "You know all this is unconstitutional, don't you ?"

The girl answered him with a long, sustained glare of contempt.

"We've paid attention to you and others like you too long. Unconstitutional ! What do we care if it's unconstitutional ? You take a record. That's all you've got to do."

"I'll do nothing of the kind," retorted the secretary. "The minute-books of the union aren't kept to record this sort of thing !"

"Do you hear that ?" Olive Curnow demanded of the assemblage below her. "We pay this man, but he won't take orders from us. I don't mind saying

I think he prefers to take them from Paul Kronen. . . ."

"Now that's more than I'll stand!" exclaimed the secretary.

But another babel broke out in the hall. There were shouts of:

"Get someone else!"

"Pull him down!"

"I'm wiping my hands of the whole business," said the secretary angrily. "I'm secretary of the Department Store Employees' Industrial Union of Workers, not Kronen's employees. Do you think I'm going to take orders from a lot of hysterical girls?"

"Then get out!" exclaimed Olive Curnow. "Get out, and take your bloody books with you! We don't need you."

The secretary took his books and papers under his arm and left. Girls and men gave him passage, averting their faces, or gazing at him sullenly or angrily. Then a temporary secretary was appointed, a quiet fell on the hall, and the girl Olive Curnow began a passionate address. She had no gift of rhetoric, but she had no self-consciousness. She talked to the assemblage as she might have talked to individual girls in her department at Kronen's Limited, her voice hot with indignation and vibrant with anger, and her words were weighted with sincerity. She carried her listeners with her.

She spoke of Ethel Rumble, and the thoughts of her audience flew to the girl in visions of her body lying on a slab at the morgue. She cursed Paul Kronen, his arrogance, his overweaning vanity. And her audience cursed with her silently. She cursed the state of society which put into Kronen's hands the power of life and death over his employees. Ethel Rumble had been dismissed because she would not yield to Kronen's

lust; she had told him that her wages were all that stood between her family and destitution; she had pleaded with him. . . . Paul Kronen! . . . Olive Curnow's voice quivered with hatred and rage. Ethel Rumble had not neglected her work. The head of her department said that he had no complaint to find with her—though he had recanted after he had seen his master, the bloody crawler! Ethel Rumble had done her work as well as any girl in the shop, but she had refused to submit to being made Kronen's plaything, so Kronen had condemned her to death. Yes, Paul Kronen, their Paul, had the power of life and death in his hands like any medieval tyrant! . . . It might have been any other girl as easily as Ethel Rumble—any girl who had happened to excite his lust. It had been Ethel Rumble, however, so the rest of them were permitted to live. Paul Kronen had been content to leave them their lives and cut their wages down. Generous of him. Yes! He was a philanthropist. Hadn't they all read of his magnificent gift to the unemployed? A thousand pounds. The public would flock to buy things at the shop of a philanthropist, and he would soon get his thousand pounds back, of course, and another thousand with it. And no one would believe that a great philanthropist had anything to do with the deaths of Ethel Rumble and her mother and sister and father. No one would believe that a man who would give a thousand pounds to the unemployed would try to seduce one of his employees, and sack her because she wouldn't let him. Nor had any of these considerations been in Paul Kronen's mind when he suddenly decided to become a philanthropist. The irony in Olive Curnow's voice was like a corrosive acid. No, it was simple generosity. And to make sure that his employees appreciated it,

he had made them share it. He had cut their wages so that in a few weeks he would have his thousand pounds back from them as well as from the public. And they—his employees—they'd have a warm feeling in their hearts at the thought that it was really they who had given a thousand pounds to the unemployed; and if they had to scratch a little harder to make ends meet, and go without a few more of the little amenities of civilization they'd heard so much about—well, there was the warm feeling in their hearts as compensation.

"Like hell a compensation!" the girl cried. "What are you going to do about it? If that wage-cut comes into operation we ought to strike! That's what we ought to do: strike! That's the only thing our philanthropist will understand. And we ought to demand the reinstatement of the girls and men who were sacked on Friday while we're about it!"

In a moment babel had broken out again. There were shouts and cries, and disputes began in a dozen places at once. But there was a note of purpose in both the cries and disputes. The girl had raised them to a state of excitement bordering on hysteria, but she had also infected them with some of her own reckless determination. The issue before them had become clear where before it had been confused, and the minds of most of them were already made up. Others, however, hesitated: chiefly the men, who could bear the cut better than the girls, and were less willing to gamble. In a vague way, too, many of the men resented the domination of the meeting by a girl.

"How can we afford a strike?" one demanded. "We know how the union's placed. The strike fund has been used for current expenses."

"And the union won't recognize us," said another. "What can we do on our own? There ought to be a full meeting of the union—of all shops."

"Fools!" cried Olive Curnow. "Don't you see that if we strike while the other shops are still at work we have a better chance than if they all came out? Kronen will see himself losing money, see it going to other shops, see his thousand pounds' worth of philanthropy wasted. And those who are still at work will help us. It's not the union that will oppose us, it's the executive—the officials we pay to protect us. What have they done for us? We've had cut after cut, and they've done nothing but tell us to wait, wait! *Their* wages haven't been cut, though they've used our strike fund to pay them. They've sold us! We've got to fight our own battles, and fight them against our own officials as well as the bosses. But the rank and file will be with us! . . ."

She stood before them with her strong, uncomely face flushed and her breast heaving. And they acclaimed her! She waited till the cheering had died down, then addressed them again. They needed a committee of action appointed from among themselves. They needed volunteers to place their demands before Kronen, and whoever undertook that task would run a risk of victimization. . . .

There were volunteers at once. They came forward and began to scramble on to the platform. Amongst them was Theodora Luddon. She cried:

"Wait! Wait!" Her usually serene face was animated and her eyes sparkled with excitement. "Why should anyone whose job is still secure be victimized? Over thirty were sacked on Friday. I'm one, and there are others here. Some of *us* should see Paul Kronen. We've already lost our jobs. We've nothing to lose,

but you're going to try and have us reinstated and we've everything to gain. . . ."

"Good girl!" exclaimed Olive Curnow. "You've got brains!"—and Theodora felt a thrill of pleasure at the big girl's praise.

A deputation of four of the dismissed employees was chosen: Theodora and two other girls, Susan Cripps and Jane Marshall, and a youth, Peter Smith.

The cheering broke out anew. . . .

2

Theodora was tired when she came away from the meeting, but she was filled with a sense of elation she could not remember having experienced before. A warm glow of emotion suffused her. Crying a score of good nights to girls who, in the course of an hour had become her friends, she started to walk home.

The moon rode high in the pale sky above the city, and the only street lights were the standards at main intersections. The polished bitumen of the street reflected the moonlight in a soft glow of silver, which changed transiently to gold as cars passed with their electric blaze. The trees at the edge of the footpath grew from pools of black shadow.

Hurrying footsteps came up behind her and she turned her head to see Steven Riley. She stopped and waited for him, greeting him with some surprise. He took her arm and urged her on, grinning in his wolfish way. His grin was sharp in the moonlight, a grimace in shadows and highlights.

He said: "Good work, Theo! I'm proud of you!"

"You weren't at the meeting, were you?" she exclaimed in surprise.

"No, but I heard about it."

She was pleased. She said: "Were you waiting for me, Steve?"

He nodded. "I wanted to hear about it. I heard only the outline."

"Why didn't you go to my room and wait there?"

"And run into your magistrate lover as he ran into me?" answered Riley, frowning. "No, thank you!"

"Oh, Steve!" the girl protested.

Suddenly the emotional glow that still suffused her seemed to reach out and embrace the man who walked beside her.

"Oh, Steve," she said unsteadily, "don't you know you can always go there when you want to? You're my friend. He . . ."

He squeezed her hand and answered gruffly: "Thanks, Theo. But I prefer not to run any risk of meeting him again. He's no good to you, Theo. You're on different sides, you and he. You should see that now—after to-night's business."

"I know," she said quietly.

She felt an irrational desire to weep. She took his arm and held it close against her side, and for a while they walked on in silence.

"Tell me about the meeting," the man said at last.

She told him, speaking with an animation that was the greater for being false.

"Good work, Theo."

"Olive Curnow . . . she was splendid. She just carried me away!"

"Were you carried away?" asked Riley in a queer tone.

"Yes," she admitted frankly.

"You're different," the Communist said gloomily. "None of the others would have admitted that. Sometimes I think they're not worth bothering about.

They'll only act when they're carried away. They don't think; they don't even try to think. Oh, Marx realized that! But they haven't even any imagination. Half of them can't visualize anything better than they have now. 'Workers of the world, unite!'" he quoted ironically. "'You've nothing to lose but your chains. . . .' Half of them don't know they're wearing chains till somebody jerks them! Then they forget again. Like cattle in a branding yard! They bellow and struggle while they're being branded, then they forget."

He fell moodily silent.

"Poor Steve," said Theodora, and after a moment added: "I think I'll get Olive Curnow to come up so that you can meet her. I think she feels like that. She was . . . splendid."

"I know her," said Riley, harshly. "She's a member of the Party. This was her first job. She did it well."

"Olive Curnow!"

"Why does that surprise you?" he demanded. "Do you think we're idle? I shouldn't have told you. You must say nothing about it."

"I . . . I'll say nothing. But . . . I didn't know."

They reached their destination and stopped, facing each other. Riley's eyes shone in the moonlight. Theodora felt her own gaze soften as she looked at him. She slipped a hand into one of his and squeezed it gently.

"You like me, don't you, Steve?"

The brightness faded from his eyes as he answered abruptly: "Yes."

"And I like you, Steve."

"What's the matter with you to-night, Theo?" he demanded. "You're . . . all worked up about something."

"It was the meeting," she said in a low voice. "I'm still full of emotion."

"You must be. You look as though you didn't know whether to laugh or cry."

"I don't," she replied, and both laughter and tears were in her voice. "Come up, Steve. Don't let's stand here."

He dropped her hand. "No."

She made a helpless gesture.

"All right, if you won't."

"It's late," he said in an embarrassed way.

"Steve, dear . . . listen . . . when you want to come, don't . . . stay away . . . because you think *he* might be there. Promise me, Steve. Any time you come and he's here I'll send him away."

Riley caught her by the shoulders and stood gazing at her for a moment. He seemed to fight a battle with himself. Then he swept her into his arms and kissed her once savagely before he released her.

"Steven . . ." she whispered weakly.

"You wanted me to do that!" he exclaimed.

She said simply: "I've wanted you to for months."

"Well, you've got what you wanted. Now I'm going!"

He turned on his heel and walked rapidly away.

For a little while Theodora stood watching him. He did not look back. Yes, she had got what she wanted. As she mounted the wide stairs to her room she still did not know whether she wanted to laugh or cry.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

1

"YOU can go in," said the inquiry-clerk, holding open the polished jarrah gate. "His high-and-mightiness has graciously condescended to see you!"

The man and three girls comprising the deputation from the shop employees passed through the gate, through the outer office into the ante-room where Kronen's pretty secretary sat, and so to the holy-of-holies of Paul Kronen himself. He regarded them coldly from behind his great desk, his gaze flickering from face to face.

He said: "I understand that this is a deputation from the employees of Kronen's Limited. Well, come to the point. What is it?"

The four looked at each other. All were under notice of dismissal; they had no reason to fear the man who regarded them so coldly from behind his great desk; but the habit of fear was strong upon them; they were nervous in the presence of power; they hesitated to say what they had come to say. Theodora felt an impulse of shame. They had become cowards! She swallowed once, then said calmly:

"We've come to ask you to reconsider the wage-cut, Mr. Kronen."

"Is that all you've come for?" demanded Kronen angrily. "Then let me tell you this: you're guilty of a piece of gross impertinence! The management of this business decided to reduce wages only when it became urgently necessary, but that decision has been

reached and it is not permissible for any employee to question it. If that is all you've come to say you'd better get back to your work."

A piece of impertinence! Theodora regarded him contemptuously. He was only a fool after all!

"That's all we came about," she said.

"Well, you have my answer. Before you go back to your work, give me your names."

He poised a pencil over a scribbling-pad and waited.

"All our names are on the last list of dismissals," said Theodora. "You won't need them. We have to tell you that if that wage-cut comes into operation we're going to strike."

Kronen breathed heavily and the mask that sheathed his deeper angers settled over his face.

"I've said all I have to say. Get back to your work."

"If we strike," said Theodora, "we're not going to let you get others in to fill our jobs. We're going to picket. You'd better think it over, Mr. Kronen."

"I've heard all I want to hear," answered Kronen. "For the last time, get back to your work."

The deputation departed.

The man, Smith, whispered to Theodora: "You didn't say anything about our being reinstated?"

"I forgot," she returned. "It doesn't matter. There's going to be a strike."

2

In the afternoon the departmental managers were called to a conference. On their return they briefly informed their staffs that the managing director wished to see all assistants at a meeting in the shop cafeteria on the top floor at five minutes past six. There was some grumbling at this. Why couldn't he

hold the meeting in his own time? Many of them would miss trams and trains in consequence. Their resentment against Paul Kronen deepened, but immediately after six they began to gather in the cafeteria, pushing aside the chairs and tables and palms to make room for themselves.

Kronen kept them waiting for five minutes. His face was pale and impassive. Without a glance to right or left he made his way to the dais upon which, in more prosperous times, an orchestra had played. He was followed by the staff-manager, the business-manager, and two others of his executive officers. They grouped themselves about him on the dais.

The rays of the setting sun struck through the hundred windows of the cafeteria and into the eyes of the men on the dais, dazzling them. Paul Kronen blinked and frowned.

"One of you draw the blinds on that side," he said curtly, and a middle-aged man hastened to do his bidding.

Kronen stood negligently while the blinds were being drawn, one hand in a pocket of his trousers. His elegance of dress and his air of passive aloofness placed him apart even from those who stood with him on the dais. When he spoke his voice was cold and without clue to the weakness he felt.

"I am given to understand," he said, "that unless Kronen's Limited intimates its intention of not putting into effect a decision to reduce the wages of employees, the employees propose to strike . . ."

"And unless you reinstate those who were sacked with Ethel Rumble on Friday!" a voice cried.

With a plain effort at control, Kronen went on, ignoring the interjection: "This was the . . . ultimatum . . . delivered to me this morning by four

employees purporting to speak on your behalf. Those four, I have since discovered, were all under notice of dismissal. If they had not been they would be now. Their mission was a piece of gross impertinence in which, in so far as they were your representatives, you shared. But that may be passed over. I have called you together to tell you that the management of this firm is not to be intimidated by any threats of a strike. The wage reduction which has been announced will take effect from next week. It has been imposed legally and of necessity. Kronen's Limited, in common with all other businesses, must economize if it is to weather the present storm. The reduction is as much in your interests as in ours. It is better that you should earn reduced wages than none at all. If you paid less attention to the malcontents and trouble-makers in your ranks you'd realize that for yourselves. It is those malcontents who are spreading false statements about *me*. I know the story you've heard . . ."—the pitch of Kronen's voice altered, became shrill—"It's false, every word of it! . . ."

Those near the dais saw his lips quiver. The shop-manager touched his sleeve, but he went on with his voice under control: "I and my lieutenants are entitled to your trust. In the ordinary way you *do* trust us. You don't worry about your jobs petering out; it never occurs to you to think that Kronen's Limited could fail; that's proof of your trust. You give us your trust until it becomes necessary to do something you don't like, then the fact that for years past your jobs have been dependent upon our brains and ability counts for nothing; you want to go on strike. Very well, if you can't understand that your wages are being reduced only because it's urgently necessary to ensure the continuance of your jobs—strike! There

are thousands out of work who would be glad of your jobs at the wages which are not good enough for you. It makes no difference to me whether we employ them or you. But bear this in mind: no employee who goes on strike will ever again get a job at Kronen's. This firm has no use for fair weather hands. . . ."

He was silent at last, and his little eyes behind the pale lashes began to move rapidly to and fro in their sockets as his gaze roved his assembled employees. And for a long moment they, too, were silent. Then, from several places at once, came a sound such as a man makes when he breaks wind. Kronen turned pale. As though he struggled for breath he said:

"Very well. That's all I have to say. You can go."

A girl's laugh rang out, mocking and contemptuous.

"I want that girl's name!" cried Kronen, his face suddenly contorted.

"Olive Curnow's my name," she replied.

"You can report for your pay in the morning!"

A murmur ran through the crowd in the cafeteria. The girl laughed again. With another effort Kronen controlled himself. He made a gesture of dismissal, spoke a word to those on the dais with him, and with wooden dignity made his way out of the already emptying room. He was close to tears.

3

The policeman on point duty at the intersection recognized the car of the managing director of Kronen's Limited, and held up the cross-traffic to let the young magnate pass, touching his cap and smiling obsequiously as the long, blue car accelerated by. Kronen acknowledged the courtesy with a brief gesture. The mortification that filled him made him reckless. Sure of

his skill, he always drove fast, but rarely so fast as he did now through the thinning city traffic. People on the footpaths turned to stare at the long, low vehicle as it hurtled past through the blur of the late evening.

Reaching his home he garaged the car and, entering the house, went at once to the telephone in the wide entrance hall and called the number of the secretary of the Department Store Employees' Industrial Union of Workers. He said:

"I want to see you, Creighton. . . . No, I can't talk over the telephone. Come round here at eight o'clock."

He banged the receiver down on to its hook, and went up to his room to wash and shave before dinner.

Both his parents and his sister Mavis were home for the meal. They talked idly across the white expanse of cloth while a maid brought them food and carried away their empty plates. The son alone was silent. When his mother addressed a remark to him he said:

"Don't talk to me. I've had a bad day at the shop. I'm in a bad temper."

She gazed at him for a moment then shrugged her shoulders lightly and addressed her daughter. James Kronen looked at his son with his ironical, world-weary eyes, smiled, and turned his attention again to his plate. He had been thinking of his auxiliary yacht which was almost finished, and the cruise which awaited him. Now his thoughts dwelt for a moment on his son. The whelp did not know how to meet trouble. He, James, had never deluded himself with the belief that the means were the end. Paul did. That was his trouble. The shop was an end in itself, had become identified with his ego, and he saw every

business hurdle as a personal slight. Like all these modern business-men—sentimental! . . . And with it he seemed to lack real business ability. . . .

Paul Kronen ate his food quickly and excused himself. Retiring to his study, he poured himself a glass of whisky and sat smoking cigarettes till Creighton was shown in to him. The union secretary was ill at ease.

"I say, Mr. Kronen," he began, "I shouldn't be coming to your house. You sent for me so I came, but . . ."

"Sit down!" said the other. "What do I care what you should or shouldn't be doing!"

"Well, it's not good enough," Creighton protested. "There's trouble in the union, and . . ."

"There's trouble in my business!" said Kronen sharply. "That's why I sent for you. There are a few things I want to say to you, Creighton. You've got to keep those sluts of yours in order, do you understand? It's the women who're making trouble, not the men. We don't want any trouble at the present juncture, and you can't afford trouble that doesn't suit us. Bear that in mind, Creighton. You're a shareholder in Kronen's Limited—you and most of the other officials—and I doubt if your members would understand it if it were disclosed."

"What can I do? Do you think I'm responsible? Do you think I haven't done what I can?"

"I don't know what you've done or what you haven't done, but I know you're going to nip this trouble in the bud or you and your executive are going to run up against troubles of your own."

"What do you mean?" the secretary demanded.

"Listen, Creighton. We don't want a strike. If there's a strike it will be because you and the rest

have lost control. Well, if you can't control the union there'll be a new executive, that's all. You've done pretty well for yourself out of being secretary of the union, haven't you, Creighton? So have the others. Even since this depression set in you haven't done so badly. Well, if there's a strike your members will learn exactly *how* well you've done, do you understand?"

"If it hadn't been for that girl, Rumble, there'd never've been any talk of a strike," Creighton said sullenly.

Kronen glared at him. "We won't talk about the Rumble girl, if you please!"

The union secretary shrugged. "She's as much the cause as the wage-cut."

"Nevertheless, we won't talk about her. There's no trouble in any of the other shops. There ought to be a majority of your members opposed to trouble at Kronen's. They won't like strike levies."

"There is. But your people won't listen. They've chucked all the rules overboard and elected a committee from among themselves. They won't listen to anyone but that girl Curnow. There's a meeting called for Friday night, and they'll vote against a strike. I know. But I don't think your people'll take any notice. They can't think of anything but that girl, Ethel Rumble, who they say you . . ."

"Didn't I tell you to leave her out of it?" said Kronen through his clenched teeth. "She's got nothing to do with it! You've got to make them realize she's got nothing to do with it! You've got to put a stop to it, d'you hear!" He sprang to his feet. "I've said all I've got to say. You've got to stop that tale and you've got to stop that strike, or your members'll learn the sort of secretary you are!"

"Now listen, Mr. Kronen . . ." began the secretary, rising too.

"I'll listen to nothing!" cried Kronen furiously. "I've told you where you stand. Now go home and get on with the job. Call a committee meeting. Do any damned thing you please, but *stop that strike*!"

The union secretary left angrily. Kronen poured himself another whisky and dropped back into his chair. The glass chattered against his teeth as he drank.

On the table beside him the evening paper lay folded. He caught sight of the headlines: "MAGNATE'S GENEROSITY. CHURCH LEADERS' VIEWS".... The church leaders regarded him as a shining example of Christian charity. The Moderator of the Presbyterian church said that the employees of Paul Kronen must feel proud to be working for such a man . . .

CHAPTER TWENTY

I

BEFORE Olive Curnow had ceased speaking at the extraordinary meeting of the union she knew she had failed. The meeting accepted the advice of the executive and refused to sanction the strike. Some of the employees of Kronen's Limited were secretly glad, thinking that now there was no question of a strike, but the majority were incensed and bitter against the executive, and resolved upon a struggle.

On Monday morning they came to work as usual, but instead of punching the time-clocks and proceeding in to their various departments, they gathered in a crowd in the street outside the shop. Olive Curnow and other members of the committee made speeches from the kerbs. They were cheered. Groups of men and girls formed themselves into pickets, glaring fiercely at any of their fellows who would have entered the shop to work. The crowd in the street held up the traffic, and soon the police were at work clearing a way for vehicles.

The police were courteous. These strikers were normally the supporters of the government in power. The pickets were permitted to patrol the footpaths unhindered when the crowd had dissipated and had drifted home.

Within the great shop the wide aisles were empty. The departmental managers and office staff flew from counter to counter to supply the wants of the few customers who passed the pickets and entered.

During the morning typed notices addressed to the strikers and offering immunity to those who returned to their work before midday were pasted in the windows. The pickets forced their way into the shop and tore them down. In a rage, Paul Kronen rang up the Commissioner of Police, demanding protection, and an extra squad of police was sent to guard the doors. The notices appeared again. When the pickets sought to enter and tear them down they were stopped by the police. The notices were therefore suffered to remain for a while, but anon someone suggested that they might be hidden by sheets of newspaper pasted on the outside of the windows, and they disappeared again.

Olive Curnow went from picket to picket, encouraging and cheering them, and all day long the police were kept busy moving on the people who tended to collect outside the shop in the hope of trouble.

The evening paper announced the strike in headlines. A leading article charged the strikers with folly and ingratitude to a man who, only a few days since, had given a thousand pounds for the relief of the unemployed. Kronen's Limited advertised as vacant the posts of their striking employees. The pickets read the reports and laughed or cursed, felt angry or miserable and discouraged.

In his office on the gallery Paul Kronen glanced over the transcripts of certain years'-old letters which had accompanied the applications for shares in the company that Creighton and others of the Department Store Employees' Union executive had been invited to make. . . . Creighton had rung him up during the day protesting that he had done all he could. The fear in the man's voice had given Kronen a savage pleasure. If Creighton couldn't control his sluts he

would have to give way to a man who could! He put the transcripts into an envelope and addressed it to the secretary of the Australian Labour Party. In due course they would be the subject of an inquiry, and in due course there would be a change in the union executive unless Creighton was cleverer than Kronen believed.

Hours before the opening time in the morning, men and girls were forming in queues at the doors of Kronen's Limited in quest of the jobs of the strikers. Anticipating this, the departmental managers arrived at seven and began to engage assistants. When, a little before eight o'clock, the strikers' pickets arrived, it was to find that already over three hundred new-comers had been engaged. Others, in steady streams, poured through the doors. The pickets began to plead and remonstrate, but most of the new-comers were desperate from long unemployment, and could not be deterred. A few turned away but there were others to take their places. Finding their pleas and remonstrations of no avail the pickets became angry and began to spit threats and abuse at the strike-breakers, but they did not dare offer violence because of the presence of the police. By nine o'clock, when the shop was opened to the public, seven hundred hands had been engaged and every department in the great store, though short of its usual numbers, was staffed.

Olive Curnow and others attempted to re-hearten the pickets who showed signs of giving way to discouragement.

"Not one in ten of them has had any experience. They don't know the work and by the time they've learnt we'll have won. Keep the public out. Tell them the sort of philanthropist Paul Kronen is. Tell them about Ethel Rumble. And if that won't stop

them make it so unpleasant for them that they'd rather shop anywhere than at Kronen's Limited!"

Nevertheless some of the strikers slipped surreptitiously into the store and applied for their jobs. They were curtly informed that they should have applied before noon on the previous day; they were no longer wanted. This intelligence rallied them more effectively than the eloquence and example of Olive Curnow and the other leaders. They no longer had anything to lose. Customers entering the store were subjected to ridicule and abuse, and others approaching, intending to enter, were deterred.

The evening press contained articles attacking the government for its apathy and demanding protection for the public and action against the strikers . . .

2

Steven Riley left the meeting of the council of the Communist Party with the intention of going straight to his room and to bed, but when he had walked a hundred yards or so through the cold night air he changed his mind. Theodora would be interested to hear what had transpired at the meeting, he told himself, veiling his longing to see her with the thought, and forgetting his fatigue in the longing.

Reaching her lodgings he crept quietly up the stairs. He was afraid that she would be asleep, but there was a line of light under her door. All his fatigue left him. As she opened the door the light behind her shone through the thin kimono and pyjamas she wore, dimly outlining her young body; and Riley felt a constriction of his throat and a swelling of his genitals as he looked at her. He entered the room quickly lest he yield to the temptation to take her in his arms

there and then, and offer up his Communist austerity on the white and golden altar of her flesh. She read both the desire and the abjuration on his face, and smiled a little sadly.

"Still afraid of me, Steve?"

"I came to talk to you about the strike," he said roughly.

"Oh."

In the silence that followed he went to the chair by the fireplace: the chair that Theodora always thought of as his. An electric radiator was glowing in the fireplace and the room was pleasantly warm. The girl dropped down on a cushion by the chair.

"Someone distributed a lot of Communist leaflets to-day," she said, and made a helpless gesture. "Oh, Steve, it all seems so useless. They've replaced over half of us already. To-morrow . . ."

"A strike's never useless," he said.

"But they're going to break it! We've no money—only last week's pay. In a day or two that'll be gone. The union won't support us. . . ."

"Yes it will," he said gently. "Look at this, Theo."

As he spoke he drew some papers from his pocket and leaning forward spread them out on the floor in front of her. They were copies of the transcribed letters Paul Kronen had sent to the secretary of the Australian Labour Party. Theodora read them wonderingly. She gathered that Creighton and others held shares in Kronen's Limited under other names.

"How did you get these, Steve? How do they help?" she asked.

Riley ran his fingers through his tousled, blond hair.

"One of our people is in the A.L.P. office. These arrived there anonymously it seems—just before the

office closed to-night. He got hold of them and made copies. To-night we're making three thousand copies on the multigraph, and to-morrow every worker in every department store in town will get one. Then, maybe, they'll understand what actuated their officials in advising them to have nothing to do with a strike. Maybe they'll ask themselves whether their officials haven't got shares in other shops, and what they've been paying union fees for. Maybe they'll ask themselves quite a lot of things."

Theodora handed the papers back to him. She felt depressed. She had felt depressed ever since reading the letter from her mother that she had found awaiting her on her return home that day. The coal-owners had put off a hundred men, and amongst them was her father. Her mother seemed to think that she would be able to assist. . . .

She could not but feel that the strike was already broken. Perhaps Riley was right, perhaps the exposure of the union executive would result in support being forthcoming for the strike. But it would be too late, too late. It would only postpone the inevitable end. She tried to see the strike through Riley's eyes: not merely as a fight against a reduction in wages and for the reinstatement of those who had been dismissed, but as a battle in the long war of the classes. She tried to forget the individuality of the strikers: that did not matter in the Communist view. "The individual is only a cell in the larger organism of society," Riley had said to her once. She was acquainted with the elements of physiology, but it was not easy for her, unversed in the subtleties of the Marxist philosophy, to grasp all the implications of that statement. Individuals—cells in the larger organism of society; in their freedom of will, in their thoughts, their

emotions, their actions as circumscribed by the needs of society as cells by the metabolism of the human body. . . . If she looked at it like that, in the travail of society the fate of a few strikers mattered no more than a scratch to a man who fought his way through a jungle. . . . But she could not look at it like that. A sense of comradeship with the men and girls with whom she had worked had grown out of the events of the last few days, and it was too deep for her to look at it like that. . . .

She smiled up at Riley in a wan way.

"Things'll begin to move in a day or two," he assured her.

"Yes."

He continued to talk. She responded with monosyllables. But that was her habit and he did not notice.

Presently, however, he found his thoughts no longer on the strike of which he talked, but on Theodora, and he fell silent, watching her. The red glow of the radiator bathed her, and again his throat constricted and the blood ran to his loins.

"Have you seen your friend, Riddle, again?"

She shook her head.

"Getting tired of you, is he?" he sneered, and since she did not reply immediately, added: "They always do—his kind."

The girl was irritated. "Steve," she said in protest, "why is it you can never mention him without being unpleasant?"

Why? Riley did not know himself. The thought of the magistrate and Theodora seemed to inject venom into his blood and he said whatever came to his mind, and then, a moment later, was ashamed.

"Sorry," he said, avoiding her eyes.

"One would almost think you were jealous!"

"Jealous!" For an instant he glared at her angrily. Then he looked away and his face became gloomy. "He's not your sort. You belong to the proletariat, not the bourgeoisie. That's all it is."

She mocked him gently: "To be jealous would be bourgeois, wouldn't it, Steve?"

He retorted obscurely: "Maybe you've got fewer bourgeois vices than I have, at that! In spite of Riddle and the capitalist pig who seduced you!"

"Oh, Steven!" she said impatiently.

"I hate the class," he told her.

"I know you do, but there's no need to hate every member of it. Charles Amison was no more a pig than James. I liked him. He was kind and considerate. And he didn't seduce me; I'd had lovers before I met Charles Amison!"

"I hate the class and every member of it," Riley said. "I know what's happening to you, Theo. It's happened a million times to a million working girls. You meet wealthy men—men who have money to spend, and manners, and charm—I know—everything the men of your own class haven't got. And you forget that men are only wealthy and gay and charming at the cost of the misery of your own class. They win you away from your class. A million working girls turned into a million complacent little snobs!"

"That's just silly, Steve," she said, and she thought: yes, it was silly. Of other girls it might be true. It *was* true. She had seen them, complacent little snobs, climbing ostentatiously into the cars of men like Peter Groom, like Paul Kronen. But of herself it was silly. . . .

"You're the daughter of a coal miner," she heard Riley saying. "Why don't you choose your lovers from your own class?"

"It takes . . . two to make a bargain of that sort," she answered in a voice that was little more than a whisper. Then she looked up at him steadily and added: "I'd rather have you as a lover than either Charles or James, Steve."

Watching him, she saw him swallow, and saw the expression of fanatical renunciation she had seen so often before come over his face.

"Oh!" she exclaimed. "You're not bourgeois, you're . . . *medieval!*"

Riley got up.

"I've known for months that I could be your lover any time I wanted to," he said harshly. "But I've got work to do; I've got no time for that sort of thing. I'm going!"

"I interfere with your work as it is," Theodora said. "Oh, Steve, in some ways you're such a fool!"

But already he had turned and was walking towards the door, and he went out without answering. Theodora sighed. What could one do with a man like that? A monk! An ascetic! She rose, and began to prepare for bed. One could do nothing . . .

3

Riley made his way to the nearest brothel.

A tiny shutter in the door swung back. He was scrutinized then admitted. It was not a brothel to which he had ever been before. The grossly fat madam smiled at him, wrinkling her raddled cheeks, and showed him to a room in which two women sat at a table, playing cards.

"This is Rose, and this is Yvonne," said the madam. "You can take your choice."

Riley regarded the women indifferently. They had

risen at his entrance and were smiling at him. They were raddled like the madam. They wore high-heeled red shoes and black stockings and dresses that reached only half-way down their thighs. He indicated the younger, who came forward and slipped her arm round his waist.

"Do you want to love me, darling?" she said mechanically.

In her room she examined him to make sure that he suffered from no disease, annointed him with a smear of ointment, then extended her hand.

"You'll give me some money first, darling?"

He dropped five shillings into her hand. She put it away in a drawer, then went to the bed, pulling up her short dress and smiling fixedly.

It was over in a moment.

Ten minutes after he had entered the brothel Riley was out in the street again. Fatigue oppressed him but the fever was out of his blood, and even of Theodora he could for the nonce think calmly.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

I

THE following day, the 25th of April, was Anzac Day. At dawn on April 25, 1915, in the course of the Imperialist war of 1914-1918, Australians and New Zealanders on one side and Turks on the other had turned a beach at Gallipoli into a bloody shambles. Anzac Day was the holy anniversary of that event.

Dawn broke upon a concourse of ten thousand people gathered with bared heads before a memorial on the river heights overlooking the city. Some wreaths were placed against the memorial. There was a long, solemn roll of muffled drums, and on a great hush a bugler blew the Last Post. For two minutes the concourse held silence and, willy-nilly, their thoughts dwelt on Gallipoli, and it seemed to them that it was an apotheosis, not a shambles, that had taken place on the Anzac beach. Women who had lost husbands or sons or lovers wept silently, and men swallowed the lumps that rose in their throats. Then the bugler blew Reveille, another bugle echoed the call, there was a stirring and sighing in the ranks of the concourse, and the dawn celebration was over. As the crowd streamed away, people paused to place wreaths against the memorial until the granite base was buried under the flowers.

In the mid-morning there was another ceremony on the green reserve on the river-front, and over forty thousand people attended.

From a flag-draped dais the governor of the State,

officers of the military forces, and priests and prelates of Christ and Jewry exhorted the people to remember the spirit of the days of carnage, and called aloud upon their God to keep that spirit alive so that when the time came the people might again plunge willingly into an orgy of blood. The drums rumbled, the bugles blew the symbolic notes, and again there was silence while men swallowed and women wept. The men upon the dais looked down upon the multitude with pleased, rapt faces, beholding in the despair and misery they saw only a holy memory of the shambles at Anzac and an answer to their prayers.

When the ceremony was over a procession of ex-soldiers in civilian clothes re-formed, and behind their bands and the flying colours of their battalions, marched again through the city. Their clothes were shabby, dirty, torn. Their faces were drawn and furtive from want and hopelessness, yet they wore bravely on their threadbare coats the medals they had won in the carnage. Half of them were unemployed, but the crowds which lined the footpaths of the streets through which they passed did not notice. The crowds cheered the workless, homeless heroes of Anzac, and the smiling, prosperous-looking officers who led the battalions raised their hands in salute. . . .

2

On Anzac Day a fortnight had elapsed without word from or news of Cynthia. The young idler, Peter Groom, became anxious. He drove from one to another of the houses of her friends. None of them had either seen her or heard from her. He came to the conclusion that she had gone to stay with her parents at York, and reluctantly put through a long-distance telephone call: he did not like referring to her parents, but he had to find Cynthia, for the necessity of borrowing money from his friends was troubling him. Members of his club were beginning to display a disposition to avoid him. The secretary had asked him when he proposed to redeem his chits, and had reminded him that members were expected to settle their bar-accounts promptly.

The phone was answered by Cynthia's mother, whom he disliked, and who disliked him.

"Yes, Peter," she said in answer to his question, "Cynthia has been here, but she's not here now, and she made me promise not to tell you where she's gone. If you like to write a letter to her and address it here I'll send it on."

"But I'm penniless!" he protested.

"You might go to work," she suggested. "Perhaps to have to do some work would bring you to a realization of your responsibilities, Peter."

The young idler was too worried to feel angry with her. "Listen, Mrs. Blundel," he said, "I'm coming out to see you."

"It would be no use, Peter. I shan't tell you where Cynthia is. If she returns to you it will be of her own free will. She told me what occurred and I don't blame her in the least. In the same circumstances I should have done the same thing myself. You have humiliated her beyond endurance."

"I'm coming to see you," he said again.

"Very well," she replied, and rang off.

York was sixty miles away on the other side of the ranges, but Groom drove fast and reached the town in an hour and a half. Mrs. Blundel received him coldly.

"I warned you that you were wasting your time

in driving out here, Peter. I'm not going to interfere."

He pleaded with her but was unable to move her. She said:

"Cynthia is not here and she's not in the State. I advised her to go on holiday long enough to forget you, or to give you a chance of coming to your senses."

"Did you also advise her to cancel my power of attorney and leave me penniless?" Groom asked angrily.

"I did," she replied coldly.

"I thought someone had. Cynthia would never have thought of a dirty trick like that herself. What am I going to do?"

"I'm quite indifferent to what you do, Peter."

As he drove back to town, for the first time it occurred to him that Cynthia might not come back. A cold sweat of fear broke out on him as he realized what it would mean. He had never worked in his life. What work could he do in an age when one in three of all who normally worked were unemployed?

As the fear passed and the sweat upon his face dried in the wind, he reflected that he might be able to get a job as a motor-car salesman. He determined to go and see his friends in the motor-car trade on the following day. To-day it was impossible; to-day every shop and business in the city was closed because it was Anzac Day.

He had foregone his lunch in order to see Cynthia's mother, and he was hungry when, in the mid-afternoon, he got back to the city. He went to a restaurant and ordered a grilled steak and mashed potatoes, and while he ate it made a mental list of those he knew in the motor trade. When he had paid for the meal he had twopence left in his pocket, and he noted with chagrin

that there were only half a dozen cigarettes left in his case.

He had to get a job. Now that he realized that Cynthia might not return he could not continue to borrow from his friends. The thought of what he had already borrowed troubled him. He consoled himself with the reflection that he would be able to pay it back when he found a job.

He drove home gloomily with one hand in his pocket most of the way, rubbing together the two pennies that were all the money he had left. . . .

3

When the evening drew in he began to think again of a meal. There was food in the flat. The vendors of fish and meat, milk, ice, bread, fruit and vegetables who called at the flat each day continued to supply him on credit. But the prospect of a lonely meal in the empty flat of a sudden filled him with dismay. On impulse he locked up the flat, retrieved his car from the garage, and drove out to see John Graham and Gerda.

He had not been very popular with Gerda lately. He had been neglecting her and she resented it. But he wanted to see Gerda less than her husband at the present moment. He recognized the quality of John Graham. The keen faculties of the bulky chemist and the wide sympathy of his mind seemed to offer the chance of a solution to his dilemma.

Gerda opened the door to him.

"I've come to dinner," he said, grinning at her.

"You don't really deserve to be let in."

"I know I don't," he said, "but you'll let me in all the same."

"Give me a kiss, then!" she commanded, holding up her face that with its yellow-ivory whiteness in its frame of black hair made him think of Babylonian temples.

He slipped an arm behind her shoulders and kissed her. "Now I've paid the price of admission . . ." he suggested.

"Oh, damn you, Peter!"

"Cynthia's beaten you to it," he said.

She stood aside to let him enter. "Cynthia?"

"She hasn't come back yet," he told her.

"Well, does that worry you?"

"It mightn't if she hadn't left me without a cent and instructed the bank not to pay my cheques. I'm broke, Gerda. I'll have to go to work."

She gasped: "Peter!"

"That was her mother's doing," Groom said. "The old bitch never did like me."

"Oh, Peter! You *fool*! You awful *fool*! Didn't I tell you you should never have made your money over to Cynthia? I knew this would happen!"

When John Graham was acquainted with the young idler's troubles he laughed and remarked: "So it's happened at last, has it?"

Groom said ruefully: "I seem to be the only one who didn't expect it to happen."

But the chemist was not unsympathetic. He asked a few questions: had Groom seen a lawyer to find out whether there was any flaw in the deed of gift? There probably wasn't but it should be worth while to find out. Had he written to Cynthia? No? Then write to her to-night and see a lawyer to-morrow. Better not mention to Cynthia that he was going to see one, though.

"In any case, you'll only have to endure a

little temporary discomfort. She'll come back to you."

"Are you sure?" Groom pleaded.

Graham shrugged. "Barring a malevolent act of God!" He regarded the young man in an amused way. "She's in love with you. If she wasn't she'd never have been so spiteful."

"That was her bloody mother . . ." Groom began.

Graham interrupted him: "Nonsense! Her mother had to have something to work on. Like a social agitator. Agitators don't create social unrest; they simply direct it. Her mother may have directed Cynthia's spite against you, but she didn't put it there." The big man became thoughtful. But Cynthia will realize sooner or later that leaving you penniless hasn't secured you to her, and if only because of that she'll come back."

Groom said hopefully: "She couldn't see that my playing around with other women occasionally didn't do her any harm."

"She was afraid of losing you, Peter. That's the basis of all jealousy. But it's possible that she'll be more amenable to reason when she comes back."

Groom grunted. "Something will have to happen to change her a lot!"

"Something is happening to change most things," Graham observed. "The fundamental structure of society is about to change, and with it all the moral and intellectual and emotional values that are based upon it. Individual men and women are cells in the larger organism of society, Peter, and they are undergoing psychological modification preparatory to the change. Cynthia's modification is progressing along with other things. This modern decay of manners and morals, and the crisis with its train of bankruptcies

and unemployment and social unrest, are simply different phases of the same process. Have a whisky?"

"Yes, thanks. That's a novel idea, isn't it, John?"

"It's an idea that must have occurred to many people," said the chemist, pouring out whisky for himself. "It's possible that the relationship of the individual to society is literally that of the cell to the higher organism. Society appears to be about to emerge from a pupa stage of development, and cellular modifications are taking place preparatory to it breaking through the cocoon."

At midnight Groom rose to go, grinning. He had drunk a lot of whisky and had forgotten about Cynthia. A warm glow pervaded him, and he no longer seemed to have anything to worry about.

"Have another drink before you go?" the chemist suggested.

He refused. "Had quite enough!"

"Yes," said Graham, "perhaps you have."

Gerda accompanied him to the door. He kissed her perfunctorily and walked unsteadily out to his car.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

I

IN the morning the police warned the strikers that no further heckling of the public would be permitted. The protests of the press had taken effect. Feeling secure in the knowledge that the government had been elected by the votes of trades-unionists the strikers ignored the warning. A sergeant barked a few sharp orders. Almost before they were aware of what threatened several girls and a man were arrested. The abuse and heckling stopped abruptly and the strikers looked blankly at one another. There were angry murmurs but no resumption of the heckling. A raised voice anywhere brought a blue cap and a silver-buttoned blue tunic in view.

Olive Curnow, accompanied by two men carrying bundles of leaflets, appeared late. She found the pickets looking scared and resentful, talking together in whispers.

"What's happened?" she demanded.

They told her.

"And you let them be taken!" she cried furiously.

A policeman thrust forward, gripped her shoulder roughly, and said: "Come on, you!"

She wrenched herself from his grasp and flung about, crying: "Take your hands off me! What have I done?"

"Come on!" he said, lunging forward and clutching her again.

Other police pressed forward.

"Are you going to let them take me, comrades?" the girl screamed. "Are you going to let them get away with it?"

"You bet they are!" her captor said grimly.

His fingers dug into her flesh. She struggled vainly. Her eyes flashed from face to face like the eyes of a cornered animal. She saw anguish on their faces, fear, misery, hopelessness. But no one raised a voice, no one made a move. The pickets were cowed. She noticed that the men she had brought with her from the Communist Party rooms were moving about quietly, distributing the pamphlets: multigraphed copies of the letters sent by Kronen to the secretary of the Australian Labour Party.

"All right," she said. "I'll go quietly."

She ceased struggling, but her captor maintained his savage grip on her arm and hustled her along roughly.

2

When he had breakfasted the young idler, Peter Groom, drove into town to see his friends in the motor trade. They were not encouraging. If anything turned up they would let him know. Or there were a hundred competent and experienced car-salesmen out of jobs. Or in normal times it was sometimes possible to make a job for a friend, but in a time like the present it was all they could do to keep their own heads above water. One of them would not believe that he was in difficulties and tried to sell him a new car. He found that any of them would pay him a commission if he could introduce anyone who would buy a car, and he secured the name of a firm of financiers which, he was assured, would lend him money on his own car. He went to see this firm.

The manager was a dapper little Jew who came out with him and examined the car and then insisted upon being driven round to a garage where a further examination was conducted. The Jew had a whispered conversation with a mechanic and the manager of the garage, then asked Groom how much he wanted to borrow.

"As much as I can damn well get," the young idler answered.

"We might be able to lend you fifty pounds," said the Jew.

"Why, the car cost me four hundred and fifty pounds less than fifteen months ago!"

The Jew explained that second-hand cars were a glut on the market, and in the event of Groom defaulting—that, of course, he interpolated suavely, was unlikely, but anything might happen, anything at all—then a long time would elapse before the car could be sold, and all the time interest would be mounting up. There would be incidental expenses and commission to the man who sold it. It might be necessary to get as much as a hundred pounds for it to recoup a loan of fifty.

Groom finally accepted. He returned with the Jew to the latter's office, and the Jew placed a hire-purchase agreement before him to sign. He sold the car for seventy-five pounds and bought it back for a hundred. The Jew gave him two cheques, one for fifty pounds and one for twenty-five. He endorsed the latter and handed it back as a deposit on the purchase of his own car. The balance of seventy-five pounds and interest he was to pay by twelve monthly instalments, and should he fail to meet any one instalment he would lose the car. But the Jew was so suave and pleasant that Groom liked him. . . .

He cashed the cheque at his bank and looked up the friends from whom he had borrowed money. When he had paid Noel Manning, his last debt, he had twenty-two pounds left.

The journalist was working upon a one-act play script, and was not pleased at being disturbed. The play was being produced by the Dramatic Society. After seeing a rehearsal Manning was modifying the text. He was angry with the amateurs who were casting the play because they spoke their lines in a manner which obscured their significance. He pocketed the five pounds Groom tendered to him with a gruff "Thanks!" and spoke of his difficulty:

"It's an allegorical satire but they play it as if it were a farce! I've got to underline every point by re-phrasing it. If the actors can't see the meanings in the lines as they are it's a bloody certainty the audience won't!"

Groom sympathized with him but, perceiving that he wished to continue his work, did not stay.

It was nearly one o'clock and he was beginning to feel hungry. With money in his pocket he did not relish the idea of lunching alone. He decided to pick up Theodora at Kronen's Limited and take her to lunch if she would come, but as he approached the shop he saw the pickets patrolling the footpaths and the police standing about watchfully, and remembered that there was a strike at Kronen's Limited. He drove on to Theodora's lodgings.

A car was stationary at the kerb outside the house, with a uniformed constable at the wheel. Groom parked his car behind the other and ran up the stairs to find an agitated landlady standing on the landing outside Theodora's room. The landlady recognized him:

"Oh, you're her brother!" she exclaimed. "I don't know what your sister's been doing, I'm sure I don't! They came here with a warrant . . ."

"My sister!" he echoed in surprise.

"You're her brother, aren't you?"

Groom remembered then that he had once gained entrance to Theodora's room in her absence by representing himself as her brother. He gazed into the room in astonishment. Two men in plain clothes were making a thorough-going search. One of them was transferring books from the mantelpiece to a suitcase. The girl herself was not there. Seeing him, one of the men demanded what he wanted.

"He's the young lady's brother," the landlady explained while Groom silently cursed her.

"Her brother, are you?"

"No," he said. "That's a mistake. But I'm a friend of hers. What has happened?"

"Well!" exclaimed the landlady.

"What's your name?" the plain clothes man barked.

A little resentfully Groom gave his name. The other seemed to weigh him mentally. He said at length:

"Well, you don't look like a red. You'd better be on your way."

Groom turned pointedly to the landlady, and asked: "Where is Miss Luddon, do you know?"

She wailed: "I don't know. I thought you were her brother. She might be down at Kronen's. It's the first time I've ever had the police in my house. . . ."

Resentful against both the landlady and the police Groom left before she had finished speaking. It seemed suddenly urgent that he should find Theodora. He drove back to Kronen's Limited and scanned the

pavements but could not see her. He asked one of the pickets.

"I think she's around somewhere," the girl answered, but could tell him no more.

The footpaths were congested with the lunch-hour crowds. People jostled one another confusedly. The presence of the police and the pickets added to the confusion.

Groom found the girl at last and got her out of the crowd and told her what was happening. She was incredulous. She repeated several times: "But what for? But, Peter, what for?"

He told her that he had seen the plain clothes men packing away some books from the mantelpiece, and at that she had an inkling of the truth, and gasped with fear for Steven Riley.

"Peter," she exclaimed, "have you got your car?"

"Why, yes!"

"Peter, those books belonged to Steven Riley. I've got to let him know. Will you drive me?"

"Of course!"

"I don't know where he'll be," she said when they reached the car. "I think we had better go first to the Friends of the Soviet Union. Do you know where it is?"

"No."

She directed him, adding: "Please drive fast."

"You might tell me what it's all about," he said when they were under way. "Who is Steven Riley?"

"He's a Communist," she told him. "He kept his books in my room because he was afraid his own might be raided. I don't know how they could have found out . . ."

She gave him a quick, sidelong glance. There was a look of stupefaction on his face.

"I remember!" he said in an astounded way. "I remember now. I noticed the titles but I didn't think anything about it. Great Scot, Theo! How did you come to get mixed up with a fellow like that?"

"Steven Riley's my friend," she replied quietly.

"But a Communist!"

"Don't talk about things you don't understand," she said, and he detected a hardness in her voice that he had never heard before.

He looked at her in astonishment.

"Are *you* a Communist?"

"I'm not a member of the Party," she replied non-committally.

"Well, I'm damned!" he exclaimed; he could think of nothing else to say.

"If you'd rather not drive me now you know . . ." Theodora suggested.

"What rot! No, of course I'll drive you. But . . . Good God! . . . I . . . I'm mazed, that's all!"

The Friends of the Soviet Union occupied a grimy shop in the northern quarter of the city. Outside the shop an ill-dressed crowd had gathered. The crowd was chattering in an excited way. Theodora sprang out of the car. The pictures of industry in the U.S.S.R., pictures of factories and wheat-fields and smiling groups of workers, with which the window was usually filled, were gone. With Groom behind her she thrust through the crowd into the shop. The almost life-size photogravure of Lenin which had hung at the end of the shop was gone. The counters which were customarily laden with piles of papers and pamphlets, and the shelves behind them, which had held a little library for the use of members of the organization, were bare.

"What's happened?" inquired Groom. "Have you been raided, too?"

The starved-looking man to whom he addressed the question nodded. "We been raided all right, comrade. They've taken everything. They've taken our papers and our lists and our typewriter, and they even took the blank typewriter paper, and the blank receipt-books, and our library which didn't have a revolutionary book in it."

Theodora asked: "Where's Steven Riley? Has he been here?"

"I haven't seen him, comrade."

"I've got to find him. If he comes in will you tell him that the police have raided my room, too?"

"You're? . . . ."

"I'm Theodora Luddon."

The man nodded. "I'll tell him, but I expect he'll know by this. They've raided the Party headquarters. I think they've raided us everywhere."

Theodora clutched Groom's sleeve, dragging him out of the denuded shop.

"Come on. We've got to find Steve!"

"But if he already knows, as that bloke said . . . ."

"He *mightn't* know. We've got to find him."

"Oh, all right."

The girl gave him the address of the Communist headquarters.

Riley was not there, but Anna Peacelove, the wife of the leader of the Party, comforted Theodora with an assurance that Riley already knew.

"We were raided here, too," she said. "Steve was here, and was afraid for you, so he rang up your landlady."

"He wasn't arrested?" Theodora cried in alarm.

"No. There was no one arrested. They only confiscated everything. They took the last number of the *Red Star* which was just off the machine and all the paper we had. But they left us the multigraph. Tom and Steve have gone to see about getting out a special. We'll sell five thousand copies on the strength of this raid, even if it's only a single sheet. . . ."

"Where now?" Groom asked when he and Theodora were again back in the car.

The girl hesitated. "If he knows . . . there's no need to find him now. But I wish I'd seen him. . . . Thank you, Peter. You've been good."

"Nonsense!" he retorted. "What about some lunch then? It was to take you to lunch that I went to your room."

"I ought to get back and see what they've taken."

"All right," he agreed. "We'll go back first, then we'll have some lunch."

Theodora consented silently. Left to herself she would have gone without lunch. Most of the erstwhile workers at Kronen's Limited were going without lunch, conserving as well as they might the little money that remained to them.

They arrived at her lodgings. As they entered the landlady emerged from her room under the stairs and approached with an air of urgency.

"I was waiting for you to come in, Miss Luddon," she said. "I suppose you know the police have been here. I don't know what you've done to get mixed up with the police, Miss Luddon, and I may say I don't care because I'm not wishing to pry into your affairs and I've never had any complaints to make about you myself. But I think you ought to understand that this makes a difference. I've got to think of my house. I'll have to ask you to find another room, Miss Luddon. I don't like doing it, and God

knows I can't afford to have a room empty, but I've got to think of my house. I don't mind giving you a few days to find another room, of course."

Theodora listened. This was a development that she had half expected. She said:

"Very well, Mrs. Withers; I'll find another room."

"I'm sorry, Miss Luddon. As I said, I've nothing to complain about myself, but . . ."

Theodora cut her short. "There's no need to say any more, Mrs. Withers. I'll find another room to-day. My rent is paid to to-day."

"So long as you understand, then . . ."

"I understand."

With a glance of disapproval at Groom, the landlady went back to her room beneath the stairs.

"I say, I'm sorry!" Groom exclaimed.

"There's no need to be sorry. I'd have had to move, anyway. The room was too expensive for me."

They went up the stairs. The police search had been thorough. The contents of drawers, cupboards, trunks, and cases had been turned over, but nothing had been taken except the books belonging to Riley and some letters that had reposed in a dressing-table drawer. They were innocuous letters, mainly from her home in Collie. Her clothes, however, had been mauled and crumpled. Dresses that had been on hangers lay in a heap on the floor of the wardrobe. A box of face-powder was spilt over a drawer of lingerie.

She exclaimed in a dismayed way: "Oh, the beasts!"

"Well, you'll have to pack them all, anyway," Groom consoled her. "Don't worry now. Come and have some lunch. Afterwards, if you like, I'll run you round till you find another room, then come and help

you pack. In fact, I'll do any darned thing you want me to."

"Thanks, Peter." He *was* kind, she thought.

At a restaurant they ate grilled flounders and sweet omelettes and drank locally-brewed lager beer.

Theodora was silent. She was wondering how the police had known there was anything in her room to seize. She came to the conclusion that either Steven Riley had told someone who had passed on the information, or that the policeman who had called on her a few days ago to find out what she knew of Ethel Rumble had noticed the books and reported them. He had not seemed to notice; he had seemed to be concerned only with what she had to tell him of the excursion to Rockingham with Ethel Rumble and Paul Kronen and Peter Groom. Groom ought to know about that, she thought, and told him.

"They came to see me, too," he said. "Poor kid, her father must have been mad!"

"Yes," Theodora agreed.

"Theo—that story about Paul Kronen sacking her because she wouldn't play—was that right, Theo?"

"That's what she said," Theodora replied in a low voice.

"I don't understand it. After we'd dropped you and her that night Paul told me he'd made the grade. How did the story get about?"

She told him briefly.

He said thoughtfully: "Well, it might be right, but he told me he'd made the grade. Do you know what I thought? I thought he'd sacked her because he didn't like her being in the shop after he'd had her. He'd be afraid of her talking, undermining his prestige. He's crazy about his prestige in the shop. He didn't know that you and she worked there, that night when

we set out. He thought your faces were familiar, but he couldn't place you. Afterwards I told him. I thought it was a good joke, but he got out of the car in a rage. But if that was why, I don't understand why he didn't sack you too."

"He did," said Theodora quietly.

The young idler echoed: "He did! Oh! I didn't know. I'm right, then. It was because he was afraid for his prestige. Don't you see?"

In the hard voice that he had heard her use once before that day, Theodora said: "Does it matter why he sacked us? If he hadn't sacked Ethel she'd still have been alive—and her father and mother and sister."

"But you can't hold him responsible for that. He didn't know *that* would happen."

"It happened," Theodora said in the same hard voice. "And it's not the only time things like that have happened. When people are underpaid all their lives so that they can't provide for emergencies, and then turned out to starve on the dole, the men who exploit them and then turn them out to starve aren't guiltless when murders and suicides occur!"

Groom gazed at her first with astonishment, and then with an expression of doubtful respect on his candid, sun-tanned face.

"Of course, if that's the way you feel about it. . . ."

"That's the way I feel about it," Theodora said, and there was a silence.

A Greek waiter came bearing coffee on a tray, and set cups before them. Groom began to talk of other things. At last he said:

"Listen, I'm a grass-widower. Cynthia's away. After we've found another room for you and moved your things, what say we run up to the hills and have

dinner together? Maybe we could even stay the night."

He smiled at her cheerfully and, as always, she had to smile back. She liked her companion; she could not help liking him, though he belonged to a class she was beginning to hate. Paul Kronen's class, she thought. But he was not like Paul Kronen.

"It'd be nice," she admitted. "But there mightn't be time after we've found a room."

"Don't let's waste time, then," he cried, rising. "Let's go and find it."

She was about to raise an objection but checked herself, feeling a little ashamed. She had already made up her mind to go.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

I

THE magistrate James Riddle signed and blotted the orders for the release on bail of Olive Curnow, Gladys Crooks, Gertrude May Shannon, Mary Blane, Millicent Thompson, Peter Smallpage Smith, and Algernon Grimwood. The chemist John Graham, who had deposed his rugged bulk on a corner of the magistrate's table, smiled mildly. Gathering the orders together in a sheaf, Riddle handed them to the waiting police orderly and directed an unsmiling glance at the chemist.

"One of these days," he remarked, "you're going to regret going bail for this sort of riff-raff. One of them will jump bail and where will you be then? You can't afford to lose fifty pounds."

"I'll take the risk," said Graham placidly.

"I signed a search-warrant for your place amongst others this morning."

"I noticed your signature."

"What I'm afraid of, John, is having to sign a warrant for your arrest. You've nothing in common with this rabble you aid and abet with your time and brains and money. Break away from them before you're too deeply involved."

"I prefer to be on the winning side," said the chemist gently.

"The winning side? You're mad! Those raids this morning were more than a gesture. Every known Communist haunt in the State was raided this morning,

John. The Minister for Justice acted at the request of the Federal Government. And it's only a beginning."

The still smile that at once charmed and irritated Riddle flickered on the face of the chemist.

"So the State is going to play Canute at last, is it, James?"

"What do you mean?"

"Armed with incantations from the Crimes' Act, the State is going to cry 'Enough' to the tide of evolution!"

The magistrate twisted uncomfortably in his chair and exclaimed contemptuously: "Your evolution!"

Graham laughed and stood up.

"Forget it, James. Don't worry about me. Are you doing anything in particular next Wednesday night?"

"I'm going to draw up a comfortable chair to a fire," growled Riddle, "and read."

"Plato's Republic, perhaps," suggested the other.

"Perhaps."

"You'd do better to read Marx—the *Poverty of Philosophy*. But that's by the way. What about having dinner with us on Wednesday night and coming on to the Dramatic Society afterwards? Young Manning—you know him, I think—is having a play produced. I've read it in manuscript. I think it would interest you."

"What's it about?"

"It's about nut-picking," answered Graham. "A phase of modern industry that merits more attention than it's received."

"If you don't think I'm likely to regret it," said Riddle. "Yes, I'll come. Thank you, John."

2

The evidence was of the usual order, Riddle thought. He listened patiently to the story of the police; breaches of the peace committed against the disquieting background of the class-war. It appeared that the ringleader of the strikers, the girl Olive Curnow, was a Communist. The police seemed to think that evidence of conduct was unimportant if witnesses could be induced to swear, in cases like these, that one of the accused was a Communist. Over and over again he had reproved the prosecuting sergeant for advancing the political convictions of accused persons as evidence. The sergeant resented the reproofs. Riddle was well aware that the sergeant regarded him, Riddle, as an old woman, and referred to him privily as "the Lord of the Urinal", like the drunkards and hoodlums and thieves who appeared in the dock, and the Communists the sergeant seemed so bitterly to hate.

Olive Curnow attempted to make a speech from the witness-stand, but he cut her short.

"You're not on a soap-box," he reminded her. "Confine yourself to a statement of what happened."

For himself he was disposed to listen patiently to speeches from the dock or witness-stand. A little patience in that regard did much to counteract the impression that it was not justice that the courts dispensed. But the Minister for Justice thought otherwise. The Minister feared the effect of inflammatory speeches even upon the small audiences that could squeeze into the public enclosure of the court. That was always the way with a Labour government. The more radical a government purported to be the more fearful it was of revolutionary propaganda.

Olive Curnow protested angrily that she was being muzzled, and there was a low murmur from the back of the court.

With desperate patience Riddle said: "You're not being muzzled. Tell the court your version of what happened, but tell it briefly and without comment. It has been stated in evidence that you attempted to incite your associates to commit a breach of the peace and an assault on the police. You say you didn't. Tell us what you *did* do."

"I did nothing. I wasn't there when the others were arrested. When I returned, and was told, I was astounded. I said: 'And you let them take them?' No more than that. And almost before I had said it I was grabbed by two brutes and dragged away. Of course I struggled! I'd done nothing to deserve being treated in that way. They tore my dress and my stockings, and my arms and shoulders are a mass of bruises. Look!"

She wrenched down her dress from a shoulder, exposing the blue, bruised flesh.

"Very interesting," said the prosecuting sergeant. "But you brought it on yourself by resisting arrest. You say you weren't there when the others were arrested. Where were you?"

"I was away."

"Of course you were away. Suppose you answer the question. Where were you?"

"What's that got to do with it?"

"Isn't it a fact that you visited the headquarters of the Communist Party, and that you came back with Communist literature to distribute amongst the strikers?"

The girl forced a laugh. "The Communist headquarters were raided and all their literature was taken," she said. "How could I have got literature?"

"The raid took place several hours after the time

we're speaking of," said the sergeant smoothly. "Did you visit the Communist Party rooms and bring back literature?"

"And if I did, what's that got to do with me inciting a breach of the peace?"

Riddle interposed: "It's got nothing to do with it, but you shouldn't prevaricate. Remember that you're giving evidence on oath. Sergeant, I am as well aware as you are that Communists or Communist elements are behind most troubles of this sort. Evidence that an accused person is a Communist, or an associate of Communists, in some cases might be relevant. In this case it is not. It is not, I may say, in most of the cases where you seek to adduce it. Have you any more *relevant* questions to put to the witness?"

"No, sir," said the sergeant scowling.

Olive Curnow returned to the dock.

"Is there any record?" queried Riddle.

"No, sir," said the sergeant reluctantly.

"I find the charges proved," said the magistrate curtly, and imposed fines amounting to four pounds with a fourteen days default. He had imposed the same penalties in the other cases.

Olive Curnow laughed ironically and said: "Thank you, your worship, I'll take the gaol!"

Three of the strikers by the help of friends or relatives, paid their fines. The others, Olive Curnow, Mary Blane, Gladys Crooks, and Peter Smith were hustled into cells in the lock-up.

The air in the lock-up was stale and clammy, and smelled of vermin, urine, and sweat. The bedding was stiff and sticky with dirt from the bodies of prisoners who had used it before. When night fell a damp cold crept in, and when morning came, no sunshine entered the cells.

3

On the stage an orchard of nut-trees grew from green-painted tubs. Men, naked save for ragged cloths round their waists, their faces and torsos smeared with grease-paint so that they looked tired and emaciated, so that their ribs seemed to protrude from their sunken flesh, slowly picked the nuts with which the branches of the trees were laden. Women, also in rags, helped the men.

Amid the trees, and as widely separated as the tiny stage made possible, were three double thrones on each of which sat a man and woman in brilliant evening dress. Each 'king' held a sceptre in his right hand. At the foot of each throne was a wooden tub almost filled with nuts, and by each tub sat a girl in rags, boring holes in the nuts and threading them on strings and placing each string as she finished it round the neck of her 'queen'.

There were no footlights. The stage appeared to be illuminated by a single yellow spotlight directly overhead. The garish light shone straight down on the heads of the actors. Their eyes shone from the caves of shadow cast by their brows; their noses appeared longer and sharper, and the shadows of their noses bearded their chins; they trod in pools of shadow which clung to their feet as they moved.

The effect was weird and unreal, and was enhanced by the muted groaning sound the nut-pickers made as they worked. Spasmodic dialogues took place amongst them, and the audience gathered that they starved and despaired. The three kings came down from their thrones and beat the nut-pickers about their heads and shoulders with their sceptres. The nut-pickers cringed away, made gestures of obeisance, and

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went back to their work. The kings returned to their negligent lounging on their thrones. The ragged girls by the tubs continued to thread nuts on strings, and the queens seemed to be oblivious of everything that went on about them.

Then the lights began to dim, and the nut-pickers approached with their baskets to the tubs at the feet of the thrones and counted in their nuts. Each had twelve nuts. One after another the kings said : "Well done, ye good and faithful servants," and, dipping their hands into the tubs, distributed four nuts to each of the ragged pickers. The pickers cracked the nuts and ate then ravenously, then threw themselves down under the trees in attitudes of sleep, and the light waned till the stage was in complete darkness.

In a dead silence the audience waited. The light appeared again, a faint glow, then grew to its full yellow blaze. The ragged nut-pickers roused themselves and began their work anew. Anon the light grew dim, and they came to the thrones with twelve nuts each.

So the queer play proceeded. The garish light waxed and waned, and the audience sensed the passing of days and nights.

By and by the nuts gathered by the pickers began to overflow the tubs and spill over on to the bare boards of the stage. The faces of the kings registered sudden panic. They leaned forward on their thrones, watching the growing piles of nuts. When the overflowing from the tubs began to bury the legs of the thrones the kings cried out in alarm : "Stop! Stop!" And the work stopped. The light waxed and waned, but the nut-pickers sat about in idleness under the trees, gathering no more nuts, and receiving none from the hands of the kings.

The colour of the lighting changed. The ragged

nut-pickers seemed to become still more wan and emaciated. One of them reached up and plucked a nut from the tree above him, glancing about furtively as he did so. A king saw him and sprang from his throne and beat the man about the head with his sceptre till the picker fell in a heap on the stage. The others muttered sullenly. The king dealt a blow here and there, however, and they were quiet. Then one cried :

"Are we to starve ?"

"If you want food you must work for it," answered the king.

"But you won't let us work," protested the nut-pickers.

"Am I to be buried in nuts that I cannot use and cannot sell ?" demanded the king, pointing to his own throne and then to his two colleagues with their tubs overflowing with nuts. "Are there no eyes in your thick heads ? How can I sell my nuts when those who might buy them already have too many of their own ? Can *you* buy them ?"

"For every twelve nuts we picked, our share was four," a nut-picker said sullenly. "Our share was four!" he repeated. "Not enough to fill our bellies. If our share had been larger your tub wouldn't have overflowed. May we eat the nuts that have overflowed ?"

"Are you to eat nuts for which you haven't worked ?" shouted the king, striking out again with his sceptre.

The light dimmed. The stage was in darkness. Then a thin white spotlight played upon the stage from the back of the theatre, revealing the three kings in conference.

"We must get rid of the nuts," said the first, and

the second and the third agreed : "Yes, we must get rid of the nuts "

"The pickers are beginning to complain," said the first.

"We must give them something to occupy their minds," said the second.

"We must give them the task of getting rid of the nuts," said the third. "We must declare war on one another."

"War ?"

"War !"

"Yes, that is the only way."

The spotlight went out. The stage was in darkness. The stark yellow light from above appeared again, growing in garish brilliance. The first king stood erect in front of his throne with his nut-pickers before him.

"Forget your empty bellies," he said. "Your honour is at stake !"

The nut-pickers looked at one another with uncomprehending wonder.

"It is war," said the king solemnly. "Cheer !"

The nut-pickers gazed at one another wonderingly.

"Cheer, damn you !" cried the king. "Don't you understand ? It's war. Cheer !" he shouted, raising his sceptre threateningly.

"Hurrah !" cheered the nut-pickers. "Hurrah, hurrah, hurrah !"

"To arms, then," said the king.

Whereupon the nut-pickers took up nuts from the tub at the foot of their king's throne and began to throw them at the other thrones.

A second king sprang to his feet crying : "War ! The sanctity of treaties !" and the pickers about him took up nuts and returned the fire of the enemy.

Then the third king rose. "A war to end war !" he

shouted, and his pickers, too, took up nuts and flung them at the others.

The stage was clamorous with shouts and cries and the sound of bursting nuts. The yellow glare changed to red. While the men hurled nuts at one another the women picked more nuts from the trees. Men fell in simulated death. The nuts smashed. But the ragged girl beside each throne continued to thread nuts on lengths of string, and the queens seemed oblivious of all that was going on.

The piles of nuts about the thrones dwindled and disappeared. The tubs were emptied.

"Enough !" cried the first king. "Civilization is saved !"

The other kings took up the cry. The pickers limped back to the thrones, bearing their dead, and the kings made speeches to them, lauding their deeds and their courage and the virtues of their dead. The light faded. The stage was in darkness. The yellow light waxed again. The pickers rose from their sleep beneath the nut-trees and began to gather nuts. The light waned. They came, each with his twelve nuts, to the thrones and counted them into the tubs.

"Well done, ye good and faithful servants," said the kings, and to each picker distributed four nuts.

The light waxed and waned, waxed and waned. Slowly the tubs filled with nuts and overflowed. The pickers began to mutter amongst themselves. The kings fell upon them with their sceptres. . . .

Then the curtain fell and the auditorium lights shone out, and there was a polite outburst of clapping. Members of the audience turned to one another.

"What an extraordinary play !"

"Whatever can it mean ?"

"How silly !"

"How strange!"

"How boring!" remarked Gerda Graham, yawning and gazing about her at the audience, looking for people she knew.

John Graham smiled grimly and glanced at Riddle, who sat on the other side of Gerda.

"What did you think of it, James?"

"I don't know," answered the magistrate in a troubled way.

He was more impressed than he cared to confess. Was that extraordinary play a true representation of the facts? Was he, Riddle, indeed a sceptre in the hands of an irresponsible power, a bludgeon to silence the mutterings of slaves? The thought was still troubling him when the auditorium lights went out again, and the curtain rose on a second one-act play.

But after *The Nut-Pickers* it seemed trivial and dull. So did a third play which followed. He was glad when the final curtain fell.

In the street outside some showers had fallen. The wet pavement gleamed in the light of the overhead standards. The air was sweet and cold. People were turning up the collars of their overcoats.

Graham suggested that they should go to a café for some hot coffee before they went home, but the magistrate refused. His bus departed in a few minutes. He bade good night to his hosts and hurried along to his bus. His mind was still troubled by the bizarre fantasy he had witnessed.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

I

A SLIGHT, dark, well-dressed man appeared amongst the pickets who patrolled the pavements outside Kronen's Limited, and inquired for their leader. The girl of whom he made the inquiry looked him up and down resentfully. His polished shoes, his fawn spats, his well-tailored suit, the expensive felt hat that shaded his shrewd, dark, thin features, the suggestion of wealth and power and authority in his face and bearing typified everything against which she and her fellows were struggling.

"We've got no leader," she said rudely. "She's in gaol."

"There's someone in her place, isn't there?" he asked sharply. "I want to make a contribution to your strike funds."

The girl said in an astonished way: "A contribution! The strike's in the hands of the committee of action. You could see Theo Luddon. Wait. I'll see if I can find her."

"I won't wait here," he answered quickly, and pointed to a café across the street. "I'll be sitting at a table in there. Will you bring her to me?"

"Yes."

The man entered the café and disposed himself at a table where he was in plain view from the door. A waitress approached and he ordered a cup of coffee. Within a few minutes the girl to whom he had spoken on the footpath entered with Theodora and two other

girls and a man. The girl hesitated for a moment, looking about her, then perceived the man at the table and led the others over to him.

"This is Theo Ludden," she said, "and some others of the committee."

"What do you want ?" Theodora asked.

"I want to subscribe to your strike funds," he said softly. "If you'll sit down I think we'll be less conspicuous. I don't want to advertise the fact that I'm helping you."

They pulled out chairs and sat down, and the man took a fold of Treasury notes from a pocket of his vest and pushed them across the table to Theodora. He said :

"There's a hundred pounds there. That ought to help you."

"But . . . but who are you, and why are you giving us this money ?"

"Never mind who I am if you don't know me," the man said, and seemed to lose a little of his assurance. "If you *should* find out who I am," he added, "I'd be glad if you wouldn't broadcast it."

"We can promise you that," Theodora said. "But . . ."

"And why I'm doing it doesn't matter to you," the man said.

He drank his coffee quickly, and rose, nodded, and walked out of the café.

The girl who had nudged Theodora whispered quickly : "Don't you know who he is ? He's Herbert Ringer. His wife used to buy her hats at Kronen's. He's a millionaire.

Theodora exclaimed bewilderedly : "By why should he give us a hundred pounds ?"

"A hundred pounds is nothing to him. Don't you

remember ? There was a Royal Commission about him. They said he was selling blocks of land by misrepresentation."

"That doesn't explain why he gave us a hundred pounds."

A waitress came for an order.

"We don't want anything, thank you," Theodora said.

They went out hastily to convey the news to their comrades.

2

The gaoler unlocked the doors of the cells in which Olive Curnow, Gladys Crooks, Mary Blane, and Peter Smallpage Smith were confined, and said gruffly :

"Come on. Your fines have been paid."

"Who paid them ?" Olive Curnow demanded impulsively.

"How should I know ?" answered the gaoler.

He led the way down the long passage and opened the heavy door at the end.

"Go to the desk for anything they took off you when they brought you here."

Outside the lock-up, Theodora and half a dozen other strikers were waiting.

"Did you pay our fines ?" Olive Curnow inquired. "Where did you get the money to pay them ?"

Several of them began to explain at once.

"Well, that's a break," Olive Curnow said. "But why did you pay our fines when you needed it to carry on ? When we'd served more than half the default !"

Theodora told her that she was needed. She had to be present at the meeting of the union that had been called for the following night. Without her to speak

they would be denied again. The secretary and executive would explain away the charges against them.

Olive Curnow was silent.

Gazing at the other's strong, unhandsome face, Theodora seemed to sense the thoughts that flowed behind it : pleasure in the knowledge of her capabilities as a leader, pleasure in their general recognition of it, but the pleasure tempered by the weight of responsibility they put upon her. Theodora wished that she herself could share the other's burden. She wondered if she could find the reserves of strength ever to lead, and doubted. . . .

"Well, come on," Olive Curnow said.

They moved off in a group to rejoin the pickets.

3

Over two thousand members of the Department Store Employees' Industrial Union of Workers crowded into the Trades Hall. The president of the union whispered to the vice-president who sat beside him in the centre of the semi-circle of seated officials who occupied the stage :

"There's a bigger attendance than there was at the strike meeting. It looks bad."

He rose and addressed the meeting briefly. They heard him in silence. There was not a single interjection. As he sat down a few isolated hands were clapped timidly, and then abruptly ceased to clap.

"We want to hear about those shares !" a voice cried. "Can you explain about those shares ?"

The secretary Creighton began to speak, and for a little while he, too, was heard in silence. The silence was ominous, oppressive, broken only by the sounds

of a few feet being shuffled, and Creighton's strong, passionate voice. He spoke of disruptive elements in the union. He spoke of the steady, progressive policy that had been followed so successfully since the present executive had been in power. He cited the improved conditions, the increases in wages which had resulted from the steady prosecution of that policy in the years before the depression began. So, through a recitation of the struggles and successes of the past, he led up to the accusations that had been levelled against him and other officials of the union. Did they, his hearers, consult their employers before they put money in the savings bank, or into any little investment it was in their power to make ? Were he and other members of the union executive bound to consult the union before investing savings ?

"Under assumed names !"

"Why not in your own names ?"

"A hundred pounds' worth of shares ! How did you save a hundred pounds ?"

"What about the strike fund ?"

"Is that where the strike fund went ?"

In a moment there was uproar. From every part of the hall angry questions were shouted, and Creighton shouted to make his voice heard above the din.

"Do you think it was *your* money ? You've been listening to Communists and white-anters ! You've been listening to agitators who are trying to undermine all you've ever achieved. . . ."

"Why weren't the shares in your own names ?" shouted Olive Curnow.

"Put the motion !" a man shouted. "Put the motion if you can't explain !"

A hundred voices shouted at once : to give the speaker

a chance, to put the motion, to resign. But in a little the din died down.

"This meeting's packed with disruptionists!" said Creighton angrily. "Mr. President, I want the roll called. If it wasn't for the disruptionists amongst you this meeting would never have been called. A motion of no confidence in the executive is an insult to the intelligence! . . ."

Again there was uproar. . . .

An hour and twenty minutes after the president opened the meeting, in a hoarse, strained voice he put the motion, and by an overwhelming majority the motion was carried. Theodora felt a thrill of elation.

"Very well," said the president. "The meeting had better elect another chair."

Without opposition Olive Curnow was elected to the chair.

"We've got to elect a provisional executive to carry on until we can have a proper ballot. I'd suggest that the Kronen's Limited strike committee be appointed, plus one or two representatives from each other shop. . . ."

She spoke without her usual fervour, but with a quiet confidence. Before she appealed for support for the strike she knew it would be granted. It had been refused before on the advice of officials who were shareholders in Kronen's Limited.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

As a magistrate of the state of Western Australia, James Riddle was also a coroner. In his capacity as coroner he perused the file relating to the deaths of Colin, Elizabeth, Clarice, and Ethel Rumble. He perused it idly until he came to the statements obtained by the police from Paul Kronen, Peter Groom, and Theodora Luddon. When he had read those he put the file aside.

"I can't take this inquest," he said. "I know three of the witnesses personally. Get a justice to take it."

He did not want to encounter Theodora in any official capacity again.

The inquest was taken by the Jew, Meyer, and the interest and horror which had been allowed to die down were awakened again. But Meyer elicited details of the excursion to Rockingham which had preceded Ethel Rumble's dismissal, and the focus of the renewed interest was not upon the bloody details of the tragedy, but upon that excursion.

Mrs. William Smith, the wife of a suburban baker, read a report of the inquest in the evening paper and remarked to her husband:

"That story I heard about Paul Kronen and that poor girl must have been true. He was left alone with her in the car. I can just imagine what happened in that car. That poor girl trying to hold him off! I'll never buy another thing at Kronen's. . . ."

Her husband took the paper from her and read the report himself.

Paul Kronen said that he had been invited by Groom to make one of a party of four, consisting of himself, Groom, and two girls. He did not remember having met either of the girls previously. He did not know that they were employees of Kronen's Limited, or he would not have gone; he had strict views about the relationship of employer and employed. They had motored to Rockingham and for a while had sat drinking cocktails and talking in the hotel lounge. After about an hour they left the hotel and drove back along the road to Perth. Groom was driving the car.

When they came abreast of the old *Kwinana*, Groom stopped the car and walked down to the beach with Miss Luddon. He did not know why they did so, but assumed that they wanted to enjoy the moonlight for a few moments—it was a beautifully soft, warm, moonlit night: the warmest night that month—or that Groom wished to show the *Kwinana* to his companion. Groom had a particular interest in the *Kwinana* because he had once taken an option over it with a view to turning it into a cabaret, but he had abandoned the project.

They were away from the car for perhaps half an hour. During that time he and Miss Rumble remained in the car conversing. He had made no overtures of any kind to her. Their conversation was of a purely impersonal nature. When Groom and Miss Rumble returned, the four of them drank a bottle of sparkling burgundy which they had brought from the Rockingham hotel, and then drove back to the city.

Reaching Perth, they dropped Miss Rumble and Miss Luddon, and Groom was driving him home when he mentioned that the two girls had seemed familiar to him. Groom then told him that they were both employed at Kronen's Limited. He was very angry, and got out of the car and walked home.

He did not know every girl who worked at Kronen's Limited. Over a thousand assistants worked there, and nearly eight hundred of them were girls. Many of them he had never seen. He did not personally either engage or discharge employees. Ethel Rumble was dismissed on the recommendation of the manager of the department in which she worked, presumably because she was incompetent. He did not know then how long she had been in the employ of Kronen's Limited. He signed a list containing the names of those recommended for dismissal by the managers of departments, but did not notice what names it contained. He did not notice either Ethel Rumble's name or Theodora Luddon's name. . . .

"It sounds a bit thin," the baker said.

Alloysius Briggs, a sheet-metal worker, read the report on his way home in a tram at the end of his day, and thought: "It sounds a bit thin!"

Anthony Horton, a chartered accountant and a member of the firm of auditors and accountants who performed the audits of Kronen's Limited, was inclined to accept Kronen's statement until he read that Kronen deposed that he had not noticed the names of either Ethel Rumble or Theodora Luddon on the list. Horton thought that he knew Kronen better than that. The names of the two girls would have been impressed on his mind, and he would certainly have read through the list. . . . If Kronen had told one lie, how many more lies had he told?

Mabel Smith, a stenographer in the employ of an insurance company, read the report and reflected that no man of her acquaintance would buy her cocktails and sparkling burgundy and then be content to converse impersonally with her in the rear seat of a car. . . .

On the following morning Cynthia Groom read of the

inquest as she lay in bed in the house of an old school friend, Wilhelmina Potts, fifteen hundred miles away, in Adelaide. The paper was brought her by a maid, with her morning tea and wafers of buttered toast. As she read, the old bitterness and resentment against her husband rolled over her again.

Wilhelmina Potts came into her room with another paper in her hand.

"There's something about your husband here, my dear," she said.

"I've read it," Cynthia answered dully.

"Do you believe he was simply showing that girl over the—the—what's the name of it?—that old boat?"

"No," said Cynthia. "Mina, I've changed my mind about going back. I'm not going. I . . ."

She broke off.

"What about your ticket?"

"Damn the ticket!" Cynthia said between clenched teeth. "Oh, Mina, if you wouldn't mind just leaving me alone for a little . . . just a minute or two. . . ."

"Of course, my dear," said Wilhelmina.

Looking a little disappointed, she went out.

Cynthia began to cry quietly. . . .

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

NO light showed under Theodora's door. Riddle turned slowly and descended the stairs, disappointed. As he reached the foot the landlady shuffled out from her cupboard under the stairs.

"Were you looking for someone?"

"I was looking for Miss Luddon," the magistrate said. "I'm afraid she's out."

"Miss Luddon don't live here any more," the woman said grimly.

"Indeed? I didn't know that. When did she move?"

"About a week ago. I can't have people in my house who get in trouble with the police."

"Oh!" exclaimed Riddle softly.

"Are you a friend of hers?"

"Yes. Perhaps you can give me her address?"

The woman eyed him with disapproval.

"Well, I'll see if I can find it," she said, and shuffled back to her cupboard under the stairs.

The magistrate waited. Presently the woman came out again with a scrap of paper in her hand.

"This is the address she left. If you've got something to write it down on. . . . I can't give you this because somebody else might want it."

Riddle noted the address and thanked her and departed. He knew the street: a wide, mean thoroughfare of cheap lodging-houses. Why had Theodora gone to a locality like that? He walked on until he encountered a taxi.

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The house smelled faintly of bygone meals, but did not seem to be dirty. He was shown through a dim hall by a slatternly but pleasant-faced woman. She knocked on a door and said : "A gentleman to see you, Miss Luddon," and smiled and retreated.

"*How* did you find me here ?" Theodora said.

"I got your address from your previous lodgings. You don't seem pleased to see me."

She was silent.

"Aren't you going to ask me in ?" he inquired gently.

Theodora made a helpless gesture, and said : "Yes, come in."

In the room there was a fragrance of face-powder and scented soap. The magistrate glanced round the bare cell. It was not more than seven feet by nine. There was a bed, a chair, a varnished pine cupboard, and a painted dressing-table with a tarnished mirror, and on the floor a strip of decaying linoleum. The light from an unshaded electric globe shone back from the bare, white plaster walls and filled the room with a hard brilliance.

"Whatever possessed you to come to a place like this ?"

"I had to find somewhere cheap. I pay only six shillings a week for this."

Riddle regarded her gravely for a moment, then took her by the shoulders and said gently :

"Forgive me. There's a strike, isn't there. I'd forgotten the effect that would have. Let me help you, Theodora. Oh, you little fool ! You adorable little fool ! Why didn't you let me know ?"

"There was no reason why I should let you know," she replied, avoiding his eyes. "Things . . . have changed since I first met you. I . . . liked you, but it's over now." She disengaged herself and sat down on the chair. "I hoped you wouldn't find me here."

The magistrate was both puzzled and distressed.

"You won't let me help you ? You didn't want to see me ? Why, Theodora ?"

She laughed, and the low, rich, contralto notes dragged at his bowels.

"Oh, *don't* you understand ? Can't you see that we're on different sides ?"

Under his breath he swore. That damned Communist ! This was his doing ! But he said quietly :

"That's nonsense, Theodora. Don't you know that I love you, my dear ? How could we be on different sides ? They're imaginary—those sides, Theodora. They only exist in the jaundiced view of life's failures, my dear."

"Did I only imagine that you sent my friends to gaol ?"

He sat down on the bed, which squeaked as it received his weight.

"Do you think I did that because of any personal animus against them ? Oh, my dear, my dear ! There are circumstances over which we have no control. . . ."

"It was circumstances over which we had no control that put us on different sides," said Theodora in a low voice.

He drew a deep breath, silently cursing Riley.

"Even if I admit that, it doesn't make my regard for you the less. Let me help you, Theodora."

She shook her head.

"I've already taken some help from you that I didn't intend to take. I was going to write to you. I . . . I pawned those pearls you gave me. I got seven pounds for them."

"You pawned those pearls!" he exclaimed. "For seven pounds! Oh, you little fool! You charming, quixotic little fool! I gave forty-five pounds for those pearls. Give me the pawn-ticket. I'll get them out."

Touched, Theodora said: "You shouldn't have paid so much for them. She got up quickly and went to the cheap little dressing-table and took the ticket from a drawer. Taking the ticket from her, he drew her down on the bed beside him.

"Will you promise me not to pawn them again?"

"But . . . but . . . you're not going to give them back to me?" she protested. "You thought I'd take them back after . . . after? . . ."

"You don't mean you won't take them back!"

"Of course I won't!" she cried. "How could I?"

"But, my dear girl," he said desperately, "what use are they to me? If you won't take them back what am I to do with them?"

"You have other women friends. One of them would appreciate them."

"Listen, my dear," he said gently. "Since I've known you I haven't had any other women friends—not in the way you mean, not as mistresses. There's no one else to whom I could give those pearls. They're your pearls, Theodora. Take them back. You'll hurt me if you don't. I wanted you to promise not to pawn them again only because it's so foolish when you could come to me."

Theodora stood up.

"You're . . . you're kind," she said. "I don't want to hurt you, but . . . Oh, don't you see that it can't go on? If I took them back it would mean that it could. I can't. Oh, go please, go! You're only making it difficult."

Riddle, too, stood up. He was hurt and a little angered.

"I certainly shan't stay if my presence is distasteful to you!"

She shook her head. "You don't really misunderstand. You know it isn't that. But . . . I just can't. Oh, please go!"

"Very well," he said quietly. "I'll send the pearls to you."

She answered: "If you do I'll have to send them back. I only told you about them because I would never have been able to get them out and it seemed a shame that the pawnbroker should keep them."

As he went out he thought he saw tears in her eyes, but he was annoyed with her and did not turn back.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

I

PAUL KRONEN sat at his great glass-topped desk in his office on the gallery. Through the glass walls he could see the little black-clad girls moving hurriedly, incompetently to and fro behind the counters, and the thin streams of customers that trickled through the wide aisles.

The managing director of Kronen's Limited had lost weight. His normally ruddy, bald face looked pale and blotchy. His lips twitched in an ugly way. He was waiting for his father.

He hated his father, but hated him secretly because he also feared him. He hated the ageing man's cynical carelessness of personal dignity, his indifference to public opinion and sentiment, his amorality. He had always hated him. James Kronen had relinquished any right to interfere in the conduct of Kronen's Limited and he had never presumed upon his relationship to do so. To his son this had been a source of gratification, and nothing else his father had done or had refrained from doing had ever gratified him. But as he waited for his father now he hated him on this account, too. It seemed to him that in the decisive crisis of the firm's existence he should not have to plead with his father for help. It should have been offered freely and willingly. His father was in his dotage!

His pretty secretary announced his father. The office staff had remained loyal, had accepted the

reduction in wages. Kronen rose as the old man entered, returning inanely his father's malicious, old smile.

"Sit down, sit down!" said James Kronen, waving his stick negligently. "Don't stand on ceremony for me."

Concealing his hatred, Paul waited till his father was seated, then sat down himself, and pushed the writ and the bank's demand across the desk to him.

The old man perused them.

"I misjudged you, Paul, I misjudged you," he said, shaking his head. "You managed to stave it off longer than I expected."

Paul leaned forward upon the desk which had cost more than a shop-girl received in wages in a year, and said tensely: "You realize what it means, don't you?"

"Do you?" queried his father.

"It means that unless you come to the rescue we'll have to go into liquidation. There's no one else I can turn to."

James Kronen regarded his son with amused eyes.

"Why should I come to the rescue? It's not my business. I'm no longer interested in it."

"But . . . Great Scot, dad, don't you understand?"

"Perfectly. But, as I've said, I'm no longer interested in Kronen's Limited."

"Do you mean you're going to see us fail without raising a finger to help?" cried his son desperately. "The business you built up yourself—from nothing! Do you mean to say it doesn't mean anything to you?"

The old man shook his head. "Since I handed over control to you, Paul—nothing. I have never felt any sentiment about business. In that, maybe, I'm not

like the average business man. I never felt any sentiment, son, and I can't feel any now. This business—Kronen's Limited—was never anything more to me than a means to an end. I wanted wealth and power. As you know, I set my mind on a million. When I got my million the business had served its purpose and was of no further use. So I handed it over to you."

He extracted a cigar from his waistcoat pocket and lit it unhurriedly.

Paul said thickly: "But it's worth another million. Are you going to see it fail for the sake of a paltry hundred thousand?"

"I'm not interested in it, my boy."

The son tried to keep his voice steady as he made a last appeal.

"If you won't do it for the sake of the business won't you do it for my sake?"

James Kronen smiled, and met his son's eyes. Paul turned cold. He had always hated his father. Now for the first time, he realized that his father hated him!

"I'll call a meeting of the shareholders," he whispered.

James Kronen struggled to his feet.

"That's right. Take it philosophically, my boy. There's no one amongst the shareholders who's likely to want to indict you for mismanagement. Nothing really to worry about. Now I'm going down to see my yacht. She'll be finished in a week."

He nodded and went out.

Paul Kronen slumped back into his chair. He felt weak, as though he were recovering from a blow on the solar plexus. His face and brow were damp with sweat. Through the glass walls of his office on the

gallery he could see the little black-clad girls moving incompetently to and fro behind the counters, and the thin streams of customers passing along the wide aisles. . . .

The strike had changed things. His attempt to break it had failed. The strike-breakers were incompetent. Many of them had had no previous experience of the work. They did not know the names of goods. They could not remember where goods were kept. They could not read the private price-markings. They had to refer constantly to the departmental managers while customers were kept waiting. The managers were nearly distracted. Trade had fallen off because of the inefficient service, the activities of the pickets, and the prejudice that had grown up as a consequence of the scurrilous, whispered story of his treatment of Ethel Rumble, and the reports of the Rumble inquest.

An atmosphere of bleakness and hopelessness seemed to pervade the shop, and to creep into the soul of the young Napoleon of commerce who sat slumped in his chair behind the great glass-topped desk. He could see through one of the doors of the shop on to the street. People idled or hurried past. Amongst them were the strike pickets—some of the old, efficient employees of Kronen's Limited, some of those who had stabbed the firm in the back! A wave of self-pity rolled over the young magnate. Kronen's was to fail because those who had lived by it, and he who had built it, had stabbed it in the back! . . .

2

With the failure of Kronen's Limited, the strike came to an end. The affairs of the company passed into the hands of a liquidator, who, after a consultation

with the various managers, caused notice of dismissal to be given to more than four hundred of the new assistants, announced the restoration of the wage-scale prevailing before the strike, and invited the strikers back behind the counters. Efficient labour was necessary to ensure a rapid liquidation of stocks.

The strike committee met, then called a meeting of the strikers and advised them not to return unless all the strike-breakers were dismissed.

"No compromise!" Olive Curnow besought them. "We've compromised before. Right through the reign of the old union executive we compromised. Where did it get us? If we hold out for another day or two they'll get rid of all the scabs. They can't afford not to. Then there'll be jobs for us all, even though they're only temporary jobs. To go back on the terms we're offered now would be to victimize as many of our comrades as there are scabs remaining at work."

When the liquidator received the strikers' answer he shrugged and agreed. Dismissal notices were served on the rest of the new assistants. Efficient labour was necessary and there was no longer any question of the prestige of Kronen's Limited. . . .

In a week the strikers were back at work, and great posters plastered over the plate-glass windows of Kronen's Limited read: Liquidation Sale. Small holes cut in the posters revealed the goods piled in the windows—goods marked at a half and a third of their former prices. In crashing crescendos of black type the full-page advertisements in the newspapers cried: Liquidation Sale! . . .

From the office on the gallery overlooking the ground floor counters the liquidator could see the little black-clad girls dodging to and fro behind the counters, and the customers swarming in the wide aisles. . . .

3

While passing through the "free-ground" section of the Karrakatta Cemetery, a grave-digger, on his way to dig another hole, noticed something fluttering on the mound of a recent family grave. He remembered the grave: it contained the remains of the victims of what had become known as the Maylands Tragedy. Puzzled, he set down his spade and approached the mound and found a sheet of newspaper held down by a brick. It was a full-page advertisement of the liquidation sale at Kronen's Limited.

The grave-digger grunted and picked up the paper, crumpling it and stuffing it into his pocket. It was part of his duty to keep the cemetery tidy.

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

I

THE autumn alternations of shower and sunshine ended in a short succession of cold grey days, and the antipodean winter closed down. The higher surf of winter broke upon deserted white beaches. Shivering in rags that were still soaked with the sweat of summer, the unemployed huddled together under the bandstands in the parks, in the great, draughty rooms of the Public Library, in unused railway carriages, in latrines, in a thousand hovels. The women of the powerful bourgeoisie gathered in the lounges of fashionable hotels and drank cocktails and tea, shrieking at one another the latest fashionable catch-cries and phrases. There began a series of public balls at which it was the mode to get drunk. The subscriptions to these balls, however, were too high to permit of the general public attending.

Rains fell in the hills and the blue waters of the river rose and turned muddy.

One of the unemployed flung a beer bottle through a shop window to get into gaol, where he was assured of food and shelter, and for a fortnight afterwards there were almost daily cases of window smashing.

On the esplanade reserve Riley and other Communists made inflammatory speeches. The newspapers contained reports of wars, strikes, riots, and other excesses in every part of the world.

On June 26, at a meeting at the Trades Hall, a new executive was elected to office by the Department

Store Employees' Industrial Union of Workers. It was revolutionary. Olive Curnow was appointed to the secretaryship, and on her motion the union resolved upon a rupture of relations with the Australian Labour Party and upon affiliation with the Militant Minority Movement, the revolutionary temper of which was consistent with the new outlook of the organization. A few days later Olive Curnow offered Theodora Luddon a post as organizer, of which there were several.

Theodora demurred, feeling inadequate for the job.

"You'd be all right," Olive Curnow assured her. "Most of them know you and like you. You'd do all right."

Theodora was at once fascinated and repelled by the prospect. A sense of being drawn against her will into an uncontrollable current of events oppressed her, yet she was seized with an impulse to yield to the current and let it take her with it where it willed. She asked for a day or two in which to think it over, and Olive Curnow consented. Theodora attempted to discuss it with Riley, but the Communist laughed, and said :

"What do you want to talk about it for ? You've already made up your mind."

"I haven't," Theodora protested.

"Yes you have. You wouldn't want to talk about it if you hadn't. You've made up your mind to take it on, and asking my advice is only a cover for something else. I don't know what."

"Do you still think I'm trying to seduce you ?" the girl demanded with some heat.

"Yes," answered Riley. "I do. When you see things as I do maybe you'll have more success. Listen, now I've got over it, Theo, I may as well tell you something. Something happened to me that night I

met your friend, Riddle, in your room. I was jealous, as you said, and that's the truth. I've got over it since, but I don't trust *you* yet, and I don't want to spoil you."

Theodora's vexation disappeared as he spoke. She laughed softly and shook her head.

"You're a fool, Steve! I'll get over *you* if you're not careful."

"That wouldn't matter," Riley said deliberately. "If it did it would be the best thing that could happen."

Next day Theodora told Olive Curnow that she would take the post.

"Good girl!" exclaimed the secretary. "You'll get the female basic wage; one pound sixteen and ninepence a week. Less than you get at Kronen's."

"Well, the job at Kronen's will be over in three months. Then I'd have nothing."

"Is that what decided you to take on this job?"

"No, but it occurred to me."

"Well," said Olive Curnow, "it's what you do, not why you do it that matters."

When Theodora returned to her mean room that day she found a letter from her mother awaiting her. Her mother wanted her to return to Collie when her job at Kronen's came to an end.

> *It's good the strike is over* [her mother wrote], *but it's terrible your job will come to an end so soon, and I don't suppose you'll be able to get another. It's better when you're out of work for us all to be together. We would be able to live better together. You can't live on sustenance by yourself, but if you came home we'd be able to manage better if we had your sustenance as well as our own . . .*

Theodora thought of her home, of the squabbling and recriminations of her parents, of the squalor and dreariness of the house, of the fighting and weeping and spying and backbiting of the children. Her stomach revolted at the idea of going back. It would be better to go short of food than to endure that again. She reflected that if she had not already accepted the post Olive Curnow had offered her, the prospect of returning home would have made her accept it. She wrote to her mother telling her of her new job, and enclosed a pound note—all the money she had.

2

As one of a patient crowd sheltering in the corrugated iron shed at the Labour Bureau from the cold drizzle of rain, Peter Groom shivered and tried desperately to regard his misfortunes as part of an adventure. The human flotsam and jetsam gathered in the shed paid no attention to him, regarding him as one of themselves. Nevertheless he felt conspicuous. From the shelter shed a miserable queue stretched across a space of muddy ground to the doors of the bureau. The unemployed entered by one door and departed by another. The queue moved slowly through the drizzle, for the clerks behind the counters in the bureau went about their work leisurely. The damp cold penetrated Groom's overcoat. He clenched his hands in the pocket of the coat and stamped his feet on the ground, thankful that he had not sold this warm coat with the rest of his wardrobe, and regretting that he had not kept a thicker suit. His cheeks were dark with stubble, for he had not shaved for two days. He had refrained from shaving deliberately, thinking that the less he looked like his past self the better. He

was glad that his shoes and hat and overcoat were shabby from too regular wear and frequent wettings.

At last he took his place in the queue. As he moved slowly forward the boisterous wind drove the rain into his face beneath the brim of his hat and into his clothes. He tried to hurry on the man ahead of him who turned and snarled:

"Lay off! D'you think those bastards in there are goin' to move any quicker for your shovin'? D'you think they care a —— that we're gettin' wet?"

"Sorry," Groom muttered.

The man grunted and relapsed into damp apathy.

When Groom finally reached the door of the bureau the legs of his trousers beneath the skirts of his overcoat clung coldly to his legs, and the water dripped from the brim of his hat.

At a counter a laconic clerk eyed him contemptuously and said:

"Well, what do you want?"

"I want to register," he answered. "What the devil do you think I want?"

The clerk asked him a number of questions, then filled in a card and handed it to him.

"Here's your ticket. If you want sustenance you'll have to apply at the Relief Depot in seven days' time. You won't get any for seven days. Next! Hurry on there!"

Groom passed out of the bureau into the drizzle again, feeling angry and miserable. Adventure! . . .

He made his way back to Manning's rooms. Of all his friends, it seemed, only John Graham and his wife, and Noel Manning had failed to gloat over his misfortune, and for a while since he had been staying with Manning. He didn't like sponging on Manning

but the journalist would have to put up with him for another seven days.

In Manning's rooms he took off his wet outer clothes and hung them before an electric radiator to dry. If he hadn't been a fool, he told himself, he would have kept at least one change of clothing. He put on an old and worn pair of flannel trousers belonging to his host.

Manning did not return for lunch, but the little, harrassed maid-of-all-work employed at the rooming-house brought in lunch on a tray, and Groom ate gloomily.

The sky cleared in the afternoon. The sun shone with a pleasant warmth. Groom's clothes had dried so he put them on and went out to mouch about in the streets. Time had hung heavily on his hands since the last of his money had gone. He walked about aimlessly till he found himself in Kings Park, overlooking the city from the river heights. He was still depressed. The wide beauty of the park passed under him and over him. He walked gloomily under the magnificent trees.

From the stone terrace of a war memorial he looked down on the panorama of city and river. The brick and stone and concrete cliffs of the city reared themselves behind the gardens along the water-front. Groom reflected that every building in that huddled mass meant money. He saw the city suddenly from a new point of view: in terms of money. Millions and millions of pounds sterling were frozen there in the huddled mass of the city, and every penny of it belonged to somebody else. The riches of the antipodes were these beneath him, and not a penny of it could he touch. . . .

As he gazed down upon the wealth piled there he

hated the city. It was like his friends with their secret smiles, like his perfidious wife, like the insolent clerks behind the counters of the Labour Bureau.

He retraced his way slowly.

Ten days later the erstwhile idler, Peter Groom, with twenty-two other men, was drafted to the Brideways River relief works in the district of Wilmot, about a hundred miles south of the capital.

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

I

IN the little township of Wilmot the police force had been strengthened on account of the proximity of the relief camp, eleven miles west towards the sea. The shopkeepers and property-owners of the town lived in a state of omnipresent uneasiness as though the community of unemployed at Brideways River was a magazine of explosives which might blow up and wipe Wilmot out. Bands of unemployed from the camp would make their way into the township after they had drawn their relief pay, and plunge into debauchery. Uncomprehending mothers turned them into bogeys with which to frighten themselves and their children, and the men played unconsciously on the women's fears by making water in the streets, and making the town echo with their obscenities.

Brideways rose like a city of canvas from the black sand. Past it ran the half-excavated canal into which the Brideways River was to be diverted to irrigate the surrounding country. The relief-workers were digging the canal, fifteen miles long and a chain wide and from fifteen to thirty feet deep, with picks and shovels and wheel-barrows. The men worked on the excavation like a scattered army of ants, filling their barrows each with seven shovelfuls of sand and trundling them up the planks laid on the long inclines from the bottom of the canal to the embankment. Gangers supervised the work.

A human ant, the young idler, Peter Groom, filled

his barrow and began to wheel it up the incline. By the time he reached the top his legs and arms felt weak and his back ached dully. He sat down on the barrow for a moment, wiping away the sweat that had broken from his brow. But a man in a khaki shirt and breeches and field boots called out :

"Hey, you! That won't do. Get on with your work, now!"

Groom glared at him for a moment, but the man looked like one in authority, so he rose resentfully and wheeled the barrow back into the excavation. Taking up his shovel he began to load his barrow again. The sand was not black but yellow at the bottom of the excavation. The shovel sank into it easily, yet there seemed to be so little strength left in his arms that he had to thrust it in with his foot. It was an agony to grip the shovel. His hands had not had time to callouse, and were blistered and raw.

"Five shovels is enough for any man to push up that slope," said the man working beside him. "Seven kills a man!"

"Yes," he answered apathetically, loading his barrow.

His breath came heavily. He was conscious of the ganger watching him. He filled his barrow and began the long ascent again. He was filled with a deep resentment. Men worked like this for eight hours a day, day after day, year after year; men began to work like this as soon as the years brought them strength enough, and continued to work till the years took their strength away. With an energy born of his resentment he thrust the barrow forward. But the pain from his blistered hands stabbed through him, and he gritted his teeth and went more slowly.

Tipping the barrow on the embankment he looked

round for the man in breeches and boots, and, failing to see him, rested for a moment or two. He felt at one with the sullen, bitter, proletarian mass whose hatred charged the atmosphere of the camp. He was dirtier than he had ever been previously in his life, and there were no showers in the camp. The government wouldn't install showers. The government said that it would provide the material, but the men would have to install the showers themselves, and in their own time, if they wanted them. The men refused. Of course they refused, Groom thought resentfully. *They* hadn't built the camp on a wilderness of black sand where it was impossible to keep clean. They were only in the place at all under constraint. No showers, and a latrine that was simply an open ditch with a scantling frame to sit on. An open ditch for two thousand men to —— in. Whenever the wind blew over the latrine the whole camp smelled like a ——house. Four days' back-breaking work a fortnight for food and a filthy tent and no showers and an open trench to —— in! . . .

He thought he had better get back or the ganger would miss him. The ganger, Baskerville, was the ultimate swine. The erstwhile idler got up from the barrow and wheeled it back into the excavation.

"You took a bloody long time to dump that barrow," said the ganger, Baskerville.

"Seven shovels is too damn much!" retorted Groom. "Why don't you try wheeling a barrow out yourself for a while?"

The ganger leered at him and said: "Get on with it, silvertail."

The whistle blew at last, and the men swarmed out of the excavation. Groom felt as exhausted as he

had felt after his first day. As they trudged back to the camp they reviled the ganger, Baskerville.

"The bastard's forgotten he was ever a man himself!"

"'E's only doin' what 'e's there for. 'E's there to drive us, an' the supe's there to drive 'im, an' if the supe don't do 'is drivin' voluntary, there's someone else to drive *'im*."

"Maybe he *is* there to drive us, but he don't have to stand over us like a bloody slave-driver. Baskerville's a natural bastard. 'E *likes* slave-drivin'!"

Groom joined in their curses. The men were beginning to accept him. At first they had treated him with suspicion, which had puzzled and distressed him. After he had worried over the phenomenon for a day or two he had asked his tent-mate, the ex-structural steel-worker, Thomas Hart.

Hart had regarded him curiously.

"Because you look like a bloody silvertail, I suppose. What was you before you came here, anyway?"

And Groom had told him. At first the other was incredulous, but when he had asked a few questions he had accepted the story. He had laughed.

"What are you laughing at?" Groom had demanded.

He recalled Hart's grin.

"I suppose you never read the *Communist Manifesto*?"

"No."

"Well, in the *Communist Manifesto* it says the leisured classes spend half their time chasin' round after each other's wives. I was just thinkin' how bloody true it was!"

Even Hart had been suspicious, but thereafter he had seemed to shed his suspicions. Now others were accepting him, too.

There were over two thousand men in the camp.

They belonged to all sections of the proletariat, the professional classes, and the petty bourgeoisie. The mass was proletarian, homogeneous, sullen and bitter. Middle-class elements reaching the camp either jettisoned the past and were absorbed by the mass or held themselves apart, forming separate little cliques and coteries and denying by their pathetic dignity, their simulated cheerfulness, their careful accentuation of all that differentiated them from the proletariat, the misfortunes that threatened to identify them with it. Groom had no sympathy for them. The mental independence consequent upon the wealth and leisure he had enjoyed in the past left him free of any will to pretend to be now what he was no longer. He was contemptuous of their pretences. Did it matter that one relief-worker had been an accountant and another a labourer? They were both labourers now. They lived on their vanity, calling it "self-respect". They refused to associate themselves with the complaints of the rest, preferring to do without a sanitary service, to do without showers, to sweat up the inclines of the canal pushing barrows loaded with seven shovels of sand rather than admit, even to themselves, that they had a grievance in common with the proletariat! And men like that dominated the camp committee, the supposititiously elected body that the superintendent had brought into existence to provide the camp with a means of voicing its grievances. Half their grievances the committee refused to state! There was trouble brewing over the committee. . . .

Groom trudged tiredly over the black sand with his companions. As they reached the camp they fell silent. To enter the camp was like entering a squalid city. The tents were erected in blocks and streets like a city, and every tent was grey with an impregna-

tion of the fine black sand. Little clouds of black dust rose from their feet as they moved along. Before the entrances of the tents were the piled ashes of the cooking fires, from some of which thin curls of smoke arose. Scattered about on the ground near the ash-piles, or hanging on stakes driven into the sand, were blackened billy-cans and frying-pans, kerosene-tin buckets, pannikins, and whatnot. Despite the advanced winter, and the cooling evening, the fly swarms lingered, crawling about sluggishly. Here and there men were re-lighting the fires preparatory to cooking the evening meal.

Groom felt grateful for the arrangement he had made with Hart whereby whoever was not working did the cooking. The camp worked in gangs of about seven hundred men. Each gang worked for four days then knocked off and another took its place, so that although each man worked only four days in each fortnight the work went on continuously, except on Sundays which were kept holy. Hart was in a different gang.

Reaching his tent, he nodded to Hart, who was peeling potatoes for their meal, and entered the tent. The bunk, made of sacking and green poles, creaked as he lay down. His limbs ached with fatigue. He began to think of Cynthia in an apathetic way. The years he had spent with her seemed almost infinitely remote, but his resentment against her seemed to have burned itself out. . . .

When Hart told him the meal was ready he dragged himself from his bunk and ate enormously despite his fatigue. Then he went back to his bunk and presently fell asleep.

The brazen clamour of a great gong summoned him to work again in the morning.

2

From all over the camp men converged upon the open space between the camp and the excavation. A big fire had been lit and its ruddy glare illumined their sullen faces. By the fire was a stump upon which an orator was mounted, addressing the crowd.

". . . What's the use of a camp committee if they won't do what we want? They tell us we can't do anything about it, comrades, because there's no machinery for sacking the committee. No machinery!"—the orator spat angrily and contemptuously. "We elected the bloody committee, didn't we? . . ."

The flames of the fire flickered as they were fanned by a newly-awakened breeze, and to the nostrils of the crowd was borne the smell of the latrines. Men grimaced. A few cursed.

"There it is!" shouted the orator. "Every night when the wind comes up the whole camp's fouled with it! . . ."

The speaker went on, working himself into a fury. There were shouts and interjections. Men heaped wood on the fire till the flames leapt ten feet into the air, and, attracted by the red glare, more men wandered from the city of tents to swell the sullen crowd at the meeting-place.

The angry orator said that the camp committee had received instructions to complain of the latrines to the Minister for Works and Unemployment who, a few days previously, had visited the camp. The committee had not done so because they had deemed the matter too delicate to broach. The Minister might have been shocked by being reminded that men had to ——! And eat in the bloody smell of it! The committee was nothing but a bunch of supe's

toadies. There wasn't a man of real working-class origin on it.

". . . they make representations. Representations! They go to the supe and say: 'Yes, sir,' and 'No, sir,' and come back and tell us we're being unreasonable! Some of our complaints are never made at all—like our demand for a sanitary service. Will they complain that loading barrows with seven shovels of sand and pushing them up those bloody slopes is work no man can do for eight hours a day? Will they *demand* that showers are put up? *We* didn't put this camp on fine black sand. *We* didn't choose a spot where it's impossible for any man to keep clean. . . ."

When the speaker became hoarse another took his place. . . .

3

The relief workers muttered as they drove their shovels into the yellow sand and wheeled their barrows up the inclines. The sand was being dug on a level twenty feet below the embankments on to which it had to be dumped; the plank-paths laid on the slopes for the wheel-barrows were sixty and seventy and eighty yards long.

A sturdy, grim-visaged ex-stevedore said to the ganger: "It's too much for a man! I'll be shot if I take up another with seven in it!"

He heaped five good shovels of sand on to his wheel-barrow and stooped to the handles. The ganger placed himself in the path of the barrow. His eyes were filled with a cold, threatening glare.

"You don't take any empty barrows out of here," he said. "Load that barrow or go and take your time. Any man here who doesn't care to load his barrow can take his time," he added, raising his voice.

The ex-stevedore glowered and stood for a moment irresolutely, holding the handles of the barrow. At last he lowered them and took up his shovel again. There was no sustenance for any man discharged from a relief camp. The relief workers muttered and cursed the ganger, Baskerville, but they loaded their barrows with seven shovels of sand.

Peter Groom asked resentfully: "How much deeper are we going?"

"Seven feet, silvertail," said the ganger, grinning. "Get on with it!"

That night a meeting of the relief-workers declared the camp committee dissolved, and in its place appointed a "council of action" composed of twelve men, of whom the leader, an ex-steel-moulder named Thomas McClintock, and three others, Harry Giles, an ex-stone-mason, Jack Fullerton, an ex-mechanic, and William Gruder, an ex-shearer, were Communists.

On the following morning the council of action, at the head of two or three hundred men who were not on the working gang, went to the assembly tent adjacent to the administrative offices which had been provided for the use of the camp committee and took possession of it. Some of the committee-men were in the tent.

McClintock said: "Come on, you boss's toadies, get out! This camp is going to be run by the rank and file from now on."

The president of the deposed committee, calling to him all the dignity he had acquired in the course of twenty years in company secretaryships, cried out that it was an outrage. But McClintock and his companions advanced threateningly into the tent, and, fearing rough handling, the committee-men got out precipitately. Casting his dignity to the winds,

the president scrambled out under the canvas wall.

Then McClintock, with Giles, Fullerton, and Gruder, went to the superintendent and demanded that shower-baths and a properly organized sanitary service be installed in the camp.

"These requests," said the superintendent, "have already been made by the camp committee. They were referred to Perth and you've had an answer. The government is willing to provide the materials for the construction of showers if you are willing to erect them at your own cost and in your own time. As for the sanitary service—if you want it you'll have to organize it yourselves and provide the material yourselves. The government has no suitable material available since all existing pan services are conducted by local authorities."

"We're in this camp under constraint," said McClintock, "and it's the government's job to make it habitable, not ours. We didn't ask to come here; we were sent here. We were told that we could come here or starve. We . . ."

"I'm not going to listen to you," the superintendent replied. "The camp committee was created for the purpose of intercourse between the camp authorities and you men. If the committee has any further representations to make I'll listen, but I'm not going to discuss anything with individuals."

McClintock said: "The camp committee's no longer in existence. It wouldn't observe the wishes of the rank and file so it was dissolved. We're not here as individuals but as the duly elected representatives of the workers in this camp."

The superintendent frowned.

"I know all about that," he remarked. "There are a number of malcontents in this camp who imagine it's only necessary to pass a resolution at a meeting of some minority faction to upset all constitutional authority. You object to the committee because it won't give expression to the views of a few extremists. You may as well understand the position once and for all. The committee was elected three months ago for a period of twelve months, and as far as I am concerned the committee is the only body competent to speak on behalf of the men until it resigns or its term expires."

"If that's your last word . . ." began McClintock.

"That's my last word."

"Will you discuss the loading of barrows? Seven shovelfuls is too much to wheel up the slopes. All except the strongest of us . . ."

"I won't discuss that or any other question," answered the superintendent.

4

Mounted on the stump of a jarrah tree and thrown into relief by the red light of the fire, McClintock addressed sixteen hundred relief-workers.

". . . and if a man refuses to load seven shovels he's told he can take his time. He knows what that means—starvation, or something mighty near it. But listen, comrades, the government can refuse sustenance to one man who's sacked from a relief camp, or to a dozen men, but it daren't refuse a thousand. To-morrow we'll *all* refuse to load more than five shovels, and if any man's sacked we'll use a weapon and an argument that we haven't used yet. The superintendent refuses to discuss the matter with us; the government won't reply to our telegrams; but

they'll talk turkey when we use direct action. If we can't get satisfaction from the supe we'll get it from the fountain-head of oppression in Perth. We'll walk out in mass. We'll *march* out in mass, as an organized army of victims of the class-war. We'll march on Wilmot and billet on the town till the government provides us with a train to take us to Perth. And when we reach Perth we'll march to the Treasury, still as an army, and *demand* the right to live not as slaves but as men!"

Peter Groom was conscious of a growing tenseness. The speaker fell silent and for a moment the crowd about him, too, was silent. Then some mass restraint snapped and a deep-throated roar of approval went up. The young idler felt a wave of reckless elation sweep over him. . . .

When the gong clanged in the morning he turned out eagerly. The sense of elation was still upon him. As he joined the others making their way to the excavation he was surprised at their grim and unsmiling mien.

The ganger, Baskerville, said: "I'm told there's trouble brewing among you fellers. You may as well know where you stand before you start. The man that don't load his wheel-barrow's going to take his time, as I've told you before. And if none of you load your barrows, as I'm told you've planned, you'll all take your time. There's going to be no job-control in this camp, so get on with it!"

The men heard him in silence, and when he had finished went grimly to where their various barrows stood. Groom loaded his barrow with five shovels of sand, and stooped to the handles. The voice of the ganger rang out sharply:

"*Seven* shovels, silvertail!"

"Get——!" he answered between his teeth and began to wheel his barrow out.

In two strides the ganger reached him, caught him by the arm and wrenched him round. The barrow tipped and the yellow sand spilled out.

"Did you hear what I said? Fill your barrow or get your time!"

"Five shovels is enough for any man to wheel out," Groom retorted, glaring into the eyes of the ganger. "If you're not satisfied with that I *will* take my time."

"If you're not satisfied with that we'll all take our time, Baskerville!" said a man nearby.

There was an angry chorus of: "Yes!"

"Suit yourselves," said the ganger grimly. "Take my orders or take your time!"

The relief-workers flung down their shovels and climbed out of the excavation, and along the three miles of excavation upon which work was being done similar colloquies were followed by similar consequences.

CHAPTER THIRTY

I

THE dust rose from the feet of sixteen hundred rebellious outcasts, unwashed and unshaven, who marched in column of four along the sandy track that wound through the thin forest of jarrah between the Brideways River relief camp and the township of Wilmot. With them marched the young idler, Peter Groom. From somewhere a number of red flags had been obtained and these were borne aloft at the head of the procession. As they marched they sang the songs of the revolution.

When the citizens of Wilmot saw the column approaching they displayed every sign of panic. Many of the shopkeepers hastily closed their doors. The police ran out and strung themselves in open order across the main street, and when the column drew near raised their hands as a signal to halt. The leaders halted, but the men in the rear thought they were being arrested and began to shout threateningly. The quarter-mile long column broke and surged forward, spreading in a crowd across the street. The six police found themselves in danger of being surrounded by the angry relief-workers.

But the police were concerned only with preventing trouble. A colloquy ensued with the leaders. McClintock said that they proposed to billet on the town until the government saw fit to provide them with transport to the capital, and asked to see the chairman of the local authority. Presently the chairman

appeared, a fat and pompous grocer, trying desperately to impose dignity upon his apprehension. He said:

"What is the meaning of this invasion?"

McClintock explained, and added: "If you have any influence with the government you'd better use it to get us that train quickly. In the meantime you'll have to find billets for us."

"Billets?" cried the chairman. "It's impossible. Billets? There are twice as many of you as the population of the town!"

McClintock laughed.

"I don't mean private billets," he said.

They could sleep in the town hall, the churches, and the buildings on the Agricultural Show Ground. They had some money, and what provender they needed they would buy. If no train was made available before their money ran out, however, the town would have to provide them with food.

The chairman agreed, because he could do nothing else.

With his lieutenants, McClintock repaired to the post office and sent a long telegram to the Premier. When the postal clerk asked for payment, he said roughly:

"Charge it at the other end!"

In the morning heavy police reinforcements and a number of journalists arrived from the capital. Never had so many police been seen in the streets. The journalists went about amongst the townspeople and the relief-workers, questioning and probing, and through the afternoon and evening the telegraph lines were so burdened with press and official messages that all other business was delayed. The messages were frantic, yet the relief-workers were quiet and orderly.

Their orderliness, however, was regarded as more ominous than rioting, and there was relief in the town when it was known that a special train was on the way.

2

In the cold early morning drizzle Groom crowded into a compartment with eleven other men, two of whom were McClintock and Gruder. The train started and gathered speed, driving through the cold mist of rain. Many of the relief-workers had had nothing to eat, for the rain had made it difficult to cook in the open air. They looked forward to a stop at a refreshment station, and hot tea and coffee, pies and scones. But the train ran through all stations, blowing long blasts on the whistle and maintaining speed.

"They're giving us a non-stop run," McClintock remarked.

The countryside hid behind a grey veil of rain, but despite the rain the platforms *en route* were crowded with country-folk, with agricultural workers who cheered the "Brideways River Army" as the special passed. Some of the platforms displayed red flags.

It was cold, but there was a warm fug in the compartment. The grey veil of rain stretched over the countryside without end.

At two o'clock in the afternoon the train drew into East Perth, a station short of the capital, and stopped. Groom, sitting by a window, dropped the protecting glass and thrust out his head and gasped.

The platform swarmed with police. The police who had been sent from Perth to Wilmot as reinforcements were pouring out of the van at the rear of the train. A guard came quickly along the train, locking the doors of the compartments, and behind him came three burly police in plain clothes and the sergeant from Wilmot.

The sergeant pointed into a compartment. One of the plain clothes police unlocked it and dragged out a man, who was passed back to other police.

Someone shouted: "They're arresting the council!"

Groom drew in his head and looked in a startled way at McClintock and Gruder. The former was already on his feet.

"They're arresting the council. Quick! The other door!"

The leader tried it.

"It's locked," he said between his teeth.

Gruder opened a window, thrust out his head, then withdrew it and looked round scowling.

"It's no use. There are police on that side, too."

The compartment darkened a little as the sergeant and plain clothes men appeared at the windows. Peering in, the sergeant perceived McClintock and Gruder and said something to his companions. A plain clothes man opened the door and beckoned to the two leaders.

"Come on, you!" he said roughly.

"What are we wanted for?" McClintock inquired.

"Travelling without tickets," answered the other with a grin. "Come on!"

"But we're all travelling without tickets!" exclaimed Groom.

The plain clothes man gave him a glance, but made no comment.

"Are you coming?" he said to McClintock and Gruder. "Or have we got to drag you out?"

"We're coming," said McClintock quietly.

They stepped out on to the platform and disappeared behind the ranks of uniformed police. The sergeant

and plain clothes men went on, leaving the compartment door unlocked behind them.

The stationary train jerked suddenly and shuddered with a series of heavy shocks. Throughout its length sounded the crashing and clanging of colliding buffers. There was a clank of couplings being thrown back, then a chuff-chuffing of steam from the engine as it moved away from the carriages.

From the platform came shouts of: "All out! The train's not going any further!"

Groom got out. The relief-workers were swarming out of the train, and the police, in their long, caped great-coats, were hustling them off the platform. Men were dashing back to their compartments for their baggage with police at their heels. Men were struggling into ragged overcoats to protect themselves against the rain. Men were carrying swags, bundles of clothing, billy-cans, frying-pans. All were being hustled through the station by the police.

Groom had barely time to grasp the import of the scene before a constable shouted at him:

"Come on! Get going! Don't stand there gaping!"

He went hurriedly back into his compartment in the grip of a sudden panic. Half a dozen men reached for the luggage on the overhead racks and under the seats at once.

"Hurry up," the constable said grimly from the doorway.

"We're coming," Groom answered. "Can't you see we're coming?"

Laden with his belongings, he stumbled on to the platform again, and seemed to run a gauntlet of police, all shouldering him, pushing him this way and that, through the barriers on to the street.

In the street outside the station the Brideways

River Army gathered pitifully in the rain, a leaderless mob of unemployed. A cordon of troopers rode through them, cutting them in half. Half of them streamed one way, half the other. The police herded them like cattle in a drafting-yard, turning small groups of them into lanes or side streets, harrying them, scattering them.

Wet to the skin and almost weeping with humiliation and rage, Peter Groom escaped from the confusion and set out for the rooms of his friend, Noel Manning. He knew of nowhere else to go. His anger was directed against the police and was not unmixed with amazement. The police, whom he had regarded as the custodians of his rights and privileges, he saw through his rage as hired bravoes, as churlish bullies, as the minions of an oppressive tyranny that stood between him and the least right he thought to possess.

Cold and angry, he hurried through the rain. His way took him past the central railway station. He saw the police dispersing a crowd that had gathered to welcome the Brideways River men. Some arrested men were being bundled into motor-cars. Lying in a gutter was a red banner which bore the hammer and sickle of the Communist party and looked as though it had been trampled underfoot

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

1

HOLDING her umbrella over her head, Theodora hurried back to the headquarters of the Communist party. She was cold and hungry. She had been waiting outside the station with Riley and Martin Peacelove since one o'clock. No one had known what time the train would get in. The railway officials had been instructed not to give any information. Cold, driving rain! . . . The police, beasts! . . . But even if the police had not brought off that unexpected coup at East Perth, the demonstration that had been planned would have been ruined by the rain.

Arriving at her destination, she found Riley and Peacelove, from whom she had been separated in the breaking-up of the crowd, already there with Peacelove's wife, Anna, and several others. They made no attempt to hide their chagrin at the debacle.

"Have you heard anything?" Theodora asked, shaking the water from her umbrella.

"They arrested the leaders," Peacelove said. "But we'll get them out. The men must be got together again or everything that's been done will go for nothing. See Olive Curnow, comrade, and tell her she's to arrange for the Trades Hall for a meeting to-night. Then come back unless your own work's pressing. We're getting out a special issue of the *Red Star*."

Theodora nodded and went out. She would have to forgo the lunch she had been looking forward to,

and she was hungry; she had had nothing to eat since a slice of toast with a cup of tea in the early morning. A month had elapsed since she joined the Party, and it was not easy—trying to do her work as a union collector—she was not really an organizer, she thought—as well as the little odd jobs that Riley and Peacelove heaped upon her. Nevertheless, she felt a little proud of being a member of the Party.

2

The State Parliament began sitting at four in the afternoon, and sat, as a rule, till fairly late at night. At ten o'clock the Premier was informed that a deputation from the Brideways River men wanted to see him. He was not surprised, for a few minutes earlier he had received a telephone message from the Trades Hall informing him that the deputation was on its way. The deputation comprised twenty men; he agreed to see three of them, and McClintock, Giles and Gruder, who had been released on bail, were therefore admitted.

"I can only give you five minutes," the Premier said, frowning, "so say what you have to say as briefly as possible."

He conned over the phrases of his answer while McClintock spoke; he had spent the last ten minutes or so in arranging them. When the Brideways River leader had finished, he said:

"The government will discuss the conditions at the Brideways River camp with the appointed representatives of the men when, and only when, the men have returned and resumed work under existing conditions. There is a train back at nine o'clock on Monday morning. Passes will be made available for

that train, and until then meal and bed tickets will be issued by the government. They will be issued, however, on the express understanding that you return to Brideways by that train, and your acceptance will be assumed to mean acceptance of the government's terms."

The deputation returned to the Trades Hall and informed the men of the Premier's answer.

"We've got what we wanted, comrades," McClintock said. "The government doesn't dare let us starve. We're not going back. The Premier knows we're not going back except on our own terms, but he's got to preserve his face. We'll see on Monday how much he likes the idea of sixteen hundred organized men starving. . . ."

But on Monday at midday when the men applied for further meal and bed tickets, none were forthcoming, and the men's leaders were informed by an official of the Trades Hall that they would not be permitted to meet there again. The evening press said:

BRIDEWAYS RIVER MEN BREAK PROMISE TO RETURN.
GOVERNMENT STANDS FIRM.

That night there was a conference between the Brideways River leaders and Perth Communists, as an outcome of which notices were chalked during the night at intervals of about two hundred yards along every footpath in the city. The notices announced a meeting of Brideways River men, unemployed, and sympathizers, on the Esplanade reserve at noon on the following day.

3

Speaker after speaker mounted the rostrum. The crowd grew in size. Five thousand, six thousand, seven thousand people massed on the green, tree-rimmed reserve by the river. Here and there red banners fluttered.

In an eddy of the crowd Theodora bumped against a tall young man in shabby, work-stained clothes, with a ragged felt hat pulled low on his face. She stared at him in astonishment.

"Peter! Peter Groom!"

"Hullo, Theodora," he said, grinning in a pathetic way.

"Peter, whatever! . . ."

"Well?" he queried. "Whatever's reduced me to this condition. Is that what you mean?"

"What's *happened*?" she cried.

A few people turned their heads.

"I'm one of the Brideways River men."

"You!"

"Yes, and you've got something to do with it, if you only knew."

"I have!"

"Yes, but this isn't the time to talk about it. Where can I find you, Theodora? Are you still working at Kronen's?"

"I'm at the union office," she answered weakly.

"What are you doing here?"

"I'm . . . I'm interested. That's all."

He grinned again in the same pathetic way.

"I remember. I suppose you're actively interested." His grin faded and his face became suddenly bitter. "Well, so am I."

There was a surging movement in the crowd. The red banners moved together. McClintock shouted from the rostrum:

"Come on, Comrades! The old formation! We're going to *march* to the Treasury. . . ."

A cheer like the roar of a waterfall went up, and the banners, in ranks, moved slowly forward. Behind the banners a broad column of men began to draw out of the crowd like a colossal snake from the pile of its own coils.

"Stay with me," Peter Groom said, clutching Theodora's arm. "You shouldn't be in this, you know. There's going to be trouble."

She nodded, conscious of an upwelling excitement that made her heart thump. She moved forward at Groom's side, borne along by the irresistible current of the crowd. . . .

4

A small knot of police under the charge of a burly inspector waited alertly on the broad steps of the Treasury Building. There were no other uniforms in sight. The little knot waited as the unemployed advanced—a broad column marching along the centre of the street bearing aloft their red flags, flanking columns streaming along the footpaths on either side and overflowing them into the gutters. At last the unemployed halted before the Treasury Building, and their leaders advanced. The knot of police stepped forward to meet them.

"Where do you think you're going?" the inspector inquired grimly.

"We're going to see the Premier," one of the men answered.

"No you're not."

"I said: we're going to see the Premier," repeated the leader deliberately. "Stand aside!"

"Arrest them," said the inspector to his subordinates.

They moved forward briskly.

The man Gruder, one of the several leaders, shouted: "Stand firm, comrades. We're going to see the Premier, and we've got thousands behind us!"

A weak cheer went up from the unemployed.

The inspector's eyes glittered and his lips curled back a little from his teeth. He took a step forward and with all the weight of his great frame behind it, drove his fist into Gruder's face. The man stumbled and fell.

For an instant there was an astounded silence, then, beginning as a murmur, like a distant flood, a great roar of rage went up from the unemployed. At the same moment police whistles shrilled stridently, and from every gate and alleyway in the vicinity police appeared. Foot-police appeared with their batons gripped purposefully, and there was a clatter of the hoofs of troopers' horses.

"A trap!" someone shouted.

"Break 'em up!" said the inspector, and the police charged.

The next moment the street was filled with shouting, struggling unemployed and police. A park fence across the street gave way beneath the press, and men tore the pickets from the fallen lengths of fence to use as weapons. Whistles shrilled again and more police came running. Nearby the road was up for work on a watermain, and beside the excavation lay a heap of diorite and lumps of concrete and bitumen. In a moment the air was thick with a hail of flying

stones. The street echoed with shouts, curses, screams, and cries of rage and pain and fear.

Yet more police reinforcements arrived, and, working to a plan, cleared a space of a few score yards before the Treasury steps. Troopers formed up quickly in the space and charged the crowd. The unemployed went down before the horses. A flying stone struck a trooper on the temple and he rolled out of his saddle. Others were dragged from their horses. But the troopers reformed and charged again. Each time they charged they cleared a further few yards. Under the shock of the charges those who were unhurt began to struggle to get away, to break through the jam of humanity behind. The crowd surged and swayed like a wounded thing that cried out in its death agonies.

With Theodora beside him, Peter Groom was flung this way and that by the convulsions of the crowd like a sodden chip in a torrent. Suddenly, the crowd in front of him seemed to melt away. A trooper bore down upon him. The crowd closed in behind like a wall. Desperately Groom swung the girl behind him, with his eye on the trooper. The crowd thrust him forward against the legs of the trooper's horse. The man swung up his baton. Groom ducked and felt in his hair the wind of the baton as it descended. And in his ears sounded a dull crunch. Theodora crumpled up at his feet. The murderous devil, he thought. The trooper swung up his baton again. The young idler felt a tremendous shock, and the trooper and his horse, and Theodora, and the street and the crowd flowed together and exploded into darkness.

By and by, when the street was clear, the erstwhile idler Peter Groom, and the girl Theodora Luddon,

and several others, were placed on stretchers and conveyed in an ambulance to the Perth Public Hospital.

In the meantime, and throughout the day, the police were quelling minor riots all over the city.

CHAPTER THIRTY-TWO

I

THE magistrate James Riddle learned of the riot and the arrests as he sat in chambers. That meant that John Graham would be round before the afternoon was out. If the police opposed bail, he thought, he wouldn't grant it.

Graham arrived about four. The still, ironical smile that hovered as a rule on his lips was missing. With him came a constable with the bail bonds. The police did not oppose bail. Riddle signed the bonds impatiently.

"Next time an affair of this sort occurs," he said severely, "I'm going to consider refusing bail in my own discretion. All these agitator friends of yours know that when they're arrested they'll be released again almost within the hour. If they didn't have that knowledge they might be less disposed to create disturbances. Thirty-eight bonds !"

"Thirty-eight," Graham agreed. "There are four more to whom bail wouldn't be much use."

"What do you mean ?" Riddle inquired.

He handed the bonds to the constable and signed to him to go.

"There were fourteen taken to the hospital," the chemist said grimly. "Ten of them were released after treatment, but four were badly hurt. One of them, it may interest you to know, is a friend of yours. She got a crack over the head with a trooper's baton,

and she's suffering from a fractured skull. Theodora Luddon."

"What !" exclaimed Riddle, sitting upright with a start.

"I thought you'd be interested," the chemist observed calmly. "Her name's on the danger list. She may not live."

"Good heavens !" exclaimed Riddle in a whisper.

"The police, of course, were only doing their duty," said the chemist. "In times like these the police have a more than ordinarily difficult task to perform. It's not remarkable that under the stress of provocation they're sometimes a little rough in the exercise of their duty."

The magistrate thrust back his chair and sprang to his feet. His face was contorted.

"Damn you, John !" he cried. "That's rubbing it in. I'm going to see her."

2

Theodora Luddon ? The orderly at the hospital shook his head. She was on the danger list, he said. She couldn't have any visitors. Riddle searched in his pocket and found a card.

"Oh !" said the orderly. "I beg your pardon, sir. If you'll wait a moment I'll see the C.M.O."

Presently the magistrate was admitted, and the Chief Medical Officer himself conducted him to where Theodora lay.

He stood at the bedside and looked down at her. Her head was swathed in bandages. Her lips were parted. She breathed slowly, stertorously, heavily.

"Will she live ?"

"She has a chance," the doctor answered.

Riddle swallowed, fighting his emotion.

"She mustn't die," he said. "Everything that can be done for her must be done. Do you understand? Everything!"

"There is nothing we can do that hasn't already been done," replied the doctor. "Nothing *can* be done in these cases. There's a blood clot pressing on the brain. If it clears away she'll live, if it doesn't she'll die."

Leaving orders that he was to be notified immediately of any change in the girl's condition, Riddle went home. But he could think of nothing but Theodora. At last, afraid that his orders might be overlooked or disregarded, he rang up the hospital.

"There is no change," he was informed.

He rang up again in the morning and received the same answer: "There is no change."

3

The charges arising out of the riots were listed for hearing. The public enclosure in the court-room was crowded with unemployed. The magistrate felt their furtive eyes upon him as, in a hush, he took his seat on the bench, and his own eyes roved over them grimly. It was because of that miserable, malodorous rabble, he thought, that Theodora lay between life and death.

He tried to forget Theodora and concentrate on the procedure of the court, but could not.

Some of the accused wore plaster on their faces, or bandages round their heads, or both. They conjured up an image of the girl lying in the hospital bed with her head swathed in lint. There were some troopers in court, and one of them wore his arm in a sling.

Several of the ordinary police wore bandages. The police had not had it all their own way, it seemed.

The accused were charged separately or in batches. Anna Peacelove, charged with unlawfully addressing a crowd; Herbert Smith and William Gruder, charged with assaulting the police and resisting arrest; Thomas McClintock, charged with addressing a crowd; Steven Riley, charged with incitement to violence and resisting arrest; Peter Groom, charged with assaulting the police and resisting arrest. Peter Groom! . . .

"Peter Groom!" cried the usher, and Groom mounted the steps to the dock.

Riddle stared and frowned. How had the young fool come to be mixed up in this? The young idler glared back defiantly, with his head held high, and in a moment the magistrate found himself listening to an account of the events leading to the striking down of Theodora Luddon. A trooper accused Groom of having attempted to pull him from his horse. Groom demanded:

"Did you smash a girl's head in with your baton?"

Feeling that he was like to choke, Riddle gazed at the trooper. The man looked embarrassed, and hesitated in his answer.

"Answer that question," the magistrate ordered.

"When . . . when the accused tried to drag me off, your worship," the trooper said, licking his lips, "I aimed a crack at 'im with my baton. He ducked an' I hit a girl who was standing behind him. It was an accident."

"The girl's skull was fractured!" exclaimed Groom. "She's on the danger list. She may die. Then you knocked me out with your baton," he said, glaring at the trooper. "Didn't you? Didn't you?"

"You resisted arrest," said the trooper.

Riddle gazed at the trooper, unable to trust himself to speak.

The prosecuting sergeant interposed: "The matter of the girl may be the subject of a special inquiry, your worship. It has no bearing on the offence with which this man is charged, and it can't be advanced as an extenuating circumstance because it happened afterwards not before he tried to pull the trooper off his horse."

Riddle made an effort and said quietly: "I . . . understand, sergeant." In the same quiet voice he said to Groom: "You will confine yourself to questions which have a direct bearing on the offence with which you are charged."

"I haven't any questions then," said Groom.

A plain-clothes constable entered the witness-box and said that he had seen Groom try to pull the trooper from his horse. Groom questioned him angrily, then gave evidence himself. He said indignantly:

"It's a pack of lies! I didn't touch the man, or try to touch him. Miss Luddon was with me—standing behind me. It was the murderous blow the trooper aimed at me that struck her. . . ."

"I don't want to hear about that," said the magistrate in a hard, calm voice. "It has nothing to do with the case. You heard what the sergeant said."

There was a murmur from the back of the court, insistent and angry. A voice cried: "Shame!" and there was a sibilant hissing. Riddle's self-control snapped.

"Silence!" he shouted. "Silence! If there's another sound from the back of the court I'll have the enclosure cleared! . . . Have you got anything else to say?" he barked at Groom.

"If I'm not allowed to mention the girl, what can

I say?" demanded the young man. "I can only deny that I tried to pull the trooper off his horse!"

"Very well then!"

He reserved his decision. He had reserved it in all cases. He would deliver them all at once at the end of the proceedings. He rose abruptly, unable to contain himself.

"The court will adjourn for five minutes."

"The Lord of the Urinal!" someone in the enclosure jeered softly as he went out, and an unpleasant titter arose.

In his chambers Riddle rang up the hospital.

"There is no change," came the voice over the wire.

He went to the privy then resumed his seat in court.

The cases dragged on through the day, and the next day, but towards the end of the second day he said: "Decision reserved" in the last case.

"The court will deliver its decision at ten-thirty to-morrow morning."

For the tenth or the twentieth time he rang up the hospital; Theodora was the same. He received the same answer when he rang late at night, but early on Friday morning a nurse answered the telephone and said cheerfully:

"I think she must be better. I don't see her name on the danger-list. If you'll hold on I'll inquire."

The magistrate waited. The nurse seemed to be away a long time, but he heard her voice again at last.

"I'm sorry," she said. "I made a mistake. The patient died at half-past four this morning. That's why her name was crossed off the list. She didn't recover consciousness."

4

Promptly at half-past ten Riddle took his seat on the bench. The police and lawyers in the court commented in whispers upon his appearance. His face looked drawn and old. When he spoke his voice trembled. He said:

"As always in cases arising out of public disturbances, accusations of brutality are made against the police. I have called attention to this before, and what I have said before I say again now. When disturbances occur it is the duty of the police to quell them. Sometimes the police have to be brutal to do their duty, and this is particularly true in cases where crowds are incited by professional agitators to violence. . . .

"In two cases I find that there is insufficient evidence to warrant convictions. In all other cases I find the charges proved. . . .

"Paul Geary. . . .

"Joseph William Symonds. . . .

"Anna Peacelove. . . ."

As Riddle named the accused he pronounced their sentences. The court gasped at their severity.

"Peter Groom . . . one month's imprisonment with hard labour! . . ."

Groom raised his hand and wiped away the sweat that broke out on his brow. A month's imprisonment with hard labour! . . .

"Steven Riley. . . ."

Riley nodded grimly to Riddle, who looked back at him with cold rage. In his grief it did not occur to him that the Communist, too, was suffering. He thought of him only as the man whose influence had brought Theodora to her death.

". . . you will be sentenced to nine months' imprisonment with hard labour!"

"I made you a promise once," said Riley, clenching his hands. "You know what it was, and it still holds good!"

The magistrate rose abruptly, pushing back his heavy chair.

"The court will adjourn for five minutes."

He had to steady himself against the wall of the privy. . . .

5

Mrs. Blundel wrote to her daughter Cynthia:

My darling, I don't know how to express my sympathy for you. To his misdeeds your worthless husband has now added the disgrace and humiliation of getting mixed up in an unemployed riot and being sent to gaol. Oh, my dear, what can I say? This is too much! You mustn't hesitate any longer. You must divorce him. It was against my advice that you ever married him, but you were so insistent, thinking you knew better than your mother, and ever since you've regretted it. He couldn't be true to you, and now it appears that he has so far forgotten his class and upbringing as to throw in his lot with a lot of lazy unemployed. He must be lost to every impulse of decency and respectability. I am sure all your friends in Perth must be talking of nothing else. I am sending you the newspaper reports of the whole disgraceful affair. Oh, my dear, I'm so sorry for you, the terrible disgrace! I've written to a private inquiry agent and asked him to write to you, because you'll have to have definite evidence for a divorce. Of course, he'll

> *have to wait till Peter gets out of gaol before he can do anything, but you ought to be able to give him something to go on. I understand that before this trouble Peter actually went into the Brideways River relief camp and was with all those graceless scamps who marched out. I've sent you cuttings about that, too, so I needn't write about it. My darling Cynthia I'm so sorry for you. Please write and tell me what to do. If you can only get your freedom from Peter Groom and marry some decent man who will know how to treat you I shall be happy. . . .*

Peter! In a relief camp! In gaol! The startled Cynthia threw down her mother's letter and took up the cuttings. It was true! Her heart fluttered in her breast like a captive bird. Peter in a relief camp, in gaol! As all that that implied was borne in upon her, she burst into tears. She felt as though her heart would break. It was her fault! She had left him destitute. . . .

And she loved him. She no longer sought to deceive herself. It was because she had loved him so much that she treated him so . . . to punish him . . . bring him back to her. She was overwhelmed by remorse. His faithlessness no longer seemed important. . . .

And her mother wanted her to divorce him . . . when he was in trouble, needing her. Her mother? If it had not been for her mother she would never have done it, it would all never have happened. With the tears still streaming down her face she began to drag out her clothes and her cases. She was going back.

EPILOGUE

LATER in the same year, at Berne, an international conference of peasant and proletarian organizations took place. A revolutionary upsurge in every industrialized country of the world was remarked. The Australian delegates observed that even in Western Australia, the least advanced of the Austral States, there was a definite revolutionary upsurge.

THE END