

*Tales of Adventure
and Medical Life*

TALES OF ADVENTURE

The Debut of Bimbashi Joyce

IT WAS IN THE DAYS when the tide of Mahdism,* which had swept in such a flood from the Great Lakes and Darfur to the confines of Egypt, had at last come to its full, and even begun, as some hoped, to show signs of a turn. At its outset it had been terrible. It had engulfed Hicks's army, swept over Gordon and Khartoum, rolled behind the British forces as they retired down the river, and finally cast up a spray of raiding parties as far north as Aswan.* Then it found other channels to east and to west, to Central Africa and to Abyssinia, and retired a little on the side of Egypt. For ten years there ensued a lull, during which the frontier garrisons looked out upon those distant, blue hills of Dongola. Behind the violet mists which draped them lay a land of blood and horror. From time to time some adventurer went south towards those haze-girt mountains, tempted by stories of gum and ivory, but none ever returned. Once a mutilated Egyptian and once a Greek woman, mad with thirst and fear, made their way to the lines. They were the only exports of that country of darkness. Sometimes the sunset would turn those distant mists into a bank of crimson, and the dark mountains would rise from that sinister reek like islands in a sea of blood. It seemed a grim symbol in the southern heaven when seen from the fort-capped hills by Wadi Halfa.

Ten years of lust in Khartoum, ten years of silent work in Cairo, and then all was ready, and it was time for civilization

to take a trip south once more, travelling, as her wont is, in an armoured train.* Everything was ready, down to the last packsaddle of the last camel, and yet no one suspected it, for an unconstitutional government has its advantages. A great administrator had argued, and managed, and cajoled; a great soldier had organized, and planned, and made piastres do the work of pounds.* And then one night these two master spirits met and clasped hands, and the soldier vanished away upon some business of his own. And just at that very time Bimbashi* Hilary Joyce, seconded from the Royal Mallow Fusiliers, and temporarily attached to the Ninth Sudanese, made his first appearance in Cairo.

Napoleon had said, and Hilary Joyce had noted, that great reputations are only to be made in the East. Here he was in the East with four tin cases of baggage, a Wilkinson sword, a Bond's slug-throwing pistol and a copy of *Green's Introduction to the Study of Arabic*. With such a start, and the blood of youth running hot in his veins, everything seemed easy. He was a little frightened of the General, he had heard stories of his sternness to young officers, but with tact and suavity he hoped for the best. So, leaving his effects at Shepheard's Hotel,* he reported himself at headquarters.

It was not the General, but the head of the Intelligence Department who received him, the chief being still absent upon that business which had called him. Hilary Joyce found himself in the presence of a short, thickset officer, with a gentle voice and a placid expression which covered a remarkably acute and energetic spirit. With that quiet smile and guileless manner he had undercut and outwitted the most cunning of orientals. He stood, a cigarette between his fingers, looking at the newcomer.

“I heard that you had come. Sorry the chief isn’t here to see you. Gone up to the frontier, you know.”

“My regiment is at Wadi Halfa. I suppose, sir, that I should report myself there at once?”

“No, I was to give you your orders.” He led the way to a map upon the wall, and pointed with the end of his cigarette. “You see this place. It’s the Oasis of Kurkur – a little quiet, I am afraid, but excellent air. You are to get out there as quick as possible. You’ll find a company of the Ninth, and half a squadron of cavalry. You will be in command.”

Hilary Joyce looked at the name, printed at the intersection of two black lines, without another dot upon the map for several inches round it.

“A village, sir?”

“No, a well. Not very good water, I’m afraid, but you soon get accustomed to natron.* It’s an important post, as being at the junction of two caravan routes. All routes are closed now, of course, but still you never know who *might* come along them.”

“We are there, I presume, to prevent raiding?”

“Well, between you and me, there’s really nothing to raid. You are there to intercept messengers. They must call at the wells. Of course you have only just come out, but you probably understand already enough about the conditions of this country to know that there is a great deal of disaffection about, and that the Khalifa* is likely to try and keep in touch with his adherents. Then, again, Senussi* lives up that way” – he waved his cigarette to the westward – “the Khalifa might send a message to him along that route. Anyhow, your duty is to arrest everyone coming along, and

get some account of him before you let him go. You don't talk Arabic, I suppose?"

"I am learning, sir."

"Well, well, you'll have time enough for study there. And you'll have a native officer, Ali something or other, who speaks English, and can interpret for you. Well, goodbye – I'll tell the chief that you reported yourself. Get on to your post now as quickly as you can."

Railway to Baliani, the post boat to Aswan, and then two days on a camel in the Libyan Desert, with an Ababdeh* guide, and three baggage camels to tie one down to their own exasperating pace. However, even two and a half miles an hour mount up in time, and at last on the third evening, from the blackened slag heap of a hill which is called the Jebel Kurkur, Hilary Joyce looked down upon a distant clump of palms, and thought that this cool patch of green in the midst of the merciless blacks and yellows was the fairest colour effect that he had ever seen. An hour later he had ridden into the little camp, the guard had turned out to salute him, his native subordinate had greeted him in excellent English, and he had fairly entered into his own.

It was not an exhilarating place for a lengthy residence. There was one large, bowl-shaped, grassy depression sloping down to the three pits of brown and brackish water. There was the grove of palm trees also, beautiful to look upon, but exasperating in view of the fact that Nature has provided her least shady trees on the very spot where shade is needed most. A single widespread acacia did something to restore the balance. Here Hilary Joyce slumbered in the heat, and in the cool he inspected his square-shouldered, spindle-shanked Sudanese, with their cheery black faces and

their funny little pork-pie forage caps. Joyce was a martinet at drill, and the blacks loved being drilled, so the Bimbashi was soon popular among them. But one day was exactly like another. The weather, the view, the employment, the food – everything was the same. At the end of three weeks he felt that he had been there for interminable years. And then at last there came something to break the monotony.

One evening, as the sun was sinking, Hilary Joyce rode slowly down the old caravan road. It had a fascination for him, this narrow track, winding among the boulders and curving up the nullahs,* for he remembered how in the map it had gone on and on, stretching away into the unknown heart of Africa. The countless pads of innumerable camels through many centuries had beaten it smooth, so that now, unused and deserted, it still wound away, the strangest of roads, a foot broad, and perhaps two thousand miles in length. Joyce wondered as he rode how long it was since any traveller had journeyed up it from the south, and then he raised his eyes, and there was a man coming along the path.

For an instant Joyce thought that it might be one of his own men, but a second glance assured him that this could not be so. The stranger was dressed in the flowing robes of an Arab, and not in the close-fitting khaki of a soldier. He was very tall, and a high turban made him seem gigantic. He strode swiftly along, with head erect, and the bearing of a man who knows no fear.

Who could he be, this formidable giant coming out of the unknown? The precursor possibly of a horde of savage spearmen. And where could he have walked from? The nearest well was a long hundred miles down the track. At any rate the frontier post of Kurkur could not afford to receive

casual visitors. Hilary Joyce whisked round his horse, galloped into camp, and gave the alarm. Then, with twenty horsemen at his back, he rode out again to reconnoitre.

The man was still coming on in spite of these hostile preparations. For an instant he had hesitated when first he saw the cavalry, but escape was out of the question, and he advanced with the air of one who makes the best of a bad job. He made no resistance, and said nothing when the hands of two troopers clutched at his shoulders, but walked quietly between their horses into camp. Shortly afterwards the patrols came in again. There were no signs of any dervishes.* The man was alone. A splendid trotting camel had been found lying dead a little way down the track. The mystery of the stranger's arrival was explained. But why, and whence, and whither? These were questions for which a zealous officer must find an answer.

Hilary Joyce was disappointed that there were no dervishes. It would have been a great start for him in the Egyptian army had he fought a little action on his own account. But even as it was, he had a rare chance of impressing the authorities. He would love to show his capacity to the head of the intelligence, and even more to that grim chief who never forgot what was smart, or forgave what was slack. The prisoner's dress and bearing showed that he was of importance. Mean men do not ride pure-bred trotting camels. Joyce sponged his head with cold water, drank a cup of strong coffee, put on an imposing official tarboosh instead of his sun helmet, and formed himself into a court of inquiry and judgement under the acacia tree.

He would have liked his people to have seen him now, with his two black orderlies in waiting, and his Egyptian

native officer at his side. He sat behind a camp table, and the prisoner, strongly guarded, was led up to him. The man was a handsome fellow, with bold grey eyes and a long black beard.

“Why!” cried Joyce. “The rascal is making faces at me.”

A curious contraction had passed over the man’s features, but so swiftly that it might have been a nervous twitch. He was now a model of oriental gravity.

“Ask him who he is, and what he wants.”

The native officer did so, but the stranger made no reply, save that the same sharp spasm passed once more over his face.

“Well, I’m blessed!” cried Hilary Joyce. “Of all the impudent scoundrels! He keeps on winking at me. Who are you, you rascal? Give an account of yourself! D’ye hear?”

But the tall Arab was as impervious to English as to Arabic. The Egyptian tried again and again. The prisoner looked at Joyce with his inscrutable eyes, and occasionally twitched his face at him, but never opened his mouth. The Bimbashi scratched his head in bewilderment.

“Look here, Mahomet Ali, we’ve got to get some sense out of this fellow. You say there are no papers on him?”

“No, sir, we found no papers.”

“No clue of any kind?”

“He has come far, sir. A trotting camel does not die easily. He has come from Dongola, at least.”

“Well, we must get him to talk.”

“It is possible that he is deaf and dumb.”

“Not he. I never saw a man look more all there in my life.”

“You might send him across to Aswan.”

“And give someone else the credit! No, thank you. This is my bird. But how are we going to get him to find his tongue?”

The Egyptian’s dark eyes skirted the encampment and rested on the cook’s fire.

“Perhaps,” said he, “if the Bimbashi thought fit...” He looked at the prisoner and then at the burning wood.

“No, no, it wouldn’t do. No, by Jove, that’s going too far.”

“A very little might do it.”

“No, no. It’s all very well here, but it would sound just awful if ever it got as far as Fleet Street. But, I say,” he whispered, “we might frighten him a bit. There’s no harm in that.”

“No, sir.”

“Tell them to undo the man’s galabeeah.* Order them to put a horseshoe in the fire and make it red-hot.”

The prisoner watched the proceedings with an air which had more of amusement than of uneasiness. He never winced as the black sergeant approached with the glowing shoe held upon two bayonets.

“Will you speak now?” asked the Bimbashi savagely.

The prisoner smiled gently and stroked his beard.

“Oh, chuck the infernal thing away!” cried Joyce, jumping up in a passion. “There’s no use trying to bluff the fellow. He knows we won’t do it. But I *can* and I *will* flog him, and you tell him from me that if he hasn’t found his tongue by tomorrow morning, I’ll take the skin off his back as sure as my name’s Joyce. Have you said all that?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Well, you can sleep upon it, you beauty, and a good night’s rest may it give you!”

He adjourned the court, and the prisoner, as imperturbable as ever, was led away by the guard to his supper of rice and water.

Hilary Joyce was a kind-hearted man, and his own sleep was considerably disturbed by the prospect of the punishment which he must inflict next day. He had hopes that the mere sight of the koorbash* and the thongs might prevail over his prisoner's obstinacy. And then, again, he thought how shocking it would be if the man proved to be really dumb after all. The possibility shook him so that he had almost determined by daybreak that he would send the stranger on unhurt to Aswan. And yet what a tame conclusion it would be to the incident! He lay upon his angareeb* still debating it when the question suddenly and effectively settled itself. Ali Mahomet rushed into his tent.

"Sir," he cried, "the prisoner is gone!"

"Gone!"

"Yes, sir, and your own best riding camel as well. There is a slit cut in the tent, and he got away unseen in the early morning."

The Bimbashi acted with all energy. Cavalry rode along every track; scouts examined the soft sand of the wadis for signs of the fugitive, but no trace was discovered. The man had utterly disappeared. With a heavy heart Hilary Joyce wrote an official report of the matter and forwarded it to Aswan. Five days later there came a curt order from the chief that he should report himself there. He feared the worst from the stern soldier, who spared others as little as he spared himself.

And his worst forebodings were realized. Travel-stained and weary, he reported himself one night at the General's

quarters. Behind a table piled with papers and strewn with maps the famous soldier and his Chief of Intelligence were deep in plans and figures. Their greeting was a cold one.

"I understand, Captain Joyce," said the General, "that you have allowed a very important prisoner to slip through your fingers."

"I am sorry, sir."

"No doubt. But that will not mend matters. Did you ascertain anything about him before you lost him?"

"No, sir."

"How was that?"

"I could get nothing out of him, sir."

"Did you try?"

"Yes, sir, I did what I could."

"What did you do?"

"Well, sir, I threatened to use physical force."

"What did he say?"

"He said nothing."

"What was he like?"

"A tall man, sir. Rather a desperate character, I should think."

"Any way by which we could identify him?"

"A long black beard, sir. Grey eyes. And a nervous way of twitching his face."

"Well, Captain Joyce," said the General, in his stern, inflexible voice, "I cannot congratulate you upon your first exploit in the Egyptian army. You are aware that every English officer in this force is a picked man. I have the whole British Army from which to draw. It is necessary, therefore, that I should insist upon the very highest efficiency. It would be unfair upon the others to pass over any obvious want of zeal or

intelligence. You are seconded from the Royal Mallows, I understand?"

"Yes, sir."

"I have no doubt that your colonel will be glad to see you fulfilling your regimental duties again."

Hilary Joyce's heart was too heavy for words. He was silent.

"I will let you know my final decision tomorrow morning."

Joyce saluted and turned upon his heel.

"You can sleep upon that, you beauty, and a good night's rest may it give you!"

Joyce turned in bewilderment. Where had those words been used before? Who was it who had used them?

The General was standing erect. Both he and the Chief of the Intelligence were laughing. Joyce stared at the tall figure, the erect bearing, the inscrutable grey eyes.

"Good Lord!" he gasped.

"Well, well, Captain Joyce, we are quits!" said the General, holding out his hand. "You gave me a bad ten minutes with that infernal, red-hot horseshoe of yours. I've done as much for you. I don't think we can spare you for the Royal Mallows just yet awhile."

"But, sir, but!..."

"The fewer questions the better, perhaps. But of course it must seem rather amazing. I had a little private business with the Kabbabish.* It must be done in person. I did it, and came to your post in my return. I kept on winking at you as a sign that I wanted a word with you alone."

"Yes, yes. I begin to understand."

"I couldn't give it away before all those blacks, or where should I have been the next time I used my false beard and

Arab dress? You put me in a very awkward position. But at last I had a word alone with your Egyptian officer, who managed my escape all right.”

“He! Mahomet Ali!”

“I ordered him to say nothing. I had a score to settle with you. But we dine at eight, Captain Joyce. We live plainly here, but I think I can do you a little better than you did me at Kurkur.”

The Surgeon of Gaster Fell

I

How the Woman Came to Kirkby-Malhouse

BLEAK AND WINDSWEPT is the little town of Kirkby-Malhouse, harsh and forbidding are the fells upon which it stands. It stretches in a single line of grey-stone, slate-roofed houses, dotted down the furze-clad slope of the rolling moor.

In this lonely and secluded village, I, James Upperton, found myself in the summer of '85. Little as the hamlet had to offer, it contained that for which I yearned above all things – seclusion and freedom from all which might distract my mind from the high and weighty subjects which engaged it. But the inquisitiveness of my landlady made my lodgings undesirable and I determined to seek new quarters.

As it chanced, I had in one of my rambles come upon an isolated dwelling in the very heart of these lonely moors, which I at once determined should be my own. It was a two-roomed cottage, which had once belonged to some shepherd, but had long been deserted, and was crumbling rapidly to ruin. In the winter floods, the Gaster Beck, which runs down Gaster Fell, where the little dwelling stood, had overswept its banks and torn away a part of the wall. The roof was in ill case, and the scattered slates lay thick amongst the grass. Yet the main shell of the house stood

firm and true, and it was no great task for me to have all that was amiss set right.

The two rooms I laid out in a widely different manner – my own tastes are of a spartan turn, and the outer chamber was so planned as to accord with them. An oil stove by Ripplingille of Birmingham furnished me with the means of cooking, while two great bags, the one of flour, and the other of potatoes, made me independent of all supplies from without. In diet I had long been a Pythagorean,* so that the scraggy, long-limbed sheep which browsed upon the wiry grass by the Gaster Beck had little to fear from their new companion. A nine-gallon cask of oil served me as a sideboard, while a square table, a deal chair and a truckle bed completed the list of my domestic fittings. At the head of my couch hung two unpainted shelves – the lower for my dishes and cooking utensils, the upper for the few portraits which took me back to the little that was pleasant in the long, wearisome toiling for wealth and for pleasure which had marked the life I had left behind.

If this dwelling room of mine were plain even to squalor, its poverty was more than atoned for by the luxury of the chamber which was destined to serve me as my study. I had ever held that it was best for my mind to be surrounded by such objects as would be in harmony with the studies which occupied it, and that the loftiest and most ethereal conditions of thought are only possible amid surroundings which please the eye and gratify the senses. The room which I had set apart for my mystic studies was set forth in a style as gloomy and majestic as the thoughts and aspirations with which it was to harmonize. Both walls and ceilings were covered with a paper of the richest and glossiest black, on

which was traced a lurid and arabesque pattern of dead gold. A black velvet curtain covered the single diamond-paned window, while a thick, yielding carpet of the same material prevented the sound of my own footfalls, as I paced backwards and forwards, from breaking the current of my thought. Along the cornices ran gold rods, from which depended six pictures, all of the sombre and imaginative caste, which chimed best with my fancy.

And yet it was destined that ere ever I reached this quiet harbour I should learn that I was still one of humankind, and that it is an ill thing to strive to break the bond which binds us to our fellows. It was but two nights before the date I had fixed upon for my change of dwelling, when I was conscious of a bustle in the house beneath, with the bearing of heavy burdens up the creaking stair, and the harsh voice of my landlady, loud in welcome and protestations of joy. From time to time, amid the whirl of words, I could hear a gentle and softly modulated voice, which struck pleasantly upon my ear after the long weeks during which I had listened only to the rude dialect of the dalesmen.* For an hour I could hear the dialogue beneath – the high voice and the low, with clatter of cup and clink of spoon, until at last a light, quick step passed my study door, and I knew that my new fellow lodger had sought her room.

On the morning after this incident I was up betimes, as is my wont, but I was surprised, on glancing from my window, to see that our new inmate was earlier still. She was walking down the narrow pathway, which zigzags over the fell – a tall woman, slender, her head sunk upon her breast, her arms filled with a bristle of wild flowers, which she had gathered in her morning rambles. The white and pink of

her dress, and the touch of deep-red ribbon in her broad, drooping hat, formed a pleasant dash of colour against the dun-tinted landscape. She was some distance off when I first set eyes upon her, yet I knew that this wandering woman could be none other than our arrival of last night, for there was a grace and refinement in her bearing which marked her from the dwellers of the fells. Even as I watched she passed swiftly and lightly down the pathway, and turning through the wicket gate, at the farther end of our cottage garden, she seated herself upon the green bank which faced my window, and strewing her flowers in front of her, set herself to arrange them.

As she sat there, with the rising sun at her back, and the glow of the morning spreading like an aureole around her stately and well-poised head, I could see that she was a woman of extraordinary personal beauty. Her face was Spanish rather than English in its type – oval, olive, with black, sparkling eyes, and a sweetly sensitive mouth. From under the broad straw hat two thick coils of blue-black hair curved down on either side of her graceful, queenly neck. I was surprised, as I watched her, to see that her shoes and skirt bore witness to a journey rather than to a mere morning ramble. Her light dress was stained, wet and bedraggled, while her boots were thick with the yellow soil of the fells. Her face, too, wore a weary expression, and her young beauty seemed to be clouded over by the shadow of inward trouble. Even as I watched her, she burst suddenly into wild weeping, and throwing down her bundle of flowers, ran swiftly into the house.

Distract as I was and weary of the ways of the world, I was conscious of a sudden pang of sympathy and grief as I

looked upon the spasm of despair which seemed to convulse this strange and beautiful woman. I bent to my books, and yet my thoughts would ever turn to her proud, clear-cut face, her weather-stained dress, her drooping head and the sorrow which lay in each line and feature of her pensive face.

Mrs Adams, my landlady, was wont to carry up my frugal breakfast, yet it was very rarely that I allowed her to break the current of my thoughts, or to draw my mind by her idle chatter from weightier things. This morning, however, for once, she found me in a listening mood, and with little prompting, proceeded to pour into my ears all that she knew of our beautiful visitor.

“Miss Eva Cameron be her name, sir,” she said, “but who she be, or where she came fra, I know little more than yoursel’. Maybe it was the same reason that brought her to Kirkby-Malhouse as fetched you there yoursel’, sir.”

“Possibly,” said I, ignoring the covert question, “but I should hardly have thought that Kirkby-Malhouse was a place which offered any great attractions to a young lady.”

“Heh, sir!” she cried. “There’s the wonder of it. The leddy has just come fra France, and how her folk come to learn of me is just a wonder. A week ago, up comes a man to my door – a fine man, sir, and a gentleman, as one could see with half an eye. ‘You are Mrs Adams,’ says he. ‘I engage your rooms for Miss Cameron,’ says he. ‘She will be here in a week,’ says he, and then off without a word of terms. Last night there comes the young leddy hersel’ – soft-spoken and downcast, with a touch of the French in her speech. But my sakes, sir! I must away and mak’ her some tea, for she’ll feel lonesome-like, poor lamb, when she wakes under a strange roof.”

II

How I Went Forth to Gaster Fell

I WAS STILL ENGAGED upon my breakfast when I heard the clatter of dishes and the landlady's footfall as she passed towards her new lodger's room. An instant afterwards she had rushed down the passage and burst in upon me with uplifted hand and startled eyes. "Lord a' mercy, sir!" she cried. "And asking your pardon for troubling you, but I'm feared o' the young leddy, sir – she is not in her room."

"Why, there she is," said I, standing up and glancing through the casement. "She has gone back for the flowers she left upon the bank."

"Oh, sir, see her boots and her dress!" cried the landlady wildly. "I wish her mother was here, sir – I do. Where she has been is more than I ken, but her bed has not been lain on this night."

"She has felt restless, doubtless, and went for a walk, though the hour was certainly a strange one."

Mrs Adams pursed her lip and shook her head. But then as she stood at the casement, the girl beneath looked smilingly up at her and beckoned to her with a merry gesture to open the window.

"Have you my tea there?" she asked in a rich, clear voice, with a touch of the mincing French accent.

"It is in your room, miss."

"Look at my boots, Mrs Adams!" she cried, thrusting them out from under her skirt. "These fells of yours are dreadful places – *effroyable** – one inch, two inch: never have I seen such mud! My dress, too – *voilà!*"

“Eh, miss, but you are in a pickle,” cried the landlady, as she gazed down at the bedraggled gown. “But you must be main weary and heavy for sleep.”

“No, no,” she answered laughingly, “I care not for sleep. What is sleep? It is a little death – *voilà tout*.* But for me to walk, to run, to breathe the air – that is to live. I was not tired, and so all night I have explored these fells of Yorkshire.”

“Lord a’ mercy, miss, and where did you go?” asked Mrs Adams.

She waved her hand round in a sweeping gesture which included the whole western horizon. “There,” she cried. “*O comme elles sont tristes et sauvages, ces collines!** But I have flowers here. You will give me water, will you not? They will wither else.” She gathered her treasures in her lap, and a moment later we heard her light, springy footfall upon the stair.

So she had been out all night, this strange woman. What motive could have taken her from her snug room onto the bleak, windswept hills? Could it be merely the restlessness, the love of adventure of a young girl? Or was there, possibly, some deeper meaning in this nocturnal journey?

Deep as were the mysteries which my studies had taught me to solve, here was a human problem which for the moment at least was beyond my comprehension. I had walked out on the moor in the forenoon, and on my return, as I topped the brow that overlooks the little town, I saw my fellow lodger some little distance off amongst the gorse. She had raised a light easel in front of her, and, with papered board laid across it, was preparing to paint the magnificent landscape of rock and moor which stretched away in front of

her. As I watched her I saw that she was looking anxiously to right and left. Close by me a pool of water had formed in a hollow. Dipping the cup of my pocket flask into it, I carried it across to her.

"Miss Cameron, I believe," said I. "I am your fellow lodger. Upperton is my name. We must introduce ourselves in these wilds if we are not to be for ever strangers."

"Oh, then, you live also with Mrs Adams!" she cried. "I had thought that there were none but peasants in this strange place."

"I am a visitor, like yourself," I answered. "I am a student, and have come for quiet and repose, which my studies demand."

"Quiet, indeed!" said she, glancing round at the vast circle of silent moors, with the one tiny line of grey cottages which sloped down beneath us.

"And yet not quiet enough," I answered, laughing, "for I have been forced to move farther into the fells for the absolute peace which I require."

"Have you, then, built a house upon the fells?" she asked, arching her eyebrows.

"I have, and hope, within a few days, to occupy it."

"Ah, but that is *triste*," she cried. "And where is it, then, this house which you have built?"

"It is over yonder," I answered. "See that stream which lies like a silver band upon the distant moor? It is the Gaster Beck, and it runs through Gaster Fell."

She started, and turned upon me her great, dark, questioning eyes with a look in which surprise, incredulity and something akin to horror seemed to be struggling for mastery.

"And you will live on the Gaster Fell?" she cried.

“So I have planned. But what do you know of Gaster Fell, Miss Cameron?” I asked. “I had thought that you were a stranger in these parts.”

“Indeed, I have never been here before,” she answered. “But I have heard my brother talk of these Yorkshire moors, and, if I mistake not, I have heard him name this very one as the wildest and most savage of them all.”

“Very likely,” said I carelessly. “It is indeed a dreary place.”

“Then why live there?” she cried eagerly. “Consider the loneliness, the barrenness, the want of all comfort and of all aid, should aid be needed.”

“Aid! What aid should be needed on Gaster Fell?”

She looked down and shrugged her shoulders. “Sickness may come in all places,” said she. “If I were a man I do not think I would live alone on Gaster Fell.”

“I have braved worse dangers than that,” said I, laughing, “but I fear that your picture will be spoilt, for the clouds are banking up, and already I feel a few raindrops.”

Indeed, it was high time we were on our way to shelter, for even as I spoke there came the sudden, steady swish of the shower. Laughing merrily, my companion threw her light shawl over her head, and, seizing picture and easel, ran with the lithe grace of a young fawn down the furze-clad slope, while I followed after with camp stool and paintbox.

It was the eve of my departure from Kirkby-Malhouse that we sat upon the green bank in the garden, she with dark, dreamy eyes looking sadly out over the sombre fells, while I, with a book upon my knee, glanced covertly at her lovely profile and marvelled to myself how twenty years of life could have stamped so sad and wistful an expression upon it.

“You have read much,” I remarked at last. “Women have opportunities now such as their mothers never knew. Have you ever thought of going further – or seeking a course of college or even a learned profession?”

She smiled wearily at the thought.

“I have no aim, no ambition,” she said. “My future is black – confused – a chaos. My life is like to one of these paths upon the fells. You have seen them, Monsieur Upperton. They are smooth and straight and dear where they begin, but soon they wind to left and wind to right, and so mid rocks and crags until they lose themselves in some quagmire. At Brussels my path was straight; but now – *mon Dieu!* – who is there can tell me where it leads?”

“It might take no prophet to do that, Miss Cameron,” quoth I, with the fatherly manner which two score years may show towards one. “If I may read your life, I would venture to say that you were destined to fulfil the lot of women – to make some good man happy, and to shed around, in some wider circle, the pleasure which your society has given me since first I knew you.”

“I will never marry,” said she, with a sharp decision, which surprised and somewhat amused me.

“Not marry – and why?”

A strange look passed over her sensitive features, and she plucked nervously at the grass on the bank beside her.

“I dare not,” said she in a voice that quivered with emotion.

“Dare not?”

“It is not for me. I have other things to do. That path of which I spoke is one which I must tread alone.”

“But this is morbid,” said I. “Why should your lot, Miss Cameron, be separated from that of my own sisters, or the

thousand other young ladies whom every season brings out into the world? But perhaps it is that you have a fear and distrust of mankind. Marriage brings a risk as well as a happiness.”

“The risk would be with the man who married me,” she cried. And then in an instant, as though she had said too much, she sprang to her feet and drew her mantle round her. “The night air is chill, Mr Upperton,” said she, and so swept swiftly away, leaving me to muse over the strange words which had fallen from her lips.

Clearly, it was time that I should go. I set my teeth and vowed that another day should not have passed before I should have snapped this newly formed tie and sought the lonely retreat which awaited me upon the moors. Breakfast was hardly over in the morning before a peasant dragged up to the door the rude handcart which was to convey my few personal belongings to my new dwelling. My fellow lodger had kept her room, and, steeled as my mind was against her influence, I was yet conscious of a little throb of disappointment that she should allow me to depart without a word of farewell. My handcart with its load of books had already started, and I, having shaken hands with Mrs Adams, was about to follow it, when there was a quick scurry of feet on the stair, and there she was beside me all panting with her own haste.

“Then you go – you really go?” said she.

“My studies call me.”

“And to Gaster Fell?” she asked.

“Yes, to the cottage which I have built there.”

“And you will live alone there?”

“With my hundred companions who lie in that cart.”

“Ah, books!” she cried, with a pretty shrug of her graceful shoulders. “But you will make me a promise?”

“What is it?” I asked, in surprise.

“It is a small thing. You will not refuse me?”

“You have but to ask it.”

She bent forward her beautiful face with an expression of the most intense earnestness. “You will bolt your door at night?” said she, and was gone ere I could say a word in answer to her extraordinary request.

It was a strange thing for me to find myself at last duly installed in my lonely dwelling. For me, now, the horizon was bounded by the barren circle of wiry, unprofitable grass, patched over with furze bushes and scarred by the profusion of Nature’s gaunt and granite ribs. A duller, wearier waste I have never seen, but its dullness was its very charm.

And yet the very first night which I spent at Gaster Fell there came a strange incident to lead my thoughts back once more to the world which I had left behind me.

It had been a sullen and sultry evening, with great, livid cloud banks mustering in the west. As the night wore on, the air within my little cabin became closer and more oppressive. A weight seemed to rest upon my brow and my chest. From far away the low rumble of thunder came moaning over the moor. Unable to sleep, I dressed, and standing at my cottage door, looked on the black solitude which surrounded me.

Taking the narrow sheep path which ran by this stream, I strolled along it for some hundred yards, and had turned to retrace my steps, when the moon was finally buried beneath an ink-black cloud, and the darkness deepened so suddenly that I could see neither the path at my feet, the stream upon my right, nor the rocks upon my left. I was standing groping about in the thick gloom, when there came a crash of thunder with a flash of lightning which lit up the whole,

vast fell, so that every bush and rock stood out clear and hard in the vivid light. It was but for an instant, and yet that momentary view struck a thrill of fear and astonishment through me, for in my very path, not twenty yards before me, there stood a woman, the livid light beating upon her face and showing up every detail of her dress and features.

There was no mistaking those dark eyes, that tall, graceful figure. It was she – Eva Cameron, the woman whom I thought I had for ever left. For an instant I stood petrified, marvelling whether this could indeed be she, or whether it was some figment conjured up by my excited brain. Then I ran swiftly forward in the direction where I had seen her, calling loudly upon her, but without reply. Again I called, and again no answer came back, save the melancholy wail of the owl. A second flash illuminated the landscape, and the moon burst out from behind its cloud. But I could not, though I climbed upon a knoll which overlooked the whole moor, see any sign of this strange, midnight wanderer. For an hour or more I traversed the fell, and at last found myself back at my little cabin, still uncertain as to whether it had been a woman or a shadow upon which I gazed.

III

Of the Grey Cottage in the Glen

IT WAS EITHER ON THE FOURTH or the fifth day after I had taken possession of my cottage that I was astonished to hear footsteps upon the grass outside, quickly followed by a crack, as from a stick upon the door. The explosion of an infernal machine would hardly have surprised or

discomfited me more. I had hoped to have shaken off all intrusion for ever, yet here was somebody beating at my door with as little ceremony as if it had been a village alehouse. Hot with anger, I flung down my book and withdrew the bolt just as my visitor had raised his stick to renew his rough application for admittance. He was a tall, powerful man, tawny-bearded and deep-chested, clad in a loose-fitting suit of tweed, cut for comfort rather than elegance. As he stood in the shimmering sunlight, I took in every feature of his face. The large, fleshy nose, the steady, blue eyes, with their thick thatch of overhanging brows, the broad forehead, all knitted and lined with furrows, which were strangely at variance with his youthful bearing. In spite of his weather-stained felt hat, and the coloured handkerchief slung round his muscular, brown neck, I could see at a glance he was a man of breeding and education. I had been prepared for some wandering shepherd or uncouth tramp, but this apparition fairly disconcerted me.

“You look astonished,” said he, with a smile. “Did you think, then, that you were the only man in the world with a taste for solitude? You see that there are other hermits in the wilderness besides yourself.”

“Do you mean to say that you live here?” I asked in no conciliatory voice.

“Up yonder,” he answered, tossing his head backwards. “I thought as we were neighbours, Mr Upperton, that I could not do less than look in and see if I could assist you in any way.”

“Thank you,” I said coldly, standing with my hand upon the latch of the door. “I am a man of simple tastes, and

you can do nothing for me. You have the advantage of me in knowing my name."

He appeared to be chilled by my ungracious manner.

"I learnt it from the masons who were at work here," he said. "As for me, I am a surgeon, the surgeon of Gaster Fell. That is the name I have gone by in these parts, and it serves as well as another."

"Not much room for practice here?" I observed.

"Not a soul except yourself for miles on either side."

"You appear to have had need of some assistance yourself," I remarked, glancing at a broad, white splash, as from the recent action of some powerful acid, upon his sunburnt cheek.

"That is nothing," he answered, curtly, turning his face half round to hide the mark. "I must get back, for I have a companion who is waiting for me. If I can ever do anything for you, pray let me know. You have only to follow the beck upward for a mile or so to find my place. Have you a bolt on the inside of your door?"

"Yes," I answered, rather startled at this question.

"Keep it bolted, then," he said. "The fell is a strange place. You never know who may be about. It is as well to be on the safe side. Goodbye." He raised his hat, turned on his heel and lounged away along the bank of the little stream.

I was still standing with my hand upon the latch, gazing after my unexpected visitor, when I became aware of yet another dweller in the wilderness. Some distance along the path which the stranger was taking there lay a great grey boulder, and leaning against this was a small, wizened man, who stood erect as the other approached, and advanced to meet him. The two talked for a minute or more, the taller

man nodding his head frequently in my direction, as though describing what had passed between us. Then they walked on together, and disappeared in a dip of the fell. Presently I saw them ascending once more some rising ground farther on. My acquaintance had thrown his arm round his elderly friend, either from affection or from a desire to aid him up the steep incline. The square, burly figure and its shrivelled, meagre companion stood out against the skyline, and turning their faces, they looked back at me. At the sight, I slammed the door, lest they should be encouraged to return. But when I peeped from the window some minutes afterwards, I perceived that they were gone.

All day I bent over the Egyptian papyrus upon which I was engaged, but neither the subtle reasonings of the ancient philosopher of Memphis, nor the mystic meaning which lay in his pages, could raise my mind from the things of earth. Evening was drawing in before I threw my work aside in despair. My heart was bitter against this man for his intrusion. Standing by the beck which purred past the door of my cabin, I cooled my heated brow, and thought the matter over. Clearly it was the small mystery hanging over these neighbours of mine which had caused my mind to run so persistently on them. That cleared up, they would no longer cause an obstacle to my studies. What was to hinder me, then, from walking in the direction of their dwelling, and observing for myself, without permitting them to suspect my presence, what manner of men they might be? Doubtless, their mode of life would be found to admit of some simple and prosaic explanation. In any case, the evening was fine, and a walk would be bracing for mind and body. Lighting my pipe, I set off over the moors in the direction which they had taken.

About halfway down a wild glen there stood a small clump of gnarled and stunted oak trees. From behind these, a thin, dark column of smoke rose into the still evening air. Clearly this marked the position of my neighbour's house. Trending away to the left, I was able to gain the shelter of a line of rocks, and so reach a spot from which I could command a view of the building without exposing myself to any risk of being observed. It was a small, slate-covered cottage, hardly larger than the boulders among which it lay. Like my own cabin, it showed signs of having been constructed for the use of some shepherd, but, unlike mine, no pains had been taken by the tenants to improve and enlarge it. Two little peeping windows, a cracked and weather-beaten door and a discoloured barrel for catching the rainwater were the only external objects from which I might draw deductions as to the dwellers within. Yet even in these there was food for thought, for as I drew nearer, still concealing myself behind the ridge, I saw that thick bars of iron covered the windows, while the old door was slashed and plated with the same metal. These strange precautions, together with the wild surroundings and unbroken solitude, gave an indescribably ill omen and fearsome character to the solitary building. Thrusting my pipe into my pocket, I crawled upon my hands and knees through the gorse and ferns until I was within a hundred yards of my neighbour's door. There, finding that I could not approach nearer without fear of detection, I crouched down, and set myself to watch.

I had hardly settled into my hiding place when the door of the cottage swung open, and the man who had introduced himself to me as the surgeon of Gaster Fell came out, bare-headed, with a spade in his hands. In front of the door there

was a small, cultivated patch containing potatoes, peas and other forms of green stuff, and here he proceeded to busy himself, trimming, weeding and arranging, singing the while in a powerful though not very musical voice. He was all engrossed in his work, with his back to the cottage, when there emerged from the half-open door the same attenuated creature whom I had seen in the morning. I could perceive now that he was a man of sixty, wrinkled, bent and feeble, with sparse, grizzled hair and long, colourless face. With a cringing, sidelong gait, he shuffled towards his companion, who was unconscious of his approach until he was close upon him. His light footfall or his breathing may have finally given notice of his proximity, for the worker sprang round and faced him. Each made a quick step towards the other, as though in greeting, and then – even now I feel the horror of the instant – the tall man rushed upon and knocked his companion to the earth, then whipping up his body, ran with great speed over the intervening ground and disappeared with his burden into the house.

Case-hardened as I was by my varied life, the suddenness and violence of the thing made me shudder. The man's age, his feeble frame, his humble and deprecating manner, all cried shame against the deed. So hot was my anger, that I was on the point of striding up to the cabin, unarmed as I was, when the sound of voices from within showed me that the victim had recovered. The sun had sunk beneath the horizon, and all was grey, save a red feather in the cap of Pennigent.* Secure in the failing light, I approached near and strained my ears to catch what was passing. I could hear the high, querulous voice of the elder man and the deep, rough monotone of his assailant, mixed with a strange

metallic jangling and clanking. Presently the surgeon came out, locked the door behind him and stamped up and down in the twilight, pulling at his hair and brandishing his arms, like a man demented. Then he set off, walking rapidly up the valley, and I soon lost sight of him among the rocks.

When his footsteps had died away in the distance, I drew nearer to the cottage. The prisoner within was still pouring forth a stream of words, and moaning from time to time like a man in pain. These words resolved themselves, as I approached, into prayers – shrill, voluble prayers, pattered forth with the intense earnestness of one who sees impending and imminent danger. There was to me something inexpressibly awesome in this gush of solemn entreaty from the lonely sufferer, meant for no human ear, and jarring upon the silence of the night. I was still pondering whether I should mix myself in the affair or not, when I heard in the distance the sound of the surgeon's returning footfall. At that I drew myself up quickly by the iron bars and glanced in through the diamond-paned window. The interior of the cottage was lit up by a lurid glow, coming from what I afterwards discovered to be a chemical furnace. By its rich light I could distinguish a great litter of retorts, test tubes and condensers, which sparkled over the table, and threw strange, grotesque shadows on the wall. On the farther side of the room was a wooden framework resembling a hencoop, and in this, still absorbed in prayer, knelt the man whose voice I heard. The red glow beating upon his upturned face made it stand out from the shadow like a painting from Rembrandt, showing up every wrinkle upon the parchment-like skin. I had but time for a fleeting glance; then, dropping from the window, I made off through the rocks and the heather, nor slackened

my pace until I found myself back in my cabin once more. There I threw myself upon my couch, more disturbed and shaken than I had ever thought to feel again.

Such doubts as I might have had as to whether I had indeed seen my former fellow lodger upon the night of the thunderstorm were resolved the next morning. Strolling along down the path which led to the fell, I saw in one spot where the ground was soft the impressions of a foot – the small, dainty foot of a well-booted woman. That tiny heel and high instep could have belonged to none other than my companion of Kirkby-Malhouse. I followed her trail for some distance, till it still pointed, so far as I could discern it, to the lonely and ill-omened cottage. What power could there be to draw this tender girl, through wind and rain and darkness, across the fearsome moors to that strange rendezvous?

I have said that a little beck flowed down the valley and past my very door. A week or so after the doings which I have described, I was seated by my window when I perceived something white drifting slowly down the stream. My first thought was that it was a drowning sheep, but picking up my stick, I strolled to the bank and hooked it ashore. On examination it proved to be a large sheet, torn and tattered, with the initials J.C. in the corner. What gave it its sinister significance, however, was that from hem to hem it was all dabbled and discoloured.

Shutting the door of my cabin, I set off up the glen in the direction of the surgeon's cabin. I had not gone far before I perceived the very man himself. He was walking rapidly along the hillside, beating the furze bushes with a cudgel and bellowing like a madman. Indeed, at the sight of him,

the doubts as to his sanity which had risen in my mind were strengthened and confirmed.

As he approached I noticed that his left arm was suspended in a sling. On perceiving me he stood irresolute, as though uncertain whether to come over to me or not. I had no desire for an interview with him, however, so I hurried past him, on which he continued on his way, still shouting and striking about with his club. When he had disappeared over the fells, I made my way down to his cottage, determined to find some clue to what had occurred. I was surprised, on reaching it, to find the iron-plated door flung wide open. The ground immediately outside it was marked with the signs of a struggle. The chemical apparatus within and the furniture were all dashed about and shattered. Most suggestive of all, the sinister wooden cage was stained with blood marks and its unfortunate occupant had disappeared. My heart was heavy for the little man, for I was assured I should never see him in this world more.

There was nothing in the cabin to throw any light upon the identity of my neighbours. The room was stuffed with chemical instruments. In one corner a small bookcase contained a choice selection of works of science. In another was a pile of geological specimens collected from the limestone.

I caught no glimpse of the surgeon upon my homeward journey, but when I reached my cottage I was astonished and indignant to find that somebody had entered it in my absence. Boxes had been pulled out from under the bed, the curtains disarranged, the chairs drawn out from the wall. Even my study had not been safe from this rough intruder, for the prints of a heavy boot were plainly visible on the ebony-black carpet.