

Benson Edward Frederic

The House of Defence.

Volume 1



Edward Benson

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E. F. Benson

The House of Defence v. 1

DEDICATION

TO

C. E. M

My Dear Friend,

It is with your permission that I dedicate this book to you, and with your permission and by your desire that I explain the circumstances of its dedication. You were cured, as both you and I know, of a disease that medical science had pronounced incurable by a certain Christian Science healer, who used neither knife nor drugs upon you.

I, a layman in medical affairs, think, as you know, that your disease was nervous in origin, and you will readily admit that the wise and skilful man who figures here as Sir James thought the same. But it was already organic when you went to him, and, after consultation with others, he pronounced it incurable. At the same time, he acknowledged its nervous origin, and you will acknowledge that with the utmost frankness he confessed entire inability to say *how* a nervous affection entered the more obviously material world of organic trouble. He had instances in plenty: fear, anxiety, he said, affected circulation and digestion, and that, of course, is patent to everybody. So, too, is the cure: remove the anxiety or fear, and you will get gastric affairs to go smoothly again, *unless* organic trouble has begun.

I suppose it is because we are all so used to that sort of mental healing (do not contradict me yet) that we no longer see any mystery attaching to it. But in such a cure there is no doubt whatever that the mind acts on the body, even as it acted before, when fear produced the imperfect action of the digestion, and heals just as it hurt. To go a step farther, I see no reason why the mind should not heal the disease of drinking or drug-taking, for in these, too, it is the brain that is the seat of the trouble, and its disease and desire is the real cause of the damage done to bodily tissue. But when – still logically, though in a scale that swiftly ascends – you tell me that some power not surgical can heal a compound fracture, then I must part company. At least, I do not believe that any man living upon this earth can make it happen that bones that are broken should join together (especially when the fracture is compound and they stick out of the skin) without assisting Nature by what you call “mere manipulation,” but by what I call, “setting the bone.”

It is here we join issue.

We have often discussed these points before, and the discussion has ever ended in laughter. But the discussion ends this time in the book which I have written.

You have read these pages, and you know that in some points you seem to me to be very like Alice Yardly, but those are the points on which we agree to differ. I think Alice Yardly and you are often too silly for words. But you are much more essentially like Bertie Cochrane, and it is to you, in the character of him, that I dedicate this book. You, sick with a mortal disease, found healing in Christian Science, and in it found happiness. And now you yourself heal by the power that healed you. For I hope I shall never forget that which I with my own eyes saw you do – that which is the foundation of the last scene of the healing in “The House of Defence.” To save that drug-logged wreck, who was our friend, when you saw no other way of convincing him of the beastliness of his

habit, you drank that which by all that is known of the drug should have killed you, and you drank it with complete and absolute confidence that it could not possibly hurt you. It is true – at least, Sir James tells me so – that it is not quite easy to poison oneself with laudanum, because the amateur will usually take too much, and be sick, or too little, and thus not imbibe a fatal dose. But you drank a good deal – I can see now the brown stuff falling in your glass – and it appeared to have no effect whatever on you. I will go further: it had no effect whatever on you. But it had the effect you foresaw on your patient: it cured him.

Now, again and again I ask myself, how did it cure him? He was very fond of you; he saw you, in the desire to save him, apparently lay down your life for him. I believe that his brain, his will-power, received then so tremendous and bracing a shock that laudanum for that moment became to him a thing abhorrent and devilish, as no doubt it is. The sight of you swallowing the deadly thing gave a huge stimulus to his will. That seems to me not only possible, but natural. Only, if this is the case, it was again his own mind, on which your action acted, that healed him.

That, however, does not explain why the drug had no effect on you. There again we part company. I believe it to have been your absolute confidence that it could not hurt you that left you unharmed and unaffected. You said, with a faith that to me is transcendent, “This thing shall not hurt me, because it is necessary for me to drink it.” And your body obeyed the orders of your mind, and was not harmed. But you will have none of that explanation. You say it could not harm you, because there is neither healing nor hurt in material things... And here we are again!

Let me cease to argue with you. Let me only say that to me that evening was an epoch. I have seen and heard of cheerful and serene heroism before, but it never before came so close to me as then, when the storm bugled outside, and the fire spluttered, and you drank your deadly glass.

Affectionately yours,

E. F. Benson

CHAPTER I

THE little travelling-clock that stood on the broad marble chimney-piece, looking strangely minute and insignificant on the slab supported by two huge Caryatides, had some minutes ago rapped out the hour of eight in its jingling voice, but here, in these high latitudes of Caithness, since the time of the year was close on midsummer, the sun still swung some way above the high hills to the north-west. It shone full, with the cool brightness of the light of Northern evenings, into the deep-seated window where Maud Raynham was sitting, waiting, without impatience, for impatience was alien to her serene habit of mind, but with a little touch of anxiety, for her brother's return. The anxiety, the wish that he would come, could not be absent, since affection and all its kindred cares were the hearth-side inhabitants of her heart. Also, it must be confessed, she was extremely hungry, and wanted dinner quite enormously.

The window in which she sat was one of six, for the room was of great extent, and looked, perhaps, even larger than it really was owing to its half-dismantled condition, while the shining parquetted floor, almost bare of carpets, was like a surface of dim looking-glass, multiplying the area. In one corner was a small table, laid for two, where they would belatedly dine when he came in; near it was a man's table, littered with correspondence and the apparatus of tobacco, while close by the fireplace was a low easy-chair, with a basket disgorging needlework beside it, which indicated where she herself had been making her nest until she had strolled across to the window, when the clock struck eight, to enjoy the last half-hour of sunlight, and also to catch sight of her brother when his figure should appear coming up the straight riband of the road towards the house, from the village below, where he had been all day. Though the month was mid-June, a gay sparkle of fire, born of the delectable mixture of peat and coal, burned on the hearth between the two marble Caryatides, making an agreeable brightness for the eye, and destined after sunset to make a warmth not less agreeable; for nights even now were not often without the chill that turned to frost before morning, and this evening, in spite of the clear shining of the low sun, there was in the air that crystalline brightness that portended cold when the direct rays were withdrawn. For the house stood high and exposed on these grey and purple-heathered hills of Caithness, without protection from neighbouring tops or screen of wind-swept trees, and the full vigour of the temperatures both of noon and midnight was felt there without abatement.

This table laid for dinner in one corner, the man's littered desk, and the woman's nook near the fireplace, all planted together in one big room out of the many big rooms that this great grey house contained, gave the note as of gipsy and unpremeditated encampment, and this was borne out also by the holland sheetings that had not been removed from the two big glass chandeliers which hung from the ceiling, and which loosely enveloped certain large articles of furniture, and made a pall in front of a bookcase. All this pointed to a sudden and temporary occupation, as if those who had taken possession of the house were content with the mere necessities of life, and gave no thought to its adornments and decorations. Such was indeed the case, for Lord Thurso and his sister, Lady Maud Raynham, had arrived here a few days ago only, preceded by a telegram to the caretaker to make habitable a bedroom for each of them, and a living-room for them together. They had come, in fact, suddenly and in mid-season, for in the village of Achnaleesh, over which Maud's eyes now looked, a mile below the house, there had broken out, virulent and appalling, an epidemic of typhoid fever; and since Achnaleesh, like everything else within those wide horizons, was part of Lord Thurso's immense Scotch property, it had been clear to him, without debate or question on the subject, that it was his business to leave town at once and come up here to see how far human efforts could avail to check this pestilence, and relieve the sufferings of those homes already stricken with it. His wife, however, though not her heart only, but her efforts and active support, were ever at the service of charitable schemes, had not in the least seen her way to accompanying him. If Thurso thought he had better go,

by all means let him do so, but she failed to see what object there could be in her accompanying him which would compensate for the inconvenience of leaving town just now. For herself, she could see nothing gained by the journey of either of them, since he was in hourly communication with his agent, a reliable and careful man, who would see that everything medically desirable was carried out. But she was not aware how either his presence or hers would be conducive to the effectiveness of sanitary measures; yet, since she knew that her husband looked on many questions with a different eye from hers, she had no more attempted to dissuade him from going than he had tried to persuade her to come up with him. But it had seemed quite obvious to Maud that Thurso must not go by himself, and without either publicly or privately criticising his wife's refusal to go, she had simply taken her place. Indeed, she had not even felt the inclination to criticise; the things that kept Catherine in London were such as could ill be cancelled. Maud had hardly offered her brother her companionship; she had just joined him at an early dinner, and driven to King's Cross with him. Perhaps it seemed almost equally natural to him that she should come.

In any case, the state of things which they found on their arrival seemed to them both to have rendered his coming imperative. Even in the last twenty-four hours there had been a portentous increase of cases, and a panic terror, such as is only possible among folks ignorant for the most part of all illness except such as shadows old age, and naturally of rude health, had seized the village at this sudden smiting down of the strongest and healthiest among them. Mixed with this panic, too, was the fear and distrust of doctors, and the inability to believe that it could be right, when a man was prostrate with the exhaustion of long-continued fever, to deny him a morsel of meat or a crust of solid food. Doctors were there and nurses, as Thurso had ordered, but it was the obedience to their orders which, till he came, had been so hard to enforce. For this alone he knew he had been right in coming himself, apart from the reason of sentiment which forbade him to be absent, since a word from him, his expressed wish, was more potent than all the orders that doctors might give. For feudal obedience to that long and kindly race of landlords was far more paramount than medical advice; and since the laird ranged himself on the side of the doctors, who ordered windows to be opened when all other folk of commonsense would be inclined to shut every chink and cranny by which air might enter and give cold to the patient, and forbade solid food even to those "puir bodies who had been crying out half the nicht for a bit of bread," it was necessary to follow these inscrutable decrees, though wise heads were shaken over such unreasonable treatment. Lady Maud, too, had had the fever, and with her own mouth testified that even she, when all delicacies were within the reach of her purse, had been content with nothing but milk, and no bite of solid food. That, too, carried weight.

Thurso had brought his valet up with him, but Maud's maid had so clearly shown that she regarded the journey to the plague-stricken spot as equivalent to a sentence of death that she had left her behind in town, and the caretaker and his wife were the only other servants in the huge house that in autumn buzzed with attendance. Upstairs there was a bedroom for each of them, and below just this one half-shrouded room, in a corner of which they encamped, leaving the rest to holland sheeting. Otherwise the great house was at siesta, and to Maud, who only knew it hitherto when it was a kaleidoscope of guests, there was something attractive in its repose. She had come straight from the whirl of mid-season in London, at the time of the year when every day consists of forty-eight hours, and each hour of that day of a hundred and twenty minutes, all immensely occupied; and the contrast between the hour now, while she sat in the late evening sun in the window-seat waiting for Thurso to return, and the corresponding hour which was going on in London, when she would have been hurrying out to dinner, with a busy day behind her, and the opera and a ball to make short work of the night, gave her food for a certain quiet contentment. The contrast was so pleasantly violent; it was like that moment when one steps suddenly, out of the glare and brilliance of a ball-room, where one has enjoyed the waltz quite immensely, onto some quiet, tented balcony, with the trees of the park in front, and above the serenity of starlight. On a slightly larger scale that contrast was hers now. She had stepped out from London into the tranquillity of these Caithness moors. To say that she had not

regretted leaving town would be untrue; she had, at any rate, regretted the clear necessity of leaving it, and coming up here with her brother. But it had been necessary for her to go; she could not possibly have done otherwise, and though she was sorry (if she allowed her mind to dwell on that) to have cut herself off from all the delightful things that were going on in town, from the ceaseless stream of friends whom one met all day and all night, and who were amusing themselves so diligently, even as she had been amusing herself, it was still quite clear that somebody must come up here with Thurso, and that, since Catherine did not propose to come, she was the obvious person to do so. But she no more wasted sighs over what she was missing in town than she wasted sighs when she lost a fish. That particular fish was off; she would angle for another fish instead. There were fish everywhere; there was no situation, as far as she knew, out of which nothing was to be captured. Here, indeed, she had her fish already hooked for her; she had come to keep house for Thurso, to make things cheerful for him as far as she could, to prevent his being a prey to boredom and depression when he came home in the evening after a long day spent in the fever-stricken village. She had already found that there was room for her skill.

Nature had for many generations adopted a very reasonable plan with regard to the gifts she devoted to the Raynhams. As a family they were extremely prolific, so with regard to them she had certainly said to herself, "There is not enough beauty at my disposal to go round. What shall I do about them? Shall I divide all the beauty which I feel justified in investing in each generation, among all the children, or shall I endow one of them with it all, and leave the rest to look after themselves?"

She had adopted the latter and most sensible alternative, and now for six or seven generations of Raynhams one of the many children had always been endowed with extraordinary beauty, while the others had to be content with a certain air of distinction and pleasantness which, after all, made their plainness of feature a matter of small account. Sometimes Nature had made an error of judgment, as anyone seeing the family portraits must feel, in investing the beauty of a generation in a boy instead of a girl; but in this instance she had made no such mistake, and here in the window, waiting for her brother, was the bank in which the physical fortunes of the family were, for this generation, invested. Like them all, Maud was tall, and charm in her had not been sacrificed to perfection of feature. For violet eyes, rare in themselves, are so often no more than violet eyes, just pieces of exquisite colour. But here the myriad moods of the girl's mind that chased each other like cloud and shadow on some windy day of spring across dark seas, lit wonderful lights in those violet pools, or made them dark as sapphires at night, and through these beautiful windows of her soul a beautiful soul looked forth. Humour and an alert sense of the ludicrous, so valuable as weapons in that arsenal of the mind from the stores of which we have ever to be arming ourselves against the assaults of tiresome and aggressive circumstance, gleamed there, ready to set the mouth smiling; eager and kindly interest in the spectacle of life was there, like a friendly face in the theatre; and deep down in those eyes you would say that something not yet awake or aware of itself slept and perhaps dreamed in its slumber of twenty years. And a man might find his breath catch in his throat at the thought of awakening it.

Being a Raynham, she was very fair of complexion, but her hair was not of that vague straw colour which loosely passes for gold, provided only that the skin is white and pink, but of that tint which has been touched and proved by assay to be of the veritable metal. It grew low on her forehead and abundantly, but not in those excessive quantities that instantly call to the mind of the observer those ladies who stand all day with their backs to the windows of populous thoroughfares in order to display the riotous excess of capillary covering which the use of some advertised unguent results in. Nor did her mouth ever so faintly resemble the "Cupid's bow" which is so dear to the fashion-plates of feminine loveliness. It was not like a bow at all; it was rather large, rather full-lipped, but, like her eyes, or like aspen-leaves in spring, it was ever a-quiver to the breeze of the moment, instinctively obeying the kindly mind that prompted it. Nor were her lips vermilion – a hue that Nature happily does not employ in the colouring of the human mouth, leaving its employment to art – but they were

of that veiled blood-tint, blood below something like oiled silk, that speaks of youth and vitality as surely as vermilion speaks of the desire to be vital and young.

The window faced north-west, and the rays of the sun, near its setting, poured full onto her, so that she half closed her eyes as she looked out across the golden haze of its level beams, while the breeze from the open sash just stirred her hair. The lawn, so pleasant to walk on, that carpet of grass woven with moss, and so impossible to use for the desecrating games which in England demand that a lawn be hard and flat, lay below the windows, enclosed in a riband of flower-bed, brilliant with the strong colours that distinguish the North and the South from the more temperate zone. Beyond ran a wall of grey stone, some four feet high, where tropæolum was rampant, but outside the untamed moor broke against it, as against a sea-wall, so that, going out from the garden-gate, set in the middle of it, one foot might still be on the soft tameness of the lawn, while the other was on the primeval heather. Just these few acres of garden and land for the house had been captured and tamed out of the moorland, while outside and all round, ragged and prehistoric as the ocean, there flowed, like the sea round some sand castle erected by children playing on the shore, the hills and heather of Caithness, tossing and tumbling there, as they had tumbled and tossed before ever the foot of man had set his tread on this waste land. Stone Age and what-not had gone to their making, and in so short time again – reckoning as the stones and the vegetable life of these transitory things number the years – these little puny efforts of man, the lawns and the terraces, would be swallowed up again, and smothered in the effervescence and fever of the world. Even now, how the infinitesimal microbe of disease was prevailing against the fragile life of the poor bewildered peasants in the village set down there in a wrinkle of the hill, invisible itself, but over which hung the blue smoke of the fires kindled at sunset!

These thoughts were of sombre texture, and Maud, through whose head they were passing unbidden, like scenes involuntarily presented, never consciously allowed herself indulgence in sombre thought, unless from the shadows she expected the birth of something bright. Yet even after she had acknowledged the sombreness and inutility of it, she let her mind dwell on it all a little longer, searching, though vaguely, for some bracing counterblast. Of course, God was over all: she knew that quite well, and actively believed it. But when a plague like this, caused, no doubt, by the carelessness and uncleanness of man, was snapping off lives like dried stalks, she would have liked to be able to think of some image that reconciled the beneficence of God with these hideous phenomena. It was impossible to see what ultimate good could come of letting people die like this. If from it all came some sign, some signal evidence of Divine power, it would be intelligible, or at least salutary. As it was, they died; the place was stricken.

Then the instinct of youth, of health, of exuberant vitality, came to her aid, and she dismissed these questionings altogether. For her instinct told her, though the thought did not quite reach the coherence of definite words, how paralysing to oneself, and how infectious as regards others, is the indulgence of all dispiriting and depressing thought. Its microbes were as truly existent in the emotional and spiritual world as were the fever bacilli in Achnaleesh. But equally existent and even more potent and infectious were the sun-loving germs of confidence and the cheerful outlook. Already had she proved the truth of that in connection with Thurso, who had come home about this hour last night in a state of the blackest gloom and despair over the plight of this village of fever-stricken homes, but whose deadly depression had been quickly dispersed by her steady optimism. Thurso was naturally of extremely impressionable and imaginative mind, and the day, spent, as it had been, in going from house to house, finding everywhere the apparatus of illness, or the simpler and grimmer apparatus of death, had been like some hideous and real nightmare to him. Then, too, he tortured himself with a hundred unfounded suppositions. The epidemic seemed to him, though how he knew not, to be primarily his fault. Clearly, if everything – drains, water-supply, sanitary arrangements – had all been in perfect order, typhoid could not have come. The people were his tenants; it was his business to make sure that the conditions under which they lived were absolutely healthy.

Now Thurso, as a matter of fact, was the most conscientious and careful of landlords, and these suppositions, though they had seemed hideously real to him yesterday evening, were but morbid creations of his brain, and on them Maud, with her cheerfulness and serenity of spirit, had acted like a charm. She knew well that he had in no detail been neglectful or culpable, and that being certain, she had set herself, not directly to combat his doubts and questionings, but to turn his attention resolutely away from them, just as a wise nurse will direct a patient's attention to some interest alien to his pain, and not, by attempting to prove that pain is only an impression conceived by the brain, let his mind dwell on it. She had said to herself, "Darling old Thurso is terribly depressed. So I must distract his mind by being foolish."

So foolish she had been, but yet with art, so that it did not occur to him that she was playing the part of a nurse. And as when David played before Saul to exorcise the evil spirit, so she had played till for the time he forgot his troubles, both real and imaginary, in the charm and gaiety which, though she made deliberate use of them, were yet natural to her.

To-night, however, the obsession of his fears and despondency seemed to have descended on and infected her, and it needed a long and conscious effort to rid herself of them. For – this might be unreasonable too – she knew at the back of her mind she was very anxious about him. Terrible as the epidemic was, it was producing a disproportionate effect on him; he was taking it too hard and far too self-consciously. From her intimate knowledge of him, and from that instinct which common blood possesses, which can enable a sister to know precisely what a brother is feeling, though to a wife even the knowledge would be vague, she felt that he was strung up almost to breaking-point. But she knew also, with a glow of secret pride in his courage, that nobody but she would have guessed that, unless, perhaps, some skilled observer of nervous symptoms. That from childhood had been the danger of his constitution: he was balanced on so fine an edge, ready to topple over into the gulfs of black despondency; but, with the courage of high breeding, he ever concealed his private hell from the world, turning a brave and tranquil aspect to it, even though he must wear a mask. But for her he wore none, and she often saw his inward torture, when others knew only of a pleasant, courteous man – not gay, but of a manner that denoted quiet enjoyment of the world and habitual serenity.

Maud got up from her seat in the window and closed the sash – for the air grew instantaneously chilly, and the sun had dropped behind the hills to the north-west, leaving her in shadow – still looking down the grey riband of road that led to the lodge and crossed the moor to the village beyond. Her mind was decidedly not at ease about her brother. How inextricably soul and body were mixed and mingled! how instantaneously they acted and reacted on each other! For Thurso's anxiety about his people, a purely mental or spiritual condition, had kept him awake last night, and he had come down this morning with one of those excruciating neuralgic headaches to which he had been liable all his life. His suffering mind had called in his body to suffer with it, and the bodily pain had reacted back on his mind, making the poor fellow – not to put too fine a point upon it – most abominably cross to Maud at breakfast. Then, since there was the day's work in front of him, for the sake of which he had come up here – and in his racking pain he was really incapable of doing it – he had taken the remedy which he had always by him, but which, in theory, he disliked having recourse to, as much as Maud disliked his taking it. But when after breakfast he had said to her, "Maud, I simply can't go down there, and if I did, I couldn't help in any way, unless I get rid of this agony," she had agreed that it was an occasion for laudanum.

She strolled across to the fire, and held out her hands to the blaze, which shone through her fingers, making them look as if they were redly luminous in themselves and lit from within. Then suddenly, with a little dramatic gesture, as if she carried her trouble, a palpable burden, in her hands, she threw it into the fire, and, having consigned it to destruction, walked back to the window again. Yet she knew in herself that it was not thus easily got rid of, for it went very deep. There must be some explanation of all this undeserved suffering, but what was it? How could it be just that a child should be cursed with inherited disease? How could it be just that Thurso's very kindness and concern for

his tenants should give him hours of blinding torture?.. But there at last was a figure on the road, and, without putting on her hat, she went out to meet him.

She saw at once, before she could clearly see his face, by a limpness and dejection in his walk, that he was horribly tired and in pain. But that, since now there was something for her to do, enabled her to get rid of her own dejection, since her cheerfulness, her serenity, must be brought into action. So, before they actually met, she called to him.

“Oh, Thurso, how late!” she said. “Have you any idea that it is after half-past eight, and I’ve got such a sinking inside as is probably quite unparalleled? Don’t let us dress; then we can dine at once. I’m sure dinner is ready, because I distinctly smelled soup, and something roast, and baked apples, all rolling richly out of the kitchen windows. I nearly burst into tears because I wanted them so much. Well, how has the day gone?”

He looked at her in a sort of despair.

“Oh, Maud, it is too awful,” he said. “Twelve fresh cases to-day; I don’t know what to do. And when my head is like this I’m worse than useless. I can’t think; I can’t face things.”

Maud took his arm.

“Poor dear old boy!” she said. “Has it been bad all day?”

“No; it was all right in the morning after the laudanum, but it came on worse than ever after lunch. Well, not exactly after lunch, because I didn’t have any.”

Maud gave a little exclamation of impatience.

“Thurso, you are too bad!” she said. “You know perfectly well that if you go without food too long, you always get one of these headaches. And it isn’t the slightest use your saying that there wasn’t any time for lunch, because the biggest lunch that ever happened can be eaten in ten minutes, whereas a headache takes hours. I hate you to be in pain; but what a fool you are, dear! You are wicked also, knave and fool, because you make yourself of absolutely no use to anybody when you are like this.”

He smiled at her; the infection of her energy put a little life into him.

“Well, I forgot about lunch till the pain came on,” he said; “and it was turned full on at once. After that I simply couldn’t eat; it was no use trying.”

“If that is meant to imply that you are not going to have any dinner either,” she said, “you make a grave error. You are going to have soup and meat and roast apples. And if you attempt to deny it, I shall instantly add toasted cheese. In fact, I think I will in any case.”

Thurso was silent a moment.

“Ah, these poor wretched people – ” he began.

But Maud rudely and decisively interrupted.

“I am not going to hear one word about them till you have finished dinner,” she said. “Afterwards, because you will be better then, we will talk. Don’t you remember how, if we weren’t quite well, nurse always said that we would be better after dinner? And we always were, unless we ate too much. I wonder whether it was dinner that did it, or mere suggestion – don’t they call it – from the omnipotent and infallible nurse.”

“Dinner,” said he. “Oh, damn my head!” he added in a sudden burst of tired irritability and pain, which was rare with him, even to Maud.

“Yes, with pleasure, if that will make it better. But I wonder if it was entirely dinner. You know, there is something in suggestion, though I prefer supplementing suggestion with some practical measure. Who are those people who are always quite well because they think they are?”

“I should think they are fools,” said he.

“Yes, but that is not their official title.”

“I can’t think of a better one,” said he. “By the way – ”

“Well?”

“No, nothing,” he said.

Maud withdrew her arm from his with dignity.

“That is extremely ill-bred,” she said. “Mind, I don’t in the least want to know what you were going to say – in fact, I would much sooner you did not tell me – but having begun, you would, if you had decent manners, go on.”

Thurso laughed; sharp though his neuralgia still was, he was already beginning to think of things apart from himself.

“How can you say that?” he asked. “You are bursting to know.”

“Well, yes, I am. Do tell me.”

“I sha’n’t Maud, I think I will change, though it is so late, as I have been in and out of those houses all day. But you needn’t; you can begin without me, if you like.”

Maud put her nose in the air.

“Did you *really* imagine I was going to wait for you?” she asked.

Thurso went upstairs, still smiling at Maud’s unbridled curiosity, especially since there was no mystery or reason for secrecy about that which he had stopped himself telling her. He merely was not quite sure whether or no he wanted to do that which he had been on the point of proposing, and which in itself was of a perfectly unexciting nature. The bare, dull facts of the matter were these. He had let the salmon-fishing of the river here until the end of July to an American, whose name at the moment he could not remember, and this afternoon, as he came out of one of the cottages, he had passed one of his gillies carrying rod and gaff, and walking with a young man of clearly transatlantic origin, whom he felt sure must be the American in question; and the remark he had refrained from making to Maud was that it might be neighbourly to ask him to dinner. But as he made his hurried toilet, he found himself debating the reasons for and against doing this with a perfectly unaccountable earnestness, as if the decision this way or that was one that could conceivably be of importance. On the one side, the reasons against asking him were that the hospitality they could offer him was of the plainest and most baked-apple kind, served in a shrouded room, and that he would probably get a much better dinner at the inn where he was quartered. Also, he himself felt that if he had come up to Caithness to fish, he would much sooner that his landlord did not ask him to dinner, since his hospitality, if accepted, would mean the curtailment of the cream of the evening rise. So perhaps the truer hospitality would be shown in not burdening his tenant with the necessity of inventing an excuse or of accepting a tiresome invitation. Then suddenly the man’s name, Bertie Cochrane, flashed into his mind. Thurso had thought it so odd to sign a lease by an abbreviated name. In any case, it would be kinder not to ask Mr. Bertie Cochrane to come three miles in order to eat Scotch broth with a tired landlord, who would probably be suffering from severe neuralgia.

But, on the other hand, Thurso felt a perfectly unaccountable desire to see him. He had just met and passed him in the village street, after coming out from one of those fever-stricken cottages where a young stalker of his was lying desperately ill. At the moment he, too, was screwed down to the rack with this hideous unnerving pain, and feeling utterly dispirited and beaten and hopeless. But for half a second his eyes had met Cochrane’s, and just for that half-second – by chance, perhaps, or perhaps by reason of that subtle animal magnetism which some people possess – Thurso had suddenly felt both soothed and encouraged. Maud, he knew, had something of this magnetic quality, and to be with her always braced him to a livelier optimism; but in this case the effect had been magical. There was nothing particularly remarkable about the man: he was rather tall, young, clean-shaven, with a pleasant boyish face that suggested plenty of cold water and open air. That was all, but at the moment Thurso had felt almost inevitably inclined to speak to him and thank him; to tell him how bitterly his head ached and how miserably dispirited he felt; to tell him also that he had made him feel better. The impulse had been quite absurdly strong, but in another moment they had passed, going their respective ways. But all the afternoon, subsequent to that chance encounter, the remembrance of Mr. Cochrane strolling down to the river, and talking in so pleasant and friendly a manner to the gillie, had never been wholly out of his mind. Cochrane had seemed an incarnation of health and contentment, and the other all day had found it scarcely possible to believe in the existence of such

qualities, so remote were they from him. Then antagonism to Mr. Cochrane had begun to take root in him: he seemed a millionaire in happiness, leaving pauperism all round him. Well, it was unlikely they would meet again; reasons of hospitality were sufficient for not asking him to accept it.

He finished dressing without any severe return of pain, but just as he was ready to go downstairs it came suddenly back again in such stabs and spasms of anguish that for a moment he held on to his dressing-table with clenched hands, bitten lips, and a dripping forehead. Then his eye fell on the bottle of laudanum which stood by his looking-glass, and though never before had he taken two doses on the same day, yet never before after one dose had he suffered pain so agonising and excruciating as this. But to-day the impulse was uncontrollable: he could no longer reason about the expediency of it, and next moment, with shaking hand, he poured a full dose into the graduated glass, and drank it. Those few moments had made him feel faint and sick with pain, and after drinking he sat down to wait for the divine relief that would come so quickly. On his very sensitive and excitable nerves the drug exercised an almost instantaneous effect – not soporific at all, but tranquillising and at the same time immensely stimulating. The pain would fade like the melting away of the vapour of breath on a frosty morning, till it became an incredible memory, while even as it faded a warm tingling glow began to invade him. It was as if after some frost-bitten Arctic night the sun of the South would pour its beams upon his brain; happiness and content would unfold, and, like some magic rose miraculously opening its rosy petals in the luminous peace of a summer morning, a sense of unspeakable well-being would sprawl and blossom over his consciousness.

He had not to wait long: before the seconds on the watch which he had just taken up when the agony seized him had ticked themselves into a minute, the divine remission of pain began, and, increasing as it increased, there came that extraordinary glow of content, so that a couple of minutes afterwards it was not so much in the utter relief of pain that his body revelled as in the ecstasy of this supreme, harmonious sense of health. And then, as always, this spread like some tide of warm incoming waters to his mind. The horror and suffering he had seen that day in the fevered village ceased to weigh upon him and darken him with the sense of his possible responsibility and certain helplessness. Instinctively, his mind ceased to dwell on the thought of the stalker whose life was nearly despaired of, but went to another bedside where a life that had been almost despaired of yesterday had seemed to pause at the very entrance of the valley of the shadow, and had crawled back a little way into life again. The shadow from the valley still lay over it, but its face was set towards the living. Already this divine drug had done that for him: it stopped pain of the mind, it seemed, even as it stopped the torture of an anguished nerve.

He had sat down for a moment to recover from the physical faintness which had seized him at that savage assault of pain, but he had sat down also in order to abandon himself with greater receptiveness to the rapture of the effect that he knew would come with that remission. Then, after a few minutes more, he got up, remembering two things – the first that Maud was probably waiting for him, though she had scorned the notion; the second that this evening for the first time he was consciously revelling and delighting in the bodily and mental sensations that the opium produced, apart from its anodyne qualities. Hitherto he had taken it purely medicinally, sparingly also, in order to relieve pain, when the pain was frankly intolerable, or when it paralysed his power of making exertions that he was clearly called upon to make; and, having taken it like a medicine, he had in intention done no more than profit by the medicinal advantage of its restorative qualities. But to-night he knew, if he honestly looked at the spring of motive, that he had done something different – had drunk with a different desire. True, the pain had been in itself almost demoralising in its intensity, but when he drank he had waited for and desired, not only the remission of that, but the glow of exquisite well-being and that harmony of sensation which the drug gave him. That was even more heavenly than the cessation of the acutest pain.

But after a minute or so he got up, thereby interrupting the blissfulness of sensation, for Maud would wonder why he tarried. And as he went downstairs a third thought, suggested by that secret

friend in the brown bottle, occurred to him. He must not let his sister know that he had taken a second dose to-day, and, arising from that, he must conceal from her how suddenly and completely the pain had gone, lest she should guess or suspect. Already he felt half ashamed of the mixed motive which had led to his taking it, yet ... yet the supreme sense of physical well-being that was his just now prevented him from feeling acutely anything but that. And if Maud suspected up to the point of asking him if he had dosed himself again? Well, in that case it would be wise to follow the example of Sir Walter Scott. She had no business to ask such a question; his answer, whatever it might be, was her responsibility, not his. Perhaps it would be better to minimise the possibility of her asking; he had better appear silent and suffering till dinner was nearly over, and then confess that dinner had done him good. She had told him that it would; she would be delighted to see the efficacy of her prescription. And that the pain left him suddenly would be no surprise to her. Often it left him as suddenly as it came on – as if it was the turning of a tap.

All this flashed instantaneously into his mind, just as a man takes in a landscape at a glance, though it may take him many words to describe what a moment's vision has conveyed to him. Another thought flashed there too. There was authentic Paradise in that little bottle; whether one had been in pain or not, there was the Garden of Eden. He felt that he would willingly endure tortures if at the end he could push open those golden gates again, and walk past the flaming sword of its guardian. Pain weighed light compared to those pleasures, and surely half an hour of Paradise now and then could not hurt him, a drop of water on the lips of Dives. He felt perfectly willing, weighing the two in the balance of his mind, to pass through hells of torture for that compensation. Then faintly and far away came the suggestion that even without the hours in hell there was Paradise still open.

Maud had been very hungry, and had already finished soup when he came downstairs, and, according to his plan, he said little or nothing till he had caught her up on the “something roast.” Indeed, his first question had been the demand for a second supply of that, and Maud gave him an approving nod. He had eaten no lunch, and now, as soon as he began to eat, he was conscious of being extremely hungry, and the second supply vanished with the same briskness as the first. Then he leaned back in his chair as plates were changed.

“I don't like telling you that you are right,” he said, “because it will only confirm your belief in your own wisdom. But I am nothing if not honest. Dinner or suggestion or both have certainly done the trick. The Lady Neuralgia has turned off the tap – turned it off with the same firm hand as she turned it on. It doesn't even drip. I will allow, even, that it was your suggestion that made her do it. Who cares how it happened? I will allow anything. Yes, two roast apples, please, and I think we will have toasted cheese. I had no lunch, you must remember.”

“Oh, Thurso, I am so glad,” she said. “And I so often wish I could take some of it – no, not toasted cheese, you silly – for you.”

“I don't think you would wish it so much when you had got it,” he remarked.

“Oh, I don't say I should like it. But I know I could bear lots of pain if I knew that otherwise it would be somebody else's. The difficulty would be if it was only your own. And, I tell you frankly, you bear it most awfully well. You are cross with me because you know I don't mind –”

“At breakfast, do you mean?” he asked. “I know I was. I am sorry, but I was mad with it. You don't think I show it to other people, do you?”

“No, dear, only to me, or I shouldn't have mentioned it.”

He looked at her a moment in silence, then he laughed, but grew grave again before he spoke.

“No; you understand,” he said, and then the poisonous fumes of the drug stirred and recommended caution in his brain. “I think you would always understand,” he said. “I think I would always tell you everything.”

“About to-day, then,” said she. “You may tell me about it now. Oh, how wise I was not letting you talk before dinner! I'm sure you were taking a neuralgic view.”

“I was. I was thinking only of poor Sandie, who, they are afraid, is dying, instead of thinking about Donald Fraser’s wife, who seems to be a little better, though yesterday they thought she could not live. It was the Lady Neuralgia who made me remember the one and forget the other. There was something else, too, I wanted to talk about with you. It’s this, Maud. I made the plan only this morning: I couldn’t have told you before.”

He paused a moment. That last sentence, again, was, though absolutely true, an effort of self-justification. He had acquiesced in deceiving Maud on one point, should that point come forward; he felt as if he had to tell not only her, but himself, that he was showing the whole truth about this.

“I know you will feel with me,” he said, “though no doubt Catherine will make a fuss when she knows, if she ever does, and will probably paint everything with carbolic. But I must turn this house into a hospital for all those poor folk – for all, at least, who can be moved here. Think of it! A case appears in one of those tiny houses, and what happens? There are three, or perhaps four, rooms in them, and the whole of the family has to live in two rooms, or at the most three. The sick-room, too, where it is most important that there should be plenty of air – it is ten feet by twelve, and one small window! Dr. Symes agrees with me. He thinks, at any rate, that any case would have a much better chance up here. The moving is easy. They have one ambulance bed, and I have ordered more to-day from Inverness.”

He lit a cigarette, and saw Maud looking at him with shining eyes. This was the Thurso whom she knew and loved. Then he went on:

“There’s the big dining-room here,” he said: “it will hold a dozen beds. There is the hall: it will hold eighteen, I should think. There are all the bedrooms; there is the billiard-room. Also, up here every nurse can look after twice the number of patients that she can attend to in scattered cottages, and look after them all much better. So I have given orders. Dr. Symes will move up here to-morrow all those whom he thinks can be moved without undue risk. All fresh cases will come up here at once. Of course, you will go back to town. I – I appreciate tremendously your coming here at all, but now it will be impossible for you to stop in the house.”

Maud laughed.

“And you, dear?” she asked.

“Me? Oh, I shall stop here, of course. I can’t leave.”

Maud left her place, and dragged a chair up beside him.

“Thurso, you are admirable,” she said. “It’s an excellent idea moving them up here, so excellent that I wonder I did not think of it first. But as for my going back to town – ”

“But how on earth can you stop here with the house crammed full of typhoid patients?”

“Same way as you can. I leave here when you leave.”

“But, Maud – ”

“There isn’t any ‘but, Maud.’ I don’t go unless you turn me out into the cold bleak night – oh, let’s poke up the fire, I am sure there is a frost! – in which case I shall die of exposure on the lawn. To begin with, there is no risk of infection, and, to go on with, I shouldn’t catch it if there was.”

“Oh! Why not?”

“Because one is mercifully allowed to get through the day’s work. I came up here as your ‘pal.’ And if I went to bed with typhoid I couldn’t be anybody’s ‘pal.’ Besides, I’ve had typhoid already. At the present moment I am going to play you at picquet, and you owe me nine shillings from last night.”

CHAPTER II

MAUD had happened to come across in a book she was reading on the way up to Scotland an account of an epidemic of typhoid, in which the charitable lady (vicar's wife) of the place sat by the bedsides of the patients, held their hands, and fed them with "cooling fruits." It occurred to her as possible, though not very likely, that the treatment of typhoid had undergone alterations even as radical as this indicated, since she had had the disease herself, and on arrival she had asked the doctor, quoting this remarkable passage, if she should telegraph for a supply of cooling fruits. The excellent Dr. Symes, though not given either to joking or quick in the perception of a joke, had laughed immoderately.

"Cooling fruits!" he said. "Feed them with cooling fruits, Lady Maud, and you will soon stop the epidemic, because everybody will be dead." Then he checked his laughter. "It was good of you to come," he said, "but you have your work up at the house. Just keep Lord Thurso – because I know him – from moping and being miserable. I am glad you came with him. But when he is away, down in the village, do what you please apart from the cooling fruits. I suggest your being out of doors all you can. You will have your work in the evening, and the sun and the wind and the rain, which pray God we get, will fit you best for it."

This advice came into her head the next morning after she had seen Thurso off to the village, and it was counsel which jumped with her inclinations, since, according to her view, the world (especially the world of out-of-doors) was a swarm of delightful and congenial occupations, and of them all none was so entrancing as catching sea-trout on a light rod and with light tackle. And since the river, which should be full of these inimitable fish, ran within some half-mile of the house, there was no great difficulty in the way of putting the doctor's recommendation into practice. She knew, of course, nothing of the fact that Thurso had let the fishing to the American whom he had met yesterday in the street, and had decided not to ask to dinner.

Thurso was not to come home to lunch that day, and as the house would be full of workmen busy shifting furniture, and making the rooms ready, under the superintendence of one of the doctors, for the reception of the typhoid patients, Maud went off to the river, without a word to anyone, except an order for a sandwich lunch, with a heart that was high and exultant in spite of the surrounding calamitous conditions. This turning of the house into a hospital was entirely characteristic of Thurso; she rejoiced to think that their comfort, not money alone, was being sacrificed to sufferers. It was a cheap charity to give money, to spend merely unless expense pinched one, but it was a far more real effort of sympathy to turn the house into a feverward. It was that which brought people into touch, the knowledge that somebody's relief implied somebody else's trouble. Thurso was rich, the cost of what he did was of no account, but this was a more active sympathy.

Sandie, poor fellow, her special fishing gillie, was down with typhoid, and his case, as she knew, was very serious; so she set off alone, with a sandwich in her creel, and a light rod and a landing-net, feeling rather heartless, for she so much expected an enchanting day. She had to a huge degree that sensible gift which enabled her, when she had done her best in one direction, to enjoy the pleasure that lay before her in another; and being satisfied that she could not be of the slightest use during these next hours, either at home or in the village with the "cooling fruits," she let herself go with regard to the excitement of the river-side. Her natural *joie de vivre* gilded all employments for her, but this angling for sea-trout had no need of gilding, since it was gold already. Nothing could be more entrancing – for hours one might cast an unclaimed fly upon the waters, yet never lose the confident anticipation that at any moment the swirl of submerged strength and activity would bend the rod to that glorious curve that the fisherman knows to be the true attack of what he has never seen. Like everything else that anybody really feels it to be worth while doing (keeping accounts alone being excepted), mystery and romance illuminated the pursuit, and as she walked down to the river, all else

– Thurso’s trouble, the fever-stricken village and its tragedies – were all sponged off her mind. Her heart was no less tender and solicitous than it had been, but her attention was engaged. Instead, mixed with the excitement of her anticipations, the dreadful things that might be in store for her by the river were in her mind, for to fish with a big sea-trout fly might easily attract the notice of the sea-trout’s mightier cousins, in which case good-bye, probably, to the light tackle. But as it was no sport to catch sea-trout on a salmon-rod, Maud took this chance with a light heart.

The day was one of those grey days (rare in the North, where a grey day implies for the most part an east wind, which sucks the colour out of land and sky), with soft breezes from the south-west, which made heather and hillside and golden gorse and river more brilliant and full of colour than even the direct sunbeams, and, preoccupied though Maud was with the prospects of her fishing, her mind kept paying little flying visits to the beauty of the morning. Five minutes after she had left the house she was absolutely alone, and no sight either of human form or human habitation broke the intense solitude of eye and ear which to such as her makes so dear and intimate a companionship. For she loved the pleasant things of the earth – the honey-scented heather and the sunshine of the gorse, and the close, silent friendship of Nature, unvexed and undistracted by human presences. To her, as to St. Francis, the trees were her dear brothers, and the sky and river her dear sisters, and somehow also the very sea-trout, in the slaughter of which she hoped to spend a delightful day, were blood relations and beloved by her. She could not have explained that attitude at all: she would frankly have admitted that it implied an inconsistency. But there the fact was.

And here at last was the rushing, jubilant river, which a rainy May had filled from bank to bank. She struck it at the Bridge Pool, at the head of which the stream was spanned by a swaying, airy suspension bridge, from which the pool took its name. Deep water lay on the near side, and a considerable piece of shallow water on the other; but just beyond the shallows, could she but cast over it, ran a little channel she knew well, since it was a favourite place for the sea-trout. So she crossed the swaying, dancing bridge, debating within herself the choice of a fly. The river was high, the sky grey, and sea-trout would probably prefer a rather large fly, but so, unfortunately, would salmon. However, she must chance that – the big fly was certainly the correct game.

Five minutes was enough for the soaking of a cast and the adjustment of her rod, and already, with an attack of “fisherman’s heart,” which makes that organ apparently shift from its normal position into the throat, she began casting from just below the bridge. But with the longest line of which she was capable she could not reach that channel of deep water, and if she did not do that she might as usefully go a-fishing in a pail, like Simple Simon. But ... there was nobody within sight, and next minute she had kilted her skirts till she could wade out over that barren shoal-water, and stand where, with the cool bright water flowing nearly up to her knees, yet leaving her skirt unwetted, she could reach the deeper water beyond. Well she knew what a wet skirt meant to one who proposed to walk and fish all day; the heavy clinging blanket made all activity, all lightness of going, out of the question, and as she waded out she hitched it an inch or two higher. Then for a moment she had to pause to laugh at the figure she must inevitably be presenting were there anyone to see her. There was a knitted jersey for her upper half, a tweed cap for her head, a much kilted skirt and stockings for the rest. Her beauty and the vigour and grace of her limbs she forgot to consider, just as a beholder, had there been one, might have paid but scanty attention to the cap and jersey and skirt. But from where she stood she could cast over the coveted channel.

Half a dozen times her fly went on its quiet, unerring circuit, then suddenly a gulp and a fin broke the surface just below it, and with another gulp her heart jumped upwards from her throat into her very mouth. The owner of that fin had not touched her fly, but – oh, the rapture and danger of it! – he was no sea-trout, but a fresh-run salmon. At that the pure sporting instinct usurped all other feeling. Light though her rod was and light her tackle, since there was a salmon in the river that felt an interest in her Jock Scott, she must try to catch him. He might (probably would) break her: then

she would be broken. She had no gaff; very well, she must do without. He was a heavy fish too; she had seen enough of him for that. What a desperate and heavenly adventure!

She waded ashore, being far too wise in the science to cast over him again at once, preferring to wait a minute or two before she tempted him again, and as she gained dry land she saw that there was a man half-way across the bridge just above the pool. He carried a salmon-rod over his shoulder, and a fishing-bag slung by a strap. He could not, of course, be fishing here on Thurso's water, and she guessed he must be going over to Scarsdale, where she knew that some new tenants had taken the lodge. But she gave him only the slightest and most fleeting attention, being far more interested that moment in one particular fish than in any particular man, and took no further notice of him, except that she unkilted her skirt an inch or two, for it showed really too much of what was called "leg." Then, without giving a further glance at the figure on the bridge, who had paused there watching her, she walked back again through the shallows to a point some ten yards above that where she had raised the fish, in order to make sure of casting over him again. The unkilted skirt dragged a little in the water, but she would have waded neck-deep after that fish. Also – this popped in and out of her mind – there was a man watching, and she had no objection to a gallery when she was fishing. She would show him how to – well, probably lose, a salmon on trout-tackle with a trout-rod.

Yard by yard she moved down to where the dear monster had risen before. There he was again, but this time no fin broke the surface, only a submerged boil came at her fly. But this was the true attack – the suddenly bent rod, the sudden message on the line. At the same moment, out of the corner of her eye, she saw that the man had moved from his place on the bridge, and was coming up behind her on the bank.

But that occupied her infinitesimally; all that she really knew was that she was the possessor of a light trout-rod, fitted with light tackle, at the far end of which at the present moment there happened to be a salmon. Her landing-net was somewhere on the bank, but, as far as that went, it would be just as useful to her if it had been at Jericho instead. But immediately the fish bolted down-stream, and her reel sang shrilly. Then, like an express train, he came back, and with the calmness of despair she reeled in, thinking for the moment he meant to go up under the bridge, in which case there would be need to soak another cast and look out another fly. But he changed his mind, and once more, after two or three rushes, he was opposite to her just where she had hooked him originally, shaking his head, so it seemed, for the rod jerked and jumped, yet no line ran out. Maud had moved back across the shoal-water during these manœuvres so as to gain the shore again, for she knew she must get somewhere where she could run, when from close behind her came a level, pleasant voice.

"He is well hooked," he said; "I saw him take it. But he'll be off down-stream in a minute, and there are a hundred yards of rapid before the next pool. I should get to shore quick if I were you, and be ready to run."

Maud still thought of nothing but her fish, which had already begun to bore slowly away into the deep water on the far side of the river, and she knew well what that would lead to. And she replied to the voice as if it had been only her own thoughts, which were identical, with which she was communing.

"Yes, I know," she said; "he's making for the deep water now. There!"

She splashed her way through the margin of the shoal-water, nearly tripping up over a submerged stone, just as the fish felt the full current of the river, and was off, full-finned, down-stream. Her reel screamed out, and in a couple of seconds there was a dreadful length of line between her and the fly. But she gained the smooth turf of the bank, and was off like an arrow after him, when, just before matters were desperate, a bend in the rapids brought her nearer to him, and, still running, she reeled hurriedly in. Then – oh, blessed haven! – he reached the deep water at the head of the pool below, and, swimming there in small circles, allowed her to recapture more of her line. Then, still without taking her eyes off the water (for she felt sure that the owner of the voice had run down behind her), she spoke to him again.

“The humour of the situation is that I have only the very lightest tackle,” she said; “for I came out after sea-trout. But luckily my fish doesn’t know that. And would you be so kind as to get my landing-net? I left it on the bank just below the bridge.”

“I saw it and brought it,” said the voice. “But I don’t know what you want it for. He’s a twenty-pounder.”

The voice was a very pleasant and friendly one, and Maud probably noticed that instinctively, for she spoke to this man whom she had never seen as if he was of her own class, anyhow. And here she laughed suddenly.

“I wonder what is going to happen next,” she said. “That’s half the joy of fishing, isn’t it? Oh, look!”

For the first time the fish jumped, showing himself from head to tail, and splashed soundingly back into the pool again.

“Far side of twenty pounds,” remarked the voice. “I told my gillie, I’m glad to say, to be down here by eleven, and he will bring a gaff. He should be here every minute. But there’ll be no gaffing going on just yet.”

This turned out to be perfectly true, and a dozen times in the next quarter of an hour Maud knew that she was within an ace of losing her fish. He behaved like the lusty fresh-run monster that he was, making disconcerting rushes down to the very tail of the pool, and running out her line almost to its last yard before she had time to follow him down the steep stony bank. Then he would seek the very deepest holes, and lie there sulking or jiggering, and putting the most dangerous snapping strains on her light tackle. Then with a rush he would come straight back towards her, so that, do what she would, there were long perilous moments, though she reeled in with a lightning hand when he was on a slack line. But at length he began to tire a little, and instead of hurling himself about the pool, allowed himself to drift every now and then with the stream. That, too, was dangerous, and she had to treat him with the utmost gentleness, since both his dead weight and the press of the water were against her. Then again a spark of his savage pride would flare up, and he would protest against this mysterious compelling force; but he was weakening.

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