

"TELEPATHY? Yes, there's something in it, you know. There must be. And that strange bond of sympathy, or what is even stronger than sympathy, which exists between some people and knows not distance, is a very real thing. I remember the case of a brother and sister who idolised one another, and he was shot through the heart in one of the Egyptian wars. And when they had made the necessary adjustments for time they found that the moment he died was the same moment that his sister called his name out loud, put her hand to her heart and fainted. And she was in England."

"I know another story too: even stranger."

The little, sandy-haired man with eyes that were the most trustful things I have ever seen—and the saddest—stared thoughtfully out to sea. In the distance a band was playing: the front was crowded with people taking their evening stroll. And I felt my heart warm to the little sandy-haired man. He seemed so terribly lonely.

"There's an hour before dinner," I said encouragingly.

" They met first in one of the intermediate Union Castle boats going down the East Coast. I don't know if you've ever done the trip, but if you have you'll know that it is one where shipboard acquaintance ripens under very favourable conditions. Lots of ports of call : cargo delays : warm nights.

" She had come on board at Naples and was bound for Delagoa Bay to join her husband who was farming up in the Letaba district : he had embarked at Alexandria bound for the same destination.

" And from the very first it was one of those inevitable things that only immediate flight can save. And you can't fly far on a ten-thousand ton boat.

" I think he was one of the most attractive specimens of manhood I've ever seen. Not that he was particularly good-looking : but then that doesn't matter in the least. He was so intensely alive : you could see it bubbling out of him. To look at he was just a tall, lean, bronzed man in the early thirties : it wasn't until you began to talk to him that you realised the magnetic virility that was his.

" He had quite sufficient money for his needs, and his trip to South Africa was principally one of pleasure. And also one of escape. For he was married too, and his wife loathed travelling. In fact she loathed anything that took her far from London. She was, I gathered,

an empty-headed, frivolous little fool, and she comes into this story for one reason only though it's a very important one. She was a devout Roman Catholic.

"So much for him: now for the woman. Everything that he was in a man found its opposite number in her. She loved life, and life looked as if it loved her. She was gloriously pretty, danced like an angel, and was utterly unspoiled. In fact the only remarkable thing about her was why she had married her husband.

"He was such a very ordinary man was her husband. Quite nice, you know: a decent sort of humdrum fellow with no peculiar vices and no particular virtues. The sort of man, in fact, who goes through life as one of the crowd. He was desperately in love with her, of course: crazy about her—who wouldn't have been? And he was under no delusions; she had been perfectly honest with him when they became engaged. It was a case of being caught on the rebound: he knew that. A girl so vastly attractive as she, was bound to have love affairs. And she'd had one rather serious one just before he came on the scene. She didn't tell him the name of the man, and anyway the point is immaterial. But this man, having been everything but definitely engaged to her had, at the eleventh hour, folded his tent and stolen silently away to the fold of a war profiteer who had a daughter.

“ It was a jar naturally : a jar to her pride, and a jar to other things as well, because she had been genuinely fond of the man. And when one is young and the wound is raw, it is cold comfort trying to realise that one is well out of a man who can do a thing like that.

“ But she was in the mood engendered by a deliberate jilt when she accepted her husband. Not that she wasn't fond of him—she was. Very fond of him indeed : but her feelings for him were never comparable to his for her. His were just blind adoration, and when she presented him with a son it seemed to him that life could hold no more.

“ The boy was four years old at the time of my story, and was with his father in Africa. She had been on a visit to her people at home, and never having done the East Coast trip she decided to go back that way instead of by the direct route. Just Fate moving the pieces and chuckling inwardly. Because by the time the boat had reached Port Sudan things had come to a head. The real thing had come at last to two people, and they both knew it.

“ The moralist of course may hold up pious hands in horror : fortunately, or unfortunately, according to your outlook on life, the world pays but little attention to moralists. And Nature pays none at all. It came to them quite suddenly—the certain blinding knowledge, and once again the moralist may cry out.



“ It was on the boat-deck one night, and she found herself in his arms : she found herself kissing him even as he was kissing her with the kisses that sweep away every barrier. All very wrong, of course, but these things happen. And it's all rather cynically humorous too, because they wouldn't be missed if they didn't happen. But once they have, they can't be ignored. If you want peace in the menagerie, you must not loose the tiger out of its cage.

“ She knew that all her former love affairs were as nothing ; she knew that her marriage was as nothing if she answered to the dictates of Nature. He knew the same. And that was the position as that intermediate liner steamed on down the Red Sea.

“ He said, ' I'll get off at Aden.'

“ But he didn't get off at Aden.

“ He said, ' I'll get off at Mombasa.'

“ But he didn't get off at Mombasa.

“ I don't blame him ; but then I'm not a moralist. I should have done the same in his position. Heaven knows there's little enough happiness in this world for a man to throw it away when it comes to him. The future ! Lord—if every man thought of the future and regulated his every act by it we should have a world peopled by automatic codfish. He gets his punishment if he doesn't, so it's quite fair. The longer you put it off the worse it is. And

if he had got off at Aden—well, I shouldn't be telling you this story.

“ He stuck to his original plan and got off at Delagoa Bay, and it was there that he met the husband—the plain ordinary husband. The husband had come down from his farm to meet his wife and had brought the boy with him ; and they all stayed at that big hotel overlooking the sea which is possibly one of the most perfect hotels in the world. And the husband, having eyes and thoughts for nothing except his wife, was deliriously happy. He had barely noticed the man when his wife had introduced them to one another : he had regarded him merely as a casual shipboard acquaintance. The only coherent idea in his head was that his wife had come back ; and the man who loved that wife stood in the background and tried to sort things out.

“ Now I don't know how far things had gone between the two of them, but the point is almost immaterial. I know it is not so accounted by the world, but we all have our own standards. And it seems to me that the main factor in the situation was the love between the man and the woman. I want to make that clear. It wasn't just an ordinary vulgar flirtation—*une affaire pour passer le temps*—it was the real thing between two real people. When you have heard what is to come you will understand why I am so very sure on that point.

“ And so for a week the play went on in that luxurious hotel—the play that was destined to finish on the twisting road that leads into the valley down Magoebas Kloof. No shadow of suspicion had entered the husband’s mind : his wife was to him as she had always been. I have said that he was under no delusions as to her feelings for him : he was content that she should return his adoration with a kindly feeling of regard. So he made his little jokes and chuckled over them consumedly—he was that type of man ; and felt a genuine pity for all the unlucky individuals who were not as fortunate as himself.

“ Off and on he talked a good deal to the man. He was frightfully keen, amongst other things, on South Africa as a country for the right type of settler, and in the man he saw an ideal one. At the time he didn’t even know the man was married ; and when he learned that fact he still saw in him possibilities as a developer of country.

“ ‘ It’s capital that is wanted,’ he said again and again. ‘ Buy some ground ; install a manager and come out for a bit every year. We shall always be delighted to put you up for as long as you like.’

“ They were in the bar at the time, and the stem of the man’s cocktail glass broke suddenly in his hand. A flaw, obviously, in the glass ; the barman was most apologetic.

“ ‘ Come up and see for yourself now,’ went on the husband when the drink had been replaced by another. ‘ I can give you some very fine shooting, and the district that I am in is second to none for fertility. Cotton, citrus—it’s marvellous. Unlimited water; railway at the door. . . .’

“ He rambled on—keyed up on his hobby. And the man heard not one word. In fact the husband remarked to his wife later that for such a singularly attractive man he was uncommonly dull and silent.

“ ‘ Perhaps the poor devil is unhappily married, my dear,’ he said as he was tying his tie for dinner that night. ‘ I’ve asked him to come up and stay with us. . . .’

“ ‘ What did he say?’ said the woman.

“ Her back was towards him as she spoke: she was choosing a frock from the wardrobe.

“ ‘ He didn’t say one way or the other,’ answered her husband. ‘ Why don’t you have a go at him after dinner! He’s exactly the type of fellow this country wants. . . .’

“ He rambled on once again, and the woman heard not one word. In fact the husband remarked jokingly to her at dinner that he would have to change a shilling into pennies in order to buy all her thoughts. ‘ I’ve told you he made little jokes like that, haven’t I?’

“ ‘ You go and tackle him,’ he said as they rose from the table. ‘ I’ve got to talk to a

man over there about my last consignment of packing-cases. They were rotten ; and I shall have to take some steps about it.'

" He moved off grumbling, and the man and the woman had their coffee together. And I suppose it was then that they settled it. I don't blame them for their decision, though I think that if ever there was a definite stopping point jutting obviously out, it was then. He need not have gone to stay with them ; equally he might have got off at Aden. But to go and stay with them was the deliberate taking of a fence, whereas stopping on in the boat was merely conforming to an original plan. Still, I don't blame them : there are certain things which are difficult to judge by ordinary standards. And until one has been tempted as they were tempted one should not pass judgment. Only I sometimes think that now that the man had met the husband and seen the child, it was—it was . . ."

The little sandy-haired man paused and stared out to sea.

" A P. & O., I think," he remarked.

I agreed, and wondered how a man whose eyes were full of tears could see a passing liner.

" So the man came and stayed at the husband's bungalow," he continued after a while. " They were still trying to sort things out—he and the woman—but they kept their secret

very well. The husband, as he took the man riding and showed him the possibilities of the place, was utterly blind to the situation that lay under his very nose. Until one day——

“Astounding, isn’t it, how suddenly one’s eyes can be opened; how the fraction of a second can alter one’s life? Even so it was with the husband in this case. He had been out alone to an outlying part of his farm, and in crossing a drift his boots had got very wet. So that when he dismounted they picked up a lot of mud and became filthy. Which seem tiny details, but unless they had taken place he would not have taken off his boots outside on the stoep and entered his bungalow in his socks. Noiselessly, you see . . .

“It was in a mirror that he saw it—the thing which brought his world crashing. The man and the woman were standing one on each side of his son’s bed, and they were staring at one another across the child. For what seemed an eternity to the husband they stood there motionless; then they moved to the head of the bed where they were hidden from the eyes of the child. And the man took the woman in his arms and kissed her.

“There are some things which are torture too exquisite to describe. That was one of them. With his heart pounding in great sickening thuds, and his mouth dry and parched, the husband stood there watching. He felt rooted

to the spot ; his legs refused to work. And then, after what seemed an eternity, he heard the man's voice :

“ ‘ Dear God ! If only it had been mine ! ’

“ She gave a little choking gasp, and with it the power of movement returned to the husband. He moved out of the line of vision, and making no sound in his stockinged feet he went into the drawing-room. In a sort of inarticulate, hazy way he felt that he had to think things out before taking any action.

“ He found himself looking at his reflection in the glass. And the face that stared back at him was the face of a stranger. It was drawn and white and lined, and he started muttering to himself unconsciously.

“ ‘ This won't do ; you must have a drink. Pull yourself together. ’

“ He had a drink, and then he fetched his boots from the stoep. They were both in the drawing-room when he returned, and the woman gave a little cry of consternation when she saw his face.

“ ‘ My dear, ’ she said, ‘ are you all right ? Have you got a touch of the sun ? ’

“ ‘ I'm a bit tired, ’ answered the husband evenly—at least his voice sounded fairly even to him. ‘ I'll just go and have a bath and change. ’

“ He tried to reason it out as he lay in the water. Why, knowing what he did, had he

gone and left them alone together? Why had he said nothing? And what was he going to do? Things couldn't go on as if nothing had happened.

"What was he going to do? Bluster: tell them that he had seen: order the man out of the house. He could do all that: he *would* do all that. At once—before dinner. And then, insidiously mocking, stole in another thought. He tried to drive it out; it refused to be driven. He argued with himself savagely that she was his wife; it still refused to be driven away. Was his position sufficiently strong for him to adopt such a course?

"Legally it was, of course; who cares about the law? What would be the result if he did bring matters to a head? He knew a good deal of his wife's character; he had a shrewd estimate of the man's. And neither of them was of the type who would be intimidated.

"If those two had fallen in love with one another nothing that he could say would alter the fact. And by bringing matters to a head he might merely precipitate a catastrophe.

"Instinctively he knew that it was a big thing. The matter at stake was the whole future of three people and a child. And as he dressed for dinner he realised with a sick hopelessness that the person of those four who would count least when the decision came to be made was himself.



“ Perhaps he was a coward ; perhaps he didn't dare risk losing her altogether. Perhaps, on the other hand, he may have been actuated by a strange sort of feeling of fairness. If she wanted to go was it playing the game to try and keep her ? You see, he knew he counted least.

“ And so he said nothing. All through dinner he acted his part, and made his little jests at which he laughed consumedly, just as he had always done in the past. Once or twice maybe he faltered when he saw the look on his wife's face as she glanced at the man, but the lapse passed unnoticed. They were far too engrossed—the other two—to pay much attention to him. And when dinner was over he made some excuse and went out of doors.

“ He left them alone purposely ; he wanted to know the worst. And for an hour or so—or was it a few minutes ?—he walked about blindly. God knows what his thoughts were : they were just blind chaos, I think. At times he cursed himself for a fool for not having spoken ; at others the grey of blank despair clogged his mind like mist round a mountain top. But at last he felt he could stand it no longer and he went back to the house. One way or the other, he had to know.

“ It wasn't intentional : he didn't mean to overhear. But knowing what he did, perhaps it was the best thing that could have happened.

His wife and the man were sitting on the stoep, and as he approached the house from one side he heard their voices. And he stopped and listened.

“ She said : ‘ It’s the boy, Bill ; it’s the boy.’

“ And after a while the man answered. He had a singularly charming voice, and every word he said carried quite clearly to the husband standing just round the corner. Foolish from a worldly point of view perhaps to run such a risk of being overheard ; but I honestly believe that it would have made no difference if he’d been sitting with them. The thing at stake was too big ; the man would still have said what he did.

“ ‘ Yes, dear— for you it’s the boy. For you also, it’s my wife. She wouldn’t divorce me ; that I know. It’s contrary to her religion ; if a woman with an outlook on life such as hers can be said to have a religion. And I couldn’t expose you to that. I know I couldn’t, in spite of the fact that at the moment I can think no coherent thought save that you’re the most wonderful thing in the world and that nothing matters or ever can matter except that you and I should never be parted again. That’s all that is seething through my brain now ; there’s no room for anything else. But deep down in me—hidden at the moment, it’s true—is the sure and certain knowledge that I couldn’t expose you to living with me on those terms. And so,

my dear, I'm going. This afternoon brought everything to a head. We drifted on board, and somehow things were different there. Now the time has come when we can drift no longer. So I'm going—to-morrow.'

" ' Oh! my God, Bill! '

" It was pitiful, that little heart-rending gasp of hers.

" ' To-morrow, woman of mine, I shall go. But there's one thing I want you to remember through the long years ahead. If ever you want me—if ever you call to me, I will come to you, though I may be at the other end of the world.'

" And the next day he went "

The little sandy-haired man fell silent for a long while and I didn't hurry him. That he was the husband, I felt sure, and though the pathos of the thing from his point of view had got me rather gripped, I was wondering what was his reason for telling the story. Up to date it was an oft-told tale.

He must have guessed what was in my mind, I suppose, because he suddenly looked at me with an apologetic smile.

" I expect you're wondering what this is all leading up to," he said. " I'm afraid the preamble has taken a bit of a time, but I rather wanted to make the man and the woman clear to you. The husband doesn't matter, but I wanted to make those two live in your mind.

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Because it's wellnigh incomprehensible—the end of the story—unless you realise the relations between them. . . .

“ There was no apparent change in the woman after he went away. A little more silent perhaps ; a little prone to fall into long reveries—but that was all. To her husband she was just the same as ever ; if anything, she was kinder and sweeter than before. He never said a word, but he had a great longing which grew in intensity that some day she would tell him. And about eight months after the man had gone away she did. She said she thought it was fairer.

“ It was after dinner one night when she told him, and her face was in the shadow. The man's name had cropped up quite naturally over an account of a meeting at Brooklands. I don't think I told you, by the way, that amongst other forms of sport he went in for motor racing.

“ She told the story quietly and simply, and her husband listened in silence.

“ ‘ I won't say I'm sorry about it, old man,’ she said at the end. ‘ I'm not, and there is no good pretending that I am. But I felt it wasn't playing the game not to let you know. It's over ; it's finished, and humanly speaking I shall never see Bill again. Will you—shake hands on it ? ’

“ ‘ My dear,’ he answered, ‘ I'm so very glad

you told me. I've been hoping all these months that you would. You see—I knew!

"She was sitting forward in her chair staring at him in amazement.

"'You knew!' she whispered. 'But how?'

"And then he told her what he had seen and heard, and it was her turn to listen in silence. But they had it out that night, and I think that the memory of the woman that lives most clearly in her husband's mind is the sight of her by the open window just before they went to bed. She was in white, and she was staring out into the African night. For a long time she stood there motionless, and then suddenly she swung round and held out both her hands.

"'It was rather big of you, Jack,' she said simply. 'Thank you, dear.'

"They never alluded to the subject again; all that could be said about it had been said that night. And after a while they found themselves mentioning his name quite naturally—so naturally, in fact, that the husband began to hope that she was forgetting. And to a certain extent, I suppose, she was. Time had healed the first raw edge; had the end not come it is possible that time might have healed altogether. Who knows?"

Once again the little sandy-haired man paused, whilst he idly traced a pattern on the ground with his walking stick.

"Do you know South Africa at all?" he

continued. "Cape Town, Durban, I suppose. Well, the roads are all right there for motoring, but the same cannot be said of the country districts. It was up in the Northern Transvaal that they had their farm, at a place about seventy odd miles from Pietersburg. For a great part of the way the road was good, but for parts of the rest it was a mere track without any real foundation at all. When the weather is fine the track is hard and just as good as the road; when it has been raining the track becomes a layer of greasy slime. Even with chains I have known that seventy miles take eight hours to do.

"They had been down to Johannesburg for a week, leaving their car at Pietersburg. And as ill-luck would have it the husband had slipped playing tennis and sprained his wrist. So that it was she who had to drive back. She had driven the car often before, though she always preferred not to. It's heavy work steering over the bumps in some of those roads—too heavy for a woman.

"The first part of the run is easy, and they made good time till they came to the high ground—a spur of the Drakensburg. And there they ran into a fine Scotch mist.

"It would have been nothing in England; it would have been nothing if the road had been good. But it was just the part where you find long stretches of unmetalled track,

and in half an hour the going was wellnigh impossible. Very foolishly they had forgotten to bring any chains, and the back wheels, when they got any grip at all, were skidding all over the place. But there was no danger ; it didn't matter if the car did leave the track. At least it didn't matter to start with.

"At last they got to the top of Magoebas Kloof. Below them the road dropped away corkscrewing into the valley. They couldn't see much of it ; the mist was too thick. But they knew every inch of it—so that didn't matter. And then they started to descend. For a bit everything went all right, and then—it happened. And even to this day I don't know how it happened. It was at one of the turns that the car skidded suddenly. And the woman lost her head. She jammed on the brake, and turned the wheel away from the skid instead of towards it. The back of the car swung round with a lurch, and went over the edge. For a moment or two it seemed to pause : then the whole car disappeared.

"How the husband was saved is a miracle. He had risen to his feet instinctively, and I think the door on his side must have come open. Anyway, he was flung out against a tree, and lay there half stunned whilst with a series of sickening crashes the car plunged on downwards. They grew fainter and fainter—and at length they ceased."

I glanced at the little man, and his forehead was wet with perspiration.

"She was dead, of course, when we got to her; crushed and unrecognisable in the twisted debris of the car. Any chance she might have had of being thrown clear was lessened by the fact that she was driving, and the steering wheel boxed her in. And the only thing the husband could pray for was that it had been instantaneous. The doctor said he thought so, thank God!

"It broke up the husband pretty badly, as you can guess. But there was the boy to consider, and after hanging on for a few more months at his farm he decided to go back to England. For a time he wondered if he would hear from the man, and then he realised that in all probability the accident would not have been reported in the English papers. And at last he decided to write himself. He knew his club in London, and somehow or other he felt that she would appreciate it. So he wrote him a letter telling him what had happened, and the answer came back about a week before he sailed. It was from a firm of lawyers, and ran as follows:

*"Dear Sir,*

*"You are evidently unaware that Mr. William Broxton was killed when competing in the Grand Prix. The accident was a terrible one as he*



*was travelling at over a hundred miles an hour at the time. He was hurled against a tree, and was killed on the spot.*

*"By what can only be described as an amazing coincidence, the accident took place on the same day as the one which cost your wife her life. Should you require any further details we shall be happy to write you more fully.*

"And so, when he got back to London, he went and interviewed that firm of lawyers. There were many gaps to be filled in—points to be cleared up. Points which, when he had thought of them sometimes on the voyage home, had left him with a queer tingling at the back of his scalp.

"The lawyer told him all he knew, which was not much: the worthy man knew little, if anything, of motor racing. Apparently the car had overturned when travelling at speed and Broxton had been crushed between it and a tree. And the mechanic had had a miraculous escape by being hurled out between two trees and landing in a ploughed field. So the husband took the mechanic's name and address and left. There was someone else he wanted to see now.

"He ran him to earth in his club—a motor maniac surrounded by other motor maniacs.

"'Bill Broxton?' said his friend, shaking his head. 'You were out of England, of course,

at the time. Poor old Bill. I don't suppose anyone will ever get to the bottom of that accident. The only man who might throw some light on the matter—Brownlow, the mechanic—at times seems to me to be holding something back. He idolised the ground that Bill walked on—always drove with him, you know.'

" 'But what the devil can there be to keep back?' chipped in one of the group.

" 'Heaven knows,' answered the other. 'He can't have been tight, and he can't have lost his head. Sometimes I think he must have gone mad. You see'—he turned to the husband—'what happened, as far as can be found out from the spectators, was this: He was taking a slight corner, when he suddenly wrenched his steering wheel round almost to the full lock. The car did one frightful skid and then turned over. Brownlow was flung clear: Bill was crushed to death. I mean, as an accident to a driver of Bill's calibre it was about equivalent to opening the door of an express train and stepping on to the lines.'

" 'What time did it take place?' asked the husband.

" 'I can easily find out for you' said his friend, and with that the husband left.

" Only the mechanic remained to be seen, and he was the most important of all. He took a bit of finding—he'd gone to a new address

—but at last the husband got in touch with him. A decent fellow, very, that mechanic, but singularly uncommunicative. He repeated the story all over again, but it seemed to the husband that what his motor friend had said was right. He was keeping something back.

“So at last he took the bull by the horns, and told the mechanic much that I’ve told you. He didn’t say he was the woman’s husband, though perhaps Brownlow guessed. And when he’d finished the other man was staring at him with dilated eyes.

“‘My God!’ he muttered, ‘but it’s strange. I’ll tell you now, sir, what I’ve never told a living soul before. It was Mr. Broxton’s last words just before it happened. I can hear ’em now ringing in my ears as clearly as the day of the accident. And I’ve never mentioned them to anyone: it seemed to me they was his secret, though I couldn’t understand them. It was just as we came to the corner when I saw his face change suddenly. I don’t know why I was looking at him, but I was. He half rose in his seat and shouted out, “Pull your wheel to the left, my darling.” And as he spoke he did it himself.’”

The little sandy-haired man took out his watch and glanced at it.

“Strange, wasn’t it? The times were simultaneous—I verified that. And you remember he’d told the woman he’d come to her even

though he was at the other end of the world if she wanted him. And I think that in some mysterious way Bill Broxton went to his woman at the end when she called him.

“ For just as those last words of his go on ringing in Brownlow’s brain, so do three other words go on ringing in the husband’s. They rang out clear and distinct just as the car on Magoebas Kloof disappeared over the edge:

“ ‘ Bill—save me ! ’ ”