

home for a little while. Mrs. Schneider replied with a string of abuse against kaffirs in general and against Sophie in particular. The next day Sophie packed her things, and gave them to a friend to take away one morning when Mrs. Schneider was out. Then Thursday came round again, and it was Sophie's afternoon off. She left the house in the afternoon, and ~~ix~~ Elaine who saw her going called goodbye from the gate. Sophie turned round several times to wave to the little girl. Her heart was heavy at leaving her, but she could hear her own children calling.

She stayed home for a month, then she came to Johannesburg again, and it was after she came back that she went to the house of Thelma Penn, where she had heard that a servant girl was needed.

CHAPTER TWO.

Thelma Penn's attitude towards her servants was coloured by her own feelings of guilt; her belief that they were miserably exploited, had to work unreasonable hours, and were underpaid. She helped with the housework, did a good deal of the cooking, and never ordered her servants to do anything. She asked them "Would you mind" or "Please, I wonder if you would ..."

She tried to make their rooms more pleasant by giving them curtains, rugs, and cupboards and chairs that she bought at auction sales. She had often thought of doing without servants altogether, but it was difficult, especially at the present time. She knew she could have managed the housework, cooking and washing if it were necessary. After all, millions of housewives in England, America and other countries did their own work, brought up their own children, and never had even one, much less two, servants in their homes.

"But the point is that everyone in this country has servants," she told her husband, Phillip. "It's easier to do what everyone does. ~~There~~ We've got cheap labour here for our homes. Doing without means I have less time for other things."

"I don't see why you worry about it," replied Phillip. "If all comes back to the same thing - you still have this idea in your head that you can change fundamental evils by the things you yourself do. If we go without servants, is that going to improve the position of the hundreds of thousands of domestic servants in this country?"

Thelma sighed. As always, she found she had no answer for Phillip's arguments; and still for a long time now she felt that he was not quite correct.

Once Thelma had thought that everything Phillip said was wonderful and true, and completely faultless. She had first been attracted to him by his militant and original outlook, his bold and new approach to old and sad problems.

In those days her father used to hold an open house, to which came people with progressive views and ideas of all kinds. Her father was a grand old man among the liberals, always too scarce in South Africa. His fearlessness and charming personality, together with the respect that his position at University commanded, attracted the young intellectuals who gathered at his house many an evening to discuss their country's ills.

Thelma was a shy girl, who sat silently and listened to the endless arguments, made tea and brought it to the men, who hardly noticed her. Avidly she listened to what they said; and each one who came had his own theories of what was wrong and how to put things right.

There was, for instance, Danie Bosman, whose life was the land. No matter what the problem, Danie could find the cause in neglect of the soil, the solution in soil conservation. He carried with him his favourite form of propaganda - photographs of

great dongas caused by washed-away soil; of solitary trees standing high on pillars of soil that their roots had knit together, surrounded by deep ravines; of the hard, stony earth bare of topsoil that was creeping across the karroo. He showed by contrast soil reclaimed through the planting of grasses and trees, barren earth made fertile again.

Hunger? Poverty? That was due to the fact that the land was being ruined. "We could grow enough to feed all the people, and much more," he would say. "If we save our soil, we save our people." Illiteracy? Backwardness? That, too, could be ended if soil erosion were ended. "The richness that we could bring - but first we must end misuse of the land. Then we can get on with the other jobs."

Or there was Adrian Dunn, who thought that nothing could be achieved until everyone was educated. "First things first," he would say. "How do you propose to get people to stop misuse of the soil? How can you teach illiterates contour ploughing and rotation of crops? No, education must come first, then everything will follow."

One night the argument centred hotly around the culling of cattle in native reserves. In a certain Area of the Northern Transvaal, members of a tribe of Bavenda were resisting the attempts of Government officials to reduce their cattle stocks.

"Absolutely essential measure," said Adrian Dunn. "Because the natives regard cattle as property and wealth, they are not interested in the quality of their stock, nor in whether their land can support the number of cattle they possess. They think the officials are just deliberately trying to ruin them when they order culling. You see? If they had some sort of education, their whole outlook would be different, they'd understand why these measures are necessary and introduced for their own good."

"But before you get them all educated," said Danie Bosman, "the good earth will be laid waste. They're hopelessly overstocked and then they start ploughing the river banks and the process of soil erosion is speeded up."

Into this argument, for the first time, came the voice of a young man who Thelma had never seen before.

"Why overstocked," he said. "I would say rather that the native population is crowded into small, inadequate reserves. What they need is not less cattle but more land."

"That may be so," said Adrian Dunn, "but even if they had more land, they'd ruin that as well through ignorance. They don't realise that times have changed since they used to wander over the whole of Southern Africa, settling on fertile land, using it up, then pushing on to a new place to start the process all over again. Education - that's the key to everything."

"Well," said the new young man - Phillip Penn - "how do you propose to get them educated?"

"How? It's simple enough," Adrian said, "More schools - we must train more and more teachers. It's gradual, but it will come."

"And how do you get more schools and more teachers?"

"I'm afraid I don't quite see the point of your question," said Adrian.

"Simply this. That I think you have to give people rights first - the vote - before they can have schools and education."

"How can you give illiterates the vote?"

"And how can you get them educated except by such means?" Phillip Penn retorted. "History has shown us, all over the world, that schools, health services, reforms of all kinds, followed on the democratic revolution. Only when the common people have the right to elect their own governments do they get the reforms they need."

That night the world for Thelma seemed transformed. She hung on the words of the

softly-spoken young man in glasses who threw such bombshells into the pleasant discussions of her father's drawing room. His voice seemed to her like a breath of strong, fresh air that cleared away the fog of fear that lay behind all their minds. He argued tenaciously for the right of all citizens, black or white, to have the vote. It was an issue they had avoided or ignored, preferring to play around with less frightening and disturbing solutions.

Edward Lacey, who was senior lecturer in English Literature at the University, was violently opposed to Phillip's ideas.

"You talk about Europe and Africa as if they were the same," he said. "You cannot compare the working people and farm labourers of England with the natives of South Africa. The natives of this country are barbarians still. They are too primitive to understand democracy, to appreciate ordered government of the kind we know. Give them power - and send South Africa back three hundred years, before civilisation was brought here."

"That's what the rulers said about the English working man," retorted Phillip Penn. "Read the speeches made in Parliament - less than a hundred years ago. They called them barbarians. By what divine right do we set ourselves up to decide the destinies of others?"

"And what becomes of our white civilisation?" asked Edward Lacey. "What happens to our culture, developed over a thousand years, when we are swamped at the polls, wiped out by a flood of blacks only a few years removed from complete savagery?"

"Why should we be wiped out?" Phillip said. "Only when we have ceased to be imprisoned by our own fears of the black people will our culture truly develop. Fear, it dominates every white person in South Africa from the time they grow out of the toddling stage. All our actions are dominated by this fear of the blacks. To keep the African in the ditch, we ourselves must stay down there. Stop being afraid! The African will respect our culture and our civilisation when we have learned to respect his."

He was not striking in appearance, and his manner, in spite of what he said, was quiet, almost diffident. He was the type of person who is not noticed in a crowd, yet when he spoke it seemed to Thelma that he towered above them all.

Because of her father's liberal views and the discussions held at the house, Thelma had always been more aware than most young South Africans of the problems of her country. Yet even to her the non-white peoples, the non-Europeans, were not ordinary human beings like herself, her family, her friends. They were always there, as water is there in the tap when you turn it on, but you don't stop to ask every time you wash your hands where the water comes from or where it is going. So it was with the African servants in her home, the homes of her friends. They were there. They did the housework. She saw them all the time without noticing them, nor did she ever stop to think of them as people, about their lives apart from being servants; where they came from, where their families were, what they did in their spare time.

To her, as to all who participated in the discussions at the house, the non-European problem was something abstract, theoretical. One discussed it in a detached way, never in relation to concrete situations, individuals, realities.

Phillip changed this for her. For the first time she saw Africans as people. She began to notice them acutely, wherever she saw them; the clothes they wore, their bare feet, their tired faces. She ~~realised~~ realised for the first time that the story she had always believed about the wonderful physique and animal strength of the Africans was not true, at least it did not apply to most of those who worked in the towns, but was just one more alibi developed by white people as an excuse for working Africans like horses. She recognised that very many of them were under-nourished and Phillip showed her how many faces bore the ravages of disease. He told her how many died of tuberculosis, and he took

her to the places where they lived, the sprawling slums that previously she had seen only casually from trains when leaving or approaching the city.

They went to the municipal township of Orlando, a housing estate the size of a large town, without a single park, playing field, swimming bath, theatre or cinema, or any place of entertainment except for one small, dusty, bare hall. He showed her the unmade streets, the tiny and inconvenient houses built without cupboards without bathrooms or kitchens, and with no doors between the rooms that invariably housed more than one family. They went there in the evening when the candles began to flicker and glow in the overcrowded rooms. Orlando Power Station, supplying heat, light and power to most of the city and its industries, was located right next to the township, but there was no electricity for the black people of Orlando. It was strange, rather eerie, for this was a great town of people without any of the usual noises of a town - hardly any traffic, no public transport except the railway line running along the edge of the veld; an unnatural evening quietness, as though someone had cast a spell on a town and made everything muted and whispered; dogs barking, children's voices, carried far in the short, blue twilight, the quiet evening, against a background of whispered sounds, the murmur of a hundred thousand people moving about their homes, cooking, eating, preparing for bed.

He showed her Alexandra with its open sewers and pit-holed, rock-strewn streets, and took her to the backyards of Sophiatown where shacks and lean-tos housed many families. She remembered vividly going into one room in a yard in Sophiatown. It was a small room, yet it was divided into two portions, and each portion housed a full family of mother, father and children. A screen made of cardboard packing cases served as the ~~dividing~~ division. Furniture was boxes. Yet the place was amazingly clean and neat, with newspapers cut into patterns to cover shelves and provide decorations on the walls.

And in this way the film that seems to lie over the eyes of white South Africans almost from the moment of birth, was lifted from hers. The Africans were people, not black savages, not robots and servants, not a theoretical problem. They were men and women, not anonymous 'boys' and 'girls'. They had pride, self-respect, and names of their own, not the universal 'Jim' or 'Mary' or 'John' which was the common form of address to any native whose first name was not known.

She became acutely aware of things around her. She saw things happening in the streets, buildings and shops, that happened every day, and that her mind had never registered before: Africans waiting patiently to be served in shops, while white customers came and went and did not have to wait. The way shop assistants turned to them with an impatient 'Yes, John ~~XX~~ What do you want, Mary?' The way Africans had to walk ten, twelve, fourteen flights to the top of tall buildings to deliver parcels when they were not permitted to use the lifts. The assaults that were common on the streets,

Every incident became a flame that burned inside her. Over and over again she started to intervene, unable to stand by and watch. It took Phillip a lot of time and much patience to explain to her why she should not do so,

"What must be changed," he would say, "are fundamental, basic laws; the laws that allow police to roam around the streets picking up passless natives; the laws that allow us to make criminals of human beings for the simple act of moving from one place to another in the land of their birth. You don't change laws by making scenes on street corners. You cause greater resentment among the whites towards the blacks.

When she and Phillip were married, they founded the League for African Progress. She was treasurer and secretary in one. Phillip had to stay in the background because his position at University, where he lectured in Bantu Law and Customs, made it necessary for him to keep clear of political organisations.

They drafted a wonderful programme of work. They wrote pamphlets, and scraped together ~~budgets~~

money to get them printed. The main aim of their League was to bring blacks and whites together on a common programme of reforms, and to break down barriers, build better relations between the races, and work for a change in the laws of the country.

In those days, nothing seemed too ambitious, and nothing seemed unattainable. They issued news sheets, which Thelma typed herself and reproduced on ^{an}old hand duplicator~~m~~. She was always struggling with ~~stencils~~ stencils that didn't come out right, and with duplicating ink and ~~sudged~~ ^{sudged} paper; but it was fun. The organisation was an outlet for her energies, and also for her anger, for Phillip had taught her not to demonstrate her feelings in more public ways.

Once, for example, when they saw a policeman arresting an African for some fault in his pass, she felt the anger boiling up in her. The African was protesting that he was on an errand from his employer, and if they would only come with him, his boss would put everything right. The policeman became angry, shouting 'Get in there, you dirty kaffir.' The African was siezed by the arm, hit over the head, and finally pushed and kicked into the pick-up van. When Thelma, white with fury, asked the policeman what right he had to assault his prisoner, he turned round and called her 'kaffirboetie.' "If you love the kaffirs so much," he said to her, his face dark and angry, "Why don't you marry one?"

Finally Phillip caught her arm and pulled her away. Over cups of coffee he told her why he thought she had behaved foolishly.

He said, "Stop a minute, and think what you did. That's the important thing - what have you accomplished? The police will only beat up that poor devil all the more because you intervened. The crowd was against you. You haven't helped the victim, and you haven't convinced anyone. You've only upset yourself."

"If I'd thought of taking his number," Thelma said, "I could have reported him."

Phillip laughed. "You've got a lot to learn about the police and courts," he told her. "The first thing you ought to know is that all black prisoners are assaulted as a matter of course. Whether it's only a few kicks and blows, or whether they receive permanent injuries - it's the usualy thing. Then you must understand that the word of a black man is never accepted against the word of a white man."

"I would have given evidence. I'm white."

"In this case, yes," said Phillip. "But this is one of hundreds and thousands of similar incidents. They happen every day. Maybe, if you were lucky, you would have got a reprimand for that policeman. And thousands of others would go on doing it."

"But what must I do when I see such things?" she asked. "Just stand by and let them get away with it?"

"Sometimes the hardest thing to do is the right thing. It's harder to keep silent, I know. Do you think I like to stand by any more than you do? But I keep thinking that what I must do is change the conditions that bring these things about, not expend useless anger in fighting the manifestations of the illness."

So they argues and argued, and slowly she learned to hold her peace.

Only when the babies started coming did she slacken her work. And then the war intervened. Those who felt most strongly about democracy were out of the country, fighting, and the work of the League seemed less important. She found herself too busy with her growing family and with voluntary war work to carry on with the League virtually alone. She joined the C.P.S., the air raid precautions organisation, learned first-aid, did voluntary work in hospitals. There was no time for the League. It simply faded away.

Phillip's poor eyesight prevented him from taking a direct part in the war. Instead, he worked harder, filling in gaps at University that were caused by staff joining up. He was often buried late into the night in his books, his student's papers, his lectures and his research. It was not that either of them deliberately withdrew from the struggle for the

African people. It just happened that way.

One evening when dinner was finished and the children were in bed, Phillip told Thelma that he had been approached by some people who wanted him to stand as a candidate in the forthcoming City Council elections.

Thelma asked. "Who approached you?"

"Some members of the Labour Party."

"But you don't belong to the Labour Party."

"Well, of course, I would have to join."

"That's a joke," Thelma said. "I bet you told them exactly what you thought of them and their party."

Phillip closed his eyes for a moment and an expression of annoyance crossed his face. "X "As a matter of fact," he said in his slow, deliberate way, "I'm seriously thinking of accepting their offer."

Thelma was astonished. "But Phillip," she said, "could you really join the Labour Party, and go into the City Council to represent them, after all you've said about them?"

He replied: "They have their limitations, it's true. ~~They~~ Severe limitations. But I see that quite a lot might be accomplished in civic affairs. They're fairly flexible as to policy, if the City Council has not the best people on it, it's largely due to the fact that people like ourselves have steered clear of public office in the past."

"You've said often enough that the Council will never amount to anything until it has non-European representatives. You said that as long as the vote is limited to Europeans only, it would always remain a farce."

Phillip said, "I've been considering this matter. It seems to me we have to face up to things as they are. The position is that only white people can elect their representatives to the Council. It will be a long time before that changes. Meanwhile, why should we leave the Council to be run by self-seekers and people who line their pockets through it? There's a lot that can be done ..."

The Labour Party gave Phillip a 'safe' seat. He was elected and in October he took his seat with the forty-one other members of the Council. Thelma went to the meeting when the new Councillors were installed and the Mayor elected for the year. The Councillors wore long, full robes, rather like those of professors. Phillip was short, and he looked small, and Thelma thought disloyally, ridiculous in the voluminous gown and three-cornered hat.

He soon became absorbed with his Council work. Thelma sometimes went to the monthly meetings of the Council which were open to the public. Phillip was obviously an important person. He was a good speaker and stood out in the Council Chamber among the many who could not speak well in public and those who could hardly speak at all.

Thelma found Phillip's new activities made her feel idle and useless. She realised that she was living exactly like any other white woman in South Africa. She had her pleasant home, her servants, her children, her garden. Perhaps she paid her servants a little more than the neighbours, perhaps she was a little more considerate to them, gave them better food, more time off. But by and large her pattern of living hardly differed from that of all the women she knew.

She spoke to Phillip about it.

"Do you think we should try and resuscitate the League?" she asked.

He answered, "No, I don't think so. It's never a good idea to blow false life into something that's finished. And I don't think it would be the best thing for these times."

"Why not?"

"We're in an entirely different situation with the war on. There's a new attitude

abroad towards the non-Europeans. Everyone now talks freely about a 'new order' for the whole population after the war. We started the League to open peoples' eyes to the need for real reforms among the African people. I think that is now recognised. What must be done now is to carry that fight forward through the legitimate political parties and legal channels that exist."

She was silent. Her mind went back to the arguments of former years: how he used to hammer home that it was useless to fight for reforms by ~~parliam~~ parliamentary means, because since Africans themselves were denied the vote, such changes would not be won through parliament. He used to speak of 'extra-parliamentary means'; he used to say that once the fundamental right, the right to vote, had been recognised, then everything else would come about through the accepted channels.

He had changed. It was not just that they were in a different situation brought about by the war, that they were confronted with different problems in different times. His outlook had changed. He did not admit it, but it was so. And more than that, he was not prepared to do anything any more, except his council work. Oh, he had good reasons. The war placed a big burden on him. But so it did on all of them. Everyone was doing more than they ever did in normal times. And his position at University - yet somehow that had never deterred him from doing something on which his heart was set. It had become an excuse for inaction.

"My position at University," he told her, "the attitude of the Board these days - whatever you do, my dear, I will have to stay in the background."

He told her to go ahead with anything she wanted to do. "Provided, of course," (with a little laugh as much as to say 'I'm only hoking,' but he wasn't joking) "you don't embarrass me, my dear."

A neighbour of hers, Mrs. Gavshon, a woman she knew slightly, came round one afternoon to ask Thelma if she had any old clothes to spare. "I want to take them to natives in the Townships," she told Thelma.

Thelma was immediately interested. She asked Mrs. Gavshon if she could go with her when she took out the clothes. She found that Mrs. Gavshon was one of a small group of white women who had organised a depot in Orlando Township to supply clothes to the 'poor and needy.' The women collected clothes from friends and neighbours, patched and mended them, had them washed, and took them out to Orlando once a month where a distribution was made to families recommended by the Social Welfare Department of the City Council.

Thelma knew that this was exactly the type of work that Phillip had once taught her to despise. But at the same time she thought it commendable that these middle-class women had undertaken this for non-Europeans, and she helped collect clothes from time to time and take them to Orlando.

But this was not sufficient. Because she wanted to discuss it with someone and Phillip had proved unhelpful, she spoke about it one night to her brother Charles.

Charles had always supported the League for African Progress, in a rather inactive fashion. He encouraged her, while remaining aloof. But he was someone who usually had good ideas about things.

She told him about her difficulty one night when Phillip was working late at University. At first he joked about it, and told her she had enough to do without messing around with something else.

"What's the matter with you, darling?" he said. "You're already tied up with more than most women, and yet ~~perx~~ you're not satisfied. If I were you, I'd just try to do less and less instead of more and more. You've plenty of excuses for sitting quietly at home managing your family. What's this mad urge to be up and doing all the time?"

"It's not a mad urge," said Thelma. "I just have a conscience, that's all."

Then Charles relented a little. "Well, there are plenty of things you could do among the non-Europeans if you wanted," he said.

"That's why I asked you over," she said. "so that you can 'suggest these 'plenty of things', not just speak about them with a vague sweep of your hand."

"I was thinking about social welfare work of various kinds," Charles said.

"That's not what I want - just scratching away at the surface patching up things here and there. I'm not the soup kitchen type."

"There are more important things than soup kitchens - organising nursery schools for African children, cultural work - it's important and interesting. Or you could start some sort of adult education schemes."

Thelma said "You know, Phillip has always been so scornful of that sort of thing. He used to say it's the kind of work that will never change one single law or take the country as a whole a single step forward."

Charles said thoughtfully, "You know, I've never really been in agreement with Phillip's attitude. It's true you don't make revolutions by starting nursery schools, but you do get something moving among the people themselves. And you help people at the same time. But what about organising a night school for domestic servants? You've got plenty of material all around you."

This appealed to Thelma, and after discussing it for a while, she decided she would try to start some sort of educational and social centre for African servants in the suburb where she lived. As Charles was leaving, she said "Can I count on your help?"

"Of course not, Thelma," said Charles. "You know I never want to do anything I don't have to do. Besides, I'm awfully busy running around these nights being a Civic Guard. We have such a wonderful collection of middle-aged corporations and bald heads, I do feel at least I add a little beauty to the outfit, if nothing else."

"Charles, you've become awfully bitter lately."

"Not bitter, darling - not really bitter."

"Cynical, then," she said.

X "Not even cynical, darling. Shall we just call it - disappointed?"

"But what is there to be disappointed about? You can't help it if they won't take you in the army - it's not your fault. You do the best you can here."

"The trouble is," he told her, "I can't wear my ulcers on my sleeve, like a badge. I look so horribly young and healthy. I don't even think I'm dying to get into the fight and do my bit winning the war for democracy, or whatever it is. I think that all I want is to justify myself in the eyes of everyone. Briefly and frankly, at a time like this, I'm ashamed."

CHAPTER TWO.

There was a small church hall near Thelma's home that was used very little. It was a somewhat dirty, dilapidated place, but Thelma thought it would be ideal for her scheme.

When she told Phillip of her plans, he said, "I'm afraid your scheme isn't practical!"

"Why not?"

"There's a regulation - under the Native Urban Areas Act, I think - that makes it impossible for halls in European areas to be used by non-Europeans."

"Oh Phillip," she said, "this place is hardly ever used by anyone. Couldn't the Council give us special permission to use it?"

Phillip said "They could probably ask the Minister to grant an exemption. I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll raise it on our committee and see if it can be arranged."

Phillip became quite enthusiastic about the idea. He discussed it with the Manager of Non-European Affairs, who promised to support the scheme, but said there would probably be opposition from residents living near the hall. Phillip suggested to Thelma that she organise a petition to the Council at the same time that he raised the matter. "Bringing pressure to bear," he said, "always effective."

Thelma canvassed her neighbours herself. She thought of Mrs. Gavshon, who had been interested enough in non-European conditions to organise the clothing depot, and went to her first for her support and help.

But Mrs. Gavshon was most definitely against the plan.

"Do you realise what it would mean?" she said. "Gathering all kinds of natives at this place right near our homes, at night time?"

"What's wrong with that?" Thelma asked.

"What's wrong?" repeated Mrs. Gavshon angrily. "Isn't there enough crime, without bringing a lot more natives into the neighbourhood? What about the noise they'd make, shouting and singing in the evenings? I've got my children to consider."

Thelma said "But Mrs. Gavshon, don't you agree that it's wrong that there aren't any facilities for Africans? Don't you think it would reduce crime if they had somewhere to go sometimes?"

"Well, I'm in favour of facilities for natives - but not near my home. You can start it somewhere else."

"Everyone will say that - 'not near my home'. Then where is it to be?"

"You can organise something in the townships."

"But we wanted this for African servants," Thelma said exasperated. "It's useless organising a scheme like this in the townships for servants working and living in this area. I thought you'd be pleased at the idea of your servants getting a little education and recreation."

"I'm not prepared to consider it under any circumstances," said Mrs. Gavshon.

Thelma told Phillip about this in the evening. "And if that damn woman ever dares ask me for clothes for her miserable little charity again," she said, "I'll tell her exactly what I think of her."

"Charity is less than skin deep" said Phillip.

The reaction among other people in the neighbourhood was much the same. Thelma found little support for her project.

Still Phillip pressed the question on various committees of the Council, and managed to get the Non-European Affairs Committee to recommend to Council that they should support the scheme.

Thelma went to the monthly meeting of the Council when the item was to be discussed.

The Council meeting was held in the evening. There were a few people in the public gallery, and one or two of the Councillor's wives, like Thelma, sat on special seats within the Council Chamber itself.

Thelma's item came up in the form of a recommendation from the Non-European Affairs Committee that they be empowered to discuss with Government representatives the possibility of opening a social and educational centre for native domestic servants at St. Luke's Hall, Parkwood.

Immediately the item came up, Phillip sprang to his feet.

"Mt. Mayor," he said, "I wish to speak to this item."

He made a good speech, long and packed with facts about the conditions of non-European servants in Johannesburg. He spoke of the little rooms and shacks in backyards, most often without electric light, or any sort of heating in winter time; the hundreds living at the

tops of blocks of flats, with nothing to do, nowhere to go in the evenings or on their 'off' days. He mentioned that it was illegal for Africans to spend a night in these back rooms unless they were actually employed by the owner of the premises, so that husbands could visit wives only illegally and surreptitiously, and were often arrested for sleeping with their wives at night. He spoke of the social conditions that arose out of these facts, the loneliness of people, the hanging around street corners, the turning to illicit liquor or crimes.

"We need these people," he said. "We want them to sleep right next to our homes so that they can start work in our houses early in the morning and finish late in the evenings. We need them to clean our houses and cook our food, to wash our dishes and care for our children. It's not too much to expect that we should give something in return. This centre will be a small start. It won't be able to cater for more than a handful of domestic servants in the area. But it will be a start in the right direction. No thinking person could possibly oppose this scheme."

He sat down, and Thelma felt proud of him. Immediately, Hansie van Niekerk jumped to his feet.

He was the leader of the Nationalist group of three in the City Council, a plump, dark man genial and well liked by most of the Councillors and officials. He was tolerant enough on almost any question ~~affairs~~ that did not affect the non-Europeans, about whom he was uncompromisingly bitter and narrow.

Hansie van Niekerk was, as usual, dressed in a pin-stripe dark suit, with a waistcoat, stiff-collared shirt, and carefully knotted tie. Above the white shirt-collar rose his sallow, plump face, with broad features and high cheek bones, his wide nose and full lips, his crinkly dark hair. For Hansie's features in some respects bore a marked resemblance to the people he so despised. If it were not that he came from such an old and respected Afrikaner family, it might have been ~~whispered~~ that he had a touch of the tar brush.

Hansie and his two colleagues were distinguished each for his own bitter hate. Each of them saw in every small incident, every question that was debated in the Council, the evil secret force that he believed lay behind everything. For Hansie himself it was always the non-Europeans, the 'naturelles' the 'kaffirs.' They menaced the culture, the jobs, the homes, the living standards, and most of all the gentle wives and pure daughters of white men. In theory Hansie declared himself to be in support of the upliftment of the non-European - within reasonable limits, of course - but in practice he opposed every item that meant spending money or doing anything for non-European welfare in any way. He believed the native should get a little education - but not the same education as the white man, because his brain was, and always would be, inferior. The black man's education should prepare him for the humble position he was destined to occupy in life, should teach him how to be a good servant, a good worker, a good farm hand, should instil the ideas of loyalty, obedience and respect to the white man. In Hansie's opinion a couple of years of such schooling was more than enough for niggers.

What infuriated Hansie more than anything else was a kaffir that had been educated. Those were the insolent ones who objected to being called 'boy', who found good honest labour too rough for them, and who emulated the white man's speech and dress. But the kaffir's brain, being smaller and different from the brain of a white man, could never actually absorb the same amount of knowledge, so an educated kaffir was to Hansie something anomalous, a rotten and perverted thing. Hansie was also a firm believer in the preservation of tribal ways and customs. It was the destruction of tribal life that caused half the trouble. If it were possible for the City Council to build kraals, instead of houses, rondavels with a hole in the middle for the smoke of the fire to go out, ~~in similar units as they were in the countryside~~, then, felt Hansie, many problems

would be overcome. Hansie spent a great deal of his time ⁱⁿ thinking up ways to preserve tribal life in a modern city. It was not a problem for which one could find a simple solution.

Most of all, Hansie hated the Coloured people, those borderline folk who were not decently black, like the natives, but not white, like Hansie. Neither fish nor fowl. He regarded them all with suspicion, for who was to know how many of them, white enough to pass as white people, had crossed the colour line and allowed themselves to be absorbed among white folk?

Councillor Klopper, the second of Hansie's little trio, while always prepared to vote against anything affecting the welfare of non-Europeans, reserved his main hate for the British, whom he loathed with a bitter and burning fury. He used Council debates to climb his hobby-horse - the Boer war, and the sufferings of women and children who had been tortured and murdered in British concentration camps during the Boer war.

Councillor Klopper was not genial, like Hansie, but tight, a close and unfriendly man with grey face and grey hair. For him the Boer War had only just been fought, only just been finished, and everything that had happened since did not matter, except as it had bearing on that one question. When anything affecting the present war, Germany, the Nazis or fascism, came under discussion, Councillor Klopper could barely contain himself until he caught the Mayor's eye, when he rose, trembling with fury, as the words came slowly, deliberately, bitterly, with burning hate, from his lips.

"How dare we," he would say, "how dare we speak of German atrocities? Whatever the Germans may have done, it was taught to them by their masters, the originators ~~of~~ of concentration camps and crimes against women and children - the British! You rise now to speak of German crimes - where were you when those far more horribly crimes were committed against the Boer people here in our own land? Your mouths were closed, you were silent - yet it was here, not thousands of miles away. The little children who were made the victims of foul experiments, the deliberate victims through the ~~wilful~~ wilful spread of epidemics, the wives and mothers who were raped and tortured, who had their innocent daughters torn from them and made the sport of soldiers before their very eyes ... on these crimes you are silent! No! You want to penalize the Germans now, who are fighting against the red hordes, to preserve a highly-civilised Western way of life ..."

Councillor Klopper was such a tight, upright, bitter, uncompromising and virtuous man, that nobody except one or two officials suspected that during his term of office as a councillor he prepared himself for a comfortable old age by land speculation, using his knowledge as a member of two important Council Committees - Town Planning and Parks and Estates - to purchase, through a friend of his, land that he knew the Council needed in the future, and then to prepare hasty outlines of a town planning development, with plans of houses, even part of the township laid out, so that when the Council wanted to purchase the land it had to recompense the owner liberally for the great losses he suffered.

And the third member of this trio was Dawie de Kock, who, while prepared to agree with his colleagues about kaffirs and the Boer War, reserved his special, his own particular hate, for the Jews. He attacked the system of international Jewish finance and bankers that was squeezing the small man in its grasp, the international Jewish communists who wanted to destroy orthodox finance and business, and the national Jewish industries that exploited the poor Afrikaner worker. It was unfortunate that Dawie, like Hansie, if you had just met him and never heard him speak, could be so easily mistaken for a member of the race he so despised. For he was thin and dark, with bony, prominent nose and the kind of persistent beard that always made his chin seem dark even when he was newly-shaven.

They were three conscientious Councillors, studying Council agendas carefully and

speaking on any items that could be related to: 1. kaffirs. 2. the Boer War. 3. jews.

Now Hansie launched into a violent tirade. He spoke of the necessity to preserve white civilisation against the pressure of black hordes; of the pure white women and innocent white children whose honour and lives would be imperilled by this scheme of a centre for blacks in the heart of a white area, the gathering together of primitive kaffirs in a white hall; the fact that the native mind was not ready for much education yet, as it was still barbaric and uncivilised, and only after hundreds of years could it possibly advance to anything approaching white civilisation. He said that native servants were well fed and well looked after, better fed and housed than in their kraals in the reserves. If their stomachs were full, they were happy, and it was people like Phillip Penn, putting ideas into these primitive heads, that were the cause of all the native unrest in the country today.

When he had finished, the debate was adjourned for the tea interval. Thelma went outside the Council Chamber and waited for Phillip, who would take her into tea with the Councillors. She saw him come out with Hansie van Niekerk. Hansie's hand was round Phillip's shoulder, and the two of them were laughing together over something.

Phillip went up to her. "You must meet my wife, Hansie," he said. "She was really the prime mover in this thing."

"Oh, you are the dangerous woman?" said Hansie. "But, Madam, you look so gentle. I'm surprised at you."

They went into tea. Hansie sat next to Phillip and they seemed to have a lot of jokes to share. Thelma sat rigid and silent. She was furious with Phillip.

The recommendation for the social centre was, of course, thrown out by the Council. As Phillip drove the car home, he said to Thelma: "Don't be^{so} disappointed. You didn't really expect them to agree to it, did you?"

"I'm not disappointed with the meeting," said Thelma. "I'm disappointed with you."

"With me? I thought I made a pretty good speech. I said everything there was to say."

"The speech was fine. It was chumming up with van Niekerk and his friends that made me sick. I don't know how you could even bear to speak to him after what he said."

Phillip gave a little laugh. "That's politics, dear," he said. "Hansie's actually quite a decent chap."

"Decent?" she exclaimed. "Are you serious? After all that he said this evening?"

Phillip said mildly, "Oh, that. We always fight like anything in the Council Chamber. Of course, he's completely stupid when it comes to the non-Europeans. Just blind prejudice. You can't even argue with him. But if I stopped speaking to everyone whose views I disagreed with - well, it would mean not speaking to just about everyone, wouldn't it?"

And again Thelma thought "Oh god, he's reasonable, what's the answer? He's reasonable but he's wrong, I know he's wrong."

Aloud she said "If that's your politics, I don't want anything to do with them. You put your convictions on and taken them off as easily as your Council robes."

"Not at all," Phillip said. "My convictions are unchanged. But meanwhile I want to live in peace with my fellow-men, no matter what their views may be."

They were silent for the rest of the drive home.

Thelma contacted one or two people who had been interested in the League in the old days. She found at least one who was enthusiastic about the idea of a night school, and helped to get it going. They organised it in the garage at her house.

The Africans came after their days work in the houses and flats round about. They finished work late, and they were always tired. Sometimes, in spite of themselves, their eyes would close as they sat listening on hard, backless wooden benches.

They were pathetically eager to learn. In kitchen suits, with bare feet, they came and struggled over the difficult words in their English lessons, changed tables like children, and exclaimed with delight and surprise when they were taught about other peoples and other countries in their geography lessons.

Thelma found the work intensely satisfying. It was not changing anyone's views: it was not xbringing about reforms. She could not hope to bring more than a very sketchy form of education to a tiny fragment of the millions of illiterates. Yet her contact xwith these poor, patient and eager people exhilarated her more than anything she had done in the past. Their longing for knowledge, which they regarded as a key to open so many doors, their gratitude towards their teachers, the ease with which they were moved to laughter, their warm, simple and forgiving natures unspoiled by the shocks and humiliations that they encountered every day of their lives - these were the things that made her happy to teach them.

Phillip did not help with the school. But at least he did not discourage her. He even referred to the school sometimes when they were among friends with a touch of pride at what she was doing.

In only a few months the night school in the garage of her houses was held on four evenings a week, and she ~~had~~ ^{and} a small committee organised another school in a second garage. They had no trouble in finding pupils - too many had to be turned away. The main difficulty was getting people to teach. Charles came occasionally, but he was not one of the 'regulars' who could always be relied on.

Usually after they had finished school, the teachers would come into the house to have some tea. When she heard the wooden benches being stacked outside, so that the car could be put away in the garage, and the sound of voices as pupils dispersed, she would open the front door and go into the kitchen to put the kettle on.

One night when she came into the front room from the kitchen she found Stanley Lipschitz, who was the keenest teacher and best helper that she had, her brother Charles, and a third person, a girl she had never seen before.

Charles said "Thelma, I want you to meet Ruth."

She was a young girl, very pretty, with an intelligent but rather tense-looking face. Stanley said "What do you think, Thelma - I made Charles teach tonight because Lily didn't turn up. Don't you think we can rope him in as a regular teacher?"

"Look," Charles said, "you run the school very well without me. I'm too busy in any case. I ~~can~~ only came along tonight to show Ruth the school. I thought she might be interested."

"Tell me about the school," said Ruth. "I've ~~never~~ never seen anything like it before."

CHAPTER THREE.

After Ruth had stayed at home with her parents for a while, she came back to Johannesburg. She came back to the city, the war-time life of Johannesburg, still completely absorbed in her own problems, wanting to work out the puzzle of living, to find the key, the correct answer. Life must have a purpose, a philosophy, a direction, it seemed to her, however casually she arrived at it. But just for a while her life had lost all direction and purpose.

She did not want to go back to Stewarts for a job, because of ~~her~~ ^{the} associations of her relationship with Chris. But she had no difficulty in finding a job in the studio of another agency. Many of the men were away in the army, and it was easy to get work.

She did her work mechanically. It did not seem to interest her very much. She put an easel in her room and at night she would think about working at some of the many sketches in her notebook, but she did not do it. Sometimes she tried, and nothing seemed to go right, and then she realised her heart was no longer in it.

Johannesburg was gay, neurotic, excitable, full of people trying very hard to have a good time. The war had taken some of the men, the war had brought inconveniences like petrol ration, the shortage of nylon stockings and butter, but otherwise it did not seem to have made a great deal of difference. Perhaps it had speeded things up, the tempo of life had increased, for there were partings, men going away for nobody knew how long, but it was a long, long way away, that war, in another land, another continent, another world.

Night clubs were full. Every day the society women had their pictures in the papers for organising a morning market for the Red Cross, a fête for Bundles for Britain, a dance for Home Comforts for soldiers. The other war women, the ones whose husbands were away, whose incomes were reduced, who moved out of their houses and went to live in flats or boarding houses, the ones who went to work during the day and cared for the children at night, the ones who lived for letters and who sat alone at night, who could not go out because there was no one to stay with the children, the ones who were lonely and anxious and heartsore, these women did not have their pictures in the papers. But even for them - yes, even for them - the war was a long way away. It had taken the one they loved best, but it had taken him far away. The war was not close to home.

There were some with relatives in Coventry or London, and some with relatives in Lithuania or Poland, in countries invaded by the Germans. But these were invisible scars, scars of heart and mind. There, along the Johannesburg streets, there were no visible scars of war. There were men in uniform, and many of the young girls were even glad of that, happy to be hanging on the arm of a smart young officer in barathra, an R.A.F. in Air Force blue. Death camps, mass bombings, great armies sweeping across ancient Europe, villages, towns, cities being wiped off the earth - it was such a long way off. And there was too much of it. The mind built its own barriers. The mauled body of a dog run over in the street was more distressing to see than the news in the paper that hundreds of women and children had been found in mass graves

It had gone all wrong - her 'marriage', her affair with Chris. But where had it gone wrong? It was not the act of living together without being married that was wrong - of that she was sure. If people truly loved each other, that should not be important. Yet at the same time she had to recognise that it had some bearing on it all. It had been the fact of not actually being married that had been at the root of every troubling incident, from the time when Chris spoke to the acquaintance in the hotel lounge at Hermanus, to the very end when the question of having the baby was not even considered, because they were not married.

It had been at the root of his attitude, too, for now she recognised and admitted to herself that Chris had changed towards her. But why? Was it just that underneath he was the same as other, lesser men, who only desire the seemingly unattainable, who lose interest once the conquest is made? But it had not been like that. Their love had been genuine, deep, sincere. Somewhere, somehow, it had gone wrong.

She was desperately, terribly lonely. She had never been lonely like this before, for it was the new loneliness of someone who has had companionship, the close, constant association of a partner and lover. She had friends, there were plenty of the old crowd still around, and many new ones, too, for in Johannesburg it is easy to meet people. Frankie asked her to his flat again as soon as he met her, and she went there once or twice. But the parties did not seem fun any longer. They were hollow, shrill, dull.

For the first time she realised that all these bright, these witty and sparkling people were trying to cover ^{something} up; they were all trying so hard to be gay, that the fun no longer seemed spontaneous. You could keep up with the crowd if you ~~stayed~~ ^{stayed} bright. You had to speak brightly, to be always alive, with ready words, facile words, superficial and shallow words. You had to be a little neurotic or a little odd. She was no longer amused by the languid, feminine and high-voiced young men, the tense, excitable and loud-voiced young women. The sound of breaking glasses, the blurred, red faces when they had been drinking too much and the party was drawing to its climax, became stale and hateful, rooted in the undiscerning past. And she was the spectator - not as once she had been, when being a spectator was part of the fun, the audience they needed, the innocent contrast - but now as an outsider, as one divorced from it all, the endless over-drinking, the too-loud voices, the absorption in petty problems, the stupid and dull pattern of behaviour that once had been merely privately pointless but was now a public wrong, a sad and terribly waste in a world held fast in the grip of life and death realities.

She was dreadfully, miserably lonely. She came back to her room at night, when it was late, but she could not sleep. Late and quiet. A few cars would pass outside, the wheels hushing against the black road, and then she would stand at the window and watch the lights of distant flats going out, going off one by one in silence across the dark streets. She was tired, but she could not rest. In her despair she even thought of going back to Cape Town, to Chris again, and only a pride stronger than pain and the thought of the baby kept her back. He had not written. She thought perhaps she had misjudged the whole situation, and he would write 'Darling, when are you coming back? I miss you so much, I am so lonely without you.' But he did not write. Or she walked down to Joubert Park at night, before the gates closed, and sat in the rose summer warmth and darkness listening to the frogs' deep croak, the crickets' intermitten chorus, and thinking 'Where did it go wrong?' but not being able to think it out clearly.

She was deeply, constantly lonely. Her work no longer absorbed her, The paths of escape seemed closed. Return to Middelrust? That, more than anything, was out of the question for she had grown completely and irrevocably away from small-town life. Go back to Cape Town? She rejected that too. Find adventure in some other place? The war had put a stop to that. And as for the other ways of forgetting or ~~losing~~ losing oneself when it is no longer possible to bear the burden of remembering, she was still too innocent or ignorant to know or find escape those ways.

She watched the young mothers wheeling their babies in the park with an envy and longing that seemed to stab her. She thought - I'll have a baby. She made childish schemes. She needn't get married. She would pick a good-looking and healthy young man and after the baby was conceived have nothing more to do with him.

Even as she made these plans she knew they were ridiculous, and that she was just trying to divert herself.

She looked at herself in the mirror of her ^{room} thinking, I have changed, I look different. But unable to see that what was different was that for a time the sparkle and joy of life had left her, and that the sweet bloom of innocence had gone forever from her face.

She took books from the library and sat reading in the evenings, but the books made her sad or increased her own sense of emptiness and loss. Night after night, sometimes with tears streaming down her cheeks, she read 'An American Tragedy', 'Anna Karenina', 'A Farewell To Arms.'

She wrote home dutifully once a week, and often sat with pen in hand thinking

perhaps she would write to Chris: Chris dear, is it a false sense of pride that keeps you from writing to me to come back? Or am I simply making a fool of myself by saying I still love you? If you want me, please write - soon. But if you don't

But if you don't. That was where it stopped. The letters were never written.

One afternoon Frankie 'phoned her. "It's a special occasion tonight," he told her, "and I do so want you to come darling. We're celebrating Lulu's new book - it's absolutely wizard - now you must come. I simply won't love you any more if you don't."

She did not want to go, and decided to stay at home. But that night, as on so many nights, her room became unbearable. It took on a malignant personality of its own, the grass chair, the round table, the bench where ~~she~~ ^{she} tried to do ~~some~~ ^{some} drawings. The mirror was a round, luminous pool on the wall, a well of light. With Chris, she could sit and read, or work at her drawing board, or anything, and be at peace. Alone it was not possible to do anything.

And so that night she went to Frankie's flat, and the usual crowd was there - not many of them seemed to have become caught up with the war - and everyone was very bright, very witty. The slick, smart chatter and bright women with bright lips and nails and bright gestures made her feel particularly dowdy and stupid and silent. They seemed to grow and swell into one loud, hard voice: Cherry and Ria and Deborah and Sybil and Lulu, that very, very bright lady journalist and writer, who battled constantly against her sense of inferiority and the patronage of the men among whom she worked. That she was better than most of them was indisputable, and that they resented her being better and therefore did everything they could to humiliate her was also indisputable. But of course they would deny this most indignantly if anyone should dare say it, because they were 'enlightened' people, who believed that women had every right to compete equally with men in all spheres, only provided that they were paid less, no matter how good they were, and also provided that they were not too good.

The journalist-~~author~~ress, who had just had her third book published, was saying: "But what I really like best about men and women is that both sexes think the other one is screamingly funny and too absolutely stupid for words - the men think they are humouring women by letting them do things, while all the time they KNOW women can't really do anything except bake a cake, and the women humour the men by letting them believe they really ARE superior beings, whereas all the time they know that if it wasn't for the women - well, where would the men be?"

At this stage the mingling of high voices and cigarette smoke, the hard laughter and forced gaiety, seemed to recede in Ruth's mind before the persistent memory of the sea at night over the rocks at Clifton, breaking on the rocky shore at Sea Point, the high mountains behind with their wooded slopes, and how often she and Chris had walked among the encroaching pines at night. And she went through the room, out for a moment on to the balcony, where at least it was cool and quieter and dark, and she could lean over watching the street below without having to make an effort at being part of the party.

From the dark balcony a voice said "Hello! Long time no see. When did you get back?" and she turned to see in the shadows the tall, thin young man named Charles who she had first met on that same balcony nearly two years ago, and who had so often taken her places in Johannesburg.

She said, "Why, Charles! It's nice to see you again. I've been back quite a while."

"Well," he said, "there's a nice thing. And you didn't think of looking up old friends and letting them know you were back in circulation."

"Why I didn't actually know which people still were in circulation - " as she said it, she realised she was possibly being rude.

He said very lightly, "It's amazing how many of us seem to remain around, isn't it?"

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