

THE YOKE OF PITY (L'ORDINATION)

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JULIEN BENDA & GILBERT CANNAN

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(L'ORDINATION)**

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BY
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TRANSLATED BY
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PART I
ASCENT

I

THE boy, Pierre, went up to bed and they were left alone, as they had been on several evenings before, at the bottom of the garden. They talked a little about their afternoon's excursion and the beauty of the night and then were silent.

They were silent for a long time. . . . They began to feel increasingly conscious of the oppression of their mutual acquiescence in the silence. . . . The lights of the hotel were put out. Each was aware that the other had seen them go out and made no move to return. They felt that they were sinking down into complicity. . . . Their hands touched and their eyes met in mingled love and reproach, as though each of the lovers were reproaching the other with the eternity of time during which they had not recognised each other.

He took her back to the door of the hotel, feeling and respecting her desire for inward

preparation in delay for their utter union. He loved her desire and the respect he had for it, for he loved rather the elegance of love than love itself.

Next day, they were walking together on the hill, thrilling with the kiss which they made no attempt to recall, drinking in their profound communion through the most trivial acts of sharing, happy in their promise of love, happy, yet not joyous.

They passed down the slope leading to the garden and sat halfway up the hill. For several minutes together she mused. Then she said:

“I am afraid, Félix . . . I am afraid lest I should not satisfy you. . . . You belong to a brilliant world. . . . Your mother, your sisters, are smart women . . . the women who loved you before were like them. . . . But I am just an ordinary bourgeoisie. . . .”

He said:

“I hate all that, my heart is not in it. I have found only lies in it: lies of talent, lies

of beauty, lies of love. . . . Only during the past month have I found truth, Madeleine, only since I have known you. I love your modest way of dressing. It is so true. . . .”

So, it seemed to him, his will overcame his habits and fervently he came to the religion of the humble.

That day she told him all her life. She told him of her sad childhood: her cold, proud mother: her elder sister's jealousy, her father, who alone had loved her, her father whom she had lost so soon. . . . She told him of her marriage to a man much older than herself, a pompous disillusioned man, who was galled by any kind of happiness and resentful at her youth. . . . Then of her first child, still-born. . . . Then of the boy Pierre, and the perpetual irritation he was to her in his resemblance to his father . . . and of the hostility of her husband's relations. . . . She told him of the silence, the emptiness, the fast captivity of her life.

She raised her eyes:

“ Ah! ” she said, laying her hand on his arm, “ You are the only creature in the whole world who has ever shed a tear for me. ”

He made her tell him more and began to discover the charm of compassion.

At night, when all were asleep, she stood trembling behind her door, waiting for him. . . . He came. . . . She fell into his arms. He pressed her to him, and not the grace and beauty of her body moved him so much as its surrender. . . .

He looked round her room. . . . He loved her simple things lying folded on a chair, her little common watch hanging above the bed.

So, until morning, they drank the poison.

Each night he came to her. . . . They laughed at the pains they now took to be together less during the daytime. . . . Their attraction for each other gained with use.