

CROCODILE TEARS

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Crocodile tears by Barbara Ross Furse

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BARBARA ROSS FURSE

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TEARS**

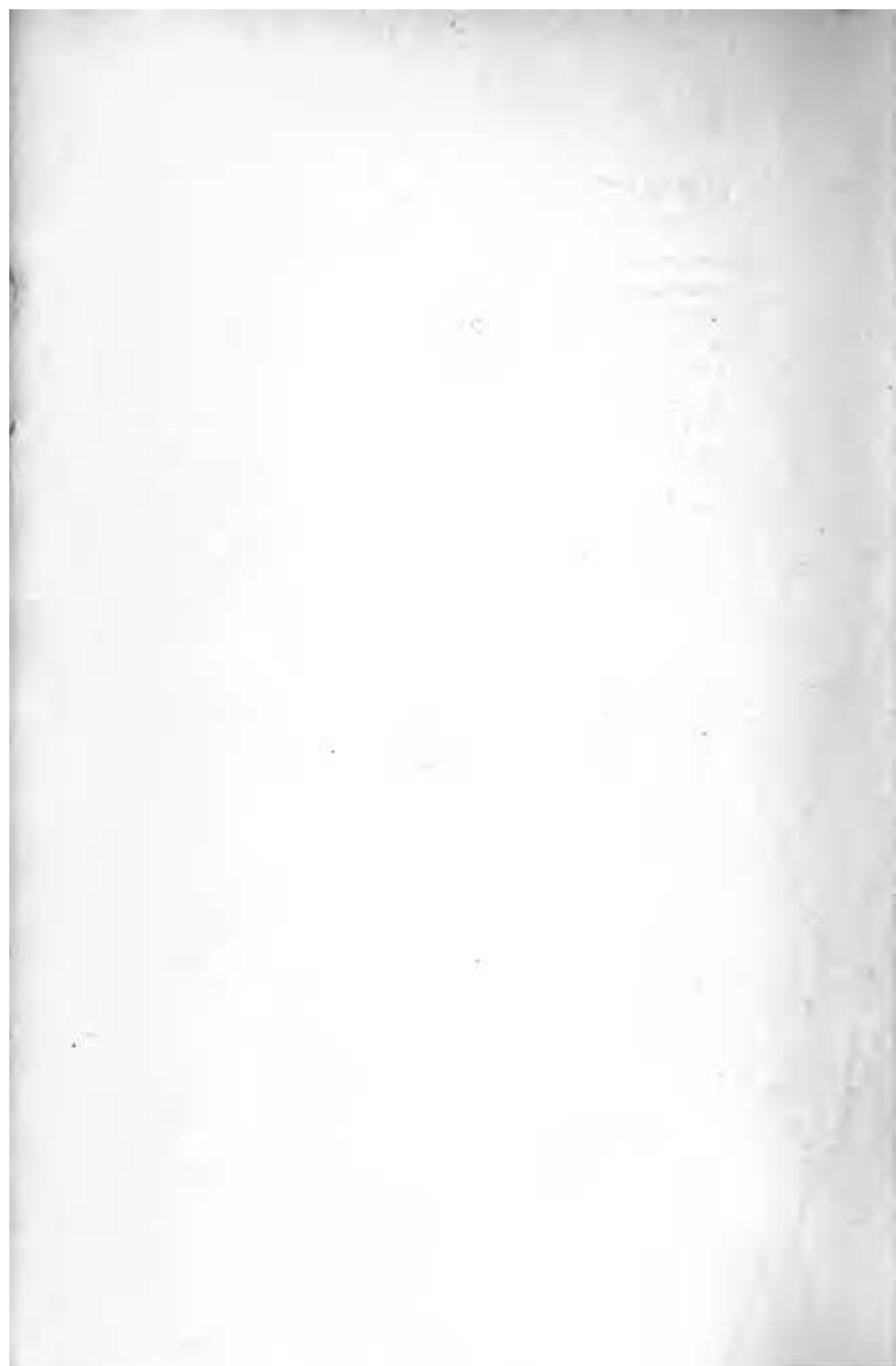
CROCODILE TEARS

AN intensely human story of those marriages of the Great War which were hastily entered into during a short leave from the Front. Phoebe and Henry certainly "married in haste" and this story shows how they "repented at leisure." As time went on Phoebe became more and more disillusioned about her husband; she had thought him understanding, but found him merely narrow and lacking in sense of humour; what she had believed to be strength turned out to be pompous and overbearing stupidity.

Henry also had a mother.

Henry's mother was a living monument to parental selfishness. She was the sun around which her five sons and daughter revolved. Phoebe soon discovered that Henry's much vaunted devotion to his mother was really nothing more than a family tradition from which he had not the strength of mind to break.

The tangle of these two lives is eventually unravelled in Kenya, whither Henry goes in an attempt to make a living.



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CHAPTER ONE

THEIRS was a War marriage. Oh! the madness of that secret marriage in Paris; she a V.A.D., Henry on leave!

She did not think that Henry had really ever understood all that that morning before her matron had meant to her in horror and shame. Nausea. Crushing disappointment that her part in the War was over. Cold, curious eyes upon her.

"You say that you are really married? Of course you are dismissed, you expected that!"

Henry in France. Prill born in War-time London. His first leave they spent in Eastbourne, what he could steal of it away from home. Love snatched too quickly and too often to know anything of the quiet face of its beauty.

Henry had not been able to imagine that awful scene with her matron, a woman she adored. The idea of women and their doings in the War always amused him. Women playing at *esprit de corps*! At the first hint of his amused smile she had kept silence, never finished telling him. But he had not shown himself quite lacking in imagination. He had asked her to keep their marriage secret. "Because of my mother," he said, his eyes tender. "After the War we'll tell her. I've written a letter telling her if I should be killed. But the five of us boys enlisted together. We went out to France, her chosen knights, with her colours tied to our arms. She thinks of us

as true to her alone. Can you understand, darling? It's only to make it easier for her to bear the worry. You'll understand when you meet her."

Phoebe thought that she understood then, and loved him the more for it.

Henry did not go back to France. He was ordered to Mesopotamia. Phoebe and Prill went to Canada to live with her father. There Hets was born, and from Mesopotamia Henry rallied her kindly on the sex of their second child.

She showed his letter to her father.

"What does he want a son for?" he snorted. "More cannon fodder! Besides, you have no money. How are you going to educate him? You must have no more children. You've no right to!"

"Henry wants a large family. He thinks people ought to have one if they're healthy and strong."

Her father snorted again.

"It's a form of vanity that's much over-indulged," he said testily. "I suppose you know all about preventing 'em? But of course you do! I can't understand why you ever had Hets, poor little scrap!"

Phoebe grinned and watched his face.

"Henry says it spoils the exaltation of the supreme moment."

"Exaltation my foot!" said her astonishingly vulgar parent. "Too bad he can't have the exaltation of the supreme moment when we can at last have mercy, and give the poor things chloroform! (He was a gynæcologist.) Don't suppose he believes in the use of chloroform in midwifery. God help me, Fibs, how did you ever come to marry the man? It's a good thing I don't know him. How we should hate each other!"

But Phoebe was up in arms at that. She adored Henry, and said so in no uncertain terms.

"Besides," she finished, "I do agree a little.

Anyway, you wouldn't hate each other. Henry likes everyone. He's the friendliest soul in the world."

"He would be!" grunted her reprehensible father.

She was not a native of the town. Her father had moved there after her marriage, appointed to the Maternity Hospital. War years were not easy ones in which to form friendships, and a woman with two young children and little money has no time in which to form them.

She longed for her husband.

But the War had been over for two years before Henry waited on the dock at Liverpool for them, a free man, his gratuity in his pocket.