

A MESSAGE

By FRANCIS BRETT YOUNG

I

IT was the first year of the Boer War, and the third of their marriage. Auckland, as you'll guess, was a Scotsman: his wife South African born and of Huguenot descent. Her maiden name was Marais. Grace Marais. Soon after their wedding they settled down on the West Rand within easy reach of Johannesburg. Auckland was a hard worker. His practice grew with the development of the reef. Their life was full, and very happy. In the first year they had managed to build themselves a wooden bungalow with a long *stoep* facing north and looking out over the high veldt to the humped masses of the Magaliesburg: a land that was like a sea vastly dappled with floating shadows of cloud. And a fine country for young people, free and exhilarating, where green things grow like wildfire. In two years their *stoep* was covered with roses and bougainvillea, and their orchard a mass of peach bloom. As yet they had no child, and for this reason their companionship was peculiarly intimate. At evening, when his work was done, they would ride out together into the veldt and watch the tremendous pageant that sunset displays in those latitudes and in that clear air. And later she would play the piano as he sat smoking on the *stoep*. A charming idyll; for they were very much in love and full of hopes; hopes that the war was coming to shatter and love that its ardours would confirm.

Indeed, they were so wrapped up in each other that when the catastrophe came they were quite unready for it. Auckland's life was too full for politics; the grievances of the Outlanders scarcely touched him; all he wanted was to be left alone to his absorbing work and his delightful wife. And she was troubled in another way. I have said that the Marais were originally French, but in the course of two hundred years her family had become, to all intents and purposes, Dutch. As a small child she had always spoken Dutch to her parents and their servants; and though she adored her husband she could scarcely think of the British except as a foreign nation. On the face of it it seemed to her that the coercion of the Boer Republics was a brutal and unnecessary outrage; and this saddened her, for Auckland thought very differently. Each knew well what the other was thinking, yet neither would run the risk of an open difference by talking about it. It was a hard time for them both.

And a harder was coming. In the end he saw that the matter could not be ignored any longer. English troops were concentrating in Natal; Boer commandos were mobilising. The flight from Johannesburg had begun.

"There is going to be war," he said. "I'm certain of it."

"But if there is war, why should it touch *us*?" she protested.

"As my wife," he told her, "you are a British subject. If war breaks out you will be in an enemy country."

"I'm a South African," she said proudly.

"But, my child, I am English. If there is to be war, I'm in it. In any case I'm in it. They'll be short of doctors."

Rather because she loved him than because she assented to his arguments she gave in. Within forty-eight hours of the Boer ultimatum they said good-bye: he to offer his services as a volunteer in Natal, she to return to her people at the Cape.

"You'll seem so far away," she said; "but perhaps it will soon be over."

"Perhaps. . . ."

"And it will be exciting for you. You'll see all sorts of strange things."

"I shall see nothing without you," he said.

"You can write to me, my darling."

"Don't count too much on that. Letters will take a long time and may be lost. If only there were something quicker!"

"Telepathy?" she said. "That sort of thing only happens when you don't want it. Supposing . . . no, I daren't think of it!"

"What would it matter?" he asked, kissing her. "We can thank God for the happiness we've had already."

"Yes, it has been very wonderful," she admitted.

II

But when they had parted she knew that all the light had gone out of her life. She was so lonely; and when she returned to her old home at the Cape, to an atmosphere saturated with memories of their early loving, she felt as though she were wandering through those familiar paths like the spirit of a woman already dead. He had gone. An absolute blank silence had received him. No letters came through; and in the end she committed herself to patience in the certainty that Auckland was suffering as deeply as herself. Even in the poignant beauty of the Cape summer, with the scent of the last orange blossom heavy on the air and the great oak-avenues in full leaf, her life was empty. Beauty wounded her. She couldn't bear to look on it alone.

At last, with the precipitation of panic, she left her old home and fled to the house of Auckland's sister near Stellenbosch to feed her hungry spirit on a family resemblance, to search for something of her husband in people of his own blood. But Auckland's sister too had her troubles. Her own husband had volunteered. What was more, he had not yet reached the front, and letters from him arrived every day. These letters isolated Grace Auckland and threw her back into a completer loneliness. She saw that she had made a mistake.

There was only one way in which she could find relief, and that was in the distraction of work. But what work? By that time women of good birth were coming out from England in scores to nurse in the hospitals.

The Cape hotels were full of them ; the city buzzed with feminine excitement. And this showed her a way. She joined a sewing party of women, who sat all day in a stuffy room, making bandages and drinking tea. Against the background of their chatter her mind was still a prey to hideous thoughts and bitter longings. She gave it up in despair. What she wanted, she told herself, was some new human relationship. She wanted to be in touch with people who understood what her husband was doing ; and so, with the reassuring qualification that she was a doctor's wife, she took her plunge and volunteered for hospital service wherever they might send her.

All went well. They accepted her, and, the same evening, Auckland's first letter arrived. It had been impossible to write sooner, for they had tossed him about like a shuttlecock. Now he had left Natal and was going to the Western front. He was fit, and far too busy to think ; and though her own case was not so happy she was thankful for the smallest of mercies. With that much-read letter in her pocket she travelled north in a troop train and was shot out at a siding where a base hospital had been erected on the edge of a little town. Already the place was being swamped with convoys of sick and wounded, many of whom came from the column to which Auckland was attached ; and when she saw these pale, dusty men arriving in their tattered uniforms she was consoled to think that if her husband, by some lucky chance, should return, it would be almost into her arms.

Her work absorbed her ; but she was a strong woman, and not afraid of physical fatigue. She lived in a bell tent through which swept the parching winds of the *karoo*, surrounded by portraits of her husband and a few books, that were precious because they had read them together. At night, when her work was over, she was almost too tired to think ; and yet, by the aid of these material reminders, by contact with things that he had touched and by memory of thoughts that they had shared, she began to achieve a sort of spiritual communion in absence that she had once thought impossible. At times she seemed almost conscious of his physical presence. It was wonderful . . . as real as a dream.

III

It was as he had said. Even over that short distance letters were uncertain. On that single line of railway everything but the wounded went forward . . . forward. The British had suffered a series of reverses, and he was busier than ever. The overflow from his business was thrown back on the base hospital where she served. By this time she had learned the name of the unit to which he was attached, and so she was always on the look-out for soldiers who belonged to it : not that they ever told her any definite news of him, but because there was always a chance that, though they didn't know it, Auckland had spoken to them. Perhaps he had even handled the bandages, red with the dust of Africa, in which their wounds were dressed. Fingering these rags it seemed to her as if

she were keeping touch. That was how she put it . . . keeping touch. And this fact alone implied the growing sensitiveness of her subconscious mind—this faith in material objects, this worship of the relic. . . .

She had told him of her new work, and his next letter was clouded by a curious jealousy. He excused himself by saying that he was "old-fashioned." He had always made a point of keeping her out of his medical work. He hated the idea of intimacy with men that her new job demanded ; he couldn't bear the thought of her touching them. She smiled, and was, perhaps, a little flattered at the reverence with which he regarded her ; she was even a little troubled ; but she could not think for one moment of abandoning a work that had proved her salvation. Here, on the bare veldt, worked to death, badly fed, employed in sordid and even menial tasks, she was a hundred times happier than in the luxury of her father's home. Besides, when it came to men she knew she could trust herself. Why shouldn't he trust her ? Of course he trusted her, he wrote back ; it wasn't that. Couldn't she understand ? Ridiculous man !

Meanwhile her services were more than ever in demand. Wounded prisoners had to be dealt with, and the elegant volunteers from England couldn't talk Dutch. They were rather glad of it ; it would have been humiliating to have come five thousand miles to nurse those horrid Boers. Most of the prisoners, indeed, were hurried further down the line to a kind of concentration camp ; but some were too ill to be moved, and among these Grace Auckland acted as interpreter.

She didn't mind whom she nursed. To her the whole job was just an anodyne. It saved her mind from thinking and from dread. One day the sister in charge of the prisoners' section sent for her. A Boer prisoner had been wounded in the fight at Modder River. It was a miracle that the man had travelled so far, for a bullet in the back had bruised his spinal cord, and from the waist downwards he was a dead man. Whether there were actual damage or merely pressure was a point as yet unsettled. The surgeons were far too busy to go into it. Only massage or electricity could keep him going, and there was no electricity available on the veldt.

"Matron tells me, Nurse Auckland, that you are Dutch," said the sister bluntly.

"Well . . . hardly that ; but I speak the language."

"Then please undertake this case."

The sense of so great a responsibility impressed her, for the cases that she had dealt with so far had been simple. The charge filled her with pride, and even more she welcomed the chance of finding an absorbing interest to distract her thoughts. The seriousness of the case so weighed upon her mind that even when she was not at the bedside of the patient, whose name was Grobler, the thought of his helplessness was with her, filling her with a conviction that would have been uncanny if it had not seemed so natural. "His life is in my hands," she told herself. "If I

concentrate, if I set my whole mind and spirit on the idea of his recovery, I can make my life go into him and he will be saved."

It wasn't easy. The physical aspect of the prisoner repelled her, for he was a dry, hard-bitten product of the back veldt with a haggard face, in which the cheek-bones stood out like those of a skeleton, lank fair hair, and pale blue eyes that burned with a light of mingled hatred and fear. "But I mustn't allow myself to be influenced," she told herself. "Even if this man is repulsive to me, he is in my hands, and it is my duty to do my best for him."

There was even more against her than this. The prisoner, wearied by the discomforts and heat of the journey, was ill-tempered and cruel, snapping at all who tended him like a wounded animal, irritated that his words had not been understood, alternating between sulkiness and savagery, a bitter enemy of all the world.

"I wish you joy of him, nurse," said the sister. "I'd be better pleased if they'd move him out of my ward. The man's a beast. You can do nothing for him. To tell you the truth, we're sick to death of him already. So different from our own men!"

Grace Auckland took no notice of what they told her. She felt in her bones that in this case there was something momentous to herself. "Perhaps it's because our Cape blood is so awfully mixed," she thought. "Perhaps he may be a cousin of some sort." And she looked at Grobler wonderingly as he lay there with his narrow brows contracted and his eyes closed.

For several days he hardly spoke to her. Except in some paroxysm of pain, he lay without motion, half-conscious, submissive to her hands. Once or twice she found him with his mad eyes open. He stared at her as though she were hateful and hostile to him, and she was half-afraid. His eyes accused her; told her that she could do nothing, that her labours were only prolonging an agony that had lasted too long already.

But after a week they told her, almost incredulously, that Grobler had improved. She came to him gladly with the news; and when he heard it he turned on her a flood of abuse. It shocked and repelled her, offending her delicacy, and brought tears to her eyes. That was what he wanted. When he saw the tears he pressed his advantage outrageously. She was tempted to reply to him; but then she remembered that it was in this way that the other nurses had been beaten, so she said nothing, and he, seeing that he could not break her as he had broken the rest, recoiled into silence.

"Now you see what he's like," said the sister. "I told you he wasn't worth it!"

After this sharp engagement things went more gently. Grobler rarely spoke to her, and then grudgingly, but she knew in her heart that he was thankful, if not grateful, for her cares. She knew that his eyes watched her furtively beneath their drooping lids. The surgeons said that he was still improving, that her massage was doing him good; and this encouraged

her. All through the working day Grobler absorbed her thought ; and that was right, she told herself, for the more often and the more assiduously she thought of him, the greater would be her power for good. A curious, mystical conception : but that was how she was made. Not only did she think of Grobler when she was with him ; but when the day was over and she retired to her tent to rest, she still found herself concentrating her mind on the case of this lean, repulsive creature whose life was in her hands. It was an enthralling interest, and atoned, though she didn't know it, for her absence from the man that she loved.

IV

And still he improved. Though this made her happier in herself she now had to put up with many annoyances. She and her pet Dutchman, as they called him, were being talked about in the nurses' mess. She found that she was being looked at with suspicion, almost with dislike. The few friends that she had made gradually drifted away from her, having scented the fact that she was becoming unpopular. And this chilled her ; for she had neither thought nor done wrong to anyone. Indeed, if it had not been for Grobler, whom she now regarded as her personal property, and something more—a creature necessary to her salvation—she would have resigned. In the end her pride, and the consciousness of her absolute rightness, stiffened her, and she hung on. She began to hate the mincing English speech of the home-bred nurses, and found a kind of refuge in Grobler's homely *taal*. Not that his attitude toward her improved. He was still the enemy of all the world ; and since she was the only living creature with whom he came in contact, it was she that suffered from his enmity. She set herself to convert him with kindness. In a thousand small ways she humoured him.

Sometimes, from the rich gardens of the Cape, flowers were sent up to the hospital for the decoration of its tents. It was the season of roses, and once, with an eager care, she managed to steal a spray of them from the general store and smuggle it into Grobler's tent. He was asleep, or pretending to sleep ; so she put the flowers in a tin of water at his bedside. There she left them, guessing that when he woke he would be pleased.

Later in the day when she came to his tent he was awake. The roses had drunk her water and revived. They brought a thrill of delight to her own heart, for they were of the kind that she and Auckland had planted on the *stoep* of their own small house. Grobler looked from her to the roses. "What is this muck ?" he asked in Dutch. She flushed. "Don't you think they're lovely ?" He didn't answer her question. "Who brought them here ?" he said. "I did . . ." He grinned. Then he reached out his hand to the box on which the tin was standing, picked up the roses and threw them on the ground. The water splattered her dress. "How dare you ?" she cried. He laughed. And this time her tears were too much for her. She would have hated him to see them, so she ran out of his tent and back to her own.

There she lay on her stretcher-bed and cried, reproaching herself, all the time, for the fact that she had allowed herself to be wounded. The bitterness of her separation from Auckland overwhelmed her ; and when, at last, she fell asleep it was only to dream. She dreamed that this hateful war was over, and that the wonderful meeting had come. She saw Auckland, worn and lined, standing at the door of her tent. She held out her arms to him, but he would not take her in his. " I've heard all about it," he said. " I'm sorry ; but you know yourself what you have done." She went cold with misery. " What have I done ? " she asked. " Don't ask me," he said. " This man Grobler . . . you can't deny that you're in love with him." " In love with him ? " she cried. " I hate him ! You must know that I hate him. Look what he did with my roses ! " " Oh, so you gave him roses ? " said Auckland. He laughed bitterly and turned away. And when she followed him he had vanished. It was awfully dark. She could not find him in the endless *karoo*. She felt that she had lost everything. She began to sob violently.

Someone touched her shoulder. A light shone in her eyes. It was the night sister. " Wake up, wake up ! " she said. " I think it's a good thing I came. You were moaning in your sleep. What's the matter ? "

" Nothing," she said. She tried to smile. " What do you want, sister ? "

" It's that Grobler," said the sister. " He's worse. I don't like the look of him. And he keeps on calling for you. I think, if you don't mind, you'd better come."

It was on her lips to say that she didn't want to see Grobler again ; but that would have been ridiculous, so she dressed in a hurry and made her way to his tent. Grobler was lying on his back with his eyes closed. One of the surgeons was kneeling at the side of the stretcher-bed.

" What is it ? " she asked in a whisper.

" I can't tell you," he said. " He's pretty bad. I think he's going. But he keeps on muttering your name. Perhaps he wants to tell you something in Dutch. You'd better stay with him."

They were alone. " What is it ? " she asked gently, " tell me. . . ." But he answered nothing. He only took her hand and grasped it. It was just as if the man were drowning and wanted something to cling to. A queer position ! If the night-sister looked in again it might be misunderstood. Once she thought he had really fallen asleep, and tried to take her hand away ; but as she moved he only clutched it tighter. And so the night passed.

Next morning the surgeon came again. " Funny case," he said. " I confess I don't understand it ; but it seems that you keep him quiet, so you'd better carry on."

All through that day they brought her her meals to Grobler's tent. The man never spoke, and yet, if she moved an inch away from him, he seemed to be disturbed. It was an exhausting business. Once or twice she fell asleep, to be awakened by a sudden pressure of his hand. In the evening they compelled her to go away ; but she was still unhappy. She

couldn't sleep. She felt it was her duty to be with him. Late in the afternoon she returned to his tent.

Some hours later the night-sister passed with her lantern. "Why, he's holding your hand!" she said.

"Yes. . . ."

"But how can you stand it?"

"He won't let me go," she said, and smiled.

But when they were alone again she grew uneasy. The atmosphere of that threatening dream in which Auckland had appeared to her returned with an appalling heaviness. From the moment of her awakening to this she had not had time to give him a thought. Her mind was possessed by Grobler as firmly as the hand that he still held. And indeed, during these later hours, she had regarded the patient with a certain tenderness. It even seemed to her that his physical aspect had changed. His eyes were closed, his tortured brow serene, his lips set in an expression of repose. Looking at him, it now seemed to her that his mouth was almost beautiful. And it suddenly came into her mind that this face was familiar, that she had seen lips like those before . . . even that she had kissed them. It frightened her; she couldn't understand it. Without thinking what she was doing she had put out her free hand and brushed back the tangled hair from Grobler's brow. Tenderly. . . . She bent above him. It came into her mind suddenly, madly, that this was the face of her husband. A wave of emotion overwhelmed her. She shuddered, and with difficulty recovered herself. For she knew that she had very nearly kissed Grobler's lips.

At this she burned with shame. "What has happened to me?" she thought. "Am I going off my head?" She wanted to get up and run away; but she couldn't free her fingers from Grobler's grasp. Her mind flashed back to her dream and Auckland's accusation. "It's true," she thought, "it's true! My fingers brushed back his hair, and I nearly kissed him. I must get away . . . somehow I must get away." But she knew that she couldn't.

In the middle of the night Grobler began mumbling to himself in Dutch. She dared no longer look at him, but she heard and understood every word that he said. He was driving a span of oxen over the veldt and calling each by name. "Come, Blauwberg," he said, "what are you doing, you sulky old *schelm*? Trek, you devils, trek! Creishman, what are you up to? D'you want to go to Pretoria? Not this time, my friend! Ah, would you? Trek, you idle bunch of mares!" And with her eyes closed she saw the scene that the sleeping man imagined; the vast monotonies of the high-veldt, a team of oxen that strained and pulled, the lashing of a long whip-thong, and, behind, a waggon that rumbled through clouds of red dust and Grobler sitting in front with his legs wide apart, tossed from side to side by the waggon's jolting.

"He has taken me right out of my own life," she mused, "into the life of the old people of my blood. Everything else is artificial. All my

own life has been a sham." But she couldn't admit it. "I don't understand," she cried; "I don't understand!"

Grobler began to talk Kaffir to his boys, threatening to sjambok one who had lost a sheep by bringing them too late to the kraal. He screamed with anger; his words were brutal and foul. She was afraid of him.

A sudden wind arose and made her candle flicker, and with it, it seemed came a curious change of atmosphere. Grobler was still talking Kaffir but the words were blurred and indistinct. The fly of the tent flapped; the wind burst in, and the candle went out. She was afraid. She couldn't see Grobler, but though he was quiet she felt that he was awake. The hand that held hers began to move; its fingers were busy tracing the shape of her own; and then, suddenly, they began to twist her wedding-ring round and round. It was a small thing in itself, but too momentous; for this was a tender trick of Auckland's. She remembered how, on the last night that they had spent together, his fingers had sought hers in the dark and twisted that ring round and round, and how she had lain still and let him do so, not daring to tell him that she was awake, since to talk would only have been to renew the bitterness of parting. And that was what Grobler was doing now. Stranger still, it was difficult to believe that the fingers that twirled the ring were not her husband's. She felt a choking in her throat. She wanted to cry. . . .

Then Grobler began to talk; but the voice was no longer Grobler's; it was Auckland's! "Grace," he said, "is that you?"

And she whispered, "Yes."

"Grace, I love you," she heard. "I love you, my darling. I'm dead tired, and awfully thirsty. I wish to God the light would come. Do you hear me?"

"Yes, I hear you," she said.

"I'm glad of that," she heard. "It's a comfort. Like a telephone. If only I could get a drop of water! My mouth's ghastly!"

She scarcely knew what she was doing. She felt in the dark for a feeding-cup and put it to Grobler's lips. He drank greedily.

"Do you want more?" she asked.

There was no answer. Then, blindly, inevitably, she bent over and kissed the lips that had spoken. "My darling . . ." she said.

She fell on the bottom of the bed and cried her heart out. She was certain that Auckland was dead.

Next morning they packed her off to the staff hospital. She hardly knew what they were doing with her, and cared nothing. She was strange and broken. For three days she lay there, mute and exhausted. On the fourth, the doctor came and talked to her severely. "You've had a bad breakdown," he said. "As a matter of fact you're not strong enough for nursing. Have you any people of your own at the Cape? . . . Very well, then, I'll send you down there as soon as you're fit to travel."

She implored him to let her stay. Now more than ever she felt it impossible to return to her own family. In a day or two, at most, she was

bound to hear the dreadful news. "Besides," she said, "I am better; I assure you I'm better. And I want to go on looking after a case of mine: that man Grobler."

Grobler, in fact, was her only hope. She clutched at the idea of seeing him. If, in one awful moment, her husband had been able to speak to her through Grobler's lips, it was just possible that he might speak again. . . . Just possible, and very terrible. In any case she must see him.

"Grobler?" she heard the doctor say. He laughed. "You needn't worry about Grobler. He's pretty well all right. We're sending him down the line to-day to a prisoners' camp. It was a queer case, and a queer recovery. When you knocked up he became better. The whole thing must have been functional: no organic damage whatever."

She didn't know what the long words meant, and in any case she couldn't believe him. "I'm sure you're thinking of someone else," she said.

"Not a bit of it," laughed the doctor. "I know Grobler: a great tall brute with fair hair. Spinal concussion. Of course he was your case." He looked at her knowingly. "I heard all about it. Do you want to see him before he goes?"

She wanted to see him dreadfully. She wanted nothing else. But if he were well, if he were no longer the prostrate medium but his hale and brutal self, her last chance was surely gone. She was afraid; she dared not tempt providence further. "No," she said with a shudder. "I never want to set eyes on him again."

And she never did.

V

Auckland himself finishes the story. "Dreams are queer things," he said. "They don't often come my way. If I dream once in a twelvemonth it's a wonder; but the queerest dream I ever had was in the Boer war. We were out on patrol near Paardeburg—just before Cronje's surrender—and my lot struck a hot corner: infilading fire, and not a Boer to be seen. Two of our men got separated from the rest and wounded, so I went out with a stretcher-bearer to bring them in. It was a nasty business: about a mile of open veldt with nothing but an occasional ant-heap for cover. My stretcher-bearer got shot through the head on the way, went down without a sound, and I had to go on crawling for about half a mile on my hands and knees. When I came within sight of the *kopje* where my wounded men were sheltering I stopped one myself. It smashed up my right ankle: you can see that I've a limp to this day. And then the fun began. The party that I'd come from were driven back, and I was left alone with the two wounded I'd come to fetch: wounded, I say—but one of them was dead when I crawled up, and the other died about sunset. There I was, with my leg smashed to bits, and the two dead men, and my unit miles away. I thought I was done for, and that's the truth!

“ The first twelve hours of it wasn't so bad. It was quite cold at night, though I managed to cover myself with the other chaps' tunics. But when the next day came the sun was awful. Not a shrub to shelter you, and the rocks heating up like a grill ! And not a sound of firing anywhere to encourage me. By nightfall I was pretty well off my head. Water was what I wanted. The other poor devils had emptied their bottles, and mine was useless. The Boers had put a bullet through it. By evening I wished the bullet had gone through me instead of the bottle and put me out of my misery.

“ I say I was pretty near off my head. I remember watching the stars. They wouldn't keep still. They went buzzing about the sky like a lot of meteors. And the jackals came smelling round. I thought : ‘ Not just yet awhile, you brutes, but you won't have long to wait ! ’ After that I went clean off it and began to dream. About water. All the time I dreamed about water : tantalising, just like a mirage. Ever seen one ?

“ And then, just as I'd come to the absolute end of my tether, I seemed to see my wife, quite clear, you know, dressed in a nurse's uniform. I'd never seen her like that in the flesh, though I knew she was working in a hospital. She came right up to me and bent over and I said . . . Well, it doesn't matter what I said. Everybody has his own way of saying things like that. Then I said : ‘ If only I could get a drop of water : my mouth's ghastly ! ’ And now comes the funny part of it. She put a cup to my mouth and I drank. It was water . . . real, cool water ! It wasn't like the water I'd been dreaming about. It was wet, and it cooled my throat. By Jove, it was heaven ! She bent over and kissed me, and I went to sleep like a kid.

“ Next day I was taken prisoner ; but that didn't last long, for three days later Cronje surrendered and I was recaptured. Of course I was pretty thoroughly knocked out. That was the end of the war for me.

“ And the curious thing is that when we came to compare dates and talk it over, I found that Grace, who had been just on the edge of a breakdown, had been indulging in just the same sort of dream. She hadn't seen me, as I saw her, but she had heard me speak and ask for water. She was nursing a Boer prisoner at the time. The voice seemed to come from him, and she had given him a drink of water instead. After that she heard nothing. Of course, if you're inclined that way, you can imagine all kinds of psychic nonsense. I think she believes to this day that she gave my astral body a drink ! She's welcome to, as far as I'm concerned. I don't believe in that sort of thing. It annoys me ! ”

When we were alone I asked Mrs. Auckland a question.

“ I've been wondering,” I said, “ if you ever told your husband that you had kissed our friend Grobler.”

She blushed, then smiled at me.

“ Of course not,” she said. “ Dear thing ! Why should I ? ”