

PRESENTING MOONSHINE



BY JOHN COLLIER

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JOHN COLLIER was born in England about 40 years ago. He is known in this country primarily for his two novels, *His Monkey Wife* and *Defy the Foul Fiend*, and for his frequent contributions to the *New Yorker*, *Atlantic Monthly*, *Harper's*, and other leading magazines. In addition, however, he is a poet and an editor, and he served for several years as literary critic for the *London Telegraph*. He has also written one motion picture, "Elephant Boy," which was a notable success of a few years ago.

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PRESENTING MOONSHINE

Presenting MOONSHINE

*This man, with lanthorn, dog, and bush of thorn,
Presenteth Moonshine.*

—A MIDSUMMER-NIGHT'S DREAM

Stories by John Collier

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For Harold Matson

Evening Primrose

In a pad of Highlife Bond,
bought by Miss Sadie Brodribb
at Bracey's
for 25¢

February 21

TODAY I MADE MY DECISION. I WOULD turn my back for good and all upon the *bourgeois* world that hates a poet. I would leave, get out, break away—

And I have done it. I am free! Free as the mote that dances in the sunbeam! Free as a house-fly crossing first-class in the *Queen Mary*! Free as my verse! Free as the food I shall eat, the paper I write upon, the lamb's-wool-lined softly slithering slippers I shall wear.

This morning I had not so much as a car-fare. Now I am here, on velvet. You are itching to learn of this haven: you would like to organize trips here, spoil it, send your relations-in-law, perhaps even come yourself. After all, this journal will hardly fall into your hands till I am dead. I'll tell you.

I am at Bracey's Giant Emporium, as happy as a mouse in the middle of an immense cheese, and the world shall know me no more.

Merrily, merrily shall I live now, secure behind a towering pile of carpets, in a corner-nook which I propose

to line with eiderdowns, angora vestments, and the Cleopatraean tops in pillows. I shall be cosy.

I nipped into this sanctuary late this afternoon, and soon heard the dying footfalls of closing time. From now on, my only effort will be to dodge the night-watchman. Poets can dodge.

I have already made my first mouse-like exploration. I tiptoed as far as the stationery department, and, timid, darted back with only these writing materials, the poet's first need. Now I shall lay them aside, and seek other necessities: food, wine, the soft furniture of my couch, and a natty smoking-jacket. This place stimulates me. I shall write here.

Dawn, next day

I suppose no one in the world was ever more astonished and overwhelmed than I have been tonight. It is unbelievable. Yet I believe it. How interesting life is when things get like that!

I crept out, as I said I would, and found the great shop in mingled light and gloom. The central well was half illuminated; the circling galleries towered in a pansy Piranesi of toppling light and shade. The spidery stairways and flying bridges had passed from purpose into fantasy. Silks and velvets glimmered like ghosts, a hundred pantie-clad models offered simpers and embraces to the desert air. Rings, clips, and bracelets glittered frostily in a desolate absence of Honey and Daddy.

Creeping along the transverse aisles, which were in deeper darkness, I felt like a wandering thought in the

dreaming brain of a chorus girl down on her luck. Only, of course, their brains are not so big as Bracey's Giant Emporium. And there was no man there.

None, that is, except the night-watchman. I had forgotten him. A regular thudding, which might almost have been that of my own heart, suddenly burst upon me loudly, from outside, only a few feet away. Quick as a flash I seized a costly wrap, flung it about my shoulders, and stood stock-still.

I was successful. He passed me, jingling his little machine on its chain, humming his little tune, his eyes scaled with refractions of the blaring day. "Go, worldling!" I whispered, and permitted myself a soundless laugh.

It froze on my lips. My heart faltered. A new fear seized me.

I was afraid to move. I was afraid to look round. I felt I was being watched, by something that could see right through me. This was a very different feeling from the ordinary emergency caused by the very ordinary night-watchman. My conscious impulse was the obvious one, to glance behind me. But my eyes knew better. I remained absolutely petrified, staring straight ahead.

My eyes were trying to tell me something that my brain refused to believe. They made their point. I was looking straight into another pair of eyes, human eyes, but large, flat, luminous. I have seen such eyes among the nocturnal creatures, which creep out under the artificial blue moonlight in the zoo.

The owner was only a dozen feet away from me. The watchman had passed between us, nearer him than me.

Yet he had not been seen. I must have been looking straight at him for several minutes at a stretch. I had not seen him either.

He was half reclining against a high dais, a platform for the exhibition of shawls and mantillas. One of these brushed his shoulder: its folds concealed perhaps his ear, his shoulder, and a little of his right side. He was clad in dim but large-patterned Shetland tweeds of the latest cut, suède shoes, a shirt of a rather broad *motif* in olive, pink, and grey. He was as pale as a creature found under a stone. His long thin arms ended in hands that hung floatingly, more like trailing, transparent fins, or wisps of chiffon, than ordinary hands.

He spoke. His voice was not a voice, a mere whistling under the tongue. "Not bad, for a beginner!"

I grasped that he was complimenting me, rather satirically, on my concealment under the wrap. I stuttered. I said, "I'm sorry. I didn't know anyone else lived here." I noticed, even as I spoke, that I was imitating his own whistling sibilant utterance.

"Oh, yes," he said. "*We* live here. It's delightful."

"*We*?"

"Yes, all of us. Look."

We were near the edge of the first gallery. He swept his long hand round, indicating the whole well of the shop. I looked. I saw nothing. I could hear nothing, except the watchman's thudding step receding infinitely far along some basement aisle.

"Don't you see?"

You know the sensation one has, peering into the half-light of a vivarium? One sees bark, pebbles, a few leaves,

nothing more. And then, suddenly, a stone breathes—it is a toad; there is a chameleon, another, a coiled adder, a mantis among the leaves. The whole case seems crepitant with life. Perhaps the whole world is. One glances at one's sleeve, one's feet.

So it was with the shop. I looked, and it was empty. I looked, and there was an old lady, clambering out from behind the monstrous clock. There were three girls, elderly *ingénues*, incredibly emaciated, simpering at the entrance of the perfumery. Their hair was a fine floss, pale as gossamer. Equally brittle and colourless was a man with the appearance of a colonel of southern extraction, who stood regarding me while he caressed moustachios that would have done credit to a crystal shrimp. A chintzy woman, possibly of literary tastes, swam forward from the curtains and drapes.

They came thick about me, fluttering, whistling, like a waving of gauze in the wind. Their eyes were wide and flatly bright. I saw there was no colour to the iris.

"How raw he looks!"

"A detective! Send for the Dark Men!"

"I'm not a detective. I am a poet. I have renounced the world."

"He is a poet. He has come over to us. Mr. Roscoe found him."

"He admires us."

"He must meet Mrs. Vanderpant."

I was taken to meet Mrs. Vanderpant: she proved to be the Grand Old Lady of the store, almost entirely transparent.

"So you are a poet, Mr. Snell? You will find inspiration

here. I am quite the oldest inhabitant. Three mergers and a complete rebuilding, but they didn't get rid of me!"

"Tell how you went out by daylight, dear Mrs. Vanderpant, and nearly got bought for Whistler's *Mother*."

"That was in pre-war days. I was more robust then. But at the cash desk they suddenly remembered there was no frame. And when they came back to look at me——"

"—She was gone."

Their laughter was like the stridulation of the ghosts of grasshoppers.

"Where is Ella? Where is my broth?"

"She is bringing it, Mrs. Vanderpant. It will come."

"Terrible little creature! She is our foundling, Mr. Snell. She is not quite our sort."

"Is that so, Mrs. Vanderpant? Dear, dear!"

"I lived alone here, Mr. Snell, ever since the terrible times in the eighties. I was a young girl then, a beauty, they said, and poor Papa lost his money. Bracey's meant a lot to a young girl, in the New York of those days, Mr. Snell. It seemed to me terrible that I should not be able to come here in the ordinary way. So I came here for good. I was quite alarmed when others began to come in, after the crash of 1907. But it was the dear Judge, the Colonel, Mrs. Bilbee——"

I bowed. I was being introduced.

"Mrs. Bilbee writes plays. *And* of a very old Philadelphia family. You will find us quite *nice* here, Mr. Snell."

"I feel it a great privilege, Mrs. Vanderpant."

"And of course, all our dear *young* people came in '29. *Their* poor papas jumped from skyscrapers."

I did a great deal of bowing and whistling. The introductions took a long time. Who would have thought so many people lived in Bracey's?

"And here at last is Ella with my broth."

It was then I noticed that the young people were not so young after all, in spite of their smiles, their little ways, their *ingénue* dress. Ella was in her teens. Clad only in something from the shop-soiled counter, she nevertheless had the appearance of a living flower in a French cemetery, or a mermaid among polyyps.

"Come, you stupid thing!"

"Mrs. Vanderpant is waiting."

Her pallor was not like theirs, not like the pallor of something that glistens or scuttles when you turn over a stone. Hers was that of a pearl.

Ella! Pearl of this remotest, most fantastic cave! Little mermaid, brushed over, pressed down by objects of a deadlier white—tentacles—! I can write no more.

February 28

Well, I am rapidly becoming used to my new and half-lit world, to my strange company. I am learning the intricate laws of silence and camouflage which dominate the apparently casual strollings and gatherings of the midnight clan. How they detest the night-watchman, whose existence imposes these laws on their idle festivals!

"Odious, vulgar creature! He reeks of the coarse sun!"

Actually, he is quite a personable young man, very young for a night-watchman. But they would like to tear him to pieces.

They are very pleasant to me, though. They are pleased that a poet should have come among them. Yet I cannot like them entirely. My blood is a little chilled by the uncanny ease with which even the old ladies can clamber spider-like from balcony to balcony. Or is it because they are unkind to Ella?

Yesterday we had a bridge party. Tonight Mrs. Bilbee's little play, *Love in Shadowland*, is going to be presented. Would you believe it?—another colony, from Wanamaker's, is coming over *en masse* to attend. Apparently people live in all stores. This visit is considered a great honour: there is an intense snobbery in these creatures. They speak with horror of a social outcast who left a high-class Madison Avenue establishment, and now leads a wallowing, beachcomberish life in a delicatessen. And they relate with tragic emotion the story of the man in Altman's, who conceived such a passion for a model plaid dressing jacket that he emerged and wrested it from the hands of a purchaser. It seems that all the Altman colony, dreading an investigation, were forced to remove beyond the social pale, into a five-and-dime. Well, I must get ready to attend the play.

March 1

I have found an opportunity to speak to Ella. I dared not before: here one has a sense always of pale eyes secretly watching. But last night, at the play, I developed

a fit of hiccups. I was somewhat sternly told to go and secrete myself in the basement, among the garbage cans, where the watchman never comes.

There, in the rat-haunted darkness, I heard a stifled sob. "What's that? Is it you? Is it Ella? What ails you, child? Why do you cry?"

"They wouldn't even let me see the play."

"Is that all? Let me console you."

"I am so unhappy."

She told me her tragic little story. What do you think? When she was a child, a little tiny child of only six, she strayed away and fell asleep behind a counter, while her mother tried on a new hat. When she woke, the store was in darkness.

"And I cried, and they all came round, and took hold of me. 'She will tell, if we let her go,' they said. Some said, 'Call in the Dark Men.' 'Let her stay here,' said Mrs. Vanderpant. 'She will make me a nice little maid.'"

"Who are these Dark Men, Ella? They spoke of them when I came here."

"Don't you know? Oh, it's horrible! It's horrible!"

"Tell me, Ella. Let us share it."

She trembled. "You know the morticians, 'Journey's End,' who go to houses when people die?"

"Yes, Ella."

"Well, in that shop, just like here, and at Gimbel's, and at Bloomingdale's, there are people living, people like these."

"How disgusting! But what can they live upon, Ella, in a funeral home?"

"Don't ask me! Dead people are sent there, to be em-

balmed. Oh, they are terrible creatures! Even the people here are terrified of them. But if anyone dies, or if some poor burglar breaks in, and sees these people, and might tell——”

“Yes? Go on.”

“Then they send for the others, the Dark Men.”

“Good heavens!”

“Yes, and they put the body in the surgical department—or the burglar, all tied up, if it’s a burglar—and they send for these others, and then they all hide, and in they come, these others— Oh! they’re like pieces of blackness. I saw them once. It was terrible.”

“And then?”

“They go in, to where the dead person is, or the poor burglar. And they have wax there—and all sorts of things. And when they’re gone there’s just one of these wax models left, on the table. And then our people put a frock on it, or a bathing suit, and they mix it up with all the others, and nobody ever knows.”

“But aren’t they heavier than the others, these wax models? You would think they’d be heavier.”

“No. They’re not heavier. I think there’s a lot of them—gone.”

“Oh dear! So they were going to do that to you, when you were a little child?”

“Yes, only Mrs. Vanderpant said I was to be her maid.”

“I don’t like these people, Ella.”

“Nor do I. I wish I could see a bird.”

“Why don’t you go into the pet-shop?”

“It wouldn’t be the same. I want to see it on a twig, with leaves.”

"Ella, let us meet often. Let us creep away down here and meet. I will tell you about birds, and twigs and leaves."

March 10

"Ella, I love you."

I said it to her just like that. We have met many times. I have dreamt of her by day. I have not even kept up my journal. Verse has been out of the question.

"Ella, I love you. Let us move into the trousseau department. Don't look so dismayed, darling. If you like, we will go right away from here. We will live in the refreshment rooms in Central Park. There are thousands of birds there."

"Don't, Charles, don't."

"But I love you with all my heart."

"You mustn't."

"But I find I must. I can't help it. Ella, you don't love another?"

She wept a little. "Oh, Charles, I do."

"Love another, Ella? One of these? I thought you dreaded them all. It must be Roscoe. He is the only one that's any way human. We talk of art, life, and such things. And he has stolen your heart!"

"No, Charles, no. He's just like the rest, really. I hate them all. They make me shudder."

"Who is it, then?"

"It's him."

"Who?"

"The night-watchman."

"Impossible!"

"No. He smells of the sun."

"Oh, Ella, you have broken my heart."

"Be my friend, though."

"I will. I'll be your brother. How did you fall in love with him?"

"Oh, Charles, it was so wonderful. I was thinking of birds, and I was careless. Don't tell on me, Charles, they'll punish me."

"No. No. Go on."

"I was careless, and there he was, coming round the corner. And there was no place for me, I had this blue frock on. There were only some wax models in their underthings."

"Please go on."

"I couldn't help it, Charles. I slipped off my dress, and stood still."

"I see."

"And he stopped just by me, Charles. And he looked at me. And he touched my cheek."

"Did he notice nothing?"

"No. It was cold. But Charles, he said—he said—'Say, honey, I wish they made 'em like you on Eighth Avenue.' Charles, wasn't that a lovely thing to say?"

"Personally, I should have said Park Avenue."

"Oh, Charles, don't get like these people here. Sometimes I think you're getting like them. It doesn't matter what street, Charles; it was a lovely thing to say."

"Yes, but my heart's broken. And what can you do about him? Ella, he belongs to another world."

"Yes, Charles, Eighth Avenue. I want to go there. Charles, are you truly my friend?"

"I'm your brother, only my heart's broken."

"I'll tell you. I will. I'm going to stand there again. So he'll see me."

"And then?"

"Perhaps he'll speak to me again."

"My dearest Ella, you are torturing yourself. You are making it worse."

"No, Charles. Because I shall answer him. He will take me away."

"Ella, I can't bear it."

"Ssh! There is someone coming. I shall see birds, flowers growing. They're coming. You must go."

March 13

The last three days have been torture. This evening I broke. Roscoe (he was my first acquaintance) came in. There has always been a sort of hesitant sympathy between us.

He said, "You're looking seedy, old fellow. Why don't you go over to Wanamaker's for some skiing?"

His kindness compelled a frank response. "It's deeper than that, Roscoe. I'm done for. I can't eat, I can't sleep. I can't write, man, I can't even write."

"What is it? Day starvation?"

"Roscoe—it's love."

"Not one of the staff, Charles, or the customers? That's absolutely forbidden."

"No, it's not that, Roscoe. But just as hopeless."

"My dear old fellow, I can't bear to see you like this. Let me help you. Let me share your trouble."

Then it all came out. It burst out. I trusted him. I think I trusted him. I really think I had no intention of betraying Ella, of spoiling her escape, of keeping her here till her heart turned towards me. If I had, it was subconscious. I swear it.

But I told him all. All. He was sympathetic, but I detected a sly reserve in his sympathy. "You will respect my confidence, Roscoe? This is to be a secret between us."

"As secret as the grave, old chap."

And he must have gone straight to Mrs. Vanderpant. This evening the atmosphere has changed. People flicker to and fro, smiling nervously, horribly, with a sort of frightened sadistic exaltation. When I speak to them they answer evasively, fidget, and disappear. An informal dance has been called off. I cannot find Ella. I will creep out. I will look for her again.

Later

Heaven! It has happened. I went in desperation to the manager's office, whose glass front overlooks the whole shop. I watched till midnight. Then I saw a little group of them, like ants bearing a victim. They were carrying Ella. They took her to the surgical department. They took other things.

And, coming back here, I was passed by a flittering, whispering horde of them, glancing over their shoulders

in a thrilled ecstasy of panic, making for their hiding places. I, too, hid myself. How can I describe the dark inhuman creatures that passed me, silent as shadows? They went there—where Ella is.

What can I do? There is only one thing. I will find the watchman. I will tell him. He and I will save her. And if we are overpowered— Well, I will leave this on a counter. Tomorrow, if we live, I can recover it.

If not, look in the windows. Look for three new figures: two men, one rather sensitive-looking, and a girl. She has blue eyes, like periwinkle flowers, and her upper lip is lifted a little.

Look for us.

Smoke them out! Obliterate them! Avenge us!

Witch's Money

FOIRAL HAD TAKEN A LOAD OF CORK up to the high road, where he met the motor truck from Perpignan. He was on his way back to the village, walking harmlessly beside his mule, and thinking of nothing at all, when he was passed by a striding madman, half naked, and of a type never seen before in this district of the Pyrénées-Orientales.

He was not of the idiot sort, with the big head, like two or three of them down in the village. Nor was he a lean, raving creature, like Barilles's old father after the house burned down. Nor had he a little, tiny, shrunken-up, chattering head, like the younger Lloubes. He was a new sort altogether.

Foiral decided he was a kind of *bursting* madman, all blare and racket, as bad as the sun. His red flesh burst out of his little bits of coloured clothes: red arms, red knees, red neck, and a great round red face bursting with smiles, words, laughter.

Foiral overtook him at the top of the ridge. He was staring down into the valley like a man thunderstruck.

"My God!" he said to Foiral. "Just look at it." Foiral looked at it. There was nothing wrong.

"Here have I," said the mad Jack, "been walking up and down these goddam Pyrénées for weeks—meadows,

birch trees, pine trees, waterfalls—green as a dish of *haricots verts*! And here's what I've been looking for all the time. Why did no one tell me?"

There's a damned question to answer! However, madmen answer themselves. Foiral thumped his mule and started off down the track, but the mad fellow fell in step beside him.

"What is it, for God's sake?" said he. "A bit of Spain strayed over the frontier, or what? Might be a crater in the moon. No water, I suppose? God, look at that ring of red hills! Look at that pink and yellow land! Are those villages down there? They look like ribs in a desert.

"I like it," he said. "I like the way the fig trees burst out of the rock. I like the way the seeds are bursting out of the figs. Ever heard of surrealism? This is surrealism come to life. What are those? Cork forests? They look like petrified ogres. Excellent ogres, who bleed when these impudent mortals flay you, upon canvas I shall restore to you an important part of your life!"

Foiral, by no means devout, took the sensible precaution of crossing himself. The fellow went on and on, all the way down, two or three kilometres, Foiral answering with a "yes," a "no," and a grunt. "This is my country!" cried the lunatic. "It's *made* for me. Glad I didn't go to Morocco! Is this your village? Wonderful! Look at those houses—three, four stories. Why do they look as if they'd been piled up by cave-dwellers, cave-dwellers who couldn't find a cliff? Or are they caves from which the cliff has crumbled away, leaving them uneasy in the sunlight, huddling together? Why don't you have any windows? I like that yellow belfry. Sort of Spanish. I like

the way the bell hangs in that iron cage. Black as your hat. Dead. Maybe that's why it's so quiet here. Dead noise, gibbeted against the blue! Ha! Ha! That doesn't appeal to you? Well, I always say what comes into my head. That's surrealism. You don't miss anything that way. I like the black clothes all you people wear. Spanish touch again, I suppose? It makes you look like holes in the light."

"Good-bye," said Foiral.

"Wait a minute," said the stranger. "Where can I put up in this village? Is there an inn?"

"No," said Foiral, turning into his yard.

"Hell!" said the stranger. "I suppose somebody has a room I can sleep in?"

"No," said Foiral.

That set the fellow back a bit. "Well," said he at last, "I'll have a look round, anyway."

So he went on up the street. Foiral saw him talking to Madame Arago, and she was shaking her head. Then he saw him trying it on at the baker's, and the baker shook his head as well. However, he bought a loaf there, and some cheese and wine from Barilles. He sat down on the bench outside and ate it; then he went pottering off up the slope.

Foiral thought he'd keep an eye on him, so he followed to the top of the village, where he could see all over the hillside. The fellow was just mooning about, he picked up nothing, he did nothing. Then he began to drift over to the little farm-house, where the well is, a few hundred yards above the rest of the houses.

This happened to be Foiral's property, through his

wife: a good place, if they'd had a son to live in it. Seeing the stranger edging that way, Foiral followed on. Sure enough, when he got there, there was the fellow peering through chinks in shutters, even trying the door. He might have been up to anything.

He looked round as Foiral came up. "Nobody lives here?" he said.

"No," said Foiral.

"Who does it belong to?" said the stranger.

Foiral hardly knew what to say. In the end he had to admit it was his.

"Will you rent it to me?" said the stranger.

"What's that?" said Foiral.

"I want the house for six months," said the stranger.

"What for?" said Foiral.

"Damn it!" said the stranger. "To live in."

"Why?" said Foiral.

The stranger holds up his hand. He picks hold of the thumb. He says, very slowly, "I am an artist, a painter."

"Yes," says Foiral.

Then the stranger lays hold of his forefinger. "I can work here. I like it. I like the view. I like those two ilex trees."

"Very good," says Foiral.

Then the stranger takes hold of his middle finger. "I want to stay here six months."

"Yes," says Foiral.

Then the stranger takes hold of his third finger. "In this house. Which, I may say, on this yellow ground, looks interestingly like a die on a desert. Or does it look like a skull?"

"Ah!" says Foiral.

Then the stranger takes hold of his little finger, and he says, "How much—do you want—to let me—live and work—in this house—for six months?"

"Why?" says Foiral.

At this the stranger began to stamp up and down. They had quite an argument. Foiral clinched the matter by saying that people didn't rent houses in that part of the world: everyone had his own.

"It is necessary," said the stranger, grinding his teeth, "for me to paint pictures here."

"So much the worse," said Foiral.

The stranger uttered a number of cries in some foreign gibberish, possibly that of hell itself. "I see your soul," said he, "as a small and exceedingly sterile black marble, on a waste of burning white alkali."

Foiral, holding his two middle fingers under his thumb, extended the first and fourth in the direction of the stranger, careless of whether he gave offence.

"What will you take for the shack?" said the stranger. "Maybe I'll buy it."

It was quite a relief to Foiral to find that after all he was just a plain, simple, ordinary lunatic. Without a proper pair of pants to his backside, he was offering to buy this excellent sound house, for which Foiral would have asked twenty thousand francs, had there been anyone of whom to ask it.

"Come on," said the stranger. "How much?"

Foiral, thinking he had wasted enough time, and not objecting to an agreeable sensation, said, "Forty thousand."

Said the stranger, "I'll give you thirty-five."

Foiral laughed heartily.

"That's a good laugh," said the stranger. "I should like to paint a laugh like that. I should express it by a *mélange* of the roots of recently extracted teeth. Well, what about it? Thirty-five? I can pay you a deposit right now." And, pulling out a wallet, this Crœsus among madmen rustled one, two, three, four, five thousand-franc notes under Foiral's nose.

"It'll leave me dead broke," he said. "Still, I expect I can sell it again?"

"If God wills," said Foiral.

"Anyway, I could come here now and then," said the other. "My God! I can paint a showful of pictures here in six months. New York'll go crazy. Then I'll come back here and paint another show."

Foiral, ravished with joy, ceased attempting to understand. He began to praise his house furiously: he dragged the man inside, showed him the oven, banged the walls, made him look up the chimney, into the shed, down the well— "All right. All right," said the stranger. "That's grand. Everything's grand. Whitewash the walls. Find me some woman to come and clean and cook. I'll go back to Perpignan and turn up in a week with my things. Listen, I want that table chucked in, two or three of the chairs, and the bedstead. I'll get the rest. Here's your deposit."

"No, no," said Foiral. "Everything must be done properly, before witnesses. Then, when the lawyer comes, he can make out the papers. Come back with me. I'll call Arago, he's a very honest man. Guis, very honest. Vigné,

honest as the good earth. And a bottle of old wine. I have it. It shall cost nothing."

"Finel" said the blessed madman, sent by God.

Back they went. In came Arago, Guis, Vigné, all as honest as the day. The deposit was paid, the wine was opened, the stranger called for more, others crowded in; those who were not allowed in stood outside to listen to the laughter. You'd have thought there was a wedding going on, or some wickedness in the house. In fact, Foiral's old woman went and stood in the doorway every now and then, just to let people see her.

There was no doubt about it, there was something very magnificent about this madman. Next day, after he had gone, they talked him over thoroughly. "To listen," said little Guis, "is to be drunk without spending a penny. You think you understand, you seem to fly through the air, you have to burst out laughing."

"I somehow had the delicious impression that I was rich," said Arago. "Not, I mean, with something in the chimney, but as if I—well, as if I were to spend it. And more."

"I like him," said little Guis. "He is my friend."

"Now you speak like a fool," said Foiral. "He is mad. And it is I who deal with him."

"I thought maybe he was not so mad when he said the house was like an old skull looking out of the ground," said Guis, looking sideways, as well he might.

"Nor a liar, perhaps?" said Foiral. "Let me tell you, he said also it was like a die on a desert. Can it be both?"

"He said in one breath," said Arago, "that he came from Paris. In the next, that he was an American."

"Oh, yes. Unquestionably a great liar," said Quès. "Perhaps one of the biggest rogues in the whole world, going up and down. But, fortunately, mad as well."

"So he buys a house," said Lafago. "If he had his wits about him, a liar of that size, he'd take it—like that. As it is, he buys it. Thirty-five thousand francs!"

"Madness turns a great man inside out, like a sack," said Arago. "And if he is rich as well——"

"—Money flies in all directions," said Guis.

Nothing could be more satisfactory. They waited impatiently for the stranger's return. Foiral whitewashed the house, cleaned the chimneys, put everything to rights. You may be sure he had a good search for anything that his wife's old man might have left hidden there years ago, and which this fellow might have heard of. They say they're up to anything in Paris.

The stranger came back, and they were all day with the mules getting his stuff from where the motor truck had left it. By the evening they were in the house, witnesses, helpers, and all—there was just the little matter of paying up the money.

Foiral indicated this with the greatest delicacy in the world. The stranger, all smiles and readiness, went into the room where his bags were piled up, and soon emerged with a sort of book in his hand, full of little *billets*, like those they try to sell for the lottery in Perpignan. He tore off the top one. "Here you are," he said to Foiral, holding it out. "Thirty thousand francs."

"No," said Foiral.

"What the hell now?" asked the stranger.

"I've seen that sort of thing," said Foiral. "And not for thirty thousand francs, my friend, but for three million. And afterwards—they tell you it hasn't won. I should prefer the money."

"This is the money," said the stranger. "It's as good as money anyway. Present this, and you'll get thirty thousand-franc notes, just like those I gave you."

Foiral was rather at a loss. It's quite usual in these parts to settle a sale at the end of a month. Certainly he wanted to run no risk of crabbing the deal. So he pocketed the piece of paper, gave the fellow good day, and went off with the rest of them to the village.

The stranger settled in. Soon he got to know everybody. Foiral, a little uneasy, cross-examined him whenever they talked. It appeared, after all, that he *did* come from Paris, having lived there, and he *was* an American, having been born there. "Then you have no relations in this part of the world?" said Foiral.

"No relations at all."

Well! Well! Well! Foiral hoped the money was all right. Yet there was more in it than that. No relations! It was quite a thought. Foiral put it away at the back of his mind: he meant to extract the juice from it some night when he couldn't sleep.

At the end of the month, he took out his piece of paper, and marched up to the house again. There was the fellow, three parts naked, sitting under one of the ilex trees, painting away on a bit of canvas. And what do you think he had chosen to paint? Roustand's mangy olives, that haven't borne a crop in living memory!

"What is it?" said the mad fellow. "I'm busy."

"This," said Foiral, holding out the bit of paper. "I need the money."

"Then why, in the name of the devil," said the other, "don't you go and get the money, instead of coming here bothering me?"

Foiral had never seen him in this sort of mood before. But a lot of these laughers stop laughing when it comes to hard cash. "Look here," said Foiral. "This is a very serious matter."

"Look here," said the stranger. "That's what's called a cheque. I give it to you. You take it to a bank. The bank gives you the money."

"Which bank?" said Foiral.

"Your bank. Any bank. The bank in Perpignan," said the stranger. "You go there. They'll do it for you."

Foiral, still hankering after the cash, pointed out that he was a very poor man, and it took a whole day to get to Perpignan, a considerable thing to such an extremely poor man as he was.

"Listen," said the stranger. "You know goddam well you've made a good thing out of this sale. Let me get on with my work. Take the cheque to Perpignan. It's worth the trouble. I've paid you plenty."

Foiral knew then that Guis had been talking about the price of the house. "All right, my little Guis, I'll think that over some long evening when the rains begin." However, there was nothing for it, he had to put on his best black, take the mule to Estagel, and there get the bus, and the bus took him to Perpignan.

In Perpignan they are like so many monkeys. They

push you, look you up and down, snigger in your face. If a man has business—with a bank, let us say—and he stands on the pavement opposite to have a good look at it, he gets elbowed into the roadway half a dozen times in five minutes, and he's lucky if he escapes with his life.

Nevertheless, Foiral got into the bank at last. As a spectacle it was tremendous. Brass rails, polished wood, a clock big enough for a church, little cotton-backs sitting among heaps of money like mice in a cheese.

He stood at the back for about half an hour, waiting, and nobody took any notice of him at all. In the end one of the little cotton-backs beckoned him up to the brass railing. Foiral delved in his pocket, and produced the cheque. The cotton-back looked at it as if it were nothing at all. "Holy Virgin!" thought Foiral.

"I want the money for it," said he.

"Are you a client of the bank?"

"No."

"Do you wish to be?"

"Shall I get the money?"

"But naturally. Sign this. Sign this. Sign on the back of the cheque. Take this. Sign this. Thank you. Good day."

"But the thirty thousand francs?" cried Foiral.

"For that, my dear sir, we must wait till the cheque is cleared. Come back in about a week."

Foiral, half dazed, went home. It was a bad week. By day he felt reasonably sure of the cash, but at night, as soon as he closed his eyes, he could see himself going into that bank, and all the cotton-backs swearing they'd never seen him before. Still, he got through it, and as

soon as the time was up, he presented himself at the bank again.

"Do you want a cheque-book?"

"No. Just the money. The money."

"All of it? You want to close the account? Well! Well! Sign here. Sign here."

Foiral signed.

"There you are. Twenty-nine thousand eight hundred and ninety."

"But, sir, it was thirty thousand."

"But, my dear sir, the charges."

Foiral found it was no good arguing. He went off with his money. That was good. But the other hundred and ten! That sticks in a man's throat.

As soon as he got home, Foiral interviewed the stranger. "I am a poor man," said he.

"So am I," said the stranger. "A damned sight too poor to pay you extra because you can't get a cheque cashed in a civilized way."

This was a peculiarly villainous lie. Foiral had, with his own eyes, seen a whole block of these extraordinary thirty-thousand-franc *billets* in the little book from which the stranger had torn this one. Still, once more there was nothing to be done about it; a plain honest man is always being baffled and defeated. Foiral went home, and put his crippled twenty-nine thousand-odd into the little box behind the stone in the chimney. How different, if it had been a round thirty thousand! What barbarous injustice!

Here was something to think about in the evenings. Foiral thought about it a lot. In the end he decided it was

impossible to act alone, and called in Arago, Quès, Lafago, Vigné, Barilles. Not Guis. It was Guis who had told the fellow he had paid too much for the house, and put his back up. Let Guis stay out of it.

To the rest he explained everything very forcefully. "Not a relation in the whole countryside. And in that book, my dear friends—you have seen it yourselves—ten, twelve, fifteen, maybe twenty of these extraordinary little *billets*."

"And if somebody comes after him? Somebody from America?"

"He has gone off, walking, mad, just as he came here. Anything can happen to a madman, walking about, scattering money."

"It's true. Anything can happen."

"It must be done before the lawyer comes."

"Yes. So far even the curé hasn't seen him."

"There must be justice, my good friends, man cannot exist without it. A man, an honest man, is not to be robbed of a hundred and ten francs."

"No, that is intolerable."

The next night, these very honest men left their houses, those houses whose tall uprights of white plaster and black shadow appear, in moonlight as well as in sunlight, like a heap of bleached ribs lying in the desert. Without much conversation they made their way up the hill and knocked upon the stranger's door.

After a brief interval they returned, still without much conversation, and slipped one by one into their extremely dark doorways, and that was all.

For a whole week there was no perceptible change in

the village. If anything, its darks and silences, those holes in the fierce light, were deeper. In each black interior sat a man who had two of these excellent *billets*, which commanded thirty thousand francs. Such a possession brightens the eyes, and enhances the savour of solitude, enabling a man, as the artist would have said, to partake of the nature of Fabre's tarantula, motionless at the angle of her tunnel. But they found it no longer easy to remember the artist. His jabbering, his laughter, even his final yelp, left no echo at all. It was all gone, like the rattle and flash of yesterday's thunderstorm.

So apart from the tasks of the morning and the evening, camouflaged to invisibility by habit, they sat in their houses, alone. Their wives scarcely dared to speak to them, and they were too rich to speak to one another. Guis found it out, for it was no secret except to the world outside, and Guis was furious. But his wife rated him from morning till night, and left him no energy for reproaching his neighbours.

At the end of the week, Barilles sprang into existence in the doorway of his house. His thumbs were stuck in his belt, his face was flushed from lead colour to plum colour, his bearing expressed an irritable resolution.

He crossed to Arago's, knocked, leaned against the door-post. Arago, emerging, leaned against the other. They talked for some little time of nothing at all. Then Barilles, throwing away the stump of his cigarette, made an oblique and sympathetic reference to a certain small enclosure belonging to Arago, on which there was a shed, a few vines, a considerable grove of olives. "It is the very devil," said Barilles, "how the worm gets into

the olive in these days. Such a grove as that, at one time, might have been worth something."

"It is worse than the devil," said Arago. "Believe me or not, my dear friend, in some years I get no more than three thousand francs from that grove."

Barilles burst into what passes for laughter in this part of the world. "Forgive me!" he said. "I thought you said three thousand. Three hundred—yes. I suppose in a good year you might make that very easily."

This conversation continued through phases of civility, sarcasm, rage, fury, desperation, until it ended with a cordial handshake, and a sale of the enclosure to Barilles for twenty-five thousand francs. The witnesses were called in; Barilles handed over one of his *billets*, and received five thousand in cash from the box Arago kept in his chimney. Everyone was delighted by the sale: it was felt that things were beginning to move in the village.

They were. Before the company separated *pourparlers* were already started for the sale of Vigné's mules to Quès for eight thousand, the transfer of Lloubes's cork concession to Foiral for fifteen thousand, the marriage of Roustand's daughter to Vigné's brother with a dowry of twenty thousand, and the sale of a miscellaneous collection of brass objects belonging to Madame Arago for sixty-five francs, after some very keen bargaining.

Only Guis was left out in the cold, but on the way home, Lloubes, with his skin full of wine, ventured to step inside the outcast's doorway, and looked his wife Filomena up and down, from top to toe, three times. A mild interest, imperfectly concealed, softened the bitter and sullen expression upon the face of Guis.

This was a mere beginning. Soon properties began to change hands at a bewildering rate and at increasing prices. It was a positive boom. Change was constantly being dug out from under flagstones, from the strawy interiors of mattresses, from hollows in beams, and from holes in walls. With the release of these frozen credits the village blossomed like an orchid sprung from a dry stick. Wine flowed with every bargain. Old enemies shook hands. Elderly spinsters embraced young suitors. Wealthy widowers married young brides. Several of the weaker sort wore their best black every day. One of these was Lloubes, who spent his evenings in the house of Guis. Guis in the evenings would wander round the village, no longer sullen, and was seen cheapening a set of harness at Lafago's, a first-rate gun at Roustand's. There was talk of something very special by way of a fiesta after the grape harvest, but this was only whispered, lest the curé should hear of it on one of his visits.

Foiral, keeping up his reputation as leader, made a staggering proposal. It was nothing less than to improve the mule track all the way from the metalled road on the rim of the hills, so that motor trucks could visit the village. It was objected that the wage bill would be enormous. "Yes," said Foiral, "but we shall draw the wages ourselves. We shall get half as much again for our produce."

The proposal was adopted. The mere boys of the village now shared the prosperity. Barilles now called his little shop "Grand Café Glacier de l'Univers et des Pyrénées." The widow Loyau offered room, board, and

clothing to certain unattached young women, and gave select parties in the evenings.

Barilles went to Perpignan and returned with a sprayer that would double the yield of his new olive grove. Llobes went and returned with a positive bale of ladies' underclothing, designed, you would say, by the very devil himself. Two or three keen card players went and returned with new packs of cards, so lustrous that your hand seemed to be all aces and kings. Vigné went, and returned with a long face.

The bargaining, increasing all the time, called for more and more ready money. Foiral made a new proposal. "We will all go to Perpignan, the whole damned lot of us, march to the bank, thump down our *billets*, and show the little cotton-backs whom the money belongs to. Boys, we'll leave them without a franc."

"They will have the hundred and ten," said Quès.

"To hell with the hundred and ten!" said Foiral. "And, boys, after that—well—ha! ha!—all men sin once. They say the smell alone of one of those creatures is worth fifty francs. Intoxicating! Stair carpets, red hair, every sort of wickedness! Tomorrow!"

"Tomorrow!" they all cried, and on the morrow they went off, in their stiffest clothes, their faces shining. Every man was smoking like a chimney, and every man had washed his feet.

The journey was tremendous. They stopped the bus at every café on the road, and saw nothing they didn't ask the price of. In Perpignan they kept together in a close phalanx; if the townspeople stared, our friends

stared back twice as hard. As they crossed over to the bank, "Where is Guis?" said Foiral, affecting to look for him among their number. "Has he nothing due to him?" That set them all laughing. Try as they might, they couldn't hold their faces straight. They were still choking with laughter when the swing doors closed behind them.

Green Thoughts

*"Annihilating all that's made
To a green thought in a green shade."*

MARVELL.

THE ORCHID HAD BEEN SENT AMONG the effects of his friend, who had come by a lonely and mysterious death on the expedition. Or he had bought it among a miscellaneous lot, "unclassified," at the close of the auction. I forget which, but one or the other it certainly was; moreover, even in its dry, brown, dormant root state, this orchid had a certain sinister quality. It looked, with its bunched and ragged projections, like a rigid yet a gripping hand, hideously gnarled, or a grotesquely whiskered, threatening face. Would you not have known what sort of an orchid it was?

Mr. Mannering did not know. He read nothing but catalogues and books on fertilizers. He unpacked the new acquisition with a solicitude absurd enough in any case towards any orchid, or primrose either, in the twentieth century, but idiotic, foolhardy, doom-eager, when extended to an orchid thus come by, in appearance thus. And in his traditional obtuseness he at once planted it in what he called the "Observation Ward," a hothouse built against the south wall of his dumpy red dwelling. Here he set always the most interesting additions to his collection, and especially weak and sickly plants, for there was a glass door in his study wall through which

he could see into this hothouse, so that the weak and sickly plants could encounter no crisis without his immediate knowledge and his tender care.

This plant, however, proved hardy enough. At the ends of thick and stringy stalks it opened out bunches of darkly shining leaves, and soon it spread in every direction, usurping so much space that first one, then another, then all its neighbours had to be removed to a hothouse at the end of the garden. It was, Cousin Jane said, a regular hop-vine. At the ends of the stalks, just before the leaves began, were set groups of tendrils, which hung idly, serving no apparent purpose. Mr. Mannering thought that very probably these were vestigial organs, a heritage from some period when the plant had been a climber. But when were the vestigial tendrils of an ex-climber half or quarter so thick and strong?

After a long time sets of tiny buds appeared here and there among the extravagant foliage. Soon they opened into small flowers, miserable little things: they looked like flies' heads. One naturally expects a large, garish, sinister bloom, like a sea anemone, or a Chinese lantern, or a hippopotamus yawning, on any important orchid; and should it be an unclassified one as well, I think one has every right to insist on a sickly and overpowering scent into the bargain.

Mr. Mannering did not mind at all. Indeed, apart from his joy and happiness in being the discoverer and godfather of a new sort of orchid, he felt only a mild and scientific interest in the fact that the paltry blossoms were so very much like flies' heads. Could it be to attract

other flies for food or as fertilizers? But then, why like their heads?

It was a few days later that Cousin Jane's cat disappeared. This was a great blow to Cousin Jane, but Mr. Mannering was not, in his heart of hearts, greatly sorry. He was not fond of the cat, for he could not open the smallest chink in a glass roof for ventilation but the creature would squeeze through somehow to enjoy the warmth, and in this way it had broken many a tender shoot. But before poor Cousin Jane had lamented two days something happened which so engrossed Mr. Mannering that he had no mind left at all with which to sympathize with her affliction, or to make at breakfast kind and hypocritical inquiries after the lost cat. A strange new bud appeared on the orchid. It was clearly evident that there would be two quite different sorts of bloom on this one plant, as sometimes happens in such fantastic corners of the vegetable world, and that the new flower would be very different in size and structure from the earlier ones. It grew bigger and bigger, till it was as big as one's fist.

And just then—it could never have been more inopportune—an affair of the most unpleasant, the most distressing nature summoned Mr. Mannering to town. It was his wretched nephew, in trouble again, and this time so deeply and so very disgracefully that it took all Mr. Mannering's generosity, and all his influence too, to extricate the worthless young man. Indeed, as soon as he saw the state of affairs, he told the prodigal that this was the very last time he might expect assistance, that his

vices and his ingratitude had long cancelled all affection between them, and that for this last helping hand he was indebted only to his mother's memory, and to no faith on the part of his uncle either in his repentance or his reformation. He wrote, moreover, to Cousin Jane, to relieve his feelings, telling her of the whole business, and adding that the only thing left to do was to cut the young man off entirely.

When he got back to Torquay, Cousin Jane had disappeared. The situation was extremely annoying. Their only servant was a cook who was very old and very stupid and very deaf. She suffered besides from an obsession, owing to the fact that for many years Mr. Mannering had had no conversation with her in which he had not included an impressive reminder that she must always, no matter what might happen, keep the big kitchen stove up to a certain pitch of activity. For this stove, besides supplying the house with hot water, heated the pipes in the "Observation Ward," to which the daily gardener who had charge of the other hothouses had no access. By this time she had come to regard her duties as stoker as her chief *raison d'être*, and it was difficult to penetrate her deafness with any question which her stupidity and her obsession did not somehow transmute into an inquiry after the stove, and this, of course, was especially the case when Mr. Mannering spoke to her. All he could disentangle was what she had volunteered on first seeing him, that his cousin had not been seen for three days, that she had left without saying a word. Mr. Mannering was perplexed and annoyed, but, being a man of method, he thought it best to postpone further inquiries until he

had refreshed himself a little after his long and tiring journey. A full supply of energy was necessary to extract any information from the old cook; besides, there was probably a note somewhere. It was only natural that before he went to his room Mr. Mannering should peep into the hothouse, just to make sure that the wonderful orchid had come to no harm during the inconsiderate absence of Cousin Jane. As soon as he opened the door his eyes fell upon the bud; it had now changed in shape very considerably, and had increased in size to the bigness of a human head. It is no exaggeration to state that Mr. Mannering remained rooted to the spot, with his eyes fixed upon this wonderful bud, for fully five minutes.

But, you will ask, why did he not see her clothes on the floor? Well, as a matter of fact (it is a delicate point), there were no clothes on the floor. Cousin Jane, though of course she was entirely estimable in every respect, though she was well over forty, too, was given to the practice of the very latest ideas on the dual culture of the soul and body—Swedish, German, neo-Greek, and all that. And the orchid-house was the warmest place available. I must proceed with the order of events.

Mr. Mannering at length withdrew his eyes from this stupendous bud and decided that he must devote his attention to the grey exigencies of everyday life. But although his body dutifully ascended the stairs, heart, mind, and soul all remained in adoration of the plant. Although he was philosophical to the point of insensibility over the miserable smallness of the earlier flowers, yet he was now as much gratified by the magnitude of the great new bud as you or I might be. Hence it was

not unnatural that Mr. Mannering while in his bath should be full of the most exalted visions of the blossoming of his heart's darling, his vegetable godchild. It would be the largest known, by far; complex as a dream, or dazzlingly simple. It would open like a dancer, or like the sun rising. Why, it might be opening at this very moment! Mr. Mannering could restrain himself no longer; he rose from the steamy water, and, wrapping his bath-towel robe about him, hurried down to the hot-house, scarcely staying to dry himself, though he was subject to colds.

The bud had not yet opened: it still reared its unbroken head among the glossy, fleshy foliage, and he now saw, what he had had no eyes for previously, how very exuberant that foliage had grown. Suddenly he realized with astonishment that this huge bud was not that which had appeared before he went away. That one had been lower down on the plant. Where was it now, then? Why, this new thrust and spread of foliage concealed it from him. He walked across, and discovered it. It had opened into a bloom. And as he looked at this bloom his astonishment grew to stupefaction, one might say to petrification, for it is a fact that Mr. Mannering remained rooted to the spot, with his eyes fixed on the flower, for fully fifteen minutes. The flower was an exact replica of the head of Cousin Jane's lost cat. The similitude was so exact, so lifelike, that Mr. Mannering's first movement, after the fifteen minutes, was to seize his bath-towel robe and draw it about him, for he was a modest man, and the cat, though bought for a Tom, had proved to be quite

the reverse. I relate this to show how much character, spirit, *presence*—call it what you will—there was upon this floral cat's face. But although he made to seize his bath-towel robe, it was too late. He could not move. The new lusty foliage had closed in unperceived, the too lightly dismissed tendrils were everywhere upon him; he gave a few weak cries and sank to the ground, and there, as the Mr. Mannering of ordinary life, he passes out of this story.

Mr. Mannering sank into a coma, into an insensibility so deep that a black eternity passed before the first faint elements of his consciousness reassembled themselves in his brain. For of his brain was the centre of a new bud being made. Indeed, it was two or three days before this at first almost shapeless and quite primitive lump of organic matter had become sufficiently mature to be called Mr. Mannering at all. These days, which passed quickly enough, in a certain mild, not unpleasant excitement, in the outer world, seemed to the dimly working mind within the bud to resume the whole history of the development of our species, in a great many epochal parts.

A process analogous to the mutations of the embryo was being enacted here. At last the entity which was thus being rushed down an absurdly foreshortened vista of the ages arrived, slowing up, into the foreground. It became recognizable. The Seven Ages of Mr. Mannering were presented, as it were, in a series of close-ups, as in an educational film; his consciousness settled and cleared. The bud was mature, ready to open. At this point, I believe, Mr. Mannering's state of mind was exactly that of

a patient who, wakening from under an anæsthetic, struggling up from vague dreams, asks plaintively, "Where am I?" Then the bud opened, and he knew.

There was the hothouse, but seen from an unfamiliar angle. There, through the glass door, was his study. There below him was the cat's head and there—there beside him was Cousin Jane. He could not say a word, but then, neither could she. Perhaps it was as well. At the very least, he would have been forced to own that she had been in the right in an argument of long standing; she had always maintained that in the end no good would come of his preoccupation with "those unnatural flowers."

It must be admitted that Mr. Mannering was not at first greatly upset by this extraordinary upheaval in his daily life. This, I think, was because he was interested, not only in private and personal matters, but in the wider and more general, one might say the biological, aspects of his metamorphosis. For the rest, simply because he *was* now a vegetable, he responded with a vegetable reaction. The impossibility of locomotion, for example, did not trouble him in the least, or even the absence of body and limbs, any more than the cessation of that stream of rashers and tea, biscuits and glasses of milk, luncheon cutlets, and so forth, that had flowed in at his mouth for over fifty years, but which had now been reversed to a gentle, continuous, scarcely noticeable feeding from below. All the powerful influence of the physical upon the mental, therefore, inclined him to tranquillity. But the physical is not all. Although no longer a man, he was still Mr. Mannering. And from

this anomaly, as soon as his scientific interest had subsided, issued a host of woes, mainly subjective in origin.

He was fretted, for instance, by the thought that he would now have no opportunity to name his orchid, or to write a paper upon it, and, still worse, there grew up in his mind the abominable conviction that, as soon as his plight was discovered, it was he who would be named and classified, and that he himself would be the subject of a paper, possibly even of comment and criticism in the lay press. Like all orchid collectors, he was excessively shy and sensitive, and in his present situation these qualities were very naturally exaggerated, so that the bare idea of such attentions brought him to the verge of wilting. Worse yet was the fear of being transplanted, thrust into some unfamiliar, draughty, probably public place. Being dug up! Ugh! A violent shudder pulsed through all the heavy foliage that sprang from Mr. Mannering's division of the plant. He awoke to consciousness of ghostly and remote sensations in the stem below, and in certain tufts of leaves that sprouted from it; they were somehow reminiscent of spine and heart and limbs. He felt quite a dryad.

In spite of all, however, the sunshine was very pleasant. The rich odour of hot, spicy earth filled the hothouse. From a special fixture on the hot-water pipes a little warm steam oozed into the air. Mr. Mannering began to abandon himself to a feeling of *laissez-aller*. Just then, up in a corner of the glass roof, at the ventilator, he heard a persistent buzzing. Soon the note changed from one of irritation to a more complacent sound; a bee had managed to find his way after some difficulty through

one of the tiny chinks in the metal work. The visitor came drifting down and down through the still, green air, as if into some subaqueous world, and he came to rest on one of those petals which were Mr. Mannering's eyebrows. Thence he commenced to explore one feature after another, and at last he settled heavily on the lower lip, which drooped under his weight and allowed him to crawl right into Mr. Mannering's mouth. This was quite a considerable shock, of course, but on the whole the sensation was neither as alarming nor as unpleasant as might have been expected; indeed, strange as it may sound, the appropriate word seemed to be something like—refreshing.

But Mr. Mannering soon ceased his drowsy toyings with the *mot juste* when he saw the departed bee, after one or two lazy circlings, settle directly upon the maiden lip of Cousin Jane. Ominous as lightning, a simple botanical principle flashed across the mind of her wretched relative. Cousin Jane was aware of it also, although, being the product of an earlier age, she might have remained still blessedly ignorant had not her cousin—vain, garrulous, proselytizing fool!—attempted for years past to interest her in the rudiments of botany. How the miserable man upbraided himself now! He saw two bunches of leaves just below the flower tremble and flutter, and rear themselves painfully upwards into the very likeness of two shocked and protesting hands. He saw the soft and orderly petals of his cousin's face ruffle and incarnadine with rage and embarrassment, then turn sickly as a gardenia with horror and dismay. But what was he to do? All the rectitude implanted by his careful

training, all the chivalry proper to an orchid-collector, boiled and surged beneath a paralytically calm exterior. He positively travailed in the effort to activate the muscles of his face, to assume an expression of grief, manly contrition, helplessness in the face of fate, willingness to make honourable amends, all suffused with the light of a vague but solacing optimism; but it was in vain. When he had strained till his nerves seemed likely to tear under the tension, the only movement he could achieve was a trivial flutter of the left eyelid—worse than nothing.

This incident completely aroused Mr. Mannering from his vegetable lethargy. He rebelled against the limitations of the form into which he had thus been cast while subjectively he remained all too human. Was he not still at heart a man, with a man's hopes, ideals, aspirations—and capacity for suffering?

When dusk came, and the opulent and sinister shapes of the great plant dimmed to a suggestiveness more powerfully impressive than had been its bright noonday luxuriance, and the atmosphere of a tropical forest filled the orchid-house like an exile's dream or the nostalgia of the saxophone; when the cat's whiskers drooped, and even Cousin Jane's eyes slowly closed, the unhappy man remained wide awake, staring into the gathering darkness. Suddenly the light in the study was switched on. Two men entered the room. One of them was his lawyer, the other was his nephew.

"This is his study, as you know, of course," said the wicked nephew. "There's nothing here. I looked round when I came over on Wednesday."

"Ah, well!" said the lawyer. "It's a very queer business,

an absolute mystery." He had evidently said so more than once before; they must have been discussing matters in another room. "Well, we must hope for the best. In the meantime, in all the circumstances, it's perhaps as well that you, as next-of-kin, should take charge of things here. We must hope for the best."

Saying this, the lawyer turned, about to go, and Mr. Mannering saw a malicious smile overspread the young man's face. The uneasiness which had overcome him at first sight of his nephew was intensified to fear and trembling at the sight of this smile.

When he had shown the lawyer out, the nephew returned to the study and looked round him with lively and sinister satisfaction. Then he cut a caper on the hearth-rug. Mr. Mannering thought he had never seen anything so diabolical as this solitary expression of the glee of a venomous nature at the prospect of unchecked sway, here whence he had been outcast. How vulgar petty triumph appeared, beheld thus; how disgusting petty spite, how appalling revengefulness and hardness of heart! He remembered suddenly that his nephew had been notable, in his repulsive childhood, for his cruelty to flies, tearing their wings off, and for his barbarity towards cats. A sort of dew might have been noticed upon the good man's forehead. It seemed to him that his nephew had only to glance that way, and all would be discovered, although he might have remembered that it was impossible to see from the lighted room into the darkness in the hothouse.

On the mantelpiece stood a large unframed photograph of Mr. Mannering. His nephew soon caught sight

of this, and strode across to confront it with a triumphant and insolent sneer. "What? You old Pharisee," said he, "taken her off for a trip to Brighton, have you? My God! How I hope you'll never come back! How I hope you've fallen over the cliffs, or got swept off by the tide or something! Anyway—I'll make hay while the sun shines. Ugh! you old skinflint, you!" And he reached forward his hand, on which the thumb held the middle finger bent and in check, and that finger, then released, rapped viciously upon the nose in the photograph. Then the usurping rascal left the room, leaving all the lights on, presumably preferring the dining-room with its cellarette to the scholarly austerities of the study.

All night long the glare of electric light from the study fell full upon Mr. Mannering and his Cousin Jane, like the glare of a cheap and artificial sun. You who have seen at midnight in the park a few insomniac asters standing stiff and startled under an arc light, all their weak colour bleached out of them by the drenching chemical radiance, neither asleep nor awake, but held fast in a tense, a neurasthenic trance, you can form an idea of how the night passed with this unhappy pair.

And towards morning an incident occurred, trivial in itself, no doubt, but sufficient then and there to add the last drop to poor Cousin Jane's discomfiture and to her relative's embarrassment and remorse. Along the edge of the great earthbox in which the orchid was planted ran a small black mouse. It had wicked red eyes, a naked, evil snout, and huge, repellent ears, queer as a bat's. This creature ran straight over the lower leaves of Cousin Jane's part of the plant. It was simply appalling: the

stringy main stem writhed like a hair on a coal-fire, the leaves contracted in an agonized spasm, like seared mimosa; the terrified lady nearly uprooted herself in her convulsive horror. I think she would actually have done so, had not the mouse hurried on past her.

But it had not gone more than a foot or so when it looked up and saw, bending over it, and seeming positively to bristle with life, that flower which had once been called Tib. There was a breathless pause. The mouse was obviously paralysed with terror, the cat could only look and long. Suddenly the more human watchers saw a sly frond of foliage curve softly outward and close in behind the hypnotized creature. Cousin Jane, who had been thinking exultantly, "Well, now it'll go away and never, never, never come back," suddenly became aware of hideous possibilities. Summoning all her energy, she achieved a spasmodic flutter, enough to break the trance that held the mouse, so that, like a clock-work toy, it swung round and fled. But already the fell arm of the orchid had cut off its retreat. The mouse leaped straight at it. Like a flash five tendrils at the end caught the fugitive and held it fast, and soon its body dwindled and was gone. Now the heart of Cousin Jane was troubled with horrid fears, and slowly and painfully she turned her weary face first to one side, then to the other, in a fever of anxiety as to where the new bud would appear. A sort of sucker, green and sappy, which twisted lightly about her main stem, and reared a blunt head, much like a tip of asparagus, close to her own, suddenly began to swell in the most suspicious manner. She squinted at it,

fascinated and appalled. Could it be her imagination? It was not—

Next evening the door opened again, and again the nephew entered the study. This time he was alone, and it was evident that he had come straight from table. He carried in his hand a decanter of whisky capped by an inverted glass. Under his arm was a siphon. His face was distinctly flushed, and such a smile as is often seen at saloon bars played about his lips. He put down his burdens and, turning to Mr. Mannering's cigar cabinet, produced a bunch of keys which he proceeded to try upon the lock, muttering vindictively at each abortive attempt, until it opened, when he helped himself from the best of its contents. Annoying as it was to witness this insolent appropriation of his property, and mortifying to see the contempt with which the cigar was smoked, the good gentleman found deeper cause for uneasiness in the thought that, with the possession of the keys, his abominable nephew had access to every private corner that was his.

At present, however, the usurper seemed indisposed to carry on investigations; he splashed a great deal of whisky into the tumbler and relaxed into an attitude of extravagant comfort. But after a while the young man began to tire of his own company; he had not yet had time to gather any of his pothouse companions into his uncle's home, and repeated recourse to the whisky bottle only increased his longing for something to relieve the monotony. His eye fell upon the door of the orchid-house. Sooner or later it was bound to have happened,

Does this thought greatly console the condemned man when the fatal knock sounds upon the door of his cell? No. Nor were the hearts of the trembling pair in the hothouse at all comforted by the reflection.

As the nephew fumbled with the handle of the glass door, Cousin Jane slowly raised two fronds of leaves that grew on each side, high up on her stem, and sank her troubled head behind them. Mr. Mannering observed, in a sudden rapture of hope, that by this device she was fairly well concealed from any casual glance. Hastily he strove to follow her example. Unfortunately, he had not yet gained sufficient control of his—his *limbs*?—and all his tortured efforts could not raise them beyond an agonized horizontal. The door had opened, the nephew was feeling for the electric light switch just inside. It was a moment for one of the superlative achievements of panic. Mr. Mannering was well equipped for the occasion. Suddenly, at the cost of indescribable effort, he succeeded in raising the right frond, not straight upwards, it is true, but in a series of painful jerks along a curve outward and backward, and ascending by slow degrees till it attained the position of an arm held over the possessor's head from behind. Then, as the light flashed on, a spray of leaves at the very end of this frond spread out into a fan, rather like a very fleshy horse-chestnut leaf in structure, and covered the anxious face below. What a relief! And now the nephew advanced into the orchid-house, and now the hidden pair simultaneously remembered the fatal presence of the cat. Simultaneously also, their very sap stood still in their veins.

The nephew was walking along by the plant. The cat, a sagacious beast, "knew" with the infallible intuition of its kind that this was an idler, a parasite, a sensualist, gross and brutal, disrespectful to age, insolent to weakness, barbarous to cats. Therefore it remained very still, trusting to its low and somewhat retired position on the plant, and to protective mimicry and such things, and to the half-drunken condition of the nephew, to avoid his notice. But all in vain.

"What?" said the nephew. "What, a cat?" And he raised his hand to offer a blow at the harmless creature. Something in the dignified and unflinching demeanour of his victim must have penetrated into even his besotted mind, for the blow never fell, and the bully, a coward at heart, as bullies invariably are, shifted his gaze from side to side to escape the steady, contemptuous stare of the courageous cat. Alas! His eye fell on something glimmering whitely behind the dark foliage. He brushed aside the intervening leaves that he might see what it was. It was Cousin Jane.

"Oh! Ah!" said the young man, in great confusion. "You're back. But what are you hiding there for?"

His sheepish stare became fixed, his mouth opened in bewilderment; then the true condition of things dawned upon his mind. Most of us would have at once instituted some attempt at communication, or at assistance of some kind, or at least have knelt down to thank our Creator that we had, by His grace, been spared such a fate, or perhaps have made haste from the orchid-house to ensure against accidents. But alcohol had so inflamed the

young man's hardened nature that he felt neither fear, nor awe, nor gratitude. As he grasped the situation a devilish smile overspread his face.

"Ha! Ha! Ha!" said he. "But where's the old man?"

He peered about the plant, looking eagerly for his uncle. In a moment he had located him and, raising the inadequate visor of leaves, discovered beneath it the face of our hero, troubled with a hundred bitter emotions.

"Hullo, Narcissus!" said the nephew.

A long silence ensued. The nephew was so pleased that he could not say a word. He rubbed his hands together, and licked his lips, and stared and stared as a child might at a new toy.

"Well, you're properly up a tree," he said. "Yes, the tables are turned now all right, aren't they? Ha! Ha! Do you remember the last time we met?"

A flicker of emotion passed over the face of the suffering blossom, betraying consciousness.

"Yes, you can hear what I say," added the tormentor, "feel, too, I expect. What about that?"

As he spoke, he stretched out his hand and, seizing a delicate frill of fine, silvery filaments that grew as whiskers grow round the lower half of the flower, he administered a sharp tug. Without pausing to note, even in the interests of science, the subtler shades of his uncle's reaction, content with the general effect of that devastating wince, the wretch chuckled with satisfaction and, taking a long pull from the reeking butt of the stolen cigar, puffed the vile fumes straight into his victim's centre. The brute!

"How do you like that, John the Baptist?" he asked

with a leer. "Good for the blight, you know. Just what you want!"

Something rustled upon his coat sleeve. Looking down, he saw a long stalk, well adorned with the fatal tendrils, groping its way over the arid and unsatisfactory surface. In a moment it had reached his wrist, he felt it fasten, but knocked it off as one would a leech, before it had time to establish its hold.

"Ugh!" said he. "So that's how it happens, is it? I think I'll keep outside till I get the hang of things a bit. *I* don't want to be made an Aunt Sally of. Though I shouldn't think they could get you with your clothes on." Struck by a sudden thought, he looked from his uncle to Cousin Jane, and from Cousin Jane back to his uncle again. He scanned the floor, and saw a single crumpled bath-towel robe lying in the shadow.

"Why!" he said. "*Well!*—Haw! Haw! Haw!" And with an odious backward leer, he made his way out of the orchid-house.

Mr. Mannering felt that his suffering was capable of no increase. Yet he dreaded the morrow. His fevered imagination patterned the long night with waking nightmares, utterly fantastic visions of humiliation and torture. Torture! It was absurd, of course, for him to fear cold-blooded atrocities on the part of his nephew, but how he dreaded some outrageous whim that might tickle the youth's sense of humour, and lead him to *any* wanton freak, especially if he were drunk at the time. He thought of slugs and snails, espaliers and topiary. If only the monster would rest content with insulting jests, with wasting his substance, ravaging his cherished pos-

sessions before his eyes, with occasional pulling at the whiskers, even! Then it might be possible to turn gradually from all that still remained in him of man, to subdue the passions, no longer to admire or desire, to go native as it were, relapsing into the Nirvana of a vegetable dream. But in the morning he found this was not so easy.

In came the nephew and, pausing only to utter the most perfunctory of jeers at his relatives in the glass house, he sat at the desk and unlocked the top drawer. He was evidently in search of money, his eagerness betrayed that; no doubt he had run through all he had filched from his uncle's pockets, and had not yet worked out a scheme for getting direct control of his bank account. However, the drawer held enough to cause the scoundrel to rub his hands with satisfaction and, summoning the housekeeper, to bellow into her ear a reckless order upon the wine and spirit merchant.

"Get along with you!" he shouted, when he had at last made her understand. "I shall have to get someone a bit more on the spot to wait on me; I can tell you that. Yes," he added to himself as the poor old woman hobbled away, deeply hurt by his bullying manner, "yes, a nice little parlour-maid—a nice little parlour-maid."

He hunted in the *Buff Book* for the number of the local registry office. That afternoon he interviewed a succession of maidservants in his uncle's study. Those that happened to be plain, or too obviously respectable, he treated curtly and coldly; they soon made way for others. It was only when a girl was attractive (according to the young man's depraved tastes, that is) and also bore herself in a fast or brazen manner, that the interview was at

all prolonged. In these cases the nephew would conclude in a fashion that left no doubt at all in the minds of any of his auditors as to his real intentions. Once, for example, leaning forward, he took the girl by the chin, saying with an odious smirk, "There's no one else but me, and so you'd be treated just like one of the family; d'you see, my dear?" To another he would say, slipping his arm round her waist, "Do you think we shall get on well together?"

After this conduct had sent two or three in confusion from the room, there entered a young person of the most regrettable description, one whose character, betrayed as it was in her meretricious finery, her crude cosmetics, and her tinted hair, showed yet more clearly in florid gesture and too facile smile. The nephew lost no time in coming to an arrangement with this creature. Indeed, her true nature was so obvious that the depraved young man only went through the farce of an ordinary interview as a sauce to his anticipations, enjoying the contrast between conventional dialogue and unbridled glances. She was to come next day. Mr. Mannering feared more for his unhappy cousin than for himself. "What scenes may she not have to witness," he thought, "that yellow cheek of hers to incarnadine?" If only he could have said a few words!

But that evening, when the nephew came to take his ease in the study, it was obvious that he was far more under the influence of liquor than he had been before. His face, flushed patchily by the action of the spirits, wore a sullen sneer, an ominous light burned in that bleared eye, he muttered savagely under his breath.

Clearly this fiend in human shape was what is known as "fighting drunk"; clearly some trifle had set his vile temper in a blaze.

It is interesting to note, even at this stage, a sudden change in Mr. Mannering's reactions. They now seemed entirely egoistical, and were to be elicited only by stimuli directly associated with physical matters. The nephew kicked a hole in a screen in his drunken fury, he flung a burning cigar-end down on the carpet, he scratched matches on the polished table. His uncle witnessed this with the calm of one whose sense of property and of dignity has become numbed and paralysed; he felt neither fury nor mortification. Had he, by one of those sudden strides by which all such development takes place, approached much nearer to his goal, complete vegetation? His concern for the threatened modesty of Cousin Jane, which had moved him so strongly only a few hours earlier, must have been the last dying flicker of exhausted altruism; that most human characteristic had faded from him. The change, however, in its present stage, was not an unmixed blessing. Narrowing in from the wider and more expressly human regions of his being, his consciousness now left outside its focus not only pride and altruism, which had been responsible for much of his woe, but fortitude and detachment also, which, with quotations from the Greek, had been his support before the whole battery of his distresses. Moreover, within its constricted circle, his ego was not reduced but concentrated, his serene, flowerlike indifference towards the ill-usage of his furniture was balanced by the absorbed, flowerlike

single-mindedness of his terror at the thought of similar ill-usage directed towards himself.

Inside the study the nephew still fumed and swore. On the mantelpiece stood an envelope, addressed in Mr. Mannering's handwriting to Cousin Jane. In it was the letter he had written from town, describing his nephew's disgraceful conduct. The young man's eye fell upon this and, unscrupulous, impelled by idle curiosity, he took it up and drew out the letter. As he read, his face grew a hundred times blacker than before.

"What," he muttered, "'a mere race-course cad . . . a worthless vulgarian . . . a scoundrel of the sneaking sort' . . . and what's this? ' . . . cut him off absolutely . . . ' What?" said he, with a horrifying oath. "*Would* you cut me off absolutely? Two can play at that game, you old devil!"

And he snatched up a large pair of scissors that lay on the desk, and burst into the hothouse—

Among fish, the dory, they say, screams when it is seized upon by man; among insects, the caterpillar of the death's-head moth is capable of a still, small shriek of terror; in the vegetable world, only the mandrake could voice its agony—till now.

Mary

THERE WAS IN THOSE DAYS—I HOPE IT is there still—a village called Ufferleigh, lying all among the hills and downs of North Hampshire. In every cottage garden there was a giant apple tree, and when these trees were hung red with fruit, and the newly lifted potatoes lay gleaming between bean-row and cabbage-patch, a young man walked into the village who had never been there before.

He stopped in the lane just under Mrs. Hedges's gate, and looked up into her garden. Rosie, who was picking the beans, heard his tentative cough, and turned and leaned over the hedge to hear what he wanted. "I was wondering," said he, "if there was anybody in the village who had a lodging to let."

He looked at Rosie, whose cheeks were redder than the apples, and whose hair was the softest yellow imaginable. "I was wondering," said he in amendment, "if *you* had."

Rosie looked back at him. He wore a blue jersey such as seafaring men wear, but he seemed hardly like a seafaring man. His face was brown and plain and pleasant, and his hair was black. He was shabby and he was shy, but there was something about him that made it very certain he was not just a tramp. "I'll ask," said Rosie.

With that she ran for her mother, and Mrs. Hedges came out to interview the young man. "I've got to be near Andover for a week," said he, "but somehow I didn't fancy staying right in the town."

"There's a bed," said Mrs. Hedges. "If you don't mind having your meals with us——"

"Why, surely, ma'am," said he. "There's nothing I'd like better."

Everything was speedily arranged; Rosie picked another handful of beans, and in an hour he was seated with them at supper. He told them his name was Fred Baker, but, apart from that, he was so polite that he could hardly speak, and in the end Mrs. Hedges had to ask him outright what his business was. "Why, ma'am," said he, looking her straight in the face, "I've done one thing and another ever since I was so high, but I heard an old proverb once, how to get on in the world. 'Feed 'em or amuse 'em,' it said. So that's what I do, ma'am. I travel with a pig."

Mrs. Hedges said she had never heard of such a thing.

"You surprise me," said he. "Why, there are some in London, they tell me, making fortunes on the halls. Spell, count, add up, answer questions, anything. But let them wait," said he, smiling, "till they see Mary."

"Is that the name of your pig?" asked Rosie.

"Well," said Fred, shyly, "it's what I call her just between ourselves like. To her public, she's Zola. Sort of Frenchified, I thought. Spicy, if you'll excuse the mention of it. But in the caravan I call her Mary."

"You live in a caravan?" cried Rosie, delighted by the doll's-house idea.

"We do," said he. "She has her bunk, and I have mine."

"I don't think I should like that," said Mrs. Hedges.
"Not a pig. No."

"She's as clean," said he, "as a new-born babe. And as for company, well, you'd say she's human. All the same, it's a bit of a wandering life for her—up hill and down dale, as the saying goes. Between you and me I shan't be satisfied till I get her into one of these big London theatres. You can see us in the West End!"

"I should like the caravan best," said Rosie, who seemed to have a great deal to say for herself, all of a sudden.

"It's pretty," said Fred. "Curtains, you know. Pot of flowers. Little stove. Somehow I'm used to it. Can't hardly think of myself staying at one of them big hotels. Still, Mary's got her career to think of. I can't stand in the way of her talent, so that's that."

"Is she big?" asked Rosie.

"It's not her size," said he. "No more than Shirley Temple. It's her brains and personality. Clever as a wagon-load of monkeys! You'd like her. She'd like you, I reckon. Yes, I reckon she would. Sometimes I'm afraid I'm a bit slow by way of company for her, never having had much to do with the ladies."

"Don't tell me," said Mrs. Hedges archly, as convention required.

"'Tis so, ma'am," said he. "Always on the move, you see, ever since I was a nipper. Baskets and brooms, pots and pans, then some acrobat stuff, then Mary. Never two days in the same place. It don't give you the time to get acquainted."

"You're going to be here a whole week, though," said Rosie artlessly, but at once her red cheeks blushed a hundred times redder than before, for Mrs. Hedges gave her a sharp look, which made her see that her words might have been taken the wrong way.

Fred, however, had noticed nothing. "Yes," said he, "I shall be here a week. And why? Mary ran a nail in her foot in the marketplace, Andover. Finished her act—and collapsed. Now she's at the vet's, poor creature."

"Oh, poor thing!" cried Rosie.

"I was half afraid," said he, "it was going wrong on her. But it seems she'll pull round all right, and I took opportunity to have the van repaired a bit, and soon we'll be on the road again. I shall go in and see her tomorrow. Maybe I can find some blackberries, to take her by way of a relish, so to speak."

"Colley Bottom," said Rosie. "That's the place where they grow big and juicy."

"Ah! If I knew where it was—" said Fred tentatively.

"Perhaps, in the morning, if she's got time, she'll show you," said Mrs. Hedges, who began to feel very kindly disposed towards the young man.

In the morning, surely enough, Rosie did have time, and she showed Fred the place, and helped him pick the berries. Returning from Andover, later in the day, Fred reported that Mary had tucked into them a fair treat, and he had little doubt that, if she could have spoken, she would have sent her special thanks. Nothing is more affecting than the gratitude of a dumb animal, and Rosie was impelled to go every morning with Fred to pick a few more berries for the invalid pig.

On these excursions Fred told her a great deal more about Mary, a bit about the caravan, and a little about himself. She saw that he was very bold and knowing in some ways, but incredibly simple and shy in others. This, she felt, showed he had a good heart.

The end of the week seemed to come very soon, and all at once they were coming back from Colley Bottom for the last time. Fred said he would never forget Ufferleigh, nor the nice time he had had there.

"You ought to send us a postcard when you're on your travels," said Rosie.

"Yes," he said. "That's an idea. I will."

"Yes, do," said Rosie.

"Yes," said he again. "I will. Do you know, I was altogether downhearted at going away, but now I'm half wishing I was on the road again already. So I could be sending that card right away," said he.

"At that rate," said Rosie, looking the other way, "you might as well make it a letter."

"Ah!" said he. "And do you know what I should feel like putting at the bottom of that letter? If you was my young lady, that is. Which, of course, you're not. Me never having had one."

"What?" said Rosie.

"A young lady," said he.

"But what would you put?" said she.

"Ah!" said he. "What I'd put. Do you know what I'd put? If—if, mind you—if you was my young lady?"

"No," said she, "what?"

"I don't hardly like to tell you," said he.

"Go on," she said. "You don't want to be afraid,"

"All right," said he. "Only mind you, it's *if*." And with his stick he traced three crosses in the dust.

"If I was anybody's young lady," said Rosie, "I shouldn't see anything wrong in that. After all, you've got to move with the times."

Neither of them said another word, for two of the best reasons in the world. First, they were unable to; second, it was not necessary. They walked on with their faces as red as fire, in an agony of happiness.

Fred had a word with Mrs. Hedges, who had taken a fancy to him from the start. Not that she had not always looked down upon caravan people, and could have been knocked over with a feather, had anyone suggested, at any earlier date, that she would allow a daughter of hers to marry into such a company. But right was right: this Fred Baker was different, as anyone with half an eye could see. He had kept himself to himself, almost to a fault, for his conversation showed that he was as innocent as a new-born babe. Moreover, several knowledgeable people in the village had agreed that his ambitions for Mary, his pig, were in no way unjustified. Everyone had heard of such talented creatures, reclining on snow-white sheets in the best hotels of the metropolis, drinking champagne like milk, and earning for their fortunate owners ten pounds, or even twenty pounds, a week.

So Mrs. Hedges smilingly gave her consent, and Rosie became Fred's real, genuine, proper young lady. He was to save all he could during the winter, and she to stitch and sing. In the spring, he would come back and they were to get married.

"At Easter," said he.

"No," said Mrs. Hedges, counting on her fingers. "In May. Then tongues can't wag, caravan or no caravan."

Fred had not the faintest idea what she was driving at, for he had lived so much alone that no one had told him certain things that every young man should know. However, he well realized that this was an unusually short engagement for Ufferleigh, and represented a great concession to the speed and dash of the entertainment industry, so he respectfully agreed, and set off on his travels.

MY DARLING ROSIE,

Well here we are in Painswick having had a good night Saturday at Evesham. Mary cleverer than ever that goes without saying now spells four new words thirty-six in all and when I say now Mary how do you like Painswick or Evesham or wherever it is she picks *FINE* it goes down very well. She is in the best of health and hope you are the same. Seems to understand every word I say more like a human being every day. Well I suppose I must be getting our bit of supper ready she always sets up her cry for that specially when I am writing to you.

With true love

FRED XXX

In May the apple trees were all in bloom, so it was an apple-blossom wedding, which in those parts is held to be an assurance of flowery days. Afterwards they took the bus to the market town, to pick up the caravan, which stood in a stable yard. On the way Fred asked Rosie to wait a moment, and dived into a confectioner's shop. He

came out with a huge box of chocolates. Rosie smiled all over her face with joy. "For me?" she said.

"Yes," said he. "To give to her as soon as she claps eyes on you. They're her weakness. I want you two to be real pals."

"All right," said Rosie, who was the best-hearted girl in the world.

The next moment they turned into the yard: there was the caravan. "Oh, it's lovely!" cried Rosie.

"Now you'll see her," said Fred.

At the sound of his voice a falsetto squeal rose from within.

"Here we are, old lady," said Fred, opening the door. "Here's a friend of mine come to help look after you. Look, she's brought you something you'll fancy."

Rosie saw a middle-sized pig, flesh-coloured, neat, and with a smart collar. It had a small and rather calculating eye. Rosie offered the chocolates: they were accepted without any very effusive acknowledgment.

Fred put the old horse in, and soon they were off, jogging up the long hills to the west. Rosie sat beside Fred on the driving seat; Mary took her afternoon nap. Soon the sky began to redden where the road divided the woods on the far hill-top. Fred turned into a green lane, and they made their camp.

He lit the stove, and Rosie put on the potatoes. They took a lot of peeling, for it seemed that Mary ate with gusto. Rosie put a gigantic rice pudding into the oven, and soon had the rest of the meal prepared.

Fred set the table. He laid three places.

"I say," said Rosie.

"What?" said Fred.

"Does she eat along with us?" said Rosie. "A pig?"

Fred turned quite pale. He beckoned her outside the caravan. "Don't say a thing like that," said he. "She won't never take to you if you say a thing like that. Didn't you see her give you a look?"

"Yes, I did," said Rosie. "All the same— Well, never mind, Fred. I don't care, really. I just thought I did."

"You wait," said Fred. "You're thinking of ordinary pigs. Mary's different."

Certainly Mary seemed a comparatively tidy eater. All the same, she gave Rosie one or two very odd glances from under her silky straw-coloured lashes. She seemed to hock her rice pudding about a bit with the end of her nose.

"What's up, old girl?" said Fred. "Didn't she put enough sugar in the pudden? Never mind—can't get everything right first time."

Mary, with a rather cross hiccup, settled herself on her bunk. "Let's go out," said Rosie, "and have a look at the moon."

"I suppose we might," said Fred. "Shan't be long, Mary. Just going about as far as that gate down the lane." Mary grunted morosely and turned her face to the wall.

Rosie and Fred went out and leaned over the gate. The moon, at least, was all that it should be.

"Seems funny, being married and all," said Rosie softly.

"Seems all right to me," said Fred.

"Remember them crosses you drew in the dirt in the road that day?" said Rosie.

"That I do," said Fred.

"And all them you put in the letters?" said Rosie.

"All of 'em," said Fred.

"Kisses, that's what they're supposed to stand for," said Rosie.

"So they say," said Fred.

"You haven't given me one, not since we was married," said Rosie. "Don't you like it?"

"That I do," said Fred. "Only, I don't know——"

"What?" said Rosie.

"It makes me feel all queer," said Fred, "when I kiss you. As if I wanted——"

"What?" said Rosie.

"I dunno," said Fred. "I don't know if it's I want to eat you all up, or what."

"Try and find out, they say," said Rosie.

A delicious moment followed. In the very middle of it a piercing squeal rose from the caravan. Fred jumped as if he were shot.

"Oh dear," he cried. "She's wondering what's up. Here I come, old girl! Here I come! It's her bed-time, you see. Here I come to tuck you in!"

Mary, with an air of some petulance, permitted this process. Rosie stood by. "I suppose we'd better make it lights out," said Fred. "She likes a lot of sleep, you see, being a brain worker."

"Where do *we* sleep?" said Rosie.

"I made the bunk all nice for you this morning," said Fred. "Me, I'm going to doss below. A sack full of straw, I've got."

"But—" said Rosie. "But——"

"But what?" said he.

"Nothing," said she. "Nothing."

They turned in. Rosie lay for an hour or two, thinking what thoughts I don't know. Perhaps she thought how charming it was that Fred should have lived so simple and shy and secluded all these years, and yet be so knowing about so many things, and yet be so innocent, and never have been mixed up in bad company— It is impossible to say what she thought.

In the end she dozed off, only to be wakened by a sound like the bagpipes of the devil himself. She sat up, terrified. It was Mary.

"What's up? What's up?" Fred's voice came like the ghost's in *Hamlet* from under the floor. "Give her some milk," he said.

Rosie poured out a bowl of milk. Mary ceased her fiendish racket while she drank, but the moment Rosie had blown out the light, and got into bed again, she began a hundred times worse than before.

There were rumblings under the caravan. Fred appeared in the doorway, half dressed and with a straw in his hair.

"She *will* have me," he said, in great distress.

"Can't you— Can't you lie down here?" said Rosie.

"What? And you sleep below?" said Fred, astounded.

"Yes," said Rosie, after a rather long pause. "And me sleep below."

Fred was overwhelmed with gratitude and remorse. Rosie couldn't help feeling sorry for him. She even managed to give him a smile before she went down to get what rest she could on the sack of straw.

In the morning, she woke feeling rather dejected. There was a mighty breakfast to be prepared for Mary; afterwards Fred drew her aside.

"Look here," he said. "This won't do. I can't have you sleeping on the ground, worse than a gippo. I'll tell you what I'm going to do. I'm going to get up my acrobat stuff again. I used to make a lot that way, and I liked it fine. Hand springs, double somersaults, bit of conjuring: it went down well. Only I didn't have time to keep in practice with Mary to look after. But if you'd do the looking after her, we'd make it a double turn, and soon we'd have a good bit of cash. And then——"

"Yes?" said Rosie.

"Then," said Fred, "I could buy you a trailer."

"All right," said Rosie, and turned away. Suddenly she turned back with her face flaming. "You may know a lot about pigs," she said bitterly. "And about somersaults, and conjuring and baskets and brooms and I don't know what-all. But there's *one* thing you *don't* know." And with that she went off and cried behind a hedge.

After a while she got the upper hand of it, and came back to the caravan. Fred showed her how to give Mary her morning bath, then the depilatory—that was very hard on the hands—then the rubbing with Cleopatra Face Cream—and not on her face merely—then the powdering, then the manicuring and polishing of her trotters.

Rosie, resolved to make the best of it, conquered her repugnance, and soon mastered these handmaidenly duties. She was relieved at first that the spoiled pig accepted her ministrations without protest. Then she noticed the gloating look in its eye.

However, there was no time to brood about that. No sooner was the toilet finished than it was time to prepare the enormous lunch. After lunch Mary had her little walk, except on Saturdays when there was an afternoon show, then she took her rest. Fred explained that during this period she liked to be talked to, and have her back scratched a bit. Mary had quite clearly decided that in future she was going to have it scratched a lot. Then she had her massage. Then tea, then another little walk, or the evening show, according to where they were, and then it was time to prepare dinner. At the end of the day Rosie was thankful to curl up on her poor sack of straw.

When she thought of the bunk above, and Fred, and his simplicity, her heart was fit to break. The only thing was, she loved him dearly, and she felt that if they could soon snatch an hour alone together, they might kiss a little more, and a ray of light might dispel the darkness of excessive innocence.

Each new day she watched for that hour, but it didn't come. Mary saw to that. Once or twice Rosie suggested a little stroll, but at once the hateful pig grumbled some demand or other that kept her hard at work till it was too late. Fred, on his side, was busy enough with his practising. He meant it so well, and worked so hard—but what did it lead to? A trailer!

As the days went by, she found herself more and more the slave of this arrogant grunter. Her back ached, her hands got chapped and red, she never had a moment to make herself look nice, and never a moment alone with her beloved. Her dress was spotted and spoiled, her smile was gone, her temper was going. Her pretty hair fell in

elf locks and tangles, and she had neither time nor heart to comb it.

She tried to come to an explanation with Fred, but it was nothing but cross purposes and then cross words. He tried in a score of little ways to show that he loved her: these seemed to her a mere mockery, and she gave him short answers. Then he stopped, and she thought he loved her no longer. Even worse, she felt she no longer loved him.

So the whole summer went by, and things got worse and worse, and you would have taken her for a gipsy indeed.

The blackberries were ripe again; she found a whole brake of them. When she tasted one, all sorts of memories flooded into her heart: she went and found Fred. "Fred," she said, "the blackberries are ripe again. I've brought you one or two." She held out some in her grubby hand. Fred took them and tasted them; she watched to see what the result would be.

"Yes," said he, "they're ripe. They won't gripe her. Take her and pick her some this afternoon."

Rosie turned away without a word, and in the afternoon she took Mary across the stubbles to where the ripe berries grew. Mary, when she saw them, dispensed for once with dainty service, and began to help herself very liberally. Rosie, finding she had nothing more urgent to attend to, sat down on a bank and sobbed bitterly.

In the middle of it all she heard a voice asking what was the matter. She looked up and there was a fat,

shrewd, jolly-looking farmer. "What is it, my girl?" said he. "Are you hungry?"

"No," said she, "I'm fed up."

"What with?" said he.

"A pig!" said she, with a gulp.

"You've got no call to bawl and cry," said he. "There's nothing like a bit of pork. I'd have the indigestion for that, any day."

"It's not pork," she said. "It's a pig. A live pig."

"Have you lost it?" said he.

"I wish I had," said she. "I'm that miserable I don't know what to do."

"Tell me your troubles," said he. "There's no harm in a bit of sympathy."

So Rosie told him about Fred, and about Mary, and what hopes she'd had and what they'd all come to, and how she was the slave of this insolent, spoiled, jealous pig, and in fact she told him everything except one little matter which she could hardly bring herself to repeat, even to the most sympathetic of fat farmers.

The farmer, pushing his hat over his eyes, scratched his head very thoughtfully. "Really," said he. "I can't hardly believe it."

"It's true," said Rosie, "every word."

"I mean," said the farmer. "A young man—a young gal—the young gal sleeping down on a sack of straw—a pretty young gal like you. Properly married and all. Not to put too fine a point on it, young missus, aren't the bunks wide enough, or what?"

"He doesn't know," sobbed Rosie. "He just doesn't

know no more'n a baby. And she won't let us ever be alone a minute. So he'd find out."

The farmer scratched his head more furiously than ever. Looking at her tear-stained face, he found it hard to doubt her. On the other hand it seemed impossible that a pig should know so much and a young man should know so little. But at that moment Mary came trotting through the bushes, with an egoistical look on her face, which was well besmeared with the juice of the ripe berries.

"Is this your pig?" said the farmer.

"Well," said Rosie, "I'm just taking her for a walk."

The shrewd farmer was quick to notice the look that Rosie got from the haughty grunter when it heard the expression "your pig." This, and Rosie's hurried, nervous disclaimer, convinced the worthy man that the story he had heard was well founded.

"You're taking her for a walk?" said he musingly. "Well! Well! Well! I'll tell you what. If you'd ha' been here this time tomorrow you'd have met *me* taking a walk, with a number of very dear young friends of mine, all very much like her. You might have come along. Two young sows, beautiful creatures, though maybe not so beautiful as that one. Three young boars, in the prime of their health and handsomeness. Though I say it as shouldn't, him that's unattached—he's a prince. Oh, what a beautiful young boar that young boar really is!"

"You don't say?" said Rosie.

"For looks and pedigree both," said the farmer, "he's a prince. The fact is, it's their birthday, and I'm taking 'em over to the village for a little bit of a celebration. I

suppose this young lady has some other engagement to-morrow."

"She has to have her sleep just about this time," said Rosie, ignoring Mary's angry grunt.

"Pity!" said the farmer. "She'd have just made up the party. Such fun they'll have! Such refreshments! Sweet apples, cakes, biscuits, a bushel of chocolate creams. Everything most refined, of course, but plenty. You know what I mean—plenty. And that young boar—you know what I mean. If she *should* be walking by—"

"I'm afraid not," said Rosie.

"Pity!" said the farmer. "Ah, well. I must be moving along."

With that, he bade them good afternoon, raising his hat very politely to Mary, who looked after him for a long time, and then walked sulkily home, gobbling to herself all the way.

The next afternoon Mary seemed eager to stretch out on her bunk, and, for once, instead of requiring the usual number of little attentions from Rosie, she closed her eyes in sleep. Rosie took the opportunity to pick up a pail and go off to buy the evening ration of fresh milk. When she got back Fred was still at his practice by the wayside, and Rosie went round to the back of the caravan, and the door was swinging open, and the bunk was empty.

She called Fred. They sought high and low. They went along the roads, fearing she might have been knocked over by a motor car. They went calling through the woods, hoping she had fallen asleep under a tree. They looked in ponds and ditches, behind haystacks, under

bridges, everywhere. Rosie thought of the farmer's joking talk, but she hardly liked to say anything about it to Fred.

They called and called all night, scarcely stopping to rest. They sought all the next day. It grew dark, and Fred gave up hope. They plodded silently back to the caravan.

He sat on a bunk, with his head in his hand.

"I shall never see her again," he said. "Been pinched, that's what she's been.

"When I think," he said, "of all the hopes I had for that pig—

"When I think," he said, "of all you've done for her! And what it's meant to you—

"I know she had some faults in her nature," he said. "But that was artistic. Temperament, it was. When you got a talent like that—

"And now she's gone!" he said. With that he burst into tears.

"Oh, Fred!" cried Rosie. "Don't!"

Suddenly she found she loved him just as much as ever, more than ever. She sat down beside him and put her arms round his neck. "Darling Fred, don't cry!" she said again.

"It's been rough on you, I know," said Fred. "I didn't ever mean it to be."

"There! There," said Rosie. She gave him a kiss, and then she gave him another. It was a long time since they had been as close as this. There was nothing but the two of them and the caravan; the tiny lamp, and darkness

all round; their kisses, and grief all round. "Don't let go," said Fred. "It makes it better."

"I'm not letting go," she said.

"Rosie," said Fred. "I feel— Do you know how I feel?"

"I know," she said. "Don't talk."

"Rosie," said Fred, but this was some time later. "Who'd have thought it?"

"Ah! Who would, indeed?" said Rosie.

"Why didn't you tell me?" said Fred.

"How could I tell you?" said she.

"You know," said he. "We might never have found out—never!—if she hadn't been pinched."

"Don't talk about her," said Rosie.

"I can't help it," said Fred. "Wicked or not, I can't help it—I'm glad she's gone. It's worth it. I'll make enough on the acrobat stuff. I'll make brooms as well. Pots and pans, too."

"Yes," said Rosie. "But look! It's morning. I reckon you're tired, Fred—running up hill and down dale all day yesterday. You lie abed now, and I'll go down to the village and get you something good for breakfast."

"All right," said Fred. "And tomorrow I'll get yours."

So Rosie went down to the village, and bought the milk and the bread and so forth. As she passed the butcher's shop she saw some new-made pork sausages of a singularly fresh, plump, and appetizing appearance. So she bought some, and very good they smelled while they were cooking.

"That's another thing we couldn't have while she was here," said Fred, as he finished his plateful. "Never no

pork sausages, on account of her feelings. I never thought to see the day I'd be glad she was pinched. I only hope she's gone to someone who appreciates her."

"I'm sure she has," said Rosie. "Have some more."

"I will," said he. "I don't know if it's the novelty, or the way you cooked 'em, or what. I never ate a better sausage in my life. If we'd gone up to London with her, best hotels and all, I doubt if ever we'd have had as sweet a sausage as these here."

Rope Enough

HENRY FRASER, WELL ASSURED THAT almost everything is done by mirrors, was given a job in India. No sooner had he set foot on shore than he burst into a horse-laugh. Those who were meeting him asked in some alarm the cause of this merriment. He replied he was laughing at the mere idea of the Indian Rope Trick.

He emitted similar startling sounds, and gave the same explanation, at a tiffin where he was officially made welcome; likewise on the Maidan, over *chota peg*, in rickshaws, in bazaars, in the Club, and on the polo ground. Soon he was known from Bombay to Calcutta as the man who laughed at the Indian Rope Trick, and he gloried in the well-deserved publicity.

There came a day, however, when he was sitting in his bungalow, bored to death. His boy entered, and, with suitable salaams, announced that a mountebank was outside, who craved the honour of entertaining the *sahib* with a performance of the Indian Rope Trick. Laughing heartily, Henry consented, and moved out to his chair upon the veranda.

Below, in the dusty compound, stood a native who was emaciated to a degree, and who had with him a spry

youngster, a huge mat basket, and a monstrous great sword. Out of the basket he dragged some thirty feet of stout rope, made a pass or two, and slung it up into the air. It stayed there. Henry chuckled.

The boy then, with a caper, sprang at the rope, clutched it, and went up hand over hand, like a monkey. When he reached the top he vanished into thin air. Henry guffawed.

Soon the man, looking upwards with an anxious expression, began to hoot and holler after the boy. He called him down, he ordered him down, he begged him down, he began to swear and curse horribly. The boy, it seemed, took no notice at all. Henry roared.

Now the black, clapping his abominable great scimitar between his teeth, took hold of the rope himself, and went up it like a sailor. He, also, disappeared at the top. Henry's mirth increased.

Pretty soon some yelps and squeals were heard coming out of the empty air, and then a blood-curdling scream. Down came a leg, thump on to the ground, then an arm, a thigh, a head and other joints, and finally (no ladies being present) a bare backside, which struck the earth like a bomb. Henry went into fits.

Then the black came sliding down, holding on with one hand, fairly gibbering with excitement. He presented to Henry, with a salaam, his reeking blade for inspection. Henry rocked in his chair.

The black, seemingly overwhelmed with remorse, gathered up the fragments of his little stooge, lavishing a hundred lamentations and endearments upon each grisly member, and he stowed them all in the giant basket.

At that moment Henry, feeling the time had come for a show-down, and willing to bet a thousand to one they'd planted the whole compound full of mirrors before calling him out there, pulled out his revolver, and blazed away all six chambers in different directions, in the expectation of splintering at least one of those deceiving glasses.

Nothing of that sort happened, but the black, doing a quick pirouette in alarm, looked down in the dust at his feet, and held up a villainous little snake, no thicker than a lead pencil, which had been killed by one of Henry's stray bullets. He gave a gasp of relief, touched his turban very civilly, turned round again, and made a pass or two over the basket. At once, with a wriggle and a frisk, the boy sprang out, whole, alive, smiling, full of health and wickedness.

The black hastily hauled down the rope, and came cringing up to Henry, overflowing with gratitude for having been saved from that villainous little snake, which was nothing more nor less than a krait—one nip and a man goes round and round like a Catherine wheel for eleven seconds; then he is as dead as mutton.

"But for the Heavenborn," said the black, "I should have been a goner, and my wicked little boy here, who is my pride and delight, must have lain dismembered in the basket till the *sahib's* servants condescended to throw him to the crocodiles. Our worthless lives, our scanty goods, are all at the *sahib's* disposal."

"That's all right," said Henry. "All I ask is, show me how the trick is worked, or the laugh will be on me from now on."

"Would not the *sahib*," said the black diffidently, "prefer the secret of a superb hair-restorer?"

"No. No," said Henry. "Nothing but the trick."

"I have," said the black, "the secret of a very peculiar tonic, which the *sahib* (not now, of course, but in later life) might find——"

"The trick," said Henry, "and without further delay."

"Very well," said the black. "Nothing in the world could be more simple. You make a pass, like that——"

"Wait a minute," said Henry. "Like that?"

"Exactly," said the black. "You then throw up the rope—so. You see? It sticks."

"So it does," said Henry.

"Any boy can climb," said the black. "Up, boy! Show the *sahib*."

The boy, smiling, climbed up and disappeared.

"Now," said the black, "if the *sahib* will excuse me, I shall be back immediately." And with that he climbed up himself, threw down the boy in sections, and speedily rejoined Henry on the ground.

"All that," said he, scooping up legs and arms as he spoke, "all that can be done by anyone. There is a little knack, however, to the pass I make at this juncture. If the *sahib* will deign to observe closely—like that."

"Like that?" said Henry.

"You have it to perfection," said the black.

"Very interesting," said Henry. "Tell me, what's up there at the top of the rope?"

"Ah, *sahib*," said the black with a smile, "that is something truly delightful."

With that he salaamed and departed, taking with him

his rope, his giant basket, his tremendous great scimitar, and his wicked little boy. Henry was left feeling rather morose: he was known from the Deccan to the Khyber Pass as the man who laughed at the Indian Rope Trick, and now he could laugh no more.

He decided to keep very quiet about it, but this unfortunately was not enough. At tiffin, at *chota peg*, at the Club, on the Maidan, in the bazaar, and at polo, he was expected to laugh like a horse, and in India one has to do what is expected of one. Henry became extremely unpopular, cabals were formed against him, and soon he was hoofed out of the Service.

This was the more distressing as in the meantime he had married a wife, strong-featured, upstanding, well groomed, straight-eyed, a little peremptory in manner, and as jealous as a demon, but in all respects a *mem-sahib* of the highest type, who knew very well what was due to her. She told Henry he had better go to America and make a fortune. He agreed, they packed up, and off they went to America.

"I hope," said Henry, as they stood looking at the skyline of New York, "I hope I shall make that fortune."

"Of course," said she. "You must insist upon it."

"Very well, my dear," said he.

On landing, however, he discovered that all the fortunes had already been made, a discovery which very generally awaits those who visit America on this errand, and after some weeks of drifting about from place to place, he was prepared to cut his demand down to a mere job, then to a lesser job, and finally to the price of a meal and a bed for the night.

They reached this extremity in a certain small town in the Middle West. "There is nothing for it, my dear," said Henry. "We shall have to do the Indian Rope Trick."

His wife cried out very bitterly at the idea of a *mem-sahib* performing this native feat in a Middle Western town, before a Middle Western audience. She reproached him with the loss of his job, the poor quality of his manhood, with the time he let her little dog get run over on the bund, and with a glance he had cast at a Parsee maiden at Bombay. Nevertheless, reason and hunger prevailed: they pawned her last trinket, and invested in a rope, a roomy grip, and a monstrous old rusty scimitar they discovered in a junk-shop.

When she saw this last, Henry's wife flatly refused to go on, unless she was given the star part and Henry took that of the stooge. "But," said Henry, drawing an apprehensive thumb down the notched and jagged edge of the grim and rusty bilbo. "But," said he, "you don't know how to make the passes."

"You shall teach me," she said, "and if anything goes wrong you will have only yourself to blame."

So Henry showed her. You may be sure he was very thorough in his instructions. In the end she mastered them perfectly, and there was nothing left to do but to stain themselves with coffee. Henry improvised a turban and loin-cloth: she wore a *sari* and a pair of ash-trays borrowed from the hotel. They sought out a convenient waste lot, a large crowd collected, and the show began.

Up went the rope. Sure enough, it stuck. The crowd, with a multiple snigger, whispered that everything was

done by mirrors. Henry, not without a good deal of puffing, went up hand over hand. When he got to the top, he forgot the crowd, the act, his wife, and even himself, so surprised and delighted was he by the sight that met his eyes.

He found himself crawling out of something like a well, on to what seemed to be solid ground. The landscape about him was not at all like that below: it was like an Indian paradise, full of dells, bowers, scarlet ibises, and heaven knows what all. However, his surprise and delight came less from these features of the background than from the presence of a young female in the nearest of these bowers or arbours, which happened to be all wreathed, canopied, overgrown and intertwined with passion flowers. This delightful creature, who was a positive houri, and very lightly attired, seemed to be expecting Henry, and greeted him with rapture.

Henry, who had a sufficiently affectionate nature, flung his arms round her neck and gazed deeply into her eyes. These were surprisingly eloquent: they seemed to say, "Why not make hey hey while the sun shines?"

He found the notion entirely agreeable, and planted a lingering kiss on her lips, noting only with a dim and careless annoyance that his wife was hooting and hollering from below. "What person of any tact or delicacy," thought he, "could hoot and holler at such a moment?" and he dismissed her from his mind.

You may imagine his mortification when his delicious damsel suddenly repulsed him from her arms. He looked over his shoulder, and there was his wife, clambering

over the edge, terribly red in the face, with the fury of a demon in her eye, and the mighty scimitar gripped well between her teeth.

Henry tried to rise, but she was beforehand with him, and while yet he had but one foot on the ground, she caught him one across the loins with the huge and jagged bilbo, which effectually hamstrung him, so that he fell grovelling at her feet. "For heaven's sake!" he cried. "It's all a trick. Part of the act. It means nothing. Remember our public. The show must go on."

"It shall," said she, striking at his arms and legs.

"Oh, those notches!" cried he. "I beg you, my dear, sharpen it a little upon a stone."

"It is good enough for you, you viper," said she, hacking away all the time. Pretty soon Henry was a limbless trunk.

"For the love of God," said he, "I hope you remember the passes. I can explain everything."

"To hell with the passes!" said she, and with a last swipe she sent his head rolling like a football.

She was not long in picking up the scattered fragments of poor Henry, and flinging them down to earth, amid the applause and laughter of the crowd, who were more than ever convinced it was all done by mirrors.

Then, gripping her scimitar, she was about to swarm down after him, not from any soft-hearted intention of reassembling her unfortunate spouse, but rather to have another hack or two at some of the larger joints. At that moment she became aware of someone behind her, and, looking round, there was a divine young man, with the appearance of a Maharaja of the highest caste, an abso-

lute Valentino, in whose eyes she seemed to read the words, "It is better to burn upon the bed of passion than in the chair of electricity."

This idea presented itself with an overwhelming appeal. She paused only to thrust her head through the aperture, and cry, "That's what happens to a pig of a man who betrays his wife with a beastly native," before hauling up the rope and entering into conversation with her charmer.

The police soon appeared upon the scene. There was nothing but a cooing sound above, as if invisible turtle doves were circling in amorous flight. Below, the various portions of Henry were scattered in the dust, and the blue-bottle flies were already settling upon them.

The crowd explained it was nothing but a trick, done with mirrors.

"It looks to me," said the sergeant, "as if the biggest one must have splintered right on top of him."

Thus I Refute Beelzy

"THERE GOES THE TEA BELL," SAID Mrs. Carter. "I hope Simon hears it."

They looked out from the window of the drawing-room. The long garden, agreeably neglected, ended in a waste plot. Here a little summer-house was passing close by beauty on its way to complete decay. This was Simon's retreat: it was almost completely screened by the tangled branches of the apple tree and the pear tree, planted too close together, as they always are in suburban gardens. They caught a glimpse of him now and then, as he strutted up and down, mouthing and gesticulating, performing all the solemn mumbo-jumbo of small boys who spend long afternoons at the forgotten ends of long gardens.

"There he is, bless him," said Betty.

"Playing his game," said Mrs. Carter. "He won't play with the other children any more. And if I go down there—the temper! And comes in tired out."

"He doesn't have his sleep in the afternoons?" asked Betty.

"You know what Big Simon's ideas are," said Mrs. Carter. "Let him choose for himself," he says. That's what he chooses, and he comes in as white as a sheet."

"Look. He's heard the bell," said Betty. The expression

was justified, though the bell had ceased ringing a full minute ago. Small Simon stopped in his parade exactly as if its tinny dingle had at that moment reached his ear. They watched him perform certain ritual sweeps and scratchings with his little stick, and come lagging over the hot and flaggy grass towards the house.

Mrs. Carter led the way down to the play-room, or garden-room, which was also the tea-room for hot days. It had been the huge scullery of this tall Georgian house. Now the walls were cream-washed, there was coarse blue net in the windows, canvas-covered armchairs on the stone floor, and a reproduction of Van Gogh's *Sunflowers* over the mantelpiece.

Small Simon came drifting in, and accorded Betty a perfunctory greeting. His face was an almost perfect triangle, pointed at the chin, and he was paler than he should have been. "The little elf-child!" cried Betty.

Simon looked at her. "No," said he.

At that moment the door opened, and Mr. Carter came in, rubbing his hands. He was a dentist, and washed them before and after everything he did. "You!" said his wife. "Home already!"

"Not unwelcome, I hope," said Mr. Carter, nodding to Betty. "Two people cancelled their appointments: I decided to come home. I said, I hope I am not unwelcome."

"Silly!" said his wife. "Of course not."

"Small Simon seems doubtful," continued Mr. Carter. "Small Simon, are you sorry to see me at tea with you?"

"No, Daddy."

"No, what?"

"No, Big Simon."

"That's right. Big Simon and Small Simon. That sounds more like friends, doesn't it? At one time little boys had to call their father 'sir.' If they forgot—a good spanking. On the bottom, Small Simon! On the bottom!" said Mr. Carter, washing his hands once more with his invisible soap and water.

The little boy turned crimson with shame or rage.

"But now, you see," said Betty, to help, "you can call your father whatever you like."

"And what," asked Mr. Carter, "has Small Simon been doing this afternoon? While Big Simon has been at work."

"Nothing," muttered his son.

"Then you have been bored," said Mr. Carter. "Learn from experience, Small Simon. Tomorrow, do something amusing, and you will not be bored. I want him to learn from experience, Betty. That is my way, the new way."

"I have learned," said the boy, speaking like an old, tired man, as little boys so often do.

"It would hardly seem so," said Mr. Carter, "if you sit on your behind all the afternoon, doing nothing. Had *my* father caught me doing nothing, I should not have sat very comfortably."

"He played," said Mrs. Carter.

"A bit," said the boy, shifting on his chair.

"Too much," said Mrs. Carter. "He comes in all nervy and dazed. He ought to have his rest."

"He is six," said her husband. "He is a reasonable being. He must choose for himself. But what game is this, Small Simon, that is worth getting nervy and dazed over? There are very few games as good as all that."

"It's nothing," said the boy.

"Oh, come," said his father. "We are friends, are we not? You can tell me. I was a Small Simon once, just like you, and played the same games you play. Of course there were no aeroplanes in those days. With whom do you play this fine game? Come on, we must all answer civil questions, or the world would never go round. With whom do you play?"

"Mr. Beelzy," said the boy, unable to resist.

"Mr. Beelzy?" said his father, raising his eyebrows inquiringly at his wife.

"It's a game he makes up," said she.

"Not makes up!" cried the boy. "Fool!"

"That is telling stories," said his mother. "And rude as well. We had better talk of something different."

"No wonder he is rude," said Mr. Carter, "if you say he tells lies, and then insist on changing the subject. He tells you his fantasy: you implant a guilt feeling. What can you expect? A defence mechanism. Then you get a real lie."

"Like in *These Three*," said Betty. "Only different, of course. *She* was an unblushing little liar."

"I would have made her blush," said Mr. Carter, "in the proper part of her anatomy. But Small Simon is in the fantasy stage. Are you not, Small Simon? You just make things up."

"No, I don't," said the boy.

"You do," said his father. "And because you do, it is not too late to reason with you. There is no harm in a fantasy, old chap. There is no harm in a bit of make-believe. Only you have to know the difference between

day dreams and real things, or your brain will never grow. It will never be the brain of a Big Simon. So come on. Let us hear about this Mr. Beelzy of yours. Come on. What is he like?"

"He isn't like anything," said the boy.

"Like nothing on earth?" said his father. "That's a terrible fellow."

"I'm not frightened of him," said the child, smiling. "Not a bit."

"I should hope not," said his father. "If you were, you would be frightening yourself. I am always telling people, older people than you are, that they are just frightening themselves. Is he a funny man? Is he a giant?"

"Sometimes he is," said the little boy.

"Sometimes one thing, sometimes another," said his father. "Sounds pretty vague. Why can't you tell us just what he's like?"

"I love him," said the small boy. "He loves me."

"That's a big word," said Mr. Carter. "That might be better kept for real things, like Big Simon and Small Simon."

"He is real," said the boy, passionately. "He's not a fool. He's real."

"Listen," said his father. "When you go down the garden there's nobody there. Is there?"

"No," said the boy.

"Then you think of him, inside your head, and he comes."

"No," said Small Simon. "I have to do something with my stick."

"That doesn't matter."

"Yes, it does."

"Small Simon, you are being obstinate," said Mr. Carter. "I am trying to explain something to you. I have been longer in the world than you have, so naturally I am older and wiser. I am explaining that Mr. Beelzy is a fantasy of yours. Do you hear? Do you understand?"

"Yes, Daddy."

"He is a game. He is a let's-pretend."

The little boy looked down at his plate, smiling resignedly.

"I hope you are listening to me," said his father. "All you have to do is to say, 'I have been playing a game of let's-pretend. With someone I make up, called Mr. Beelzy.' Then no one will say you tell lies, and you will know the difference between dreams and reality. Mr. Beelzy is a day dream."

The little boy still stared at his plate.

"He is sometimes there and sometimes not there," pursued Mr. Carter. "Sometimes he's like one thing, sometimes another. You can't really see him. Not as you see me. I am real. You can't touch him. You can touch me. I can touch you." Mr. Carter stretched out his big, white, dentist's hand, and took his little son by the shoulder. He stopped speaking for a moment and tightened his hand. The little boy sank his head still lower.

"Now you know the difference," said Mr. Carter, "between a pretend and a real thing. You and I are one thing; he is another. Which is the pretend? Come on. Answer me. Which is the pretend?"

"Big Simon and Small Simon," said the little boy.

"Don't!" cried Betty, and at once put her hand over

her mouth, for why should a visitor cry "Don't!" when a father is explaining things in a scientific and modern way?

"Well, my boy," said Mr. Carter, "I have said you must be allowed to learn from experience. Go upstairs. Right up to your room. You shall learn whether it is better to reason, or to be perverse and obstinate. Go up. I shall follow you."

"You are not going to beat the child?" cried Mrs. Carter.

"No," said the little boy. "Mr. Beelzy won't let him."

"Go on up with you!" shouted his father.

Small Simon stopped at the door. "He said he wouldn't let anyone hurt me," he whimpered. "He said he'd come like a lion, with wings on, and eat them up."

"You'll learn how real he is!" shouted his father after him. "If you can't learn it at one end, you shall learn it at the other. I'll have your breeches down. I shall finish my cup of tea first, however," said he to the two women.

Neither of them spoke. Mr. Carter finished his tea, and unhurriedly left the room, washing his hands with his invisible soap and water.

Mrs. Carter said nothing. Betty could think of nothing to say. She wanted to be talking: she was afraid of what they might hear.

Suddenly it came. It seemed to tear the air apart. "Good God!" she cried. "What was that? He's hurt him." She sprang out of her chair, her silly eyes flashing behind her glasses. "I'm going up there!" she cried, trembling.

"Yes, let us go up," said Mrs. Carter. "Let us go up. That was not Small Simon."

It was on the second-floor landing that they found the shoe, with the man's foot still in it, like that last morsel of a mouse which sometimes falls from the jaws of a hasty cat.

Variation on a Theme

A YOUNG MAN, WITH A BOWLER HAT, cane, flaxen moustache, and blue suit, was looking at a gorilla in a zoo. All about him were cages floored with squares of desert. On these yellow flats, like precise false statements of equatorial latitudes, lay the shadows of bars. There were nutshells, banana skins, fading lettuce; there were the cries of birds who believed themselves mewed up because they were mad, the obeisance of giraffes, the yawns of lions. In an imitation of moon crags, mountain goats bore about ignobly eyes that were pieces of moon. The elephants, grey in a humidity of grass and dung, shifted from one foot to another. Jurassic days, it seemed, would quite definitely never be here again. Mice, moving with the speed of a nervous twitch, were bold in the freedom of a catastrophe of values.

Perceiving that they were alone, the gorilla addressed the young man as follows: "You look very good-natured. Get me a suit like yours, only larger, a bowler hat, and a cane. We will dispense with the moustache. I want to get out of here. I got ambitions."

The young man was greatly taken aback to hear a gorilla speak. However, common sense reminded him that he was in a city in which many creatures enjoyed that faculty, whom, at first sight, or at any hearing, one

would hardly credit with sufficient intelligence to have attained it. He therefore recovered from his wonder, but, having a nice sense of distinctions, he replied to the gorilla, "I do not see that I can do that, for the place for a gorilla is either a cage or the Congo. In the society of men you would be like a fish out of water, like a bull in a china shop, or a round peg in a square hole. You would be a cause of embarrassment, and would therefore yourself be embarrassed. You would be treated as an alien, disdained on account of your complexion, and slighted because of your facial angle."

The gorilla was very much mortified by this reply, for he was extremely vain. "Here," he said, "you don't want to say that sort of thing. I'm a writer. Write you anything you like. I've written a novel."

"That alters the situation entirely!" cried the young man with enthusiasm. "I am a novelist myself, and am always ready to lend a hand to a struggling fellow author. Tell me one thing only, and my services are yours. Have you genius?"

"Yes," said the gorilla, "I certainly have."

"In that case," said the young man, "I shall bring your suit, hat, cane, shoes, and body-linen at this hour tomorrow. I will also bring you a file, and you will find me awaiting you under the large chestnut tree by the West Gate, at the hour of dusk."

The gorilla had not expected the file. As a matter of fact, he had asked for the outfit, not for purposes of escape, but in order to cut a figure before the public. He was rather like one of those prisoners who wrote from old Spain, and who were more interested in what they

got in than in how they got out. However, he hated to waste anything, so, having received the file, he put it to such use as enabled him to join his benefactor under the dark and summer tree.

The young man, intoxicated by his own good action, shook the gorilla warmly by the hand. "My dear fellow," said he, "I cannot say how glad I am to see you out here among us. I am sure you have written a great novel in there; all the same, bars are very dangerous to literary men in the long run. You will find my little house altogether more propitious to your genius. Don't think that we are too desperately dull, however; everyone drops in on Sundays, and during the week we have a little dinner or two, at which you will meet the sort of people you should know. By the way, I hope you have not forgotten your manuscript."

"Fellow came snooping in just as I was making my getaway," said the gorilla. "So I had to dump it. See?" This was the most villainous lie in the world, for the unscrupulous ape had never written so much as a word.

"What a terrible pity!" cried the young man in dismay. "I suppose you feel you will have to return to it."

"Not me," said the gorilla, who had been watching some singularly handsome limousines pass the spot where they were standing, and had noticed the faultless complexions and attractive toilettes of the ladies whom these limousines were conveying from one party to another. "No," said he. "Never mind. I got the whole thing in my head. You put me up: I'll write it out all over again. I don't worry."

"Upon my word, I admire your spirit!" cried his de-

liverer enthusiastically. "There is something uncommercial about that, which appeals to me more than I can say. I am sure you are right; the work will be even more masterly for being written over again. A thousand little felicities, necessarily brushed aside in the first headlong torrent of creativeness, will now assert their claims. Your characters will appear, so to speak, more in the round than formerly. You will forget some little details, though of course you will invent others even more telling; very well, those that you forget will be the *real* shadows, which will impart this superior roundness to your characters. Oh, there is nothing like literature! You shall have a little study on the second floor, quiet, austere, but not uncomfortable, where you shall reconstruct your great work undisturbed. It will undoubtedly be the choice of the Book Society, and I really don't see why we should not hope for the Hawthornden as well."

By this time they were strolling along under the dozing trees, each of which was full-gorged with a large block of the day's heat, still undigested, and breathed spicily upon them as they passed below.

"We live quite near here," said the enthusiast. "My wife will be delighted to make your acquaintance. You two are going to be great friends. Here is the house: it is small, but luckily it is of just the right period, and as you see, we have the finest wistaria in London." Saying this, he pushed open a little wooden gate, one of some half-dozen in a quiet cul-de-sac, which still preserved its Queen Anne serenity and charm. The gorilla, looking discontentedly at certain blocks of mansion flats that towered up on either hand, said never a word.

The front garden was very small: it had flagstones, irises, and an amusing urn, overflowing with the smouldering red of geraniums, which burned in the velvet dark like the cigarette ends of the lesser gods.

"We have a larger patch behind," said the young man, "where there is a grass plot, nicotinas, and deck chairs in the shade of a fig tree. Come in, my dear fellow, come in. Joanna, where are you? Here is our new friend."

"I hope," said the gorilla in a low voice, "you ain't given her the low-down on *you know what*."

"No, no," whispered his host. "I have kept our little secret. A gentleman from Africa, I said—who has genius."

There was no time for more. Mrs. Grantly was descending the stairs. She was tall, with pale hair caught up in an unstudied knot behind, and a full-skirted gown which was artistic but not unfashionable.

"This is Mr. Simpson," said her husband. "My dear, Mr. Simpson has written a book which is going to create more than a passing stir. Unfortunately he has lost the manuscript, but (what do you think?) he has consented to stay with us while he rewrites it. He has it all in his head. His name's er—er—Ernest."

"How perfectly delightful!" cried Mrs. Grantly. "We live terribly simply here, I'm afraid, but at least you will be quiet. Will you wash your hands? There is a little supper waiting for us in the dining-room."

The gorilla, not accustomed to being treated with so much consideration, took refuge in an almost sullen silence. During the meal he spoke mostly in monosyllables, and devoured a prodigious number of bananas, and his hostess, with teeth and eyes respectively.

The young couple were as delighted by their visitor as children with a new toy. "He is unquestionably dynamic, original, and full of that true simplicity which is perhaps the clearest hall-mark of genius," said the young man when they were in bed together. "Did you notice him with the bananas?"

Mrs. Grantly folded her husband in her arms, which were delightfully long and round. "It will be wonderful," she said. "How I look forward to the day when both your books are published! He must meet the Booles and the Terrys. What discussions you will have! How delightful life is, to those who care for art!" They gave each other a score of kisses, talked of the days when first they had met, and fell happily asleep.

In the morning there was a fine breakfast, with fruit juice, cereals, bacon and mushrooms, and the morning papers. The gorilla was shown his little study; he tried the chairs and the sofa, and looked at himself in the glass.

"Do you think you will be happy here?" asked Mr. Grantly very anxiously. "Is the room conducive to the right mood, do you think? There are cigarettes in that box; there's a lavatory across the landing. If you'd care to try a pipe, I have a tobacco jar I'll send up here. What about the desk? Is there everything on it that you'll require?"

"I shall manage. I shall manage," said the gorilla, still looking at himself in the glass.

"If there's anything you want, don't hesitate to ring that bell," said his host. "I've told the maids that you are now one of the family. I'm in the front room on the floor below if you want me. Well, I suppose you are burning

to get to work. Till lunch time, then!" And with that he took his leave of the gorilla, who continued to stare at himself in the glass.

When he was tired of this, which was not for some time, he ate a few of the cigarettes, opened all the drawers, had a look up the chimney, estimated the value of the furniture, exposed his teeth very abominably, scratched, and finally flung himself on the sofa and began to make his plans.

He was of that nature which sets down every disinterested civility as a sign of weakness. Moreover, he regarded his host as a ham novelist as well as a milksop, for he had not heard a single word about percentages since he entered the house. "A washout! A highbrow!" he said. "A guy like that giving the handout to a guy like me, eh? We'll soon alter that. The question is, how?"

This gorilla wanted suits of a very light grey, pearl tie-pins, a superb automobile, blondes, and the society of *the boys*. Nevertheless, his vanity itself was greedy, and snatched at every crumb; he was unable to resist the young man's enthusiasm for his non-existent novel, and instead of seeking his fortune as a heavy-weight pug, he convinced himself in good earnest that he was a writer, unjustly hindered by the patronage and fussing of a blood-sucking so-called intellectual. He turned the pages of half the books in the book-case to see the sort of thing he should do, but found it rather hard to make a start. "This goddam place stifles me," he said.

"What's your plot like?" said he to the young man, one day soon afterwards, when they were sitting in the shade of the fig tree.

Grantly was good enough to recite the whole of his plot. "It sounds very trifling," he said, "but of course a lot depends on the style."

"Style? Style, the hell!" observed the gorilla with a toothy sneer.

"I thought you'd say that!" cried his entertainer. "No doubt you have all the vitality that I so consciously lack. I imagine your work as being very close to the main-springs of life, the sultry passions, the crude lusts, the vital urges, the stark, the raw, the dynamic, the essentially fecund and primitive."

"That's it," said the gorilla.

"The sentence," continued the rhapsodist, "short to the point of curtness, attuned by a self-concealing art to the grunts, groans, and screams of women with great primeval paps, and men——"

"Sure," said the gorilla.

"They knock each other down," went on his admirer. "As they taste the salt blood flowing over their lips, or see the female form suddenly grow tender under the influence of innumerable upper-cuts, right hooks, straight lefts, they become aware of another emotion——"

"Yes!" cried the gorilla with enthusiasm.

"And with a cry that is half a sob——"

"Attaboy!" cried the gorilla.

"They leap, clutch, grapple, and in an ecstasy that is half sheer bursting, burning, grinding, soul-shattering pain——"

The gorilla, unable to contain himself any longer, bit through the best branch of Mr. Grantly's fig tree. "You

said it! That's my book, sir!" said he, with a mouthful of splinters.

I hate to have to record it: this gorilla then rushed into the house and seized his hostess in a grip of iron. "I'm in a creative mood," he muttered thickly.

Mrs. Grantly was not altogether free from hero worship: she had taken her husband's word for it that the gorilla was a genius of the fieriest description. She admired both his complexion and his eyes, and she, too, observed that his grip was of iron.

At the same time, she was a young woman of exquisite refinement. "I can't help thinking of Dennis," said she. "I should hate to hurt him."

"Yeah?" cried the ill-bred anthropoid. "That poor fish? That ham writer? That bum artist? Don't you worry about him. I'll beat him up, baby! I'll——"

Mrs. Grantly interrupted him with some dignity. She was one of those truly noble women who would never dream of betraying their husbands, except at the bidding of a genuine passion, and with expressions of the most tender esteem.

"Let me go, Ernest," she said, with such an air as compelled the vain ape to obey her. This ape, like all vulgarians, was very sensitive to any hint that he appeared low. "You do not raise yourself in my opinion by disparaging Dennis," she continued. "It merely shows you are lacking in judgment, not only of men but of women."

"Aw, cut it out, Joanna," begged the humiliated gorilla. "See here: I only forgot myself. You know what we geniuses are!"

"If you were not a genius," said Joanna, "I should have you turned out of the house. As it is—you shall have another chance."

The gorilla had not the spirit to interpret these last words as liberally as some of us might. Perhaps it was because he had lived so long behind bars, but they fell upon his ear as upon that of some brutalized coward snuffing in the dock. The timid husky saw no invitation in Mrs. Grantly's smile: he was panic-stricken at the thought of losing his snug quarters.

"Say, you won't split on me, sister?" he muttered.

"No, no," said Mrs. Grantly. "One takes the common-sense view of these trifles. But you must behave more nicely in future."

"Sure," said he, much relieved. "I'll start in working right now."

He went straightway up to his room, looked at himself in the glass, and thus, oddly enough, recovered his damaged self-esteem. "I'll show those po' whites how to treat a gentleman," said he. "What did that poor worm say? 'Leap—clutch—grapple—' Oh boy! Oh boy! This book's goin' to sell like hot cakes."

He scribbled away like the very devil. His handwriting was atrocious, but what of that? His style was not the best in the world; however, he was writing about life in the raw. A succession of iron grips, such as the one he had been forced to loosen, of violent consummations, interruptions, beatings-up, flowed from his pen, interspersed with some bitter attacks on effete civilization, and many eulogies of the primitive.

"This'll make 'em sit up," said he. "This'll go big."

When he went down to supper, he noticed some little chilliness in Mrs. Grantly's demeanour: this was no doubt due to his cowardly behaviour in the afternoon. He trusted no one, and now became damnably afraid she would report his conduct to her husband; consequently he was the more eager to get his book done, so that he should be independent and in a position to revenge himself. He went upstairs immediately after the meal, and toiled away till past midnight, writing like one who confesses to a Sunday newspaper.

Before many days had passed in this fashion, he was drawing near the end of his work, when the Grantlys announced to him, with all the appearance of repressed excitement, that the best selling of all novelists was coming to dine with them. The gorilla looked forward to the evening with equal eagerness; he looked forward to gleaning a tip or two.

The great man arrived; his limousine was sufficiently resplendent. The big ape eyed him with the very greatest respect all through the meal. Afterwards they sat about and took coffee, just as ordinary people do. "I hear," said the Best-seller to Grantly, "that you are just finishing a novel."

"Oh, a poor thing!" said the good-natured fellow. "Simpson, here, is the man who's going to set the Thames on fire. I fear my stuff is altogether too niggling. It is a sort of social satire, I touch a little on the Church, Fleet Street, the Fascists—one or two things of that sort, but hardly in a full-blooded fashion. I wish I could write something more primitive—fecund women, the urge of lust, blood hatred, all that, you know."

"Good heavens, my dear Grantly!" cried the great man. "This comes of living so far out of the world. You really must move to some place more central. Public taste is on the change. I can assure you, that before your book can be printed, Mr. Glitters" (he mentioned the critic who makes or breaks) "will no longer be engaged, but married, and to a young woman of Junoesque proportions. What chance do you think the urge of lust will have with poor Glitters, after a month of his marriage to this magnificently proportioned young woman? No, no, my boy; stick to social satire. Put a little in about feminism, if you can find room for it. Guy the cult of the he-man, and its effect on deluded women, and you're safe for a record review. You'll be made."

"I've got something of that sort in it," said Grantly with much gratification, for authors are like beds; even the most artistic requires to be made.

"Who's doing the book for you?" cried the novelist enthusiastically. "You must let me give you a letter to my publisher. Nothing is more disheartening than hawking a book round the market, and having it returned unread. But Sykes is good enough to set some weight on my judgment; in fact, I think I may say, without boasting, you may look on the matter as settled."

"Say, you might give me a letter too!" cried the gorilla, who had been listening in consternation to the great man's discourse.

"I should be delighted, Mr. Simpson," returned that worthy with great suavity. "But you know what these publishers are. Pig-headed isn't the word for them. Well, Grantly, I must be getting along. A delightful evening!

Mrs. Grantly," said he, slapping his host on the shoulder, "this is the man who is going to make us old fossils sit up. Take care of him. Give him some more of that delicious zabaglione. Good night. Good night."

The gorilla was tremendously impressed by the great man's manner, his confidence, his pronouncements, his spectacles, his limousine, and above all by the snub he had given him, for such creatures are always impressed by that sort of thing. "That guy knows the works," he murmured in dismay. "Say, I been barking up the wrong tree! I oughta gone in for *style*."

The Grantlys returned from the hall, where they had accompanied their visitor, and it was obvious from their faces that they too placed great reliance on what they had heard. I am not sure that Mr. Grantly did not rub his hands.

"Upon my word!" he said. "It certainly sounds likely enough. Have you ever seen Glitters' fiancée? His views will certainly change. Ha! Ha! Supposing, my dear, I became a best-seller?"

"It's terribly exciting!" cried Joanna. "Will it change your idea of going on a cruise when first the book comes out?"

"No, no," said he. "I think an author should detach himself from that side, however gratifyingly it may develop. I want to know nothing of the book from the moment it appears till it is forgotten."

"What? You going to spend a coupla days at Brighton?" struck in the gorilla bitterly.

"Ha! Ha! What a satirist you would make!" cried Grantly with the greatest good nature. "No. We thought

of going for a trip round the world. I agree a shorter absence would outlast whatever stir the book may make; however, we want to see the sights."

The gorilla wrote never a word that night. He was overcome with mortification. He could not bear to think of the Grantlys sailing round the world, while the book he had despised piled up enormous royalties at home. Still less could he bear the thought of staying behind, left without a patron, and with his own book piling up no royalties at all. He saw a species of insult in his host's "striking gold" as he termed it, and then turning his back on it in this fashion.

"That guy don't *deserve* the boodle!" he cried in anguish of spirit. In fact, he uttered this sentiment so very often during the night that in the end an idea was born of its mere repetition.

During the next few days he hastily and carelessly finished his own masterpiece, to have it ready against the *coup* he planned. In a word, this vile ape had resolved to change the manuscripts: he had alternative title pages, in which the names of the authors were transposed, typed in readiness. When at last the good Grantly announced that his work was complete, the gorilla announced the same; the two parcels were done up on the same evening, and the plotter was insistent in his offers to take them to the post.

Grantly was the more willing to permit this, as he and his wife were already busy with preparations for their departure. Shortly afterwards, they took their farewell of the gorilla, and, pressing into his hand a tidy sum to meet his immediate necessities, they wished his book

every success, and advised that his next should be a satire.

The cunning ape bade them enjoy themselves, and took up his quarters in Bloomsbury, where he shortly had the pleasure of receiving a letter from the publishers to say that they were accepting the satirical novel which he had sent them.

He now gave himself great airs as a writer, and got all the publicity he could. On one occasion, however, he was at a party, where he beheld a woman of Junoesque proportions in the company of a bilious weakling. The party was a wild one, and he made no scruple of seizing her in a grip of iron, regardless of the fury of her companion. This incident made little impression on his memory, for he attended a good many Bloomsbury parties.

All the same, nothing is entirely unimportant. It so happened that the bilious weakling was no other than Glitters, the greatest of critics, and the Junoesque lady was his promised spouse. The critic reviewed her behaviour very bitterly, the engagement was broken off, and you may be sure he noted the name of the author of his misfortunes.

Very well, the two books came out: Dennis's, which the gorilla had stolen, and the gorilla's own raw outpourings, which now appeared under the name of Dennis Grantly. By a coincidence, they appeared on the same day. The gorilla opened the greatest Sunday newspaper, and saw the pleasing headline, "Book of the Century."

"That's me!" said he, smacking his lips, and fixing a hungry gaze on the letter-press, he discovered to his horror that it actually was. The critic, still a celibate, and by now an embittered one also, had selected

the anthropoid's original tough stuff as being "raw, revealing, sometimes dangerously frank, at all times a masterpiece of insight and passion." Farther down, in fact at the very bottom of the column, the stolen satire was dismissed in two words only—"unreadably dull."

As if this misfortune was not sufficient, the next day the poor gorilla was leaving his lodgings when a young man in a black shirt tapped him on the shoulder and asked him if he was Mr. Simpson. The gorilla replying in the affirmative, the black shirt introduced him to a dozen or so friends of his, similarly attired. It appeared that these young gentlemen disapproved of certain references Grantly had made to their association, and had decided to give the wretched Simpson a beating-up by way of acknowledgment.

The gorilla fought like a demon, but was overpowered by numbers; in the end he was flogged insensible and left lying in the mews where the ceremony had taken place. It was not till the next morning that he dragged himself home; when he arrived there, he found a bevy of lawyers' clerks and policemen inquiring for him. It appeared that Dennis, for all his delicacy and restraint, had been guilty of blasphemy, ordinary libel, obscene libel, criminal libel, sedition, and other things, in his references to the State, the Church, and so forth. "Who would have thought," the gorilla moaned bitterly, "that there was all that in a little bit of style?"

During the various trials, he sat in a sullen silence, caring only to look at the newspapers which contained advertisements of the book he had substituted for

Grantly's. When the sales passed a hundred thousand, he became violent, and insulted the judge. When they reached double that figure he made a despairing attempt at confession, but this was put down as a clumsy simulation of insanity. In the end his sentences amounted to a book in themselves, and were issued in serial form. He was carted off, and put behind the bars.

"All this," said he, "comes of wanting a suit of clothes for the public to see me in. I've got the clothes, but I don't like them, and the public aren't allowed in anyway." This gave him a positive hatred of literature, and one who hates literature, and is moreover in quod for an interminable period of years, is in a truly miserable condition.

As for Dennis Grantly: by the time he returned, he was so much the fashionable author that he never found a moment in which to open a book again, and thus he remained happily ignorant of the fraud. His wife, when she reflected on the fame and riches won by her husband, and remembered that afternoon when she had been almost too favourably impressed by the iron grip of the primitive, frequently went up to him and gave him an uninvited hug and kiss, and these hugs and kisses afforded him a very delicious gratification.

Old Acquaintance

THE APARTMENT, ON A FIFTH FLOOR in the *huitième arrondissement*, was pervaded by the respectable smell of furniture polish. The Parisian ménage of 40,000 francs a year smells either thus, or of a certain perfume, which indicates quite a different way of living.

Monsieur and Madame Dupres, admirably fitted by temperament for the rotund connubialities of a more spicily scented dwelling, nevertheless had dwindled away twenty years of life in the austere aroma of furniture polish. This was because of an intense though unacknowledged jealousy, which had early inclined both parties to the mortification of their own flesh.

Monsieur had been jealous because he had suspected that Madame was not without certain regrets when they married. Madame had been jealous rather in the manner of a miser who underpays his servant and therefore suspects his honesty. It is true that, on the rare occasions when they visited the café, Monsieur would look round for a copy of *La Vie Parisienne*, and if there was a picture in it that interested him his eyes would remain riveted on it for five minutes at a stretch.

Hence the unvoluptuous furniture of Parisian puri-

tanism, and hence its weekly anointings with the pungent resins of respectability.

Now, in the bedroom, the smell of medicine was added. Madame Dupres lay dying of a frugal pneumonia. Her husband sat beside the bed, unfolding his handkerchief in hopeful expectation of a tear, and craving damnably for a smoke.

"My dear," said Madame faintly, "what are you thinking about? I said: 'Get the gloves at Pascal's. There the prices are not beyond all reason.'"

"My dear," replied her husband, "excuse me. I was thinking of long ago: how we used to go about together, you and I and Robert, in the days before he went to Martinique, before you and I were married. What friends we were! We would have shared our last cigarette."

"Robert! Robert!" murmured Madame Dupres. "I wish you could be at my funeral."

At these words a ray of light fell into a long-neglected corner of Monsieur's mind. "Holy saints!" cried he, slapping his knee. "It was Robert, then, all the time?"

Madame Dupres made no reply; only smiled, and expired. Her husband, a little at a loss as to what to do, kissed her lifeless brow once or twice, tried kneeling by the bedside, got up, and brushed his knees. "Twenty years!" he murmured, stealing a glance at the mirror. "Now I must let the doctor know, the notary, the undertaker, Aunt Gabrielle, the cousins, the Blanchards. I must call at the Mairie. I can hardly get a smoke at the Mairie.

"I could have a puff here, but people coming in would smell it. It would savour of a lack of respect for the

dead. Perhaps if I went down to the street door, just for five minutes . . . After all, what are five minutes, after twenty years?"

So Monsieur Dupres descended to the street door, where he stood on the step, conscious of the soft air of early evening, and inhaling the first puff from his long-awaited cigarette. As he drew in his first puff, a smile of the utmost satisfaction overspread his plump features.

"Ah, my poor Monsieur Dupres," said the concierge, emerging suddenly from her den, "how goes it with Madame? She suffers?"

Conscious of his cigarette and his smile, Monsieur Dupres felt he could hardly explain that his wife had passed away but a minute before. "Thank you," said he, "she suffers no longer. She sleeps."

The concierge expressed optimism. "After all," she said, "Madame is from Angers. You know the proverb about the women of Angers."

She prattled on in this vein; Monsieur Dupres paid no attention. "I will go upstairs," thought he, "and make the sad discovery. Then I can return and confront this old cow with a more appropriate countenance."

"And then, my God! there is the doctor, the notary, the funeral arrangements, aunts, cousins . . . My cigarette is done already, and I scarcely noticed I was smoking it. In a civilized country a bereaved should be left alone with his regrets."

The concierge retired, but would undoubtedly soon return to the attack. Monsieur Dupres felt that he could do with another cigarette, but this time a cigarette smoked under better conditions, so that its healing task

might be accomplished unhindered. His nervous condition demanded a seat in a modest café, a glass of Pernod before him, and all about him the salutary air of cafés, which is infinitely more fragrant than furniture polish.

"A cigarette, a Pernod," thought Monsieur Dupres, "and then a good meal! A good meal calls for a glass of cognac afterwards: the digestion requires it, the doctors recommend it. And yet—what is one glass of cognac?"

"I will tell you," said he to a passing dog. "The first glass of cognac is utilitarian merely. It is like a beautiful woman, who has, however, devoted herself entirely to doing good; to nursing, for example. Nothing is more admirable, but one would like to meet her sister. The second glass, on the other hand, is that self-same sister, equally beautiful, and with leisure for a little harmless diversion. . . . Twenty years!"

Monsieur Dupres went upstairs for his hat.

He decided to go to the Victoire on the Boulevard Montparnasse. It was there they used to celebrate, he and she and Robert, in the old student days, whenever they were in funds. "It will be, in effect, an act of homage," thought he, "far better than disturbing her rest with doctors and cousins. And the cuisine used to be superb."

Soon he was comfortably seated at the Victoire, with a monster Pernod before him. Every sip was like a caress, and, like a caress, led to another. Monsieur Dupres ordered a second, and permitted himself to glance at the pages of *La Vie Parisienne*.

"There is no doubt about it," said he to himself, "life

is what you choose to make it." He looked about him in search of a little raw material. "Those two girls over there," thought he, "are probably good-natured to a fault. I wonder if they wear little articles like those in this picture."

His imagination conjured up a scene which he found incredibly diverting. He was compelled to snigger through his nose. He experienced an ardent desire to slap somebody. "What in the world have I been doing," thought he, "all these twenty years? Nothing!"

He looked up again, with the intention of darting a certain sort of glance at the two young ladies who had appealed to his fancy. He was mortified to see that they were gone.

He looked round the café, in the hope that they had only changed their table, and saw, to his overwhelming surprise, at a table quite near him, with a monster Pernod before her, none other than Madame Dupres herself, apparently in the best of health, and wearing her grey hat.

She was at once aware of his regard, compressed her lips, and stifled a giggle, which exploded like soda-water within. She then fixed him with an eye as quizzical as a parrot's eye. Monsieur Dupres, taking up his glass, made haste to join his spouse. "My dear," said he, "I came out to recover my calm."

Madame made no answer, only downed the second half of her Pernod at a single swig, and, replacing the glass on the table, fixed her eye unwaveringly upon it till her husband signalled the waiter. "Another Pernod," said he. "In fact, bring two."

The power of conscience is so great, in a small way, that Monsieur Dupres, on being discovered in the café, could not help feeling that his wife knew his most secret intentions, even those concerning the two young ladies. He anticipated a volley of reproaches. You may imagine his relief when he saw that Madame was cocking her eye at him in the most tolerant and understanding fashion over the rim of her glass, the contents of which were drawn up as if by magic into the refined pouting of her lips. "Marie," said he with a smile, "perhaps we have lived too narrowly, as it were. After all, this is the twentieth century. What a magnificent figure of a woman you really are!"

Madame Dupres smiled indulgently. At that moment the door swung violently open, and a man entered, who looked about him on all sides. Monsieur Dupres looked at this man. "Impossible!" said he. "As I was saying, Marie, I have a delicious idea. Prepare yourself to be shocked."

Madame Dupres, however, had noticed the newcomer. She smiled delightedly, and waved her hand. Smiling also, but not evincing any surprise, the newcomer hastened over.

"Robert!" cried Madame Dupres.

"God in heaven!" cried Monsieur. "It is Robert."

No words can express the felicity of these three old friends, bound together by memories which were only mellowed by the passage of twenty years. Besides, they were already half tight, for it was apparent that Robert also had been indulging in an *apéritif* or two. "Fancy seeing you!" said he to Monsieur Dupres. "What a small

world it is! There is really no room to do anything."

Monsieur Dupres was equally incoherent. He could do nothing but slap Robert on the back. They had a last round, and moved into the restaurant on the other side of the partition.

"What have you been doing all these years?" asked Robert as they seated themselves.

"Nothing very much," said Madame Dupres.

"Oho!" cried Robert, smiling all over his face. "Is that so? What a magnificent evening we shall have! Tonight we drink the wine we could never afford in the old days. You know the wine I mean, Marie?"

"You mean the Hermitage," said Monsieur Dupres, who already had his nose in the list. "Eighty francs. Why not? To the devil with eighty francs! A wine like that puts all sorts of ideas into one's head. Champagne first. Why not? Like a wedding. Only better."

"Bravo!" cried Robert. "You have neatly expressed it."

"What shall we eat?" said Monsieur Dupres. "Study the menu, my children, instead of looking at one another as if you were raised from the dead. We must have something spicy. Marie, if you eat garlic, I must eat garlic. He! He! He!"

"No garlic," said Robert.

"No garlic," said Madame Dupres.

"What?" said her husband. "You know you adore it."

"One's tastes change," said Madame.

"You are right," said her husband. "That was what I was saying when Robert came in. I wish the fal-lal shops were open. Marie, I would like to buy you a little present. Something I saw in a magazine. Heavens, what wicked-

ness there is in the world! The air seems full of it. Marie, we have wasted our time. Here is the champagne. Here is a toast. After Lent, the Carnival!"

"After Lent, the Carnival!" cried the others, in the highest good humour, touching their glasses together.

"Why be ashamed?" said Monsieur Dupres, laughing heartily. "We have been married twenty years, Marie. Robert has been in Martinique. There, they are black. What of it?"

"What of it?" echoed Madame, filliping Robert on the nose, and giggling uncontrollably.

"Embrace one another!" cried Monsieur Dupres, suddenly, and in a voice of thunder. He rose in his chair to put an arm round each of them. "Go on. Give her a kiss. She had a weakness for you in the old days. You didn't know that, my boy. I know now: I know everything. I remember on the night of our nuptials, I thought: 'She has a weakness for somebody.' Twenty years! Marie, you have never looked more beautiful than you look tonight. What is twenty times three hundred and sixty-five?" Overcome by the enormous figure that resulted, Monsieur Dupres burst into tears.

While he wept, the others, who were as drunk as he was, leaned across the table, their foreheads now and then colliding, while they chuckled inanely.

With the arrival of the brandy, Monsieur Dupres emerged into a calmer mood. "The thing to do," said he, "is to make up for lost time. Do you not agree with me?"

"Perfectly," said Robert, kissing him on both cheeks.

"Regard her," said Monsieur Dupres. "A woman of

forty. Oh, if only those little shops were open! Robert, old friend, a word in your ear."

Robert inclined that organ, but Monsieur Dupres was unable to utter the promised confidence. He was capable of nothing but a sputter of laughter, which obliged Robert to use his napkin as a towel.

"To the devil with your little shops!" said Robert. "We need nothing. There are cafés, bars, *bistros*, *boîtes*, night clubs, cabarets, everything. To the boulevard, all three!"

With that, he sprang up. The others unsteadily followed him. On the street everyone looked at them with a smile. Madame's respectable grey hat fell over her nose. She gave it a flick, and sent it equally far over to the back of her head. They linked arms, and began to sing a song about a broken casserole.

They visited several bars, and emerged from each more hilarious than before. The men, crouching down so that their overcoats trailed along the ground, shuffled along in imitation of dwarves, as they had done in their student days. Madame was so excessively amused that she was compelled to retire into the midnight shadows of the little alley that runs between the Rue Guillaume and the Avenue des Gascons.

"I suppose," hiccuped Monsieur Dupres, when she rejoined them, "I suppose we should soon be going home."

Robert expressed his contempt for this notion wordlessly though not soundlessly. "*Mes amis*," said he, facing round, and putting a hand on a shoulder of each, while he surveyed them with a comical and a supplicating face, "*mes amis, mes amis, pourquoi pas le*

bordel?" At this he was overcome by a fit of silly laughter, which was soon echoed by the others.

"It is, after all, the twentieth century," chuckled Monsieur Dupres. "Besides, we must consider our friend Robert."

"It is in the nature of an occasion," said Madame. "It is a little reunion."

Accordingly they staggered in the direction of an establishment known as the *Trois Jolies Japonaises*, the staff of which would no doubt have worn kimonos were it not for the excessive warmth of the premises. This warmth was the undoing of Monsieur Dupres. They had no sooner seated themselves at a table in the lower salon than he found it necessary to cool his face on the glass table top, and immediately fell sound asleep.

After a humane interval, gentle hands must have guided him to the door, and perhaps given him a gentle push, which set his legs in motion after the manner of clock-work. At all events, he somehow or other got home.

Next morning he woke on the narrow sofa in the dining-room of his apartment, and smelled again the refreshing odour of furniture polish. He found his head and stomach disordered, and his mind half crazy: he had only a vague memory of great dissipation the night before.

"Thank heaven she has been spared this!" thought he, looking guiltily at the closed door of the bedroom. "It would have upset her appallingly. But what? Am I mad? Do I remember her somewhere last night? What poison they serve in these days! Yet . . . No, it is impossible.

"I must call the doctor," he said. "The undertaker, too.

Notary, aunts, cousins, friends, all the damned fry. Oh, my poor head!" As he spoke he was proceeding towards the bedroom, and now he opened the door. His brain reeled when he found his family business would not after all be necessary. The bed was empty. Madame Dupres was gone.

Clasping his brow, Monsieur Dupres staggered from the room, and more fell than walked down the five flights of stairs to the conciergerie. "Madame!" cried he to that experienced vigilant. "My wife is gone!"

"I saw her go out last night," replied the concierge. "I saw her grey hat go by soon after you had left."

"But she is dead!" cried Monsieur Dupres.

"Impossible," replied the concierge. "I would not decompose you, Monsieur, but Madame was from Angers. You know the proverb."

With that she retired into her lodge, shrugging her shoulders.

"It was, then," cried Monsieur Dupres, "a plot, between her and that abominable Robert! I had better notify the police."

He took the street car to the Châtelet, and, just as it was jolting along at its fastest, he thought he saw them, still drunk, in broad daylight, staggering round a corner in the Rue de Clichy. By the time he had stopped the car and hurried back, they had utterly disappeared.

Feeling completely overcome, Monsieur Dupres gave up his errand, and decided to go home and rest a little, and took a taxi-cab to get there the sooner. This taxi was halted in a traffic block, and from it Monsieur Dupres saw quite distinctly, in a cab passing across the very

nose of his own taxi, his wife and his friend, locked in each other's arms, scandalously drunk, and quite oblivious of his existence. "Follow that cab!" cried he.

The driver did his best. They followed a cab all the way to the Porte de Neuilly, only to see an elderly gentleman, probably an ambassador, descend from it.

Monsieur Dupres paid the fare, which was no trifle, and made his way back on the Métro. He had just descended from the train, when he saw two people, getting in at the very far end, who were experiencing some difficulty in negotiating the narrow door, for their arms were about each other's waist. He started towards them, the doors slammed all along the train, and in a moment it had pulled out of the station.

Monsieur Dupres leaned against the wall. "Is it not my old friend, Dupres?" asked a man who had just come onto the platform. "I see it is. My dear fellow, are you ill?"

"Ill enough," replied Monsieur Dupres, utterly shattered. "My wife has left me, my dear Labiche. She has left me for Robert Crespigny, and they are behaving abominably all over the town."

"No. No, my dear friend," replied the other. "Set your mind at rest, I implore you. We husbands are sometimes more suspicious even than we should be. Crespigny cannot have taken your wife, my dear fellow. I saw him only three months ago, back from Martinique and in hospital. He died a week later. Out there, their excesses are something formidable."

The Frog Prince

TWO YOUNG MEN WERE DISCUSSING life. Said the richer of them to the poorer, "Paul, you had better marry my sister."

"That is a very strange thing to say," said Paul, "considering I have told you all about my debts."

"I am not worldly," replied Henry Vanhomry. "I should prefer my sister to marry a clean, decent, and kindly fellow like yourself, than some rich but blasé roué, cynic, near-man, sub-man, or half-man."

"I am certainly not blasé," said Paul. "On the other hand, I had not the pleasure of meeting your family when I was in Boston."

"I am very fond of my sister," said Henry, "in a way."

"How delightful! No doubt she was a mother to you when you were small. A little mother!"

"No. No. She is ten years younger than I am; only twenty-eight, in fact."

"Aha! She would have come into her fortune just in the rockiest year of our financial history."

"Fortunately it is well invested, and yields her an income of forty thousand dollars."

"An objection occurs to me. We are men of the world, Henry. If we were of the other sex, we might also make mistakes. Fond as I am of children——"

"That would be a matter entirely for you to decide."

"Henry, your sister sounds charming. Tell me more about her. She is not by any chance a *teeny* little woman?" And Paul held his hand some thirty inches from the floor.

"Quite the reverse."

"*Quite* the reverse, eh?"

"My dear Paul, I do not mean that she is six feet four."

"Six feet three, perhaps?"

"And a half. But perhaps I should tell you she is rather plump. Disproportionately so, in fact."

"Upon my word! I hope she is good-tempered."

"Angelically. You should hear her petting her dolls."

"Pardon me, Henry, but is she at all—backward?"

"A matter of opinion. She reads and writes admirably."

"How delightful. We could correspond, if I happened to be away."

"I will be frank with you, Paul: her letters to famous boxers are quite amazingly expressive, though by no means perfect in orthography."

"Henry, she is capable of hero worship; she has an affectionate nature."

"Almost embarrassingly so. It appears from these letters of hers, which we censor, that she would make a devoted wife. However, my family are old-fashioned, and the boxers are cowardly brutes. I should like to see her married."

"But, as yet, if I understand you, she is pure as the driven snow? Charming!"

"Hers has been a cloistered girlhood. Yet there is something romantic in her nature which causes me alarm.

Supposing one of the boxers responded. He might not treat her politely."

"I, on the other hand, would write her the most devoted letters, and bow, with old-world courtesy, whenever we met. Hm! All I fear, to be perfectly candid, is that a certain confounded coldness, a defect of my nature, might be a cause of pain, dissatisfaction, or longing."

"Well, my dear Paul, that is hardly a matter for me to speculate upon. I can only remind you that faint heart never won fair lady."

"Very well, Henry. I will at least come with you and see your sister."

"I am afraid I cannot accompany you. You forget that I am off to Europe next week. However, I'll give you a letter of introduction to the family."

All this being arranged, our good Paul took leave of his friend, and after walking about for a little with an air of distraction, he paid a visit to the apartment of another friend of his.

"My dear Olga," he said, after a time, "I'm afraid I have some very ridiculous news for you. I am going to be poor no longer."

"Tell me only one thing, Paul. Is she beautiful?"

"Not very, it seems. I have not seen her, but she is over six feet three, and disproportionately fat."

"My poor Paul! She is simply bound to have hair on her face. What will become of you?"

"Besides all this, she is not very bright, I hear."

"And, now I come to think of it, what will become of me?"

"She has forty thousand a year, my dear Olga."

"Paul, we women are given to incredible follies when we are jealous. I might refuse everything. I find myself capable of jealousy."

"But, on the other hand, are you, or am I, capable of living any longer without a little of that forty thousand a year?"

"Or some other."

"But what other, my dear Olga? Where is another forty thousand?"

"It is true, Paul. Am I right in believing that your gigantic bride-to-be is mentally nine years, or is it twelve years, old?"

"Seven, I should think, by all that Henry told me of her. She has an exuberant innocence. She writes to boxers, but caresses dolls."

"Really? That is very interesting. Dolls are so featureless. Now, is there any great hurry, Paul? I have still that bracelet you found at Palm Beach. It would provide us with a few last weeks together."

"I was going to suggest, as a matter of fact, that it should be my present to the bride, for I like to do things in good style. However, something may turn up. I admit that I love you."

"You shall promise me not to go near Boston for at least a month. I shall be busy, I have decided to wear my hair short, but at least we shall meet at week-ends. In between, you may say farewell to all your bachelor life."

"Yes, that is true, Olga. I shall have to do that, I suppose."

Everything being agreed, this young couple spent the

next month or so as Olga had suggested, and at the end of it, she saw him off to Boston, with a restraint that he found almost too admirable.

He arrived at Boston, presented his letter of introduction, and was very well received by old Mrs. Vanhomry.

They got on admirably. "You are still a bachelor?" she asked.

"I cannot," he replied, "bring myself to regard the modern girl as a true mate. Those clipped locks, that flat masculine figure, that hardness, that ultra-sophistication! Where are the curves, the innocence, the warm-heartedness of yesteryear? But why I am telling you all this—?"

"You would have liked our dear Ethel. Such a big, healthy, affectionate, old-fashioned girl! You must meet her, and her fiancé. Perhaps you will come to the wedding?"

"Nothing could be more delightful. Unfortunately, I have to return to New York almost immediately."

On his return, Paul called at once on Olga, but found that her flat was locked up. She had left no address; you may depend he sought her everywhere.

He saw in the papers an account of the wedding of Miss Vanhomry to a Mr. Colefax: it appeared that the happy pair were on their way to the Ritz-Carlton.

"I really must go and sit in the lobby," said he, "and console myself with a peep at the disadvantages attached to that forty thousand a year."

Very well, he sat in the lobby. Before very long, he saw the enormous form of what was evidently the happy bride crossing from the elevator.

"Upon my word!" he thought. "There is a great deal to

be said for the simple life after all. One at least preserves one's individuality."

He peered about for the husband. At last he saw a sensitive face in the neighbourhood of the bride's hips. "That must be the husband," he said. "Very charming! Very charming indeed! But surely I have seen him before."

In order to make sure, he edged closer, and was amazed to find that this husband was none other than his own Olga, in male attire.

He at once applied for a private interview. "My dear Olga, this is a very pretty trick you have played on me. And what can your bride—*soi-disant*—think of it all?"

"You must regard the matter rationally, my dear Paul."

"I am so afraid there may be a scandal. You have no idea what spiteful tongues might make of it."

"You underestimate the innocence of my wife, whose dolls, as I suspected, were very ordinary dolls. And you must admit, Paul, that if either of us is to be in this position, I at least offer less grounds for jealousy. You had better be my secretary."

Paul submitted with a good grace, and for a long time enjoyed his occupation very tolerably. Fortunately, Henry Vanhomry remained in Europe.

On one occasion there was a dinner party at the Colefax home, and a few of the male guests, with Paul the friendly secretary, and dapper little Mr. Colefax, remained smoking together long after the gigantic bride had retired to bed. The conversation turned on women, a subject which the so-called Mr. Colefax enjoyed more than his secretary. They talked of attractions.

"My wife," said this charming impostor, "is disarmingly simple: why try to disguise it? Nevertheless, she has an amazing personality buried, as it were, beneath her *naïveté*. I am convinced it is there, I sense it, and yet I could hardly find an example to describe. How do you account for that?"

"It is very simple, my dear Colefax," said a very eminent doctor. "Your wife, if I may say so, owes her adorable simplicity, as she does her admirably robust physique, to a little glandular maladjustment, which (always supposing you should desire what professionally we should regard as an improvement) could easily be put right. Who knows what she is like underneath?"

"It would certainly be interesting to find out," said her false husband, intrigued.

"She might be slim, vivacious, a positive butterfly," continued the doctor.

"It would be like carving out ambergris from a whale," observed a well-known adventurer who was present.

"Or opening a neolithic barrow," added an eminent archæologist.

"Or undressing an Eskimo girl at Christmas," put in a notorious Don Juan.

"You might find more than you bargain for," observed Paul, overcome by an inexplicable foreboding.

He spoke too late. Everyone was desperately keen on the experiment.

"You must bring your dear wife to a little home that I have in Paris," said the doctor, "where I have every facility for the treatment."

"We shall come at once. You, Paul, had better remain

behind, to deal with everything we shall have to leave unsettled."

Paul, therefore, was left. Ethel and her spouse went on the next boat to Paris, accompanied by the doctor, and, as a matter of fact, by the adventurer, the archæologist, and the Don Juan as well.

MY DEAR PAUL,

You will be amazed at the result of our experiment, and possibly a little disconcerted, though you were always a connoisseur of poetic justice. Under the treatment Ethel has lost no less than a hundred pounds. The removal of this prodigious quantity of blubber has left her exposed as a lean, agile, witty, and very handsome man. "How absurd that I should have been called Ethel so long!" he observed to me when first he was apprised of this transformation. In order to put him at his ease, I replied at once, "No more absurd than that I should have been called your husband." After all, the cat was, so to speak, out of the bag, and there was nothing else to do.

He took it extremely well, saying with a smile, "We must make the punishment fit the crime." On my part, I was not long in promising never to deceive him again.

We are remaining on this side to avoid gossip, for the situation has a ludicrous side which we might find painful. But not nearly so ludicrous or painful, my dear Paul, as it might have proved, in all the circumstances, had you had your original wish.

Once more,

OLGA

Special Delivery

IT WAS WITH HIS EYES WIDE OPEN, AND with a reluctance amounting to dread, that Albert Baker slowly surrendered to the passion that was to change his whole life. "Am I mad?" he asked.

He addressed this inquiry, at the end of a long letter, to a certain Big Brother Frank, who gave candid advice in the Heart Correspondence Column of the popular *Tails Up Weekly*. They printed his letter in full.

DEAR SIR,

Excuse my writing to you, but you say write your difficulties. I am in a difficulty, and cannot ask anyone else, they will say I am mad. I am in love. Only the young lady is not like others. She is different.

Have you been along Oxford Street at eight in the morning? I have to go every morning, that is where I work. In all the shop windows you can see the young men carrying in the artificial young ladies they have to dress for the day. All the way along you can see them, like the old master picture of the Romans and the stolen women, only not so fat. Some struggle, some have their arms round the young men's necks but are looking out of the window. She does not struggle or look out of the window. She is one of those young ladies and I am one of the young men.

Surely it is not much difference from falling in love with

a film star. I have been in London on this job four years, no one to really talk to. She seems to know everything I try to say. She has those very long blue eyes, thinking about the Riveera, but very kind.

After all, what do you really want with a girl, if not higher things? It isn't only the Riveera, either, but I look after her every way, and you would really think she knew. Ordinary girls don't know, take it from me.

I take her in and keep well in front of her till she is full-dressed, no one shall write to the papers about her. Anyway, what is it they make all the fuss about—nothing.

I am not mad, she is what I want, not everybody wants a lot of chatter or a family. You want someone to understand you, so you can be happy. I would look after her. But they cost £30, you might as well cry for the moon. Besides, if I got £30, they would say to me, you are mad. Or immoral purposes. It is not like that.

In the shop they heard me speak to her and are ribbing me all the time. I shall know what to do if I know what I am. My plans are made. Please tell me Big Brother if you think they are right. Am I mad???

Yours sincerely,

ALBERT BAKER

Big Brother Frank's reply was printed below. "Take cold baths and plenty of open air exercise," said this amiable adviser. "Change your occupation. If you find yourself unable to put aside this degraded and perverse attachment, by all means consult a reliable psychiatrist, and if necessary enter an institution for treatment."

"So I'm crazy," said Albert, when the paper was de-

livered on Friday morning. "All right, then. My plans are made." There was a touch of braggadocio in this speech. Albert's only plan was to keep quiet and see what he could do.

At half-past seven in the morning there is only one thing a shop assistant can do: that is, hurry off to work as fast as he may, especially if he has to walk from Paddington. To be crazy is one thing; to be late at Rudd & Agnew Ltd. is quite another; Albert was not as mad as all that.

So he started out from his lodgings with his mouth open and his eyes wide. "If I'm late," said he, "they're bound to get hold of her. They'll bend her over. They'll do anything. I must hurry."

"I'll be in time," said Albert to Eva, speaking across the desolate glory of the new day's sunlight, the sunlight, that is, of the day on which he was definitely crazy, and anything was possible; the sunlight in which he and she were utterly and terribly alone. "I wouldn't let you down."

Unfortunately, Albert now abandoned himself to a dream, the dream of his every morning rush towards Rudd & Agnew's. This was of entering first upon the empty salon, lifting the dust-sheet. "Wake up," he would say. "Is it all right? Put your arms round my neck. Helpless, aren't you? Here's your brassiere. Here's your things." (The models at Rudd & Agnew's were lifelike to a degree, perfect in almost every particular.) "Come on," Albert would say. "Nobody can see you. Hurry up, and we'll have a minute before they come in. What did you dream about? Did you dream about the house?"

In abandoning himself to this rehearsal, Albert unconsciously fell into his normal pace. Awakening, he found himself in the glazed brick employees' entrance, devoured by the dry smell of big shops, facing a time clock that stood at three minutes past eight. "They'll be here," he said.

He fled through the catacombs below, into the main shop, downstairs, upstairs, over an interior bridge. From the gallery on the other side he could look down into the long aisles behind the principal windows. Like laden ants in a disturbed ant-hill, the shop-men ran to and fro with their still, pale burdens. Albert could see the daily joke pass, from the lips of one to the eyes of another, wherever their paths crossed, as they carried their waxen Circassians, these proud, long-suffering, far-eyed, enchanted princesses, out of their mad mysterious night to their odious toilettes, to make them ready for the long slave-market of the day. There was a slap, and a guffaw.

"Here, none of that," said the shopwalker, himself unable to restrain a scurvy grin at what Clarkie was doing.

But, rounding the gallery, Albert could see three or four gathered in the corner where Eva lay, where he put her to sleep properly, after they had all gone at night. They were out of sight of the shopwalker. They were bending over. Miller's hateful voice sounded out of the middle of the group. "Oh, my God!" cried Albert. "They've got her."

He went down the stairs as one flies downstairs in a nightmare, heedless of the steps, round the satins, into the French models. "Living statue, number three," he

heard Miller say. "Albert's 'oneymoon, or—" His hands dived out before him, without waiting to be told; his fingers were on the back of Miller's neck. They slipped on the brilliantine. He drove his nails in.

Next moment, Miller was up, facing him. "You think you can do that to me?" said Miller. "You poor loony!" There was a crack, shatteringly loud: Miller had struck him open-handed on the cheek. Such is the combat of shop assistants.

"Leave her alone, that's all," said Albert.

"What in the world is this?" cried the shopwalker, hurrying up.

"Stuck his nails in the back of my neck, that's what," said Miller, truculent, standing up for his rights, justified. "I reckon I'm bleeding."

Albert's lower lip was jerking, as if something quite independent of himself had got inside it. "He had hold of her," he said at last.

They all looked down at Eva, naked, her eyes staring out far beyond her shame, like a lion's eyes staring past the bars and the crowd. Albert bent down, and pressed her into a more seemly position. She ignored him.

"What if he had?" said the shopwalker. "You think Rudd & Agnew's waits for *you* to come in any time and fix the windows?"

"I'm sorry, sir," said Albert.

"I shall have to make a report on you," said the shopwalker. "Get on with your work."

Albert was left alone with Eva. "If they give me the sack," he murmured, "who'll look after you? Don't be hard, Eva. I couldn't help it. And I had something to

tell you. Don't you want to know what it is? You do? Really? Well, listen——”

Eva had given him an unmistakable look of understanding and forgiveness. It raised Albert to a precarious exaltation. Twice he actually risked slipping out into the entrance, where he could catch the side-long glance from her eyes. It seemed to him impossible he could get the sack.

After the midday break, however, things took a different turn. Albert spent his lunch time walking up and down in front of the shop, an exercise which was not forbidden because no one had ever thought it possible. Soon after he got in, Miller entered, full-blown, triumphant, carrying a copy of *Tails Up Weekly*.

“What a fool!” said Albert. “What a fool I’ve been!”

“Look here, boys,” cried Miller as loudly as he dared. “Come in behind here. Clarkie. Syd. Come on. Just half a tick. It’s worth it.”

“Get back to your counters,” said the shopwalker, perceiving the excitement. “What is it now, Miller, for heaven’s sake?”

“Only something that proves something,” said Miller with an air of righteousness, handing the shopwalker the fatal page.

“This is serious!” cried the shopwalker, staring at Albert. “This is a matter for the Secretary. I’m taking this paper, Miller. I’m taking it to Mr. Schilberg himself.”

He went, and Albert was left alone; standing, stared at, like a man brought out to be hanged. “It’s the sack all right,” he said to himself. “Who knows? They might have me shut up.”

The thought set his legs in motion. "Here, you'd better stand by," cried a good-natured man. "They'll be sending for you in a minute."

"Let 'em," said Albert. "I'm off."

"Well, I ain't seen you go," said the other defensively.

"I'm off!" cried Albert aloud, as he passed others of the department. They all stared at him, then pretended not to notice. He went up the stairs and round the gallery, through the corridors, out past the time-keeper. "I'm off," said he, punching the clock for the last time. "You look it," said the time-keeper indifferently.

He went into the street, and round into Oxford Street, crossing to the other side in the hope of making some undetected signal to Eva. As soon as he saw her, he knew what his real purpose was: he walked on without a change of pace, and entered the farthest doorway, into the hardware department, where as yet the news could hardly be known, and where he himself would be unrecognized.

He went through a staff door, into a maze of corridors, and found his way to a nook in a store-room, where he could lie hidden till closing time. There he lay, with his eyes closed and his hands folded, like a dead man, but there was a clock ticking in his brain.

At exactly seven o'clock he got up and stepped out quietly. He was cool, collected, utterly different. The whole place was different. A little daylight leaked in through the blinds at the back of the windows: the high glass dome was blueing, the galleries were drowned in darkness; flying staircases leapt out where the light struck them, and stopped short in mid-air where the shadow

bade them. Vast stacks of shadow, the leaning façades of towering dreams, mounted like the skyscrapers of a new-risen city from floor to unsubstantial floor, up to the dome itself. The watchman, a being of the shadows, drifted hurriedly across the diminishing territories of the light. Albert, a deeper shadow, followed him, blacker and quieter than the watchman, more utterly of the dark.

The watchman entered the main hall, crossed the region of the French models, and disappeared into a deep vista of darkness on the farther side. Albert, absolutely master of the situation, knowing exactly how many minutes were his before the watchman could stumble round again, ran noiselessly forward.

He pulled aside the dust-sheets. The models were huddled there, grouped like victims in the sack of some forgotten city. Some stood upright, unable to relax, tense to meet some new outrage; some, on hands and knees, bowed their faces to the floor, straining for the relief of tears. Others, their wits wiped out by horror, sat with their legs straight out, their hands flat and dead beside them, staring idiotically into a darkness deeper than that of the night.

"Eval" whispered Albert. "Where are you?" She was a little apart from the others, sitting as if waiting to be taken away.

"You knew I'd come," said Albert, lifting her. Her face fell forward on this: her lips touched his cheek. "You're cold," said Albert. "You're used to your bed."

He caught up the dust-sheet and tucked it about her neck. Its pale folds fell over her and him.

This cloaked double figure, this walking embrace of life and death, this beautiful nightmare under its carapace of cotton cloud, now ran noiselessly, staggering a little, up the light spirals of fretted iron, over the flying bridges, now to be seen rounding some high gallery, now swallowed by darkness, now seen higher, still mounting like a spider, till at last it reached the uppermost corridors, and the sanctuary of the little store-room.

Albert closed the door, spread a bed of wrapping papers, laid Eva upon it, took her head upon his lap, and spread the dust-sheet over them. Eva gazed up at him. There was still light here, through a little round window like a port-hole. He could see her eyes, steady and cool, gazing at him, weighing him up: his weak face with its tremulous rickety outline, his glossy inconsiderable hair. All the same, he was her saviour. More than that, for that was a job merely, he was for her the only man in the world. If ever she loved, she must love him; whatever her memories were, there was no one else now. All the rest were monsters, raging in blindness. In all his unworthiness he was the only living creature she could love. "What can I do?" thought Albert, overwhelmed by the responsibilities laid on him by this tremendous act of chance, which blackmailed her into the necessity of loving him, and left it to him to make himself worthy.

The dawn, with its threat, recalled him from a thousand fine spiritual issues to a very practical one. "I can't leave you here," said he. "What can I do?"

Albert was not a man of action: his mind was weak, broken, bound by the hundred habits of timid servitude.

He crouched, with his head in his hand, conscious, less of the problem than of Eva's blue gaze, which expected a decision.

Suddenly Albert stood up. "I've got it," said he. "They've driven me to it. Never mind. You do what I tell you: you trust *me*." He actually emphasized the word "me." He lifted Eva, and set her in the corner, as if she were a mere dummy. "Keep quiet," he said. "I'm going to deliver you, like the chap in the book."

He went out into the twilight of the vast shop; a dawn twilight, altogether different from that of the evening. Albert was equally changed: he was no longer a shadow scurrying rat-like from dark to dark, but a young man of nerve and decision. He was perfectly prepared, if he met him in the silks, to stun the night-watchman with a roll of art-shade ninon, or to hood him with a girdle if their paths crossed in the lingerie, or gag him with gloves in the gloves, or strangle him with a stocking in the hosiery, or fell him with a cucumber in the fruit. He devoutly hoped the encounter would not take place in the silver-ware or cutlery, for Albert was the mildest, gentlest creature that ever breathed, and abhorred the sight of blood. As it happened, the night-watchman was no believer in burglaries at six o'clock on a June morning, and was now in his cubby-hole far away in the basement, engaged in the nice preparation of a cup of cocoa to keep at bay the ill effects of the night air.

Albert, not knowing this, and resolved to deal with a dozen night-watchmen if necessary, was intoxicated by his only experience of courageous action, and rose from

height to height. When he had gathered up a complete wardrobe for Eva, of a rather gayer fashion than she had ever enjoyed before, he went boldly up to the main office, to a desk where forms were made out for special deliveries, and, finding a block of such forms, he chose a name from a list of customers on the desk: "Raymond Pinckney, Esq., 14 Mulberry Grove, Hampstead." This he scribbled on the form; filled in the words, "One model, special arrangement: deliver 9 a.m.—" "Now what the hell day is this?" murmured Albert. His heart sank; he was done for; he had come upon that blind spot which brings the greatest of criminals to their downfall. But no! There was a calendar: yesterday was a Friday because his washing had to be made up; this, therefore, was Saturday. "Who says I'm crazy?" said Albert. "Deliver 9 a.m. Saturday, 14 June, without fail." Now for the rubber stamp. He looked in the middle drawer: there it was. Everything was going swimmingly. It was with a light heart that he drew out the cash for expenses and hurried back to Eva.

She looked at him questioningly. "Don't you worry," said he. "I been man enough. Here, I'm going to wrap you up. When I've got you dressed, of course."

Albert dressed Eva: that was no difficult task. He wrapped the grey-white paper about her, leaving a chink for light and air to come through. Then he set himself to wait for the striking of eight o'clock. In the long interval he was as still as Eva was: he dared not move, nor think, nor scarcely breathe even; he sat holding a tourniquet on his courage, which, at the least shifting,

would begin to ebb away. He did not hear seven o'clock strike at all, or the clashing of the scrub-women's pails, or the drone of the vacuum cleaners: he heard only one bronzy reverberation, and knew it for the last stroke of eight.

He picked Eva up and ran down the back stairs, out to where a raw service-lift clanked him down into the goods yard, whence, without stopping, he walked straight out, holding up his form to the indifferent custodian. "Special delivery," he said. "Got to get a cab."

Albert looked round: he was in the street. "Oh, good heavens!" he said. "What have I done?" People were looking at him, only waiting a split second before they knew and would begin to hound him down. He forgot all about the cab; all his thought and will was concentrated on the single effort of keeping himself from breaking into a run.

Automatically, he took the way to his lodgings. Four times he saw a policeman in the distance, and walked step by leaden step under the awful eyes till he drew abreast of him, crossed the razor edge between brazen approach and guilt-proclaiming flight, felt the eyes on his back, and waited for the shout.

He passed a knot of children on their way to school. "Look what he's got!" they cried. "Hi, Crippen!"

He had had no lunch, no supper, no breakfast, no sleep: the morning sun was already sultry. Eva, whom he could carry like a baron or a brigand when he was in the shop, now became an insupportable weight. He ached in every joint, his knees gave, his head swam; every one of the thousands in the streets was a pursuer;

never was creature so universally hunted, nor moved so pitifully slow.

He turned at last into the mean street where he lived. He stumbled into the smelly passage. His landlady, who had spied him from the basement window, now called to him up the kitchen stairs. "Is that you, Mr. Baker?" cried she.

Albert stopped dead. His room was two floors above, but he could already see it as if he were in the doorway; its dimness, its frowziness, its promise of a few hours' safety with Eva. He had thought of nothing beyond that: all he wanted was just a few hours in that room. He had gone through the hellish streets for that, and now, from the tone of his landlady's voice, he knew he would never see his room again. He began to cry.

"Yes, it's me, Mrs. Budgen," he said haltingly, using the breaths between his sobs.

"Mr. Baker, there's been inquiries," shouted the landlady. "Looked like the plain-clothes to me. I'd like a word, *now*. I——"

"All right, Mrs. Budgen," said Albert. "I'll be down in half a tick. Just got to go to the W.C."

He allowed himself a few seconds to breathe, then took up Eva again, and crept out of the front door and into the hideous street. He reached the corner, and saw Praed Street with its taxi-cabs. "Got to take a cab," he said aloud, as if he were still addressing the man in the goods yard. "I dunno where I'm going."

"Hi!" called Albert to a passing taxi. It went on unheeding. "Hi!" he called. "Stop, won't you? Are you mad?" He actually galvanized his bending knees into a

pitiable stagger, and overtook the taxi a few yards on, where it had stopped at a crossing. The driver looked at him as he panted alongside.

"Here you are," said Albert, staring at the delivery slip he had held all this time in his hand. "Pinckney, 14 Mulberry Grove, Hampstead."

"O.K.," said the driver. Albert fell into the cab, and they were off.

Albert held Eva propped against him, and closed his eyes. A jerk, such as the dead will feel on the last day, recalled him to his senses. There was sunlight, altogether unlike the menacing glare in the loud streets: it was filtered through the leaves of lime trees. There was a heavenly quiet, a green iron gate, a gravel drive, a smiling house-front, peaceful, prosperous, and not unfriendly.

Albert stood in a wide porch, with his arm round Eva. A soft-faced man, in blue serge trousers and waistcoat, stood in the doorway. "Never 'eard of a tradesman's entrance?" said he mildly.

"This 'ere's special," said Albert, holding out his slip.

"Well, you've come wrong," said the man. "Mr. Pinckney's down at the Hall. Two Rivers Hall, Baddingly, Suffolk. They ought to have known at the shop. You take it back quick."

"Wanted very special," murmured Albert in despair, proffering his slip.

The man weighed up the situation for a moment. "Hand it over," said he. "The chauffeur's going down. He'll take it."

"He'll take me too," said Albert. "This is special."

"All right," said the man. "You'll have to get back by yourself, though."

"Don't you worry about me," said Albert.

There followed another dream, with Albert sitting in the back of a large touring car, Eva beside him, and the wrapping dislodged a little so that she could get the fresh air and see the fields go by. Not a word was said. Albert ceased trying to fit things together in his brain. He wished the drive would go on for ever, but, since it had to end, he was glad that it ended at a quiet house, standing on a gentle Suffolk knoll, surrounded by red walls and green gardens, full of the shade of senior trees.

"The master's in the studio," said an old woman to the chauffeur.

"You come along with me," said the chauffeur to Albert.

Albert followed with his precious burden into a cobbled stable yard. The chauffeur knocked at a door. "Young man from Rudd & Agnew's. Special delivery," said he.

"What's that?" said a voice. "Send him in."

Albert found himself in a giant room: it was a loft and stable knocked into one, with a vast cool window all down one side. A large canvas stood on an easel; there were hundreds of brushes, several palettes, boxes of colours. On a cane sofa was a young man reclining in great comfort, reading a thriller.

This young man looked up at Albert. He was a true monkey-face, hideously ugly, with a quick brown eye,

hair fallen over his forehead; cotton jersey, beach trousers, straw shoes, and a pipe. "Well, what is it?" said he.

"I've brought—" said Albert. "I've brought—I've brought this." He pulled aside a little more of the wrapping.

"I didn't order anything of this sort," said the young man. "You've brought her to the wrong place."

"Here it is," said Albert, offering his slip. "Written down."

"I don't use that sort of model," said the young man. "Might be an idea, though. However, you ask them to give you some beer in the kitchen, and then take her back."

"No," said Albert. He began to shake and tremble. He stared at Mr. Pinckney with a rabbit desperation. Mr. Pinckney stared back at him. "What is all this?" said he.

"Mister," said Albert, "have you ever been in love?"

"We won't discuss that," said the ugly young man.

"If you don't know, it's no good me talking," said Albert. "All right, I'll get out. Come on, Eva. I can't help it. We got to get out."

"Wait a little," said Mr. Pinckney. "Take it easy. Tell me all about it. I shall understand."

"It's like this," said Albert, and told, very strangely, his strange story.

"You are quite mad," said Pinckney at the end of it.

"So they say," said Albert. "I'm a human being, ain't I? I could be happy."

"I like your philosophy," said Pinckney. "Mad but happy."

"Have I ever been happy?" said Albert.

"Go on," said Pinckney.

"And what about her?" said Albert. "But you're laughing. You're ribbing me." His voice rose dangerously.

"What would you do with her?" said Pinckney.

"I would look after her," said Albert. "But not to be ribbed. No. I'll get out."

"Listen, you," said Pinckney. "If you want to look after her, don't leave her propped up against the table there. Set her in the armchair comfortably."

"Yes, sir, I will," said Albert. "I didn't like to ask."

"Take off those stuffy wrappings," said Mr. Pinckney harshly. Albert smiled at Mr. Pinckney.

"So, you're in love with her," said Pinckney, "and you want to be happy. What's your name, by the way?"

"Albert Baker. Hers is Eva."

"Well, listen, Baker," said Pinckney, in a tone of command. "I'm not making you any promises; you're just here in peace and quiet for the present. How long, depends on a lot of things: most of all, on how you behave. You're mad. Don't forget it. It doesn't matter a bit, but you've got to be sensible about it. Listen to this. If ever you feel an overpowering impulse—if ever you feel you simply must do something—whatever it is, you're to tell me first. Do you hear?"

"Yes, sir," cried Albert. "If you please, I must—I must go to the lavatory. I'm so happy."

"Excellent!" said Pinckney. "Then go and sit under the tree over there. Eva will be perfectly all right: she's resting."

"She's all right," said Albert. "She trusts you."

When he had gone, Pinckney went to the telephone, and he called his lawyer.

"I'm going to keep him here," said he, in conclusion. "Well, I'm going to, that's all— Yes, but you tell them their damned model's going to be paid for: that's all they care about— Yes, I'm responsible for him— That's it, our respected client— As long as you fix it— Oh, hideous, absolutely hideous— Might do to paint for a lark— Well, you'll let me know? Good man! That's fine."

Pinckney hung up. "He'll fix it," said he to himself. "But I'll keep that bit of news, in case he needs calling to order. If he seems depressed, I'll tell him."

Albert, however, did not seem depressed. The journey through the London streets had left him with some comfortable blanks in his mind. He wore a slightly dazed look; his mouth hung open, and his eyes filled with tears now and then, when a thought came to a happy end, transforming itself into a feeling, like a flower opening inside his mind. To the outward view there was nothing very odd about him. "He's a bit queer, isn't he?" said Mabel, the housemaid.

"Nervous breakdown," said the housekeeper. "That's what Mr. Pinckney says. My sister's boy had one. They put him in a home."

"He's no trouble," said Mabel. "Does his own room, anyway. Funny, he locks that door as if he had the Crown Jewels to look after."

"He's very willing and obliging," said the housekeeper. "And he's got to be let alone."

Albert had an old chauffeur's room, away over the end of the stables. He shone the shoes, he fetched and

carried for the housekeeper, who was told never to send him down to the village. Most of the time he helped the gardeners in the green gardens that were almost all lawn and trees. From the dusty window Eva watched him working for her in the yellow shade of the limes, in the black shade of the mulberries, and in the green shade of the mighty beech.

In the evening Albert had his supper in the housekeeper's room. At the end of it, "Thank you, ma'am," said he, and, "Thank you, miss," to Mabel. He was very polite; to him they were lesser angels, instruments of the great power that kept the world at bay. Then he hurried away to his room, to tell Eva all about it.

"He came up to me today," he would say. "Oh, he's so *nice*, Eva. I can't tell you how nice he is. Always speaks rough, only it's in a joking way. But when he mentions you—it's most respectful. He knows what you are. I ought to have told you: it was his idea about bringing up the roses. Only I thought you'd like it to be me."

This was only the beginning of their evening, which stretched far into the light summer night, for Albert slept very little, and when he did Eva came to life in his dreams. "Are you miserable?" he asked her. "Are you still longing for the Riveera?"

"Not me," she replied softly.

"It's better than the shop, isn't it?" said he, anxiously.

"It's nice being with you," said Eva.

"Do you mean it?" cried Albert eagerly. "With me?"

"I can see what you're like," said Eva.

These tender passages passed between them in dreams so mingled with his summer wakefulness that he passed

from one to another as easily and unnoticingly as he passed from shade of beech to shade of lime on the lawn. Sometimes, Albert and Eva never lay down at all, but passed the night at the window, watching the glow fade from the red roofs of the village at the foot of the slope, and not moving till the dawn brought them into sight again.

One evening, under one of these friendly red roofs, a meeting was in progress. The proceedings were concerned with the organization of the village flower-show and fête: officials were appointed to the charge of the show-tent, the gate, the side-shows, and the collection of subscriptions. "I propose Mr. Bly be asked to go round for subscriptions," said the vicar's gardener. "I beg to second that," said the blacksmith. "If Mr. Bly will be so kind," said the secretary, cocking an inquiring eye at the village constable, whose official position marked him out for this responsible office. Mr. Bly nodded formidable assent, the proposal was unanimously accepted, entered in the minutes, and the meeting was adjourned.

Next morning Mr. Bly mounted his bicycle, and pedalled slowly in the direction of the Hall.

"Oh, God!" cried Albert, peering from behind a hedge. "They've tracked us down."

Bending double, he ran to his little stable-room. "Come on, Eva," he said. "It's no good. It couldn't last. He can't save us this time. It's the police."

He took Eva in his arms and ran down under the field hedges to a wood in the bottom, and thence across country, along the edges of dusty summer fallows, crawling through standing corn, taking to the woods whenever

possible, scuttling across the roads when he came to them, shouted at by one or two men in the fields, flown at by a dog when he blundered on a keeper's hut in a clearing, stared at by an awful eye from above. All around he could sense a network of cars and men, policemen, shopwalkers, the Secretary himself, searching for him and Eva.

Night came. He could now creep only a hundred yards at a time, and then must lie still a long time, feeling the earth turn over and over, and the network of pursuit close in. "Eva," said he, "we've got to go on all night. Can you stand it?"

Eva made no response. "You're weak," said he. "Your head's going round. You can feel your heart giving way. But we've got to go on. I've let you down, Eva. We've got to go on."

The last part of that night journey was a blank to Albert. They must have come to a common. He found himself sprawled in a deep bay in a clump of furze. Eva lay tumbled beside him, in a horrible attitude, as she had lain that fatal morning in the shop. "Stretch yourself out," he said. "I'll come to in a minute. I'll look after you."

But the sun was already high when he sat up, and Eva was still sprawled as she had been before. A yellow fly crawled on her cheek: before he could move, it had crawled right over her unwinking blue eye. "Eva!" he cried. "What's up? Wake up. Has it been too much for you? Say something, do."

"She's dead!" he cried to the world at large. "Carrying her about like that—I've killed her."

He flung himself upon the sprawling figure. He opened her dress, he listened for her heart. He lay like that for a long time. The sun poured down, glimmering on the worn blue suit, parching the flossy hair, devouring the waxen cheeks, fading the staring blue eyes.

Albert's face was as dead as Eva's, till suddenly it was galvanized by an expression too distracted and too fleeting to be called hope. Thump, Thump, Thump, he heard: he thought it was her heart beating again. Then he realized it was footsteps coming near.

He raised his head. Someone was on the other side of the bushes. "They shan't disturb you, my darling," he said to Eva, and got up and stumbled round to face the intruders.

It was not policemen: it was two ordinary men, filthy, unshaven, looking at Albert out of wicked eyes.

"Nice goings on," said one of them.

"We seen you," said the other.

"There's a law against that sort of thing," said the first. He gazed up at the sky. "Might be worth a couple of quid, not to be run in for that sort of thing."

"For a decent girl it would," said the other.

"Not to be dragged along to the copper-station with her thingummys hanging round her ankles," said the first.

"You keep off," said Albert. "I haven't got no money. Straight. You can search me if you like."

"Perhaps the young lady 'as," said the first man, having verified this point.

"If she *is* a young lady, she 'as," said the second.

"And if not," said the first. "If not, Alf— What do you say? Looked O.K. to me. Nice bit of goods!"

"I'm game," said Alf, glancing round.

The men made a move. Albert got in front of them, his arms spread wide. "Keep back," he said again, feeling how light and flat and useless the words were.

"Sit on him, Alf," said the first man. "Then I will."

There was a scuffle. Albert, heaven knows how, tore himself away from Alf, and rushed after the first man, seizing him by the collar and raining blows on his hard head. "Strewth!" cried the man. "'Ere, take him off, Alf: 'e's stinging me."

Albert felt a hand seize him. He turned; there was Alf's grinning face. "Come on, dearie," said Alf. Albert, yielding for a moment, suddenly kicked as hard and viciously as he could. There was a terrifying howl: Alf was rolling on the ground.

"What'll they do to me?" thought Albert. "Eva! I did it for you."

"He's done it to me!" cried Alf. "He's done it to me. Kill the— Kill 'im!"

Something hit Albert on the side of the jaw, and a bombshell burst in his brain. "The knock-out," said the first man, turning again to go round to where Eva lay.

"Let me get my boots on him," said Alf, scrambling to his feet.

"Gawd's trewth! Look here, Alf," cried the first man from the other side of the bushes. "It's a bloody dummy."

"You come back here," said Alf. "You 'it 'im. *I* didn't!"

"What's up?" cried the other, hurrying round.

"He's a goner," said Alf. "I'm off."

"Wait a minute, pal," cried the first man. "Have some sense. You're in it as much as me. Look here, you kicked him. Do you think I can't see? Never mind. Let's get him hid; that's the main thing."

"Chuck 'em down in the chalk pit, both of 'em," said the other. "Come on: it'll look as if he fell in of his own accord. We've never seen him, have we?"

A few minutes later the men were gone. The sun poured down on the glinting common, scorching everywhere except in the cool bottom of the chalk pit, where Eva and Albert lay unsought and undisturbed. His head lay limp on her neck; her stiff arm was arched over him. In the autumn, when the overhang crumbled down on them, it pressed him close to her for ever.

Half-Way to Hell

LOUIS THURLOW, HAVING DECIDED TO take his own life, felt that at least he might take his down time also. He consulted his passbook: there was a little over a hundred pounds left. "Very well," said he. "I'll get out of this flat, which stinks, and spend a really delightful week at Mutton's. I'll taste all the little pleasures just once more, to say good-bye to them."

He engaged his suite at Mutton's, where he kept the page-boys on the run. At one moment they had to rush round into Piccadilly to buy him chrysanthemums, in which to smell the oncoming autumn, which he would never see. Next they were sent to Soho to get him some French cigarettes, to put him in mind of a certain charming hotel which overlooked the Seine. He had also a little Manet sent round by the Neuilly Galleries—"To try living with," he said, with the most whimsical smile. You may be sure he ate and drank the very best: just a bite of this and a glass of that, he had so many farewells to take.

On the last night of all he telephoned Celia, whose voice he felt inclined to hear once more. He did not speak, of course, though he thought of saying, "You should really not keep on repeating 'Hallo,' but say 'Good-bye.'" However, she had said that already, and he

had been taught never to sacrifice good taste to a bad *mot*.

He hung up the receiver, and opened the drawer in which he had stored his various purchases of veronal tablets.

"It seems a great deal to get down," he thought. "Everything is relative. I prided myself on not being one of those panic-stricken, crack-brained suicides who rush to burn out their guts with gulps of disinfectant; now it seems scarcely less civilized to end this pleasant week with twenty hard swallows and twenty sips of water. Still, life is like that. I'll take it easy."

Accordingly he arranged his pillows very comfortably, congratulated himself on his pyjamas, and propped up a photograph against his bedside clock. "I have no appetite," he said. "I force myself to eat as a duty to my friends. There is no bore like a despairing lover." And with that he began to toy with this last, light, plain little meal.

The tablets were not long in taking effect. Our hero closed his eyes. He put on a smile such as a man of taste would wish to wear when found in the morning. He shut off that engine which drives us from one moment to the next, and prepared to glide into the valley of the shadow.

The glide was a long one. He anticipated no landing, and was the more surprised to learn that there is no such thing as nothing, while there is quite definitely such a thing as being dead in the most comfortable bedroom in all Mutton's Hotel.

"Here I am," he said. "Dead! In Mutton's Hotel!"

The idea was novel enough to make him get out of bed at once. He noticed that his corpse remained there, and was glad to observe that the smile was still in place, and looked extremely well.

He strolled across to the mirror to see if his present face was capable of an equally subtle expression, but when he came to look in he saw nothing at all. Nevertheless he obviously had arms and legs, and he felt that he could still do his old trick with his eyebrows, from which he assumed that he was much the same, only different.

"I am just invisible," he said, "and in that there are certain advantages."

He decided to go out at once, in order to have a bit of fun. He went down the stairs, followed a departing guest through the revolving door, and in two minutes he was walking down Cork Street. It appeared to be just after midnight; there was a bobby, a taxi or two, and a few ladies, none of whom took any notice of him at all.

He had not gone twenty yards, however, and was, as a matter of fact, just passing his tailor's, when a lean dark figure detached itself from the shadows which hung about the railings in front of the shop, and coming up close behind his elbow, said, "Damn and blast it, man, you *have* been a time!"

Louis was a little put out at finding himself not so invisible as he had thought. Still, he glanced at the stranger and saw that his eyes were as luminous as a cat's eyes, from which it was plain that he could see better than most.

"Do you mean," said Louis, "that I've been keeping you waiting?"

"I've been hanging about here, freezing, for a week," said the stranger peevishly.

Now it was only September, and the nights, though nippy, were not as cold as all that. Louis put two and two together. "Is it possible," said he, "that you have been waiting to—to take me in charge, so to speak, on account of my recent suicide?"

"I have," said the fiend. "You'll come quietly, I suppose."

"My dear fellow," said Louis, "I know you have your duty to do, and in any case I'm not the sort of person to make a scene in the street. I'm sorry if I've kept you hanging about in the cold, but the truth is I had no idea of your existence, so I hope there'll be no ill-feeling."

"I've got an ill-feeling all right," replied the other, grumpily. "I swear I've got the 'flu, curse it!" And with that he sneezed miserably. "The worst of it is," he added, "we've got such a *human* of a way to go. I shall be fit for nothing for weeks."

"Really, I can't bear to hear you sneeze like that," cried our hero. "Have you ever tried the Quetch at the Rat Trap Club?"

"What's Quetch?" asked the other, between sneezes.

"It tastes like liquid fire," replied Louis. "I believe it's made from plum stones, though why I can't tell you. Possibly to cure your cold."

"Liquid fire, eh?" observed the stranger, his eyes glowing like cigarette ends.

"Come and try it," said Louis.

"I don't know," said the other. "We're a week late through your fault. I don't see why we shouldn't be half

an hour later through mine. I suppose there'll be trouble if they hear of it."

Louis assured him that this last half-hour must be put down to his account also. "You caught the cold through my delay," said he. "Therefore I am responsible for the time you take to cure it." The fiend obviously believed this, which caused our hero to reflect that he must be a very simple fiend.

They set out for the Rat Trap Club. Passing through Piccadilly Circus, the fiend indicated the Underground, saying, "That's where I'm going to take you when we've had this drop of what-d'ye-call-it."

"That does not take you to Hell," said Louis, "but only to Barons Court. The mistake is pardonable."

"No mistake," replied the fiend. "Let's cross the road this way, and I'll show you what I mean."

They went in, and travelled down the escalator, chatting very affably. It was fairly crowded with more ordinary passengers, but our friends attracted no attention whatever. There are a great many fiendish-looking individuals travelling on this subway, and others of a corpsy appearance. Besides, now I come to think of it, they were invisible.

When they had reached the ordinary lowest level, where the trains run, "Come," said the fiend, and drew Louis into a passage he had never before noticed, up which there came a huger clanking and a sultrier blast. He saw a notice saying, "Follow the wrong light." A few paces brought them to the top of an escalator such as our hero had never dreamed of: it swooped down from under their feet with a roar and a groan, down into the

close innards of the earth. Its passage was lit by the usual lamps. Louis, whose sight seemed to have become extremely keen, saw that at some far point on its vast curve, the black shades changed to blue, and the lamps gave place to stars. However, it seemed to go on the devil of a long way past that.

For the rest, it was made just like all other escalators: its sides were adorned with pictorial advertisements of temptations, some of which Louis thought might be very interesting. He could have stepped on, for there was no barrier or ticket collector, but, as we have seen, he liked to take his time.

Now and then, he and his companion were jostled by other fiends and their charges. I am afraid some of the latter were behaving in rather an undignified manner, and had to be marched along in a sort of policeman's grip. The effect was degrading. Louis was interested to see, however, how tremendously the escalator accelerated once it felt the weight of these infernal policemen and their victims. It was a tremendous spectacle to see this narrow moving chain, dimly lit, roaring, rushing down, looping the distance between Earth and Hell, which is greater than one would imagine.

"What did you do before this sort of thing was invented?" asked Louis.

"We had to leap down, like chamois, from star to star," replied the fiend.

"Splendid!" said Louis. "Now let's go and have that drink."

The fiend consenting, they went off to the Rat Trap, and, slipping into a cubby-hole behind the bar, they

helped themselves to a full bottle of the famous Quetch. The fiend disdained a glass, and put the bottle to his lips, whereupon Louis saw, to his great amazement, this powerful form of brandy was actually brought to the boil. The fiend appeared to like it; when the liquid was gone he sucked away at the bottle, the melting sides of which collapsed like the skin of a gooseberry sucked at by a child. When he had drawn it all into his mouth, he smiled, pursed his lips, and blew out the glass again, this time more like a cigarette-smoker exhaling his first puff. What's more, he didn't blow the glass into bottle shape as formerly, but into the most delightful statuary piece, most realistic, most amusing. "Adam and Eve," said he laconically, placing it on the table to cool.

"Oh, very, very good!" cried Louis. "Can you do Mars and Venus?"

"Oh, yes," said the fiend. Louis immediately commandeered several more bottles of Quetch.

He called for one or two other subjects, of a nature that would hardly interest the reader. The fiend, however, thought each more amusing than the last, and nearly split his sides over the effect of a hiccup on Lady Godiva. The fact is, he was getting rather tight. Louis encouraged him, not so much for the love of art as because he had no great desire to ride on that escalator.

At last the fiend could drink no more. He got up, jingled his money (fiends have money—that's where it's all gone to), puffed out his cheeks. "Whoop!" said he, with a hiccup. "My cold's better, I believe. If it isn't, well, then—to Hell with it! That's what I say. Ha! Ha!"

Louis, you may be sure, told him he was a fine fellow.

"Well," said he, as they stood on the steps of the Club, "I suppose you're going that way; I'm going this." He made a bit of a face, pleasantly, raised his hat, and set off along the street, scarcely daring to breathe till he had rounded the corner.

When he thought himself in safety, "By Jove," said he, "I'm well rid of that fellow. Here I am, dead, invisible, and the night is yet young. Shall I go and see what Celia's doing?"

Before he could embark on this rash project, he felt a very hard hand on his arm, looked round, and saw his custodian.

"Oh, there you are," said he. "I wondered where the devil you'd got to."

"Drunk as a lord," said the fiend, with a smile. "Got to see each other home, eh?"

There was nothing for it: they set out for Piccadilly Circus. The fiend kept his hand on Louis's wrist, quite inoffensively of course, only Louis would rather it had not been there.

So they went chatting into the subway again. Just as they got to the level of the Piccadilly line, which is where the infernal aperture gapes for those who are privileged to see it, whom should Louis see, in top hat, white silk scarf, and all the rest, but his damned nasty rival, catching a late train home.

"I bet," said Louis at once, addressing the fiend, "that you are not strong enough to carry me on your back from here to the escalator."

The fiend, with a sneer of contempt, immediately bent down. Louis, with a desperate effort, picked hold of his

rival round the waist and dumped him on the back of the fiend, who gripped his legs, and started off like a race-horse.

"Carry you all the way to Hell for tuppence!" cried he, in drunken pride.

"Done!" cried Louis, who was skipping along beside them to enjoy the spectacle.

He had the delicious pleasure of seeing them jump on the escalator, whose terrific acceleration seemed even more marked and more admirable than before.

Louis returned to the street as happy as a king. He walked about for a bit, and suddenly decided to look in at Mutton's Hotel to see how his corpse was getting on.

He was rather annoyed to see, even as he stood looking at it, that the effective smile, over which he had taken so much trouble, was slipping. In fact, it was beginning to look altogether idiotic. Without giving the matter a thought, he instinctively nipped inside to hook it back into place. In doing so he twitched his nose, found it necessary to sneeze, opened his eyes, and, in a word, found himself quite alive and no longer kicking, in that excellent bedroom of Mutton's Hotel.

"Well, upon my word!" said he, glancing at the bedside table. "Is it possible I dropped off to sleep after taking only two of those tablets? There is really something to be said for taking one's time. It must have been just a vivid dream."

In short, he was glad to be alive, and still gladder a day or two afterwards, when some news came through that made it seem that it was not a dream after all. Louis's rival was announced as missing, having last been seen

by two friends at the entrance of Piccadilly Circus station shortly after midnight on Tuesday.

"Who'd have thought it?" said Louis. "Anyway, I suppose I had better go and see Celia."

However, he had learned the advantage of taking his time, and before he went he thought better of it, and, in fact, did not go at all, but went to Paris for the autumn, which shows that girls shouldn't play fast and loose with the affections of small men with blue eyes, or they may find themselves left in the lurch.

Bird of Prey

THE HOUSE THEY CALL THE ENGINEER'S House is now deserted. The new man from Baton Rouge gave it up after living less than a month in it, and built himself a two-room shack with his own money, on the very farthest corner of the company's land.

The roof has caved in, and most of the windows are smashed. Oddly enough, no birds nest in the shelter of the eaves, or take advantage of the forsaken rooms. An empty house is normally fine harbourage for rats and mice and bats, but there is no squeak, or rustle, or scamper to disturb the quiet of this one. Only creatures utterly foreign, utterly remote from the most distant cousinhood to man, only the termite, the tarantula, and the scorpion indifferently make it their home.

All in a few years Edna Spalding's garden has been wiped out as if it had never existed. The porch where she and Jack sat so happily in the evenings is rotten under its load of wind-blown twigs and sand. A young tree has already burst up the boards outside the living-room window, so that they fan out like the stiff fingers of someone who is afraid. In this corner there still stands a strongly made parrot's perch, the wood of which has been left untouched even by the termite and the boring beetle.

The Spaldings brought a parrot with them when first they came. It was a sort of extra wedding present, given them at the last moment by Edna's mother. It was something from home for Edna to take into the wilds.

The parrot was already old, and he was called Tom, and, like other parrots, he sat on his perch, and whistled and laughed and uttered his few remarks, which were often very appropriate. Edna and Jack were both very fond of him, and they were overwhelmingly fond of each other. They liked their house, and the country, and Jack's colleagues, and everything in life seemed to be delightful.

One night they had just fallen asleep when they were awakened by a tremendous squawking and fluttering outside on the porch. "Oh, Jack!" cried Edna. "Get up! Hurry! Run! It's one of those cats from the men's camp has got hold of poor Tom!"

Jack sprang out of bed, but caught his foot in the sheet, and landed on his elbow on the floor. Between rubbing his elbow and disentangling his foot, he wasted a good many seconds before he was up again and had dashed through the living-room and out upon the porch.

All this time, which seemed an age, the squawking and fluttering increased, but as he flung open the door it ceased as suddenly as it had begun. The whole porch was bathed in the brightest moonlight, and at the farther end the perch was clearly visible, and on the floor beneath it was poor old Tom parrot, gasping amid a litter of his own feathers, and crying, "Oh! Oh! Oh!"

At any rate he was alive. Jack looked right and left for traces of his assailant, and at once noticed the long,

heavy trailers of the vine were swinging violently, although there was not a breath of wind. He went to the rail and looked out and around, but there was no sign of a cat. Of course, it was not likely there would be. Jack was more interested in the fact that the swaying vines were spread over a length of several feet, which seemed a very great deal of disturbance for a fleeing cat to make. Finally he looked up, and he thought he saw a bird—a big bird, an enormous bird—flying away: he just caught a glimpse of it as it crossed the brightness of the moon.

He turned back, and picked up old Tom. The poor parrot's chain was broken, and his heart was pounding away like mad, and still, like a creature hurt and shocked beyond all endurance, he cried, "Oh! Oh! Oh!"

This was all the more odd, for it was seldom the old fellow came out with a new phrase, and Jack would have laughed heartily, except it sounded too pathetic. So he carefully examined the poor bird, and finding no injury beyond the loss of a handful of feathers from his neck, he replaced him on the perch, and turned to reassure Edna, who now appeared in the doorway.

"Is he dead?" cried she.

"No," said Jack. "He's had a bit of shock, though. Something got hold of him."

"I'll bring him a piece of sugar," said Edna. "That's what he loves. That'll make him feel better."

She soon brought the sugar, which Tom took in his claw, but though usually he would nibble it up with the greatest avidity, this time he turned his lack-lustre eye only once upon it, and gave a short, bitter, despairing sort of laugh, and let it fall to the ground.

"Let him rest," said Jack. "He has had a bad tousling."

"It was a cat," said Edna. "It was one of those beastly blacks that the men have at the camp."

"Maybe," said Jack. "On the other hand—I don't know. I thought I saw an enormous bird flying away."

"It couldn't be an eagle," said Edna. "There are none ever seen here."

"I know," said Jack. "Besides, they don't fly at night. Nor do the buzzards. It might have been an owl, I suppose. But——"

"But what?" said Edna.

"But it looked very much larger than an owl," said Jack.

"It was your fancy," said Edna. "It was one of those beastly cats that did it."

This point was discussed very frequently during the next few days. Everybody was consulted, and everybody had an opinion. Jack might have been a little doubtful at first, for he had caught only the briefest glimpse as the creature crossed the moon, but opposition made him more certain, and the discussions sometimes got rather heated.

"Charlie says it was all your imagination," said Edna. "He says no owl would ever attack a parrot."

"How the devil does *he* know?" said Jack. "Besides, I said it was bigger than an owl."

"He says that shows you imagine things," said Edna.

"Perhaps he would like me to think I do," said Jack. "Perhaps you both would."

"Oh, Jack!" cried Edna. She was deeply hurt, and not without reason, for it showed that Jack was still thinking of a ridiculous mistake he had made, a real mistake,

of the sort that young husbands sometimes do make, when they come suddenly into a room and people are startled without any real reason for it. Charlie was young and free and easy and good-looking, and he would put his hand on your shoulder without even thinking about it, and nobody minded.

"I should not have said that," said Jack.

"No, indeed you shouldn't," said Edna, and she was right.

The parrot said nothing at all. All these days he had been moping and ailing, and seemed to have forgotten even how to ask for sugar. He only groaned and moaned to himself, ruffled up his feathers, and every now and then shook his head in the most rueful, miserable, despairing way you can possibly imagine.

One day, however, when Jack came home from work, Edna put her finger to her lips and beckoned him to the window. "Watch Tom," she whispered.

Jack peeped out. There was the old bird, lugubriously climbing down from his perch and picking some dead stalks from the vine, which he carried up till he gained a corner where the balustrade ran into the wall, and added his gatherings to others that were already there. He trod round and round, twisted his stalks in and out, and, always with the same doleful expression, paid great attention to the nice disposal of a feather or two, a piece of wool, a fragment of cellophane. There was no doubt about it.

"There's no doubt about it," said Jack.

"He's making a nest!" cried Edna.

"Hel!" cried Jack. "*He!* I like that. The old impostor!

The old male impersonator! She's going to lay an egg. Thomasina—that's her name from now on."

Thomasina it was. Two or three days later the matter was settled beyond the shadow of a doubt. There, one morning, in the ramshackle nest, was an egg.

"I thought she was sick because of that shaking she got," said Jack. "She was broody, that's all."

"It's a monstrous egg," said Edna. "Poor birdie!"

"What do you expect, after God knows how many years?" said Jack, laughing. "Some birds lay eggs nearly as big as themselves—the kiwi or something. Still, I must admit it's a whopper."

"She still doesn't look well," said Edna.

Indeed, the old parrot looked almost as sick as a parrot can be, which is several times sicker than any other living creature. Her eyes closed up, her head sank, and if a finger was put out to scratch her she turned her beak miserably away. However, she sat conscientiously on the prodigious egg she had laid, though every day she seemed a little feebler than before.

"Perhaps we ought to take the egg away," said Jack. "We could get it blown, and keep it as a memento."

"No," said Edna. "Let her have it. It's all she's had in all these years."

Here Edna made a mistake, and she realized it a few mornings later. "Jack," she called. "Do come. It's Tom—Thomasina, I mean. I'm afraid she's going to die."

"We ought to have taken the egg away," said Jack, coming out with his mouth full of breakfast food. "She's exhausted herself. It's no good, anyway. It's bound to be sterile."

"Look at her!" cried Edna.

"She's done for," said Jack, and at that moment the poor old bird keeled over and gasped her last.

"The egg killed her," said Jack, picking it up. "I said it would. Do you want to keep it? Oh, good Lord!" He put the egg down very quickly. "It's alive," he said.

"What?" said Edna. "What do you mean?"

"It gave me a turn," said Jack. "It's most extraordinary. It's against nature. There's a chick inside that egg, tapping."

"Let it out," said Edna. "Break the shell."

"I was right," said Jack. "It *was* a bird I saw. It must have been a stray parrot. Only it looked so big."

"I'm going to break the shell with a spoon," said Edna, running to fetch one.

"It'll be a lucky bird," said Jack when she returned. "Born with a silver spoon in its beak, so to speak. Be careful."

"I will," said Edna. "Oh, I do hope it lives."

With that she gingerly cracked the shell, the tapping increased, and soon they saw a well-developed beak tearing its way through. In another moment the chick was born.

"Golly!" cried Jack. "What a monster!"

"It's because it's young," said Edna. "It'll grow lovely. Like its mother."

"Maybe," said Jack. "I must be off. Put it in the nest. Feed it pap. Keep it warm. Don't monkey with it too much. Good-bye, my love."

That morning Jack telephoned home two or three times to find out how the chick was, and if it ate. He

rushed home at lunch time. In the evening everyone came round to peep at the nestling and offer advice.

Charlie was there. "It ought to be fed every hour at least," said he. "That's how it is in nature."

"He's right," said Jack. "For the first month at least, that's how it should be."

"It looks as if I'm going to be tied down a bit," said Edna ruefully.

"I'll look in when I pass and relieve your solitude," said Charlie.

"I'll manage to rush home now and then in the afternoons," said Jack, a little too thoughtfully.

Certainly the hourly feeding seemed to agree with the chick, which grew at an almost alarming speed. It became covered with down, feathers sprouted: in a few months it was fully grown, and not in the least like its mother. For one thing, it was coal-black.

"It must be a hybrid," said Jack. "There is a black parrot; I've seen them in zoos. They didn't look much like this, though. I've half a mind to send a photograph of him somewhere."

"He looks so wicked," said Edna.

"He looks cunning," said Jack. "That bird knows everything, believe me. I bet he'll talk soon."

"It gave a sort of laugh," said Edna. "I forgot to tell you."

"When?" cried Jack. "A laugh?"

"Sort of," said Edna. "But it was horrible. It made Charlie nearly jump out of his skin."

"Charlie?" cried Jack. "You didn't say he'd been here."

"Well, you know how often he drops in," said Edna.

"Do I?" said Jack. "I hope I do. God! What was that?"

"That's what I meant," said Edna. "A sort of laugh."

"What a horrible sound!" said Jack.

"Listen, Jack," said Edna. "I wish you wouldn't be silly about Charlie. You are, you know."

Jack looked at her. "I know I am," said he. "I know it when I look at you. And then I think I never will be again. But somehow it's got stuck in my mind, and the least little thing brings it on. Maybe I'm just a bit crazy, on that one subject."

"Well, he'll be transferred soon," said Edna. "And that'll be the end of it."

"Where did you hear that?" said Jack.

"He told me this afternoon," said Edna. "He was on his way back from getting the mail when he dropped in. That's why he told me first. Otherwise he'd have told you first. Only he hasn't seen you yet. Do you see?"

"Yes, I see," said Jack. "I wish I could be psycho-analysed or something."

Soon Charlie made his farewells, and departed for his job on the company's other project. Edna was secretly glad to see him go: she wanted no problems, however groundless, to exist between herself and Jack. A few days later she felt sure that all the problems were solved for ever.

"Jack," said she when he came home in the evening.

"Yes," said he.

"Something new," said she. "Don't play with that bird. Listen to me."

"Call him Polly," said Jack. They had named it Polly to be on the safe side. "You don't want to call him 'that bird.' The missus doesn't love you, Poll."

"Do you know, I don't!" said Edna, with quite startling vehemence. "I don't like him at all, Jack. Let's give him away."

"What? For heaven's sake!" cried Jack. "This rare, black, specially hatched Poll? This parrot of romantic origin? The cleverest Poll that ever——"

"That's it," said Edna. "He's too darned clever. Jack, I hate him. He's horrible."

"What? Has he said something you don't like?" said Jack, laughing. "I bet he will, when he talks. But what's the news, anyway?"

"Come inside," said Edna. "I'm not going to tell you with that creature listening." She led the way into the bedroom. "The news is," said she, "that I've got to be humoured. And if I don't like anything, it's got to be given away. It's not going to be born with a beak because its mother was frightened by a hateful monstrosity of a parrot."

"What?" said Jack.

"That's what," said Edna, smiling and nodding.

"A brat?" cried Jack in delight. "A boy! Or a girl! It's bound to be one or the other. Listen: I was afraid to tell you how much I wanted one, Edna. Oh boy! This is going to make everything very, very fine. Lie down. You're delicate. Put your feet up. I'm going to fix dinner. This is practice. Stay still. Oh boy! Oh boy! Oh boy!"

He went out through the living-room on his way to the kitchen. As he passed the window he caught sight of

the parrot on the dark porch outside, and he put his head through to speak to it.

"Have you heard the news?" said he. "Behold a father! You're going to be cut right out, my bird. You're going to be given away. Yes, sir, it's a baby."

The parrot gave a long low whistle. "You don't say so?" said he in a husky voice, a voice of apprehension, a quite astonishing imitation of Charlie's voice. "What about Jack?"

"What's that?" said Jack, startled.

"He'll think it's his," whispered the parrot in Edna's voice. "He's fool enough for anything. Kiss me, darling. Phew-w-w! You don't say so? What about Jack. He'll think it's his, he's fool enough for anything. Kiss me, darling. Phew-w-w!"

Jack went out into the kitchen, and sat down with his head in his hands for several minutes.

"Hurry up!" cried Edna from the bedroom. "Hurry up—*Father!*"

"I'm coming," said Jack.

He went to his desk, and took out the revolver. Then he went into the bedroom.

The parrot laughed. Then, lifting its claw, it took the chain in its beak, and bit through it as if it were paper.

Jack came out, holding the gun, his hand over his eyes. "Fool enough for anything!" said the parrot, and laughed.

Jack turned the gun on himself. As he did so, in the infinitesimal interval between the beginning and the end of the movement of his finger on the trigger, he saw the bird grow, spread its dark wings, and its eyes flamed, and it changed, and it launched itself towards him.

The gun went off. Jack dropped to the floor. The parrot, or whatever it was, sailing down, seized what came out of his ruined mouth, and wheeled back through the window, and was soon far away, visible for a moment only as it swept on broader wings past the new-risen moon.

Collaboration

THERE WAS A CERTAIN AMBROSE, WHO was proud of his superior profile and his superior taste. His wife was supposed to be a testimony to both. She was a honey blonde with a wide mouth and a bewitching eye, better than a bowl of strawberries and cream, but she was too simple to be fit for any but an adoring role, and this was what he assigned to her. He managed, however, to teach her to demand sherry, and sneer at cocktails, and sometimes she wondered if she was sighing for a Manhattan.

They had a little house on Long Island, and another in the south of France. On one occasion he was opening his letters. "All is well," said he. "We shall set off for Provence next month. We shall see our dear house, our terrace, our garden, all in perfect taste, all designed by me. I shall take you with our little Movie-ola, and you," said he, throwing back his wavy hair, "will take me."

"Yes, my dear," said she.

"If only," said he, "we had a couple of ideal children, the image of their father. They could be taken running to meet me. We could take them here on Long Island and show them to our friends in Provence, and we could take them in Provence, and show them to our friends on

Long Island. I can't understand why you don't have a couple of ideal children. You know I wish it."

"I gave up cocktails because you wished it," said she. "And now I drink sherry."

He put his fine hand to his brow. "I talk of ideal children," he moaned, "and you reply with an idiotic irrelevancy about cocktails. Leave me. You jar. I will open my letters alone."

She obediently withdrew, but soon a bitter cry brought her scurrying back again. "Oh, my dear, what in the world is it?" cried she. "Whatever is the matter?"

"Read that," said he, handing her a letter. "Don't talk to me about cocktails. Read that."

"What is this?" she cried. "Your money gone!"

"I tried to double it," said he. "I thought it would be nice. This comes of being an artist, a dreamer. Spare me your reproaches."

"We have each other," said she, allowing a large, booby tear to trickle down her cheek, as women often do when they seek comfort in this particular reflection.

"Yes," said he. "And may take films of each other in the bread-line, and show them to our friends. You may be taken so if you wish. I have my pride."

"But I have my jewels," said she. "We can live on them while you write that book you have always been talking of."

"Always been talking of?" said he. "I hardly know what you mean. Still, a great many fools write books, and sell a hundred thousand copies. What would be the royalty on five hundred thousand? Put a heap of high-grade paper in my study. Tell everyone I am not to be dis-

turbed. If only we had a couple of ideal children, you could keep them quiet while I was at work. You could tell them what their daddy was doing."

Pretty soon he was in his study, and visitors were impressed. Sometimes he would wander out among them with a fine, vague air. The only trouble was, he was equally vague when he returned to his desk, and not a line appeared on even the first sheet of his high-grade paper: nothing but drawings of profiles. "I am too much of an artist, I suppose," said he to himself. "I have no appetite for the coarse and crude material of which plots are made. I am all style. There will be no book, we shall become beggars, and Daphne will cease to adore me. I must go out and see life. Perhaps I will find a plot."

He went out and hung about the bohemian cafés in Greenwich Village, where he saw writers in plenty, but not enough life to go round, and not a plot among the whole crowd of them.

In the end he fetched up in the cheapest and shabbiest of dives, such as might be frequented by one who could not finish his book, who had no money, whose wife had ceased to adore him, and who consequently had less chance than ever of a couple of ideal children.

It was extremely crowded. Possibly there are many writers in this disagreeable situation. Ambrose had to share a table with a young man who had the appearance of a tom-cat whose ears have been bitten short in a hundred rigorous experiences. He had a bullet head, a broad nose, magnificent teeth, and a ravenous expression. His shirt was ragged, and his chest bore a plentiful growth of absolutely genuine hair.

His hands were somewhat battered. "That thumb," said he to Ambrose, "a dame shot off. Holding up a candle. One-horse circus show. Never missed ordinary-wise. Jealous. That finger a croc got. Marlinspike that one. Third mate. Mutiny. This thumb got frost-bit. Hitch-hiking across Labrador in a blizzard. Thumbing sledges. Some of them bites is horse-bites, some's wolves', some's dames'."

"Certainly," said Ambrose, "you have seen life."

"Life, birth, death, and passion in the raw," returned the other. "I'd rather see a hamburger."

"Look. There is one on the counter," said Ambrose. "Are you by any chance a writer?"

"A second Jack London," said the other. "But I got the publishing racket against me. I give 'em blood, sweat, lust, murder, everything. And they talk about style." He pronounced this last word with an air of contempt.

"Style," said Ambrose reprovingly, "is ninety-nine per cent of the whole business. I am a stylist myself. Waiter, bring over that hamburger. You see?"

"Thank you," said the young man.

"Yes," said Ambrose. "You can now look at it closely. I have this ability to gratify my friends—call it power if you will—because I am a fine stylist. I count on my forthcoming book to sell half a million copies. Eat the hamburger. It is nothing to me."

"O.K.," said the young man, falling to.

"You seem to like hamburgers," said Ambrose. "I need a sort of secretary with a good experience of life: a prentice, in short, such as the old masters had, who could rough out plots for me. You seem to have an unlimited

supply of material. I have an unlimited supply of hamburgers."

"Sell out?" cried the young man. "For a hamburger? Not me."

"There would be large steaks—" said Ambrose.

"But—" said the young man.

"Smothered with mushrooms," said Ambrose. "Fried chicken. Pie. New clothes. Comfortable quarters. Maybe a dollar a week pocket money."

"Make it two," said the young man. "You can't take a dame out on a dollar."

"Certainly not," said Ambrose. "No dames. All must go into the plots."

"That's tough," said the young man.

"Take it or leave it," said Ambrose.

The young man, after a struggle, succumbed, and soon was tied up with a long-term contract, and taken home to the little house on Long Island. Ambrose described him as a secretary, in order to conceal the true arrangement from his wife, for he feared it might lessen her adoration.

The young man, whose new clothing became him very well, ate and drank very heartily, and relished all that was set before him, all except the sherry. This he absolutely refused, demanding a cocktail. "Mix him an old-fashioned," said Ambrose to his wife, for he felt it might help to nourish up a plot full of life in the raw.

His lovely wife opened her eyes very wide, first at her husband, then at his secretary, and finally at the old-fashioned, of which she could not resist taking a sur-

reptitious sip. "How extremely delicious!" she thought. "How delightful life is, after all! In comes this young man, and at once I get what I have been sighing for. I wonder if he ever sighs for anything. He seems too vital. He would just ask for it. Or take it. Oh dear!"

With that she handed the cocktail to the young man, who received it shyly, gratefully, and yet as if it were his due. He drank it in a straightforward manly fashion, yet with a keen, primitive, simple enjoyment, holding the glass just so, throwing back his head just so—I cannot describe how handsomely this young man appeared to dispose of his cocktail.

All went well in the house. Soon Ambrose ceased to worry. Soon his wife ceased to sigh. Soon the plot was ready. It had everything. "You will remain here," said Ambrose to his secretary, "and we shall go to our little house in Provence, where I shall cast this rough clay into something rather like a Grecian vase. Meanwhile, you can think up another."

So off they went, Ambrose rubbing his hands. His wife perversely showed some disposition to sigh again when they boarded the liner, but of that he took no notice. He soon, however, had reason to sigh himself, for when he began work in his state-room he found his style was not quite as perfect as he had imagined it to be. In fact, by the end of the voyage his high-grade paper was still as blank as before.

This put Ambrose back into the depths of despair. When they got to Paris, he slunk out of the hotel, and drifted into the dingiest café he could find, where the poorest writers forgathered, who were all destitute of

plots, money, adoring wives, ideal children, and everything.

Such cafés abound in every back street of Paris, and enjoy a numerous and cosmopolitan custom. Ambrose found himself sitting beside a young Englishman whose features were sensitive to a degree, and almost transparent by reason of their extreme emaciation. Ambrose observed that this young man's eyes were full of tears. "Why," said he, "are your eyes full of tears?"

"I am a writer," said the young man, "and as the barbarous publishers pay no heed to style, but insist upon plots about beastly men and women, you may understand that I have to live very simply. I was making my frugal dinner on the smell of a superb dish of *tripes à la mode*, which that fat fellow is eating, when in came an abominable newspaper man, who sat down in our neighbourhood and poured out such a flood of journalese that I was obliged to move away. And I am so hungry!"

"Too bad!" said Ambrose. "I'll tell you what. I'll order a portion for myself, and you shall sniff as heartily as you wish."

"I am eternally grateful," said the other. "I don't know why you should benefit a stranger in this way."

"That's nothing," said Ambrose. "Have you ever tasted a piece of bread dipped in the gravy?"

"Yes, indeed!" cried the other. "I did so last Christmas. It lent a special richness to my style all through the first half of this year."

"How admirably you would write," said Ambrose, "if someone fed you *bœuf en daube*!"

"I could write an *Iliad* on it," cried the other.

"And *bouillabaisse*?"

"An *Odyssey*."

"I need someone," said Ambrose, "to put a little finishing touch to some more modern but equally magnificent conceptions of mine. I have a little house in Provence, with an excellent kitchen——"

In a word, he soon had this unfortunate in his hands, and tied up with options and loans as securely as any white slave in Buenos Aires.

The young man first lived in a rapture of sniffing, then grew quite used to bread dipped in the gravy, and finally ate all that was going, to the utmost benefit to his physique and style. He would not, however, drink any of Ambrose's sherry. "Let me have a cocktail," said he. "It will impart a modern and realistic smack to my prose, which is particularly desirable for the scenes laid in America."

"Not only that," thought Ambrose, "but it will provide a link, a *rapport*, between him and the other." Accordingly he called in his wife, at whose appearance the young man inhaled deeply. "Mix him an old-fashioned," said Ambrose.

His wife again opened her bewitching eyes wide, on husband, secretary, and cocktail, of which last she again took a secret sip. She experienced a delicious sensation. "Perhaps I was wrong to begin sighing again," she thought. "Perhaps there is very seldom any real reason to sigh. That young man looks as if he sighed a good deal, which is a pity in anyone so graceful and delicate. I wonder if he knows the cure for it."

Life, however, is not all play; the book progressed

rapidly, and soon took shape as the four-star classic of all time, thrilling enough for the most hardened low-brow, and so perfectly written as to compel the homage of the connoisseurs.

It sold like hot cakes, and Ambrose was fêted everywhere. His cellar was full of the most superlative sherries. His wife no longer sighed, not even when they left Long Island for Provence, or Provence for Long Island. "It makes a change," said she to the interviewers.

It was not very long before she crowned his happiness by presenting him with a sturdy son. "Soon," said Ambrose, "he will be able to run to meet me, and you shall take us on the Movie-ola. He is not quite as like me as he ought to be: it must be your cruder nature coming out in him. But perhaps he will improve, or perhaps you will do better next time."

Sure enough there was a next time, and Ambrose rejoiced in two ideal children. "This one," said he, "is still a little short of the ideal. He has your rather effeminate look. No matter: they average out very like their father indeed, and that is as much as could be hoped for."

So time went by, and no man was more pleased with himself than Ambrose. "What a happy man I am," said he to himself, "with my fame, my riches, my beautiful wife who adores me, my forceful plots, my exquisite style, my houses, my secretaries, and my two ideal children!" He had just called for the Movie-ola to have them taken running to meet him, when a visitor was announced, a literary pilgrim who had come to do him homage.

Such were always very welcome to the great man.

"Yes," said he. "Here I am. This is my study. Those are my books. There, in the hammock, is my wife. And down there, in the garden, are my two ideal little children. I will take you to see them. You shall watch them run to meet their papa."

"Tell me," said the visitor, "do they reflect the genius of their father?"

"Probably," said Ambrose. "In a small way, of course."

"Then," said the visitor, "let us approach them quietly. Let us overhear their prattle. Suppose they are telling stories to each other. I should like to tell the world, sir, that they have inherited their father's genius."

Ambrose was indulgent, and they tiptoed to the edge of the sandpit, where the two youngsters, squatting in the dirt, were busy gabbling their heads off. True enough, they were telling a story.

"An' the ole dragon," said the elder, "sprung out on him like mad, spittin' out flames——"

"And the monster," said the younger, "rushed forth upon him, breathing fire——"

"He hopped out of the way, and stuck his sword in its belly——"

"He leapt nimbly aside, and thrust his gleaming blade into its black heart——"

"And over it went——"

"And it fell——"

"Done in."

"Dead."

The Right Side

A YOUNG MAN, WHO WAS LOOKING extremely pale, walked to the middle of Westminster Bridge and clambered onto the parapet. A swarthy gentleman, some years his senior, in evening dress, with dark red carnation, Inverness cape, monocle, and short imperial, appeared as if from nowhere, and had him by the ankle.

"Let me go, damn you!" muttered the would-be suicide, with a tug and a kick.

"Get down, and walk beside me," said the stranger, "or that policeman, who has already taken a step or two in our direction, will most certainly run you in. Let us pretend to be two friends, one of whom wished for a thrill, while the other was anxious that he should not tumble over."

The young man, who was so eager to be in the Thames, had a great aversion to being in prison. Accordingly he fell into step with the stranger, and, smiling (for now they were just passing the bobby), "Damn and blast you!" he said. "Why can't you mind your own silly business?"

"But, my dear Philip Westwick," replied the other, "I regard you as very much my business."

"Who may you be?" cried the young man impatiently.

"I don't know you. How did you get hold of my name?"

"It came into my mind," said his companion, "just half an hour ago, when first you formed your rash resolution."

"I don't know how that can be," said Philip. "Nor do I care."

"You lovers," said his companion, "are surprised by nothing, except first that your mistresses should fancy you, and next, that they should fancy someone else."

"How do you know," cried our poor Philip, "that it was over that sort of thing?"

"I know that, and much more, equally ridiculous," replied the other. "What would you say if I reminded you that no less than a month ago, when you considered yourself in heaven, and were, in point of fact, in your Millicent's arms, you discerned something of the essence of ennui in the nape of her neck, and actually wished her transformed into the little brunette who serves in a tea-shop in Bond Street? And now you are on the brink of suicide because your Millicent has left you, though the little brunette is, for all you know, in Bond Street still. What do you say to that?"

"You seem to be unaware," said Philip, "that what a man wishes when he is in his girl's arms, and what he wishes when someone else is probably there, are two very different things. Otherwise, I admit your knowledge is devilish uncanny."

"That is only natural," replied the other with a complacent smile, from which Philip immediately realized that he was in the company of none other than the Devil himself.

"What are you up to?" he demanded, drawing back a little.

The Devil, with a look of great benevolence, offered him a cigarette.

"I suppose it's not doped?" inquired Philip, sniffing at it suspiciously.

"Oh, come!" said the Devil with a sneer. "Do you think I need resort to such measures as that, to overcome you? I have *reason* on my side."

"You have a reputation for reasoning to some effect," said Philip. "I have very little desire to be eternally damned."

"What did you expect, then," said the Devil, "when you contemplated suicide?"

"I see nothing wrong in that," said our hero.

"Nor does a puppy that destroys his master's slipper," retorted the Devil. "However, he is punished for it."

"I can't believe it," said Philip obstinately.

"Come with me, then," said the Devil, and took him to a Fun Fair in the neighbourhood of the Tottenham Court Road. Here a number of the ugliest wretches on earth were amusing themselves with gambling games; others were peering into stereoscopes which showed scenes of Parisian night life. The rest of them were picking pockets, making overtures to certain female *habituées* of the place, swearing, and indulging in all manner of filthy conversation.

The Devil looked on all these much as one who has been walking among the poppies and the wild corn-flowers of the fields looks upon the cultivated plants in the garden about his back-door. The commissioner

touched his cap much as gardeners do; the Devil acknowledged the salute and, taking out a latch-key, led Philip to a little door in the wall which, being opened, discovered a lift.

They got in, and descended for several minutes at an incredible speed.

"My dear Devil," said Philip, puffing at his cigarette, which was, in fact, doped, and gave him the impression of being a man of affairs, "my dear Devil, if we go on at this rate, we shall soon be in Hell itself."

Nothing could have been more true. The lift stopped, they got out: they were in a vast hall which resembled nothing so much as the foyer of some gargantuan theatre or picture palace. There were two or three box offices, in front of which the prices of admission were displayed: Stalls—gluttony; Private Boxes—lechery; Dress Circle—vanity; Gallery—sloth; and so forth. There was also a bar, at which one or two uniformed fiends were chatting with the barmaids, among whom our friend was astonished to see the little brunette from Bond Street.

Now and then a door opened upon the vast auditorium, and it was apparent that the play or talkie in progress was a lively one.

"There's a dance lounge through here," said the Devil, "to which I particularly wanted to take you."

A door was opened for them: they found themselves in a reasonably large apartment got up in the grotto style, with ferns and imitation rock-work, and a damp and chilly air. A band was playing a travesty of Scarlatti. Several people were dancing rather listlessly. Philip observed that many of them were disgustingly fat.

The Devil led him up to a slim and pale girl, murmured a few words, and Philip, seeing nothing else to do, bowed, offered her his arm, and they began to circle the room.

She danced very languidly, and kept her heavy lids drooped low over her eyes. Philip uttered one or two trifling remarks. "Do you come here often?" he said. She smiled faintly, but did not reply.

He was a little piqued at her remaining so listless (besides, he had smoked one of the Devil's cigarettes). "How very cold your hand is!" he said, giving it a slight squeeze. It certainly was. He manoeuvred this unresponsive partner into a corner, where he clutched her waist rather more tightly than was necessary for dancing. He felt a chilly moisture penetrate the sleeve of his jacket, and a faint but unmistakable smell of river-mud become perceptible. He looked at her closely, and observed something extremely pearly about her eyes.

"I did not catch your name," said Philip.

His partner scarcely moved her colourless lips. "Ophelia," she said.

"Excuse me," said Philip.

You may depend he lost no time in rejoining the Devil.

"Now," said that worthy, "are you still unable to believe that those who drown themselves are eternally damned?"

Philip was forced to admit the point.

"You have no idea how bored that poor girl is," said the Devil compassionately. "And she has only been here a few hundred years. What is that, in comparison to Eternity?"

"Very little. Very little, indeed," said Philip.

"You see what sort of partners she gets," continued the arch-fiend. "During every dance they reveal to her, and she to them, some little unpleasantness of the sort that so disquieted you."

"But why should they be in a dance lounge?" asked Philip.

"Why not?" said the Devil with a shrug. "Have another cigarette."

He then proposed that they should adjourn to his office, to talk matters over.

"Now, my dear Westwick," said he, when they were comfortably ensconced in armchairs, "what shall our little arrangement be? I can, of course, annihilate all that has occurred. In that case you will find yourself back on the parapet, in the very act of jumping, just as you were when I caught you by the ankle. Shortly afterwards you will arrive in the little dance lounge you saw: whether fat or thin depends upon the caprice of the waters."

"It is night," said Philip. "The river flows at four miles an hour. I should probably get out to sea unobserved. Yes, I should almost certainly be one of the fat ones. They appeared to me remarkably deficient in *it* or S.A., if those terms are familiar to you."

"I have heard of them," said the Devil, with a smile. "Have a cigar."

"No, thanks," said Philip. "What alternative do you suggest?"

"Here is our standard contract," said the Devil. "Do have a cigar. You see—unlimited wealth, fifty years,

Helen of Troy—well, that's obsolete. Say Miss —," and he mentioned the name of a delightful film-star.

"Of course," said Philip, "there's this little clause about possession of my soul. Is that essential?"

"Well, it's the usual thing," said the Devil. "Better let it stand. This is where you sign."

"Well, I don't know," said Philip. "I don't think I'll sign."

"What?" cried the Devil.

Our hero pursed his lips.

"I don't want to influence you, my dear Westwick," said the Devil, "but have you considered the difference between coming in tomorrow as a drowned suicide, and coming in—fifty glorious years hence, mind—as a member of the staff? Those were members of the staff you saw talking to the little brunette at the bar. Nice girl!"

"All the same," said Philip, "I don't think I'll sign. Many thanks, though."

"All right," said the Devil. "Back you go, then!"

Philip was aware of a rushing sensation: he seemed to be shooting upwards like a rocket. However, he kept his presence of mind, kept his weight on his heels, and, when he got to the parapet, jumped down, but on the right side.

Night! Youth! Paris!

And the Moon!

ANNOYED WITH THE WORLD, I TOOK a large studio in Hampstead. Here I resolved to live in utter aloofness, until the world should approach me on its knees, whining its apologies.

The studio was large and high: so was the rent. Fortunately my suit was strongly made, and I had a tireless appetite for herrings. I lived here happily and frugally, pleased with the vast and shadowy room, and with the absurd little musicians' gallery, on which, however, I set my gramophone a-playing. I approved also of the little kitchen, the bathroom, the tiny garden, and even the damp path, sad with evergreens, that led to the street beyond. I saw no one. My mood was that of a small bomb, but one which had no immediate intention of going off.

Although I had no immediate intention of going off, I was unable to resist buying a large trunk, which I saw standing outside a junk-shop. I was attracted by its old-fashioned appearance, for I myself hoped to become old-fashioned: by its size, because I am rather small, by its curved lid, for I was always fond of curves, and most of all by a remark on the part of the dealer, who stood pick-

ing his nose in the disillusioned doorway of his shop. "A thing like that," said he, "is always useful."

I paid four pounds, and had the large black incubus taken to my studio on a hand-barrow. There I stood it on the little gallery, which, for no reason, ran along the farther end.

Now I had no money left; I felt it necessary to sublet my studio. This was a wrench. I telephoned the agents; soon they arranged to bring a client of theirs, one Stewart Musgrave, to inspect my harmless refuge. I agreed, with some reserve. "I propose to absent myself during this inspection. You will find the key in the door. Later you can inform me if my studio is taken."

Later they informed me that my studio was taken. "I will leave," I said, "at four o'clock on Friday. The interloper can come at four-thirty. He will find the key in the door."

Just before four on Friday, I found myself confronted with a problem. On letting one's studio, one locks one's clothes in a press reserved for the purpose. This I did, but was then nude. One has to pack one's trunk: I had nothing to put in it. I had bidden the world farewell: here was my studio—sublet—there was the world. For practical purposes there is very little else anywhere.

The hour struck. I cut the Gordian knot, crossed the Rubicon, burned my boats, opened my trunk, and climbed inside. At four-thirty the interloper arrived. With bated breath I looked out through my little air-and-peep-hole. This was a surprise. I had bargained for a young man of no personal attractions. Stewart Musgrave was a young woman of many.

She had a good look around, pulled out every drawer, peeped into every corner. She bounced herself on the big divan-bed. She even came up onto the little useless gallery, leaned over, recited a line or two of Juliet, and then she approached my modest retreat. "I won't open you," she said. "There might be a body in you." I thought this showed a fine instinct. Her complexion was divine.

There is a great deal of interest in watching a lovely young girl, who imagines herself to be alone in a large studio. One never knows what she will do next. Often, when living there alone, I had not known what I would do next. But then I was alone. She thought she was alone too, but I knew better. This gave me a sense of mastery, power.

On the other hand, I soon loved her to distraction. The hell of it was, I had a shrewd suspicion she did not love me. How could she?

At night, while she slept in an appealing attitude, I crept downstairs, and into the kitchen, where I cleaned up the crockery, her shoes, and some chicken I found in the ice-box. "There is," she said to a friend, "a pixie in this studio." "Leave out some milk," said her friend.

Everything went swimmingly. Nothing could have been more delicate than the unspoken love that grew up between the disillusioned world-weary poet and the beautiful young girl-artist, so fresh, so natural, and so utterly devoid of self-consciousness.

On one occasion, I must admit, I tripped over the corner of a rug. "Who is there?" she cried, waking suddenly from a dream of having her etchings lovingly appraised by a connoisseur.

"A mouse," I telepathed squeakingly, standing very still. She sank into sleep again.

She was more rudely put to sleep some days later. She came in, after being absent most of the evening, accompanied by a man to whom I took an immediate dislike. My instinct never fails me: he had not been in the studio half an hour before he gave her occasion to say, "Pray don't!"

"Yes," said he.

"No," said she.

"I must," said he.

"You mustn't," said she.

"I will," said he.

"You won't," said she.

A vestige of refined feeling would have assured him that there was no possibility of happiness between people so at variance on every point. There should be at least some zone of enthusiastic agreement between every couple: for example, the milk. But whatever his feelings were, they were not refined.

"Why did you bring me here?" said he with a sneer.

"To see my etchings," she replied, biting her lip.

"Well, then——"

"I thought you were a customer."

"I am. A tough customer." With that he struck her on the temple. She fell, mute, inanimate, crumpled.

"Damn it!" said he. "I've killed her. I've done her in. I shall swing. Unless—I escape."

I was forced to admire the cold logic of it. It was, momentarily, the poet's unreasoning prostration before the man of action, the worldling.

Quickly he undressed her. "Gosh!" he said. "What a pity I hit so hard!" He flung her over his shoulder, retaining her legs in his grasp. He bore her up the stairs, onto the shadowy balcony. He opened the trunk and thrust her inside. "Here is a fine thing!" I thought. "Here she is, in her condition, alone with me, in my condition. If she knew she was dead she'd be glad." The thought was bitter.

With the dawn he went for a taxi. The driver came in with him; together they bore the trunk to the vehicle waiting outside.

"Strewth, it's heavy!" said the driver. "What yer got in it?"

"Books," said the murderer, with the utmost calm.

If I had thought of saying, "*Paradise Lost*, in two volumes," I should have said it, then and there, and this story would have come to an end. As it was, we were hoisted on to the cab, which drove off in the direction of Victoria.

A jet of cool night air flowed through the air-hole. She, whom I had mourned as dead, inhaled it, and breathed a sigh. Soon she was fully conscious.

"Who are you?" she asked in alarm.

"My name," I said tactfully, "is Emily."

She said, "You are kidding me."

I said, "What is your name?"

She said, "Stewart."

I could not resist the reply, "Then I am Flora MacDonald."

Thus by easy stages I approached the ticklish question of my hitherto hopeless love.

She said, "I would rather die."

I said, "In a sense you have died already. Besides, I am your pixie. Or it may be only a dream, and you could hardly blame yourself for that. Anyway, I expect he will take us to Paris."

"It is true," she said, "that I have always dreamed of a honeymoon in Paris."

"The Paris moon!" I said. "The bookstalls on the *quais*. The little restaurants on the Left Bank!"

"The *Cirque Medrano*!" she cried.

"*L'Opéra*!"

"*Le Louvre! Le Petit Palais!*"

"*Le Bœuf sur le Toit!*"

"Darling," she cried, "if it were not so dark, I would show you my etchings, if I had them with me."

We were in absolute raptures; we heard the ticket being taken for Paris. We were registered; it was next door to being married, and we laughed at the rolling of the vessel. Soon, however, we were carried up an endless flight of stairs.

"*Mon Dieu! Mais c'est lourde!*" gasped the hotel porter. "*Qu'est-ce que c'est—dans la malle?*"

"*Des livres,*" said the murderer, with the utmost sang-froid.

"*Paradis Retrouvé, une édition complète,*" I whispered, and was rewarded with a kiss.

Alone, as he thought, with his lifeless victim, the murderer sneered. "H'ya keeping?" said he coarsely, as he approached the trunk.

He lifted the lid a little, and thrust his head within. A

rim ran round inside; while yet he blinked, we seized it, and brought the lid down with a crash.

"La guillotine?" I said cuttingly.

"La Defarge!" observed my adored one, knitting her brows.

"Vive la France!"

We stepped out; we put him inside. I retained his clothes. With a sheet from the bed, the bell rope, and a strip of carpet from before the wash-stand, she made a fetching Arab lass. Together we slipped out into the street.

Night! Youth! Paris! And the moon!

Another American Tragedy

A YOUNG MAN ENTERED THE OFFICE of a prominent dentist, and seated himself in the chair. He scornfully waved aside the little probe and mirror with which the dentist smilingly approached him. "Rip 'em all out," he said.

"But," said the dentist, "your teeth seem perfectly good."

"So," said the young man, "is my money."

The dentist hesitated a little. "It would hardly be ethical," said he, "to take out teeth which are sound—unless there is a very good reason for it."

The young man, who had begun to smile at the word "ethical," here extended his smile into a cavernous gape, which laid bare the hindermost of his ivories. At the same time he twitched out a small roll of bills from his vest pocket, and held them noticeably in his hand.

The dentist utterly ignored these bills. "If you want those excellent teeth out," said he, "you must certainly be mad. Now I have a little theory: *mental* derangement is caused by *dental* derangement. It is a sign of something wrong way up behind the roots of the teeth, espe-

cially those of the upper row. Viewed from that angle——”

“Cut it, and pull them, out,” said the young man, impatient of these professional niceties.

The dentist shrugged and obeyed. As if in fear that the young man might become altogether too sane at the end of the operation, he humorously tweaked away the roll of bills with a thirty-third frisk of his forceps.

The young man made no comment, but only called for a mirror, in which he surveyed his numb and fallen chops with every appearance of satisfaction. He asked when his temporary denture would be ready, made the appointment, and went his way.

“Dear me!” thought the dentist. “Perhaps the trouble was not in his teeth after all. Certainly he is still as crazy as a coot.”

Here the dentist made a big mistake. The young man was perfectly sane, and knew very well what he was about. It happened that he had spent all his money, in some years of the vilest dissipation, but he had a very far-reaching and water-tight plan for getting some more.

He accordingly returned to the dentist on the appointed day, and was equipped with his temporary grinders, which he sucked at and gnashed in the most ordinary fashion. He paid for them with almost his last dollar, went out, and got into his racy-looking roadster, and drove out of town as if pursued by the finance company, as he certainly would have been had they caught sight of him.

He drove till nightfall, and resumed his journey next

day. Late in the afternoon he arrived in that part of the country where old and miserly uncles live in remote, dilapidated farm-houses. Our young man was more or less fortunate in possessing one of the oldest and richest of these uncles, whose house was the remotest and most dilapidated of all.

Arriving at this secluded dwelling, our hero drew up before a porch upon which no money had been squandered for years. "So much the more in the old sock," reflected the nephew, as he knocked upon the door.

He was a little disconcerted to hear the tap of high heels within, instead of the shuffle of a deaf and surly retainer, and his jaw dropped when the door was opened by a plump and squarish blonde, a baby of some thirty years and about a hundred and fifty pounds. Her mouth was as wide and as red as a slice of watermelon, she had well-darkened lashes and brows, and an abundance of phony gold hair flowing girlishly down over her shoulders. Our friend was to some extent reassured when he realized that she was dressed in what might be called a nurse's uniform, but the fact that her garters were bright scarlet, and adorned with enormous bows, caused him to wonder if his dear uncle was getting the very best of professional care.

Nevertheless it is important to get on the right side of the nurse, especially when she stands solidly in the doorway. Our hero removed his hat, and put on so soapy a smile that his false teeth nearly dropped out of his head. "I have driven all the way from the big city," said he, "to see my poor, dear, bed-ridden old uncle—God bless him! I did not expect to see so charming a nurse."

The nurse, not budging an inch, responded with a surly and suspicious stare.

"I fear he must be sinking," continued the nephew. "In fact, I had an intuition, a sort of telepathic S.O.S., telling me to hasten out here before it was too late. Let me rush to his bedside."

The nurse still hesitated, but at that moment a peculiar sound, resembling the croaking of giant bull-frogs, arose in the dim depths of the house. This was the good old uncle himself, vociferating toothlessly for an immediate sight of his nephew, whose expressions of affection and concern had been audible in every corner of the dwelling. The old boy knew very well that his relative was after money, and he was eager for the pleasure of turning him down.

The nurse somewhat grudgingly stepped aside. Our hero, with a well-rehearsed whinny of delight, scuttled into the bedroom.

Nothing is more affecting than the greetings of near relatives after a long separation, especially when they are as fond of each other as these two. "My dear Uncle!" cried the nephew. "What a pleasure it is to see you again! But why does your hand tremble so? Why are your eyes so sunken? Why are you so thin and pale?"

"If it comes to that," said his uncle, "you are not too stout and rosy yourself. Yes, you are very worn and emaciated, my boy. Your hair is thin and grey; you have lines, bags, and creases all over your face. If it were not for your handsome white teeth, I believe you would look every bit as old as I do."

"That," said the nephew, "is the effect of ceaseless toil

and moil. It is a hard struggle, Uncle, to make good in these days, especially without any capital."

"So you are making good?" said the old man. "Do you not drink any more?"

"No, Uncle, I never drink now," replied the nephew.

"Well, that's tough," said his uncle, producing a giant flask from under his pillow. "In that case I can't ask you to join me." With that, he took a mighty swig, and, wiping his lips, he continued, "I have, thank heaven, a good doctor. A typical tough, bluff, hard-hitting, straight-shooting country doc of the old school. We call him the horse 'n' buggy doc. He recommends me this as medicine."

"Perhaps that is why your hand trembles so," said his nephew.

"Your own is none too steady," rejoined his uncle. "Evidently you work too hard. Tell me, Nephew, do you ever take a little flutter with the cards?"

"Good heavens, no!" cried the nephew. "I cured myself of that folly long ago."

"I am sorry to hear it," replied his uncle. "We might have played a little cut-throat. The old horse 'n' buggy doc says the excitement keeps me lively. We often play together till after midnight."

"That is why your eyes are sunken so deep," said the nephew.

"I think yours are equally hollow," replied the old man. "You should take a little rest now and then. I suppose, my dear Nephew, you still have an occasional frolic with the girls."

"Girls!" cried the nephew, lifting up his hands. "What

an odious suggestion! It is years since I have even looked at a girl."

"Well, that's too bad," said his uncle. "The old horse 'n' buggy doc has up-to-date views. It was he who sent me Birdie." And, turning to the nurse, who happened to be arranging his pillows, he gave her a certain sort of caress such as is far better imagined than described.

"No wonder!" cried his nephew, when the nurse had gone bridling and smirking from the room. "No wonder, my poor Uncle, that you are so extremely thin and pale!"

"You are equally so," replied his uncle, "and you are only half my age."

"Well," said the nephew, trying a new tack, "perhaps your doctor is right. Perhaps I had better take your treatment."

"I heartily advise it," said the old man.

"The only thing," said the nephew, "is that I can hardly work at the same time. I suppose you would not care to give me a little money, so that I can enjoy the benefits of the system."

"Well, no," said his uncle. "I would not. Definitely not."

"I thought as much," said his nephew. "I fear I shall have to keep on toiling. How upset your good old horse 'n' buggy doc would be! Tell me one thing, however; indulge my curiosity in one trifling respect. Is there any hope I shall come into your money? Have you arranged it in your will?"

"Oh, come!" said his uncle. "Why bother your head with matters of that sort?"

"Do tell me," pressed the nephew. "You have no idea how interested I am."

"Well, if you really want to know," said his uncle, "I have left it all to the old horse 'n' buggy doc, a true down-right, straight-living, hard-faced, crusty, soft-hearted country saw-bones of the old school, and you cannot imagine how agreeable his treatment is to me."

"Is that really so?" said the nephew. "I must say I expected something of the sort. Fortunately I have made my plans against just such a contingency. Allow me, my dear Uncle."

With that he twitched a pillow from under the old man's head, and pressed it over his face. The old uncle gave a petulant kick or two, but what with one thing and another there was very little life left in him, and soon that little was gone.

The nephew, with a wary glance at the door, quickly divested himself of his clothing, which he stowed under the bed. Next, possibly feeling a little chilly, he took the liberty of borrowing his uncle's nightshirt. Then, stowing his uncle's shrunken body under the bed also, he climbed into his place between the sheets. Finally he expectorated his false teeth into a clean pocket handkerchief, which he had brought especially for the purpose, and leaned back upon the pillows, the very spit and image of the old man.

Soon he set up a pipe: "Birdie! Birdie!"

At his call the nurse came hurrying in. "Why, honey-boy," said she, "where's your worthless nephew gone?"

"He has just slipped out for a stroll around the old

place," croaked our hero. "Moreover, I don't think you should call him worthless. No, I have misjudged that young man, and I want you to send for the lawyer, so that I can do him justice in my will."

"Why, Daddy?" cried the nurse. "What's made this change in you?"

"Change?" said the nephew hastily. "There's no change in me, my dear, except perhaps I feel my latter end approaching. Otherwise I am just the same." And to reassure her on this point, he gave her a friendly little caress, exactly as his uncle had done. She emitted an hilarious squeal and went giggling on her errand.

The nephew lay at his ease, waiting only for the arrival of the lawyer. "I shall dictate a new will," thought he, "and sign it before the very eyes of the lawyer, in a shaky imitation of the old man's crabbed hand. I shall then express a desire to be left alone for a short nap, replace my poor uncle in the bed, put on my clothes, put back my teeth, and step out of the window, to march in at the front door as if newly returned from my walk. What bucketfuls of tears I shall shed, when we discover that the poor old boy has passed peacefully away!"

Pretty soon there was a heavy footstep on the porch, and a large and rough-hewn individual strode into the room, bearing a sizable black bag.

"I am glad you have come," said our hero. "I am eager to make out a new will. I wish to leave everything to my nephew."

"My dear old friend," replied the newcomer, "I fear your malady has reached the brain. Who would have thought my old pal could have mistaken me for the

lawyer? You must let me make a brief examination." With that, he pulled down the sheet, and began to probe the nephew with a hard and horny finger. The nephew realized too late that this was no lawyer, but the horse 'n' buggy doc himself, and he uttered a hollow groan.

"I feared as much," said the doctor. "There is something very wrong somewhere in here. I must act at once if you are to recover your reason." As he spoke, he turned the nephew over in the bed, and whisked out a monster hypodermic from his black bag. "Fortunately," said he, "I am always ready for emergencies."

Our hero tried to protest, but he hardly knew what to say, fearing that his uncle would be discovered under the bed, and the circumstance would tend to his prejudice. The doctor, all in a moment, injected a pint of icy fluid into the small of his back, which numbed his whole middle, and paralysed all his faculties, except that of rolling the eyes, which he indulged to the point of excess.

"I am only an old, rough, goldarn horse 'n' buggy doc," observed the doctor, "but I keep abreast of the times. Mental derangement is often caused by abdominal derangement. If you will get out my instruments, nurse, I think we shall soon find the source of the trouble."

In a moment the unfortunate nephew was laid open under his own eyes, which he never ceased to roll. The doctor, unpacking him like a Gladstone bag, kept up a running commentary. "Take this," said he to the nurse, "and put it on the wash-stand. Put these on the chair. Don't get them mixed up, or I shall have the devil of a job getting them back again. It is a pity that nephew is not back: it is more ethical to have the consent of a rela-

tive before operating. I see nothing wrong with this pancreas, considering the age of the patient. Put it on the chest of drawers. Hang these over the bed-rail.

"Hold the candle a little closer," he continued. "I still have not found the cause of his madness. Don't let the candle drip: that is hardly hygienic. Anyway, he is certainly mad, or he would not think of leaving his money to that scallawag of a nephew. It is as well you let me know, my dear, instead of bothering the lawyer. When this is all over, we must take a little trip together."

Saying this, he gave the nurse a caress, similar to that which both uncle and nephew had bestowed on her. The sight of this caress not only shocked our hero, but depressed him abominably, and lowered his powers of resistance. "It is most unprofessional," thought he, "and, what's even worse, it smacks hatefully of conspiracy." This thought caused him to roll his eyes for the last time, and next moment he was a goner.

"Dear me," said the doctor, "I fear I have lost my patient. Sometimes I quite envy the city doctor, with his well-appointed operating theatre. However, their biographies usually sell very poorly, and, after all, I did my best for the old boy, and he has remembered me in his will. Had he lived, he might have altered it. What an extraordinary trick of fate! Pass me over the various organs, my dear, and I will put them roughly into position, for I expect the nephew will be back very shortly, and he would hate to see them lying around."

Bottle Party

FRANKLIN FLETCHER DREAMED OF luxury in the form of tiger-skins and beautiful women. He was prepared, at a pinch, to forgo the tiger-skins. Unfortunately the beautiful women seemed equally rare and inaccessible. At his office and at his boarding-house the girls were mere mice, or were puddingy girls, or swarthy, or had insufficiently read the advertisements. He met no others. At thirty-five he gave up, and decided he must console himself with a hobby, which is a very miserable second-best.

He prowled about in odd corners of the town, looking in at the windows of antique dealers and junk-shops, wondering what on earth he might collect. He came upon a poor shop, in a poor alley, in whose dusty window stood a single object: it was a full-rigged ship in a bottle. Feeling rather like that himself, he decided to go in and ask the price.

The shop was small and bare. Some shabby racks were ranged about the walls, and these racks bore a large number of bottles, of every shape and size, containing a variety of objects which were interesting only because they were in bottles. While Franklin still looked about, a little door opened, and out shuffled the proprietor, a wizened old man in a smoking-cap, who seemed mildly surprised and mildly pleased to have a customer.

He showed Franklin bouquets, and birds of paradise, and the battle of Gettysburg, and miniature Japanese gardens, and even a shrunken human head, all stoppered up in bottles. "And what," said Frank, "are those, down there on the bottom shelf?"

"They are not much to look at," said the old man. "A lot of people think they are all nonsense. Personally, I like them."

He lugged out a few specimens from their dusty obscurity. One seemed to have nothing but a little dried-up fly in it, others contained what might have been horse-hairs or straws, or mere wisps of heaven knows what; some appeared to be filled with grey or opalescent smoke. "They are," said the old man, "various sorts of genii, jinns, sibyls, demons, and such things. Some of them, I believe, are much harder, even than a full-rigged ship, to get into a bottle."

"Oh, but come! This is New York," said Frank.

"All the more reason," said the old man, "to expect the most extraordinary jinns in bottles. I will show you. Wait a moment. The stopper is a little stiff."

"What is this one like?" asked Frank.

"This one," said the old man, desisting in his efforts, and holding the bottle up to the light. "This one—good heavens! My eyes are getting weak. I very nearly undid the wrong bottle. A very ugly customer indeed. Dear me! It's just as well I didn't get that stopper undone. I'd better put him right back in the rack. I must remember he's in the back right-hand corner. I'll stick a label on him one of these days. Here's something more harmless."

"What's in that?" said Frank.

"Supposed to be the most beautiful girl in the world," said the old man. "All right if you like that sort of thing. Myself, I've never troubled to undo her. I'll find something more interesting."

"Well, from a scientific point of view," said Frank, "I——"

"No. No," said the old man. "Talking of science: look at this." He held up one which contained a tiny, mummified, insect-looking object, just visible through the grime. "Put your ear to it," he said.

Frank did so. He heard, in a sort of whistling nothing of a voice, the words, "Louisiana Lad, Saratoga, four-fifteen. Louisiana Lad, Saratoga, four-fifteen," repeated over and over again.

"What on earth is that?" said he.

"That," said the old man, "is the original Cumæan Sibyl. Very interesting. She's taken up racing."

"Very interesting," said Frank. "All the same, I'd just like to see that other. I adore beauty."

"A bit of an artist, eh?" said the old man. "Believe me, what you really want is a good, all-round, serviceable type. Here's one, for example. I recommend this little fellow from personal experience. He's practical. He can fix you anything."

"Well, if that's so," said Frank, "why haven't you got a palace, tiger-skins, and all that?"

"I had all that," said the old man. "And he fixed it. Yes, this was my first bottle. All the rest came from him. First of all I had a palace, pictures, marbles, slaves. And, as you say, tiger-skins. I had him put Cleopatra on one of them."

"What was she like?" cried Frank.

"All right," said the old man, "if you like that sort of thing. I got bored with it. I thought to myself, 'What I'd like, really, is a little shop, with all sorts of things in bottles.' So I had him fix it. He got me the sibyl. He got me the ferocious fellow there. In fact, he got me all of them."

"And now he's in there?" said Frank.

"Yes. He's in there," said the old man. "Listen to him."

Frank put his ear to the bottle. He heard, uttered in the most plaintive tones, "Let me out. Do let me out. Please let me out. I'll do anything. Let me out. I'm harmless. Please let me out. Just for a little while. Do let me out. I'll do anything. Please——"

Frank looked at the old man. "He's there all right," he said. "He's there."

"Of course he's there," said the old man. "I wouldn't sell you an empty bottle. What do you take me for? In fact, I wouldn't sell this one at all, for sentimental reasons, only I've had the shop a good many years now, and you're my first customer."

Frank put his ear to the bottle again. "Let me out. Let me out. Oh, please let me out. I'll——"

"I say," said Frank, "does he go on like that all the time?"

"Very probably," said the old man. "I can't say I listen. I prefer the radio."

"It seems rather tough on him," said Frank sympathetically.

"Maybe," said the old man. "They don't seem to like bottles. Personally, I do. They fascinate me. For example, I——"

"Tell me," said Frank. "Is he really harmless?"

"Oh, yes," said the old man. "Bless you, yes. Some say they're tricky—eastern blood and all that—I never found him so. I used to let him out: he'd do his stuff, then back he'd go again. I must say, he's very efficient."

"He could get me anything?"

"Absolutely anything."

"And how much do you want for him?" said Frank.

"Oh, I don't know," said the old man. "Ten million dollars, perhaps."

"I say! I haven't got that. Still, if he's as good as you say, I could pay you on the instalment system."

"Don't worry. Give me five bucks. I've got all I want, really. Shall I wrap him up for you?"

Frank paid over his five bucks, and hurried home with the precious bottle, terrified of breaking it. As soon as he was in his room he pulled out the stopper. Out flowed a prodigious quantity of greasy smoke, which immediately solidified into the figure of a gross and fleshy Oriental, six feet six in height, with rolls of fat, a hook nose, a wicked white to his eye, vast double chins, altogether like a film-producer, only larger. Frank, striving desperately for something to say, ordered shashlik, kebab, and Turkish delight. These were immediately forthcoming.

Frank, having recovered his balance, noted that these modest offerings were of surpassing quality, and set upon dishes of solid gold, superbly engraved, and polished to a dazzling brightness. It is by little details of this description that one may recognize a really first-rate servant. Frank was delighted, but restrained his enthusiasm.

"Gold plates," said he, "are all very well. Let us, however, get down to brass tacks. I should like a palace."

"To hear," said his dusky henchman, "is to obey."

"It should," said Frank, "be of suitable size, suitably situated, suitably furnished, suitable pictures, suitable marbles, hangings, and all that. I should like there to be a large number of tiger-skins. I am very fond of tiger-skins."

"They shall be there," said his slave.

"I am," said Frank, "a bit of an artist, as your late owner remarked. My art, so to speak, demands the presence, upon these tiger-skins, of a number of young women, some blonde, some brunette, some *petite*, some Junoesque, some languorous, some vivacious, all beautiful, and they need not be over-dressed. I hate over-dressing. It is vulgar. Have you got that?"

"I have," said the jinn.

"Then," said Frank, "let *me* have it."

"Condescend only," said his servant, "to close your eyes for the space of a single minute, and opening them you shall find yourself surrounded by the agreeable objects you have described."

"O.K.," said Frank. "But no tricks, mind!"

He closed his eyes as requested: a low, musical humming, whooshing sound rose and fell about him. At the end of the minute he looked around: there were the arches, pillars, marbles, hangings, etc., of the most exquisite palace imaginable, and wherever he looked he saw a tiger-skin, and on every tiger-skin there reclined a young woman of surpassing beauty, who was certainly not vulgarly over-dressed.

Our good Frank was, to put it mildly, in an ecstasy. He darted to and fro like a honey-bee in a florist's shop. He was received everywhere with smiles sweet beyond description, and with glances of an open or a veiled responsiveness. Here were blushes and lowered lids. Here was the flaming face of ardour. Here was a shoulder turned, but by no means a cold shoulder. Here were open arms, and such arms! Here was love dissembled, but vainly dissembled. Here was love triumphant. "I must say," said Frank at a later hour, "I have spent a really delightful afternoon. I have enjoyed it thoroughly."

"Then may I crave," said the jinn, who was at that moment serving him his supper, "may I crave the boon of being allowed to act as your butler, and as general minister to your pleasures, instead of being returned to that abominable bottle?"

"I don't see why not," said Frank. "It certainly seems rather tough that, after having fixed all this up, you should be crammed back into the bottle again. Very well, act as my butler, but understand, whatever the convention may be, I wish you never to enter a room without knocking. And above all—no tricks."

The jinn, with a soapy smile of gratitude, withdrew, and Frank shortly retired to his harem, where he passed the evening as pleasantly as he had passed the afternoon.

Some weeks went by, entirely filled with these agreeable pastimes, till Frank, in obedience to a law which not even the most efficient of jinns can set aside, found himself growing a little over-particular, a little blasé, a little inclined to criticize and find fault.

"These," said he to his jinn, "are very pretty young

creatures, if you like that sort of thing, but I imagine they can hardly be first rate, or I should feel more interest in them. I am, after all, a connoisseur; nothing can please me but the very best. Take them away. Roll up all the tiger-skins but one."

"It shall be done," said the jinn. "Behold, it is accomplished."

"And on that remaining tiger-skin," said Frank, "put me Cleopatra herself."

The next moment, Cleopatra was there, looking, it must be admitted, absolutely superb. "Hullo!" she said. "Here I am, on a tiger-skin again!"

"Again!" cried Frank, suddenly reminded of the old man in the shop. "Here! Take her back. Bring me Helen of Troy."

Next moment, Helen of Troy was there. "Hullo!" she said. "Here I am, on a tiger-skin again!"

"Again!" cried Frank. "Damn that old man! Take her away. Bring me Queen Guinevere."

Guinevere said exactly the same thing; so did Madame la Pompadour, Lady Hamilton, and every other famous beauty that Frank could think of. "No wonder," said he, "that that old man was such an extremely wizened old man! The old fiend! The old devil! He has properly taken the gilt off all the gingerbread. Call me jealous if you like; I will not play second fiddle to that ugly old rascal. Where shall I find a perfect creature, worthy of the embraces of such a connoisseur as I am?"

"If you are deigning to address that question to me," said the jinn, "let me remind you that there was, in that

shop, a little bottle which my late master had never unstoppered, because I supplied him with it after he had lost interest in matters of this sort. Nevertheless it has the reputation of containing the most beautiful girl in the whole world."

"You are right," cried Frank. "Get me that bottle without delay."

In a few seconds the bottle lay before him. "You may have the afternoon off," said Frank to the jinn.

"Thank you," said the jinn. "I will go and see my family in Arabia. I have not seen them for a long time." With that he bowed and withdrew. Frank turned his attention to the bottle, which he was not long in unstoppering.

Out came the most beautiful girl you can possibly imagine. Cleopatra and all that lot were hags and frumps compared with her. "Where am I?" said she. "What is this beautiful palace? What am I doing on a tiger-skin? Who is this handsome young prince?"

"It's me!" cried Frank, in a rapture. "It's me!"

The afternoon passed like a moment in Paradise. Before Frank knew it the jinn was back, ready to serve up supper. Frank must sup with his charmer, for this time it was love, the real thing. The jinn, entering with the viands, rolled up his wicked eyes at the sight of so much beauty.

It happened that Frank, all love and restlessness, darted out into the garden between two mouthfuls, to pluck his beloved a rose. The jinn, on the pretence of serving her wine, edged up very closely. "I don't know if you remember me," said he in a whisper. "I used to

be in the next bottle to you. I have often admired you through the glass."

"Oh, yes," said she. "I remember you to perfection."

At that moment Frank returned. The jinn could say no more, but he stood about the room, inflating his monstrous chest, and showing off his plump and dusky muscles. "You need not be afraid of him," said Frank. "He is only a jinn. Pay no attention to him. Tell me if you really love me."

"Of course I do," said she.

"Well, say so," said he. "Why don't you say so?"

"I have said so," said she. "Of course I do. Isn't that saying so?"

This vague, evasive reply dimmed all Frank's happiness, as if a cloud had come over the sun. Doubt sprang up in his mind, and entirely ruined moments of exquisite bliss.

"What are you thinking of?" he would say.

"I don't know," she would reply.

"Well, you ought to know," he would say, and then a quarrel would begin.

Once or twice he even ordered her back into her bottle. She obeyed with a malicious and secretive smile.

"Why should she give that sort of smile?" said Frank to the jinn, to whom he confided his distress.

"I cannot tell," replied the jinn. "Unless she has a lover concealed in there."

"Is it possible?" cried Frank in consternation.

"It is surprising," said the jinn, "how much room there is in one of these bottles."

"Come out!" cried Frank. "Come out at once!"

His charmer obediently emerged. "Is there anyone else in that bottle?" cried Frank.

"How could there be?" she asked, with a look of rather over-done innocence.

"Give me a straight answer," said he. "Answer me yes or no."

"Yes or no," she replied maddeningly.

"Hell and fury!" cried Frank. "I'll go in and find out for myself. If I find anybody, God help him and you!"

With that, and with an intense effort of the will, he flowed himself into the bottle. He looked all around: there was no one. Suddenly he heard a sound above him. He looked up, and there was the stopper being thrust in.

"What are you doing?" cried he.

"We are putting in the stopper," said the jinn.

Frank cursed, begged, prayed, and implored. "Let me out!" he cried. "Let me out. Please let me out. Do let me out. I'll do anything. Let me out, do."

The jinn, however, had other matters to attend to. Frank had the infinite mortification of beholding these other matters through the glassy walls of his prison. Next day he was picked up, whisked through the air, and deposited in the dirty little shop, among the other bottles, from which this one had never been missed.

There he remained for an interminable period, covered all over with dust, and frantic with rage at the thought of what was going on in his exquisite palace, between his jinn and his faithless charmer. In the end, some sailors happened to drift into the shop, and, hearing this bottle

contained the most beautiful girl in the world, they bought it up by general subscription of the fo'c'sle. When they unstoppered him at sea, and found it was only poor Frank, their disappointment knew no bounds, and they used him with the utmost barbarity.

If Youth Knew if Age Could

THE FIRST THING ONE NOTICED about Henri Maurras was inevitably his gaunt and Quixotic Spanish nose, flanked by a pair of enormous eyes, extremely dark and melancholy, but capable of fire. This romantic equipment was unfortunately betrayed by the childish, petulant mouth of a Parisian, and a ridiculous little moustache.

For the rest, he was a mere thread of a young man, a veritable nail-paring, and wore a paper-thin grey suit, under which his little buttocks presented all the appearance of a hair-pin. He worked as assistant book-keeper in a big general store in Marseilles, and he desired ardently to be wed.

Frequently he would lose count of a column of figures, and turn up his dark eyes, as he visualized the bride of his dreams, youthful, devoted, passionate, deliciously rounded, and yet of immaculate reputation. Our passionate *petit bourgeois* was especially set upon the immaculate reputation.

His little moustache would twitch as he imagined the promenades they would take on Sundays, envied by all who beheld them. She would hang fondly on his arm,

driving all the men to despair; he would wear a smart suit from Marquet's, and carry a fashionable cane.

"Pleasure is all very well," said he to his fellow clerks, when they proposed some little frolic on pay-day. "But what pleasure can compare to being married? I mean, to a beautiful wife, gay, amiable, sympathetic, and—" His hands sketched certain outlines in the air. "For that," said he, "one must save. One must wait."

"Nonsense," said the others. "Come with us to Madame Garcier's. It may make saving a little harder, but the waiting becomes infinitely more tolerable. After all, a young man is entitled to a little happiness on account."

"No. No," said he. "I have certain ideals. You would hardly understand."

Henri's ideals, as lofty as the bridge of his nose, preserved him from the venal affections so popular among the youth of Marseilles. Yet that phrase, "*a little happiness on account*," took fatal root. He succumbed to the attractions of a superb malacca cane, displayed in the window of the most expensive shop in all the Rue St. Ferriol. "After all," said he to himself, "I shall have to buy one sooner or later. Why not now?"

As soon as he had paid over the money, he was almost ready to kill himself, he was so mortified at his extravagance. Yet he trembled with joy as he twirled his new treasure, leaned upon it, and hung it over his arm. On leaving the shop, he fancied that several well-dressed men eyed it with envious interest. "Wait," thought he, "till they see me in a suit from Marquet's, and with my lovely wife walking by my side."

When he got home he put his new acquisition into his

wardrobe. It would never do to get it scratched, or even to have the least gloss taken off it, before the day of his nuptials. On that day, everything was to be immaculate: everything must have its gloss absolutely unimpaired.

Nevertheless, every night, before he undressed, he put on his hat again, and took out his cane for a few minutes, holding it this way and that way in front of the mirror. He swung it as gracefully as the narrowness of his bed-chamber allowed, and, seating himself on the side of his bed, he drew a heart on the carpet.

It had a horn ferrule of the highest quality. It was as smooth and round as anything you can possibly imagine, and it was girdled with a slim circlet of gold, for all the world like a wedding ring.

Now that he possessed such a cane as this, Henri could no longer resist casting glances at the girls, although his saving was at far too early a stage to justify such boldness. He was a little bothered by a certain look on the more attractive faces he saw, a look which can only be described as suggesting worldly experience. "Where shall I find a bride," thought Henri, "as fresh, immaculate, and shining as my new cane?" He did not reflect that this cane had come to him, not leafy from the swamp in which it had grown, but straight from the hands of the polisher.

However, Henri still hoped, and every evening he rode home on the bus to his dwelling at the far end of the Prado. At this hour, at the beginning of May, the streets of Marseilles are full of a golden light. The new leaves of the innumerable plane trees exude their soft yellow into the radiance of the declining sun.

One evening a girl got on to the bus. Henri looked up;

his magnificent nose made a true point, his dark eyes flamed, his little moustache quivered, and his childish mouth pouted as if it had been stung by a bee. She was one of the Italianate Marseillaises, as lovely as a black grape, her skin had that sort of bloom upon it. This dusky bloom concentrated into a delicate adorable down along the line of her upper lip, which was bewitchingly lifted. Her eye was like the eye of a gazelle, her cheek was soft, and her figure was at once young and ample, such as any man must admire, but especially he whose buttocks are as lean as a hair-pin under his skimpy pants.

To crown it all, she was dressed very simply, in one of those nondescript black dresses affected by the well-to-do peasantry, who are so much better off than the little book-keepers. She wore black cotton gloves. It must have been a careful family, of the proper old-fashioned type, that had brought her up so completely out of the dubious mode. Such old-fashioned people are usually extremely conscientious about the *dot*. Henri admired, approved, and loved.

"It is true," he thought, "I have yet to win her affections, gain the approval of her family, and save up a whole mountain of francs. All that is possible, but how am I to make her acquaintance? At any moment she may get off the bus. If I speak to her, she will either answer me, in which case she cannot be as virtuous as she looks, or she will not answer me, and I shall never see her again." Here Henri experienced one of the greatest dilemmas known to mankind, and one which has been sadly neglected by the philosophers.

Fate, however, was altogether on his side, and caused

the bus to stop for a whole minute at a corner where a family of gipsies were giving the traditional exhibition. A goat mounted precariously upon a step-ladder, a mangy bear stood by, shifting his feet in melancholy reminiscence of his training, a nervous monkey presented a miniature tambourine for the sous of the passers-by.

The girl, as simple as a child, was ravished by this familiar spectacle. She pressed her face against the glass, smiled in rapture, and turned a bright gaze on the other passengers, to see if they were enjoying it too. Henri, leaning over, was emboldened to offer the comments of a man of the world.

"Very amusing, the little monkey," said he.

"Yes, Monsieur, very amusing."

"The bear, he is droll."

"But yes, Monsieur, very droll."

"The goat, also. For a domestic animal, he is droll too."

"Yes, Monsieur, he is truly droll."

"The *gitanos* are very picturesque, but they are a bad type."

At this point the bus jolted on. A brilliant conversation had been interrupted, but acquaintance was established, and in such a simple and innocent fashion that the most fastidious of future husbands could find nothing to object to. Henri ventured to seat himself beside her. The jolting of the bus provided the briefest but most delicious of contacts. A *rapport* was established; their tongues uttered banalities, but their shoulders were supremely eloquent. "Mademoiselle," said Henri at last, "dare I hope that you will take a little promenade with me on Sunday?"

"Oh, but I am afraid that would hardly be possible,"

replied the young girl, with an adorable appearance of confusion.

Henri urged his plea with all the feeling at his command, and at length his charmer, whose name was Marie, decided that she might overcome the obstacles, which doubtless had their origin in the excessive respectability of her upbringing.

The rendezvous was made. Henri, left alone upon the bus, rode far past his destination, lost in an ecstasy far transcending any description. The excess fare amounted to two francs.

That night he spent a whole hour before his mirror, conducting his cane in the manner in which he hoped to parade it on Sunday. "There is no doubt about it," said he to himself, "such a cane, and such a girl, absolutely demand that new suit from Marquet's. Tomorrow I will pay them a visit." He drew several hearts, all of them transfixed by arrows, and surrounded by initials. "I will take her to the *calanque*," said he to himself, "and there, seated beside her on a rock, I will draw something of this sort on the sand. She will guess what I mean."

On Sunday everything went as well as any lover could wish. Henri was first at the trysting place, and soon saw her tripping along, wearing a summer frock and white cotton gloves this time. She had the happy air of a little girl let out from school. "Her parents must be very severe," thought Henri. "So much the better. I wonder by what artless excuses she managed to get away."

Their greeting was all the heart could desire. Every true lover, and some whose aims are less creditable, knows the delicious promise of those first meetings in

which both parties act as frankly and simply as children, and take hands even as they make their way to the bus. Days beginning thus should always be spent in the open air, and no place under all the sky is more propitious to them than those deep and clifty creeks near Marseilles, which are called the *calanques*. Snow-white rocks descend into water as clear as glass, edged by tiny beaches of sand, perfectly suited for the inscription of hearts and arrows. Little pine trees cover all the slopes, and, when the afternoon sun is hot, there is all the more reason to take advantage of their shade.

Henri and his Marie did this. "Take off your gloves," said he, "and I will tell your fortune."

She willingly removed the glove from her right hand, which she extended to him with the utmost grace.

"No," said he, "I beg you to take off both."

Marie blushed, and hesitated, and began with tantalizing slowness to draw off the other glove.

"It does not seem to come off very easily," said Henri.

"You demand too much," said she. "This is only the first time I have been out with you. I did not think you would ask me to remove my gloves."

"At last," thought Henri, "I have found a girl of a simplicity, of a virtue, such as must be absolutely unique in the world of 1939. . . . Marie," cried he, pressing his lips to her hands, "I adore you with every fibre of my being. I implore you to be mine. I long, I burn, I die for the happiness of being married to you."

"Oh no," said she. "That is impossible."

"Then you do not love me," said he. "I have spoken too soon."

"No," said she. "Perhaps I do. But how can I answer you? It could not be for a year, perhaps two, possibly even three."

"What of that?" cried he. "I will wait. In fact, I still have a great deal of money to save." He told her of the prospects of the furniture business, and of the situation of his old mother, who had been treated abominably by certain relatives.

Marie was less explicit in her description of her background. She said, though, that she was treated very strictly, and could hardly introduce into her home a young man she had met so unconventionally on a bus.

"It is inconvenient," said Henri, "but it is as it should be. Sooner or later we will manage something. Till then, we are affianced, are we not? We will come here every Sunday."

"It will be very hard for me to get away," said she.

"Never mind," said he. "It will arrange itself. Meanwhile, we are affianced. Therefore I may embrace you."

An interlude followed in which Henri experienced that happiness which is only revealed to young men of the meagrest proportions in the company of girls as delightfully rounded as Marie. At the close of the day Henri had drawn almost as deeply on his future marriage as he had upon his costume and his cane. "They are right," thought he, "one is entitled to a little happiness on account."

He went home the happiest young man in Marseilles, or in all France for that matter, and next day he actually carried his cane to the office with him, for he could not bear to part with it.

That evening, on the bus, he fixed his eyes on the people waiting at every stopping place: he felt that fortune might grant him an unappointed glimpse of his beloved. Sure enough, after a false alarm or two, he caught sight of her shoulder and the line of her neck as she stood in a knot of people two or three hundred yards up the street. He recognized this single curve immediately.

His heart pounded, his hands shook, his cane almost fell from his grasp. The bus came to a stop, and he turned to greet her as she entered. To his horror and dismay, she appeared not to recognize him, and, as he blundered towards her, she gave him a warning frown.

Henri saw that behind her was an old man, a man of nearly eighty, a colossal ruin of a man, with dim and hollow eyes, a straggly white moustache horribly stained, and two or three yellow tusks in a cavernous mouth. He took his seat beside the adorable Marie, and folded his huge and grimy hands, on which the veins stood out like whipcord, over the handle of a cheap and horrible cane, an atrocity fashioned out of bamboo. He wore the expensive and ugly broadcloth of the well-to-do peasant.

Henri fixed his eyes on the pair. "Possibly he is her father," thought he.

A lover, however, has an eye which is not easily deceived. Henri knew perfectly well that this old man was not her father. He tried to repress a feeling of acute uneasiness. "He is very old," thought Henri. "It is more likely he is her grandfather. Possibly she has something to endure from him. He seems to be sitting beside her in a very familiar way. How I wish we could be married at once!"

At this point the conductor approached the old man, and jingled his little ticket machine under his nose. "Demand it of Madame," said the old man in a low and thunderous rumble.

Henri sat as if struck by lightning. "It is impossible," said he to himself over and over again. "After all, what is more natural than for a man to speak of his female companion as Madame, whether she is married or not, when he is addressing a waiter, a bus conductor, or someone of that sort? Besides, the old fool dotes; he doesn't know what the hell he is saying. He thinks it's his wife, her grandmother: his mind is in the past."

As he said this, he saw before his eyes a picture of her left hand, with the white glove on it, which she had removed so slowly and with so much trouble.

"She is a pure, sincere, serious, straightforward girl," thought he. "Yes, but that is why she had so much trouble with that glove. An artful girl would have removed her wedding ring before meeting me. So much the more terrible!

"No, no. I am going mad. He *is* her grandfather. Possibly her great-grandfather. See how old he is! People should be killed before reaching that age. Look at his mouth, his teeth! If he *should* be her husband, and fondle her! Nonsense! I am mad. The idea is absurd."

Nevertheless he lived in torment till the end of the week, when a note reached him saying that Marie could slip out for an hour or two on Sunday. She would be at the same rendezvous at two o'clock.

Nothing could be more simple and reassuring than this

note, which breathed innocence and affection. One or two words were artlessly misspelled, which always gives an effect of sincerity. Henri's suspicions departed as suddenly as they had come. "What a brute I was!" he thought, as he hastened to meet her. "I will beg her forgiveness. I will go down on my knees. But no, not in this suit. On the whole, I had better say nothing about it. What sort of a husband will she think I will make if I am already suspicious of a disgusting old man? Ah, here she comes! How lovely she is! How radiant! I certainly deserve to be thrashed with my own cane."

She came smiling up to him, and put out her hand with the white cotton glove upon it. Henri's eyes fell upon this glove, and his debonair welcome died upon his lips. "Who," said he hoarsely, "who was that old man who was with you?"

Marie dropped her hand and stared at Henri.

"He is not your father," said Henri, in a tone of rage and despair.

"No," said she, obviously terror-stricken.

"He is not your grandfather!" cried Henri. "He is your husband."

"How did you know?" cried she.

"You have deceived me!" cried Henri. "I thought you pure, true, artless, without fault. I—I—I— Never mind. *Adieu*, Madame! Be so good as to look at the newspaper in the morning, and see if any unfortunate has fallen from the ramparts of the Château d'If."

With that he turned on his heel and strode away, in the ominous direction of the port, where the little boats take

sightseers out to the Château d'If. Marie, with a cry, ran after him, and clasped his arm in both her hands.

"Do nothing rash," she begged. "Believe me, I adore you."

"And yet," said he, "you marry a disgusting old man."

"But that was before I knew you."

"So be it, Madame. I wish you every felicity."

"But, beloved," said she, "you do me an injustice. He is rich. I was young. My parents urged me. You cannot think I love him."

"Leave me, prostitute!" cried Henri.

"Ah, you are unkind!" said she. "Why should you be jealous? You are young. You are dressed in the mode, even to your cane. You are handsome. You are my dream. How can you threaten to commit a desperate act? The old man will not live for ever. You and I would be rich. We could be happy. Henri, were we not happy last Sunday, out at the *calanque*? I am just the same."

"What?" cried Henri. "Do you think I care for his dirty money? Could I be happy with you again, thinking of that old man?"

"Nevertheless," said she, "it is nearly a million francs."

"To the devil with it!" said Henri. "Supposing we stayed at the best hotels, travelled, had an apartment in Paris even, how could I enjoy anything, thinking of you and him together?"

"But he is so old," said she. "He is nearly blind. He can scarcely speak. He is deaf. He has lost the use of all his senses."

"What do you mean, all his senses?" said Henri, halting in his stride.

"All his senses," said she, facing round and nodding gravely at Henri. "All. All. All.

"He is eighty years of age," said she. "Who is jealous of a man of eighty? What is there to be jealous of? Nothing. Nothing at all."

"All the same," said Henri. "They are sometimes worse than the rest. Yes, a thousand times worse. Leave me. Let me go."

"He is a log of wood," said she earnestly. "Henri, is it possible to be jealous of a log of wood? It is not what you would choose, perhaps, or me either, but, after all, it is nothing. The same cannot be said of a million francs."

Henri demanded ten thousand assurances, and was given them all. The Parisian in him urged a common-sense view of the situation. "After all, we must be broad-minded," thought he. "Provided, of course, that it is really nothing. Absolutely and certainly nothing!"

"I shall be able to see you every Sunday afternoon," said Marie. "I have suggested to him that he take a little stroll and a drink at the café between two and six. I made very poor excuses for not accompanying him, but to my surprise he assented eagerly. I expected a lot of trouble."

"He is jealous, then?" cried Henri. "A log of wood is not jealous."

"But all the more," said Marie. "After all, is it so unreasonable, darling?"

"Nevertheless," said Henri, "I cannot understand why he should be jealous. I am jealous; that is natural. But a log of wood——"

Marie soothed him again with another ten thousand

assurances, and when at last he bade her farewell his happiness was completely restored.

Only one fly remained in his ointment. "When I consider," thought he, "how extremely scrupulous I have been, unlike any other young man in Marseilles, it certainly seems very unfair. I have never spent my money on girls. I have never visited an establishment such as Madame Garcier's. And now I am to marry a girl who— It is true he is eighty. At eighty a man is no better than a log of wood. Nevertheless, it is a difference between us. It will give rise to a thousand bitter reflections when we are married. She is so beautiful. And there is the million francs. What a pity there should be any cause for bitterness! How lovely she looked today! I wish we could have been reconciled under that little pine tree out in the *calanque*. I should be able to view matters more calmly."

At this moment a certain idea came into his head, it is impossible to say from where; probably it was from the Parisian in him. "It would certainly balance accounts between us," said he to himself. "It would go far to prevent bitterness. She would be all the happier for it. After all, it is not my fault we could not go to the *calanque*."

Reflecting thus, he bent his steps towards the famous establishment of Madame Garcier, so highly recommended by his fellow clerks. This discreet haven had all the appearance of a private house; the door was answered by a maidservant, who ushered the callers into an ante-room.

"Madame will be with you immediately," said this maidservant to Henri, taking his hat and stick and depositing them in an old-fashioned hall-stand. With that she

showed him into the ante-room, and departed, leaving the door open behind her.

"This is an excellent idea," thought Henri. "Now there will be two of us, and I shall be the worse of the two, as a man should be. So I shall not feel bitter. How happy we shall be! And after all, what is a little extravagance, when we are going to inherit a million francs?"

At that moment he heard footsteps on the stairs, and the voice evidently of the Madame, who was ushering out some favourite patron.

"This has been a delightful surprise," she was saying. "When I heard of your marriage, I declared we had seen the last of you. Delphine and Fifi were inconsolable."

"What would you?" came the reply in a thunderous rumble, which caused Henri's hair to stand erect upon his head. "A man must settle down, Madame, especially when he is no longer as young as he was. It is, so to speak, a duty to the Republic. But, Madame, I am, thank God, still in my prime, and, when he is in his prime, a man demands variety. Besides, Madame, the young women in these days——"

Henri nearly fainted. He heard the front door close, and the footsteps of the proprietress approaching the room in which he sat. He felt he must get out at all costs.

"Pardon me, Madame," he muttered. "I fear I have changed my mind. A sudden indisposition."

"Just as you please, Monsieur," said the old trot. "There is no compulsion in this establishment. But if Monsieur would like at least to *inspect* a young lady— To exchange a few pleasant remarks——"

"No, no, thank you," said Henri desperately, edging

into the hallway. "I must go. Ah, here is my hat. But my stick. Where is my stick?"

He stared, but his cane was gone. In its place the last visitor had left a cheap, nasty, battered old bamboo.

The Devil, George, and Rosie

THERE WAS A YOUNG MAN WHO WAS invariably spurned by the girls, not because he smelt at all bad, but because he happened to be as ugly as a monkey. He had a good heart, but this soured it, and though he would still grudgingly admit that the female kind were very agreeable in shape, size, and texture, he thought that in all other respects they were the most stupid, blind, perverse, and ill-natured bitches that had ever infested the earth.

He expressed this view very forcefully, and on all possible occasions. One evening he was holding forth to a circle of his cronies: it was in the Horseshoe Bar, at the bottom of the Tottenham Court Road. He could not help noticing that his remarks attracted the interest of a smart and saturnine individual seated at the next table, who had the rather repulsive look of a detective dressed up in evening clothes for the purpose of spying on a night-club.

Our friend was in no wise abashed by this scrutiny, but continued to say exactly what girls were, and what they did whenever they got the chance. He, who had least

evidence for it of any man in the world, seemed to think they were unduly inclined to lasciviousness. "Or else," said he, "in the other extreme, they are mercenary prudes, or sadistical Dianas, whose delight it is to kindle the fires of hell in a man's bosom and elsewhere, and triumphantly to describe his agonies to their little friends. I speak of the fires of hell—I wish they existed in reality, so that these harpies and teasers might be sent there, and I myself would go willingly, if only I could watch them frizzle and fry."

With that, he got up and went home. You may imagine his astonishment, when he had climbed the high stairs to his poor student's room, to find the dark and cynical stranger, who had been watching him in the bar, now standing very much at his ease upon the hearth-rug. At the very first glance, he realized this was none other than the Devil himself, in whom for many years he had had no belief at all. "I cannot easily describe," said that worthy, with the smile of a man of the world, "the pleasure it gives me to meet one of such insight and intelligence as Mr. George Postlethwaite."

George made several sorts of protest, but the Devil smiled and bowed like an ambassador. In the end he had buttered up George to some effect, and carried him off to supper in a little restaurant in Jermyn Street. It must be admitted, he stood a superb bottle of wine.

"I was vastly intrigued," said he, "by the views I heard you expressing earlier this evening. Possibly, of course, they were born of a mere passing petulance, pique, wounded vanity—call it what you will?"

"The Devil take me if they were!" cried George.

"Splendid!" said his companion. "We are getting on like a house on fire. Now, my dear chap, my little difficulty is this. The domain over which I have the honour and pleasure to preside was designed originally on the most ample scale, but, nevertheless, certain recent tendencies are fast rendering its confines too narrow, and its supervision too onerous, for one who is not as young as he was."

"Sorry to hear that," said George.

"I could cope with the increase of the population of this planet," said the Devil. "I might have coped even with the emancipation of women. But unfortunately the two are connected, and form a vicious circle——"

"I see exactly what you mean," said George.

"I wish I had never invented that particular sin," said the Devil. "I do indeed. There are a thousand million women in the world at this moment, and, with one or two negligible exceptions, every one of them is damned."

"Fine!" said George.

"Very fine indeed," said the Devil, "from the artistic point of view. But consider the pressure on space, and the ceaseless strain of organization."

"Squeeze 'em in!" cried George with enthusiasm. "Pack 'em tight. That's what I say."

"They would then imagine themselves at a party," replied his new friend, "and that would never do. No, no. Every one who comes to me must have individual attention. I intend to open a new department. The site is chosen. The builders are at work. All that I need is a superintendent of iron personality."

"I should like to know a little about the climate, salary,

and prospects," said George, in a business-like tone.

"The climate, much like that of Oxford Street on a summer afternoon," replied the Devil. "The salary is power, and the prospects are infinite. But if you are interested, my dear fellow, allow me to show you over the place. In any case, I should value your opinion on it."

No sooner said than done: they sank into the bowels of the earth, and came out in a suburb of Sydney, N.S.W.

"Here we are, then!" cried George.

"No, no," said the Devil. "Just a little farther on."

They proceeded with the speed of rockets to the north-east corner of the universe, which George perceived to be shaped exactly like a pint of beer, in which the nebulae were the ascending bubbles. He observed with alarm a pair of enormous lips approaching the upper rim of our space. "Do not be alarmed," said the Devil, "That is a young medical student called Prior, who has failed his exam three times in succession. However, it will be twenty million billion light years before his lips reach the glass, for a young woman is fixing him with her eye, and by the time he drinks all the bubbles will be gone, and all will be flat and stale."

"Poor fellow!" cried our hero. "Damn these women!"

"Do not pity him," said the Devil very tolerantly. "This is his fifth, and he is already as drunk as a lord, and closing time draws near. What's more, our destination is at hand."

George saw that they were nearing what is sometimes called a "fish" in this considerable pint of beer. As they approached it, he saw it was a dark star of gigantic pro-

portions, about which circled a satellite many hundred times larger than the earth.

"That satellite," said his conductor, "is the spot I am proposing to colonize with my new department. We will go straight there, if you wish."

George assenting, they landed in a sterile and saturnine country, close by a palace of black basalt, which covered seven square miles of ground.

"That's a snug-looking box!" cried our hero.

"Merely a pioneer's hut," said his companion. "My future overseer will have to rough it there until something better can be run up."

George, however, observed a prodigious number of barrels being run down into a cellar on the hinder side of this palace. What's more, he saw several groups of fiends, who should have been at their work, squatting in one of the unfinished galleries, with cards in their hands.

"You actually play poker here?" said he, in tones of the liveliest satisfaction.

"We are connoisseurs of every pleasure," replied the Devil, with a smile. "And when we play cards, everybody has an excellent hand."

He showed George a number of masterly pictures: some of them were a little indecent. There were also very splendid kitchens, already staffed with cooks; kennels, stables, falconries, gun rooms, music rooms, grand halls, little cosy rooms, rooms devoted to every sort of pastime, and gardens laid out rather like those of Versailles, only much larger. There was a whole cellar full of fireworks of every description. Not only these, but there were a

number of other delights, of a nature entirely new to the visitor. There was an observatory, for example, from which the behaviour of any young woman in the world could be closely inspected. "This is really a very interesting device," murmured our hero.

"Come!" said the fiend. "We must not stay here all day. Doubtless you will want to see the rest of your domain."

"Yes, indeed," said George. "For of course I could not have the prisoners here, unless now and then I had one haled up for special admonishment."

The Devil then flew with him over the whole surface of the planet, which, once they were clear of the palace and its lands, proved to have an aspect not unlike that of the Great West Road, where it approaches London. On every hand, rows of cells were being run up; to add the final refinement of misery, they were designed exactly like modern villas. Imitation husbands, who could neither speak nor hear, were planted in armchairs with their feet on the mantelpieces. The wardrobes were full of unfashionable garments. Small imps disguised as children were already rehearsing by dozens in all the upper rooms. The peculiar property of the walls was to translate the noise of those next door into the sound of a party going on, while the windows were so designed as to make the dowdiest passer-by appear to be arrayed in the very latest mode.

Vast bunion factories belched smoke among the crazy villas; lorry-loads of superfluous hair clattered along the streets. George was shown the towering gasometers of the halitosis works, and a number of other things I do not dare imagine. He saw a great concourse of fiends be-

ing instructed in door-to-door salesmanship; others were being fitted out as relations-in-law, rent-collectors, and bailiffs. He himself made two suggestions that were immediately put into force: one was for a stocking ladderer, and the other for an elastic that would break in the middle of any crowded thoroughfare.

As a final encouragement, the Devil took him over to the mainland of Hell itself, which is girdled by the Styx as Saturn by his ring. Charon's vast liner had just come to dock, and our hero had the pleasure of seeing a multitude of film-stars, baby blondes, unfaithful wives, disobedient daughters, frivolous typists, lazy serving-maids, wantons, careless waitresses, cruel charmers, naggers, sirens, clogs, unpunctual sweethearts, bridge-playing grandmas, extravagant helpmeets, mischief-making gossips, tantalizers, female novelists, crazy debutantes, possessive mothers, neglectful mothers, modern mothers, unmarried mothers, would-be, should-be, in fact all who could be, mothers: they were all there, as naked as your hand, and they filed down the gangway, some weeping, some brazen, and some in attitudes of affected modesty.

"This is a magnificent sight," remarked our hero.

"Well, my dear sir," said the Devil, "are you the man for the job?"

"I will do my best!" cried George enthusiastically.

They shook hands on it; all the little details were arranged; before evening George was installed as principal vassal of all the Devil's host, and overlord of a planet populated only by women and fiends.

It must be admitted he enjoyed himself with a vengeance. Every day he would go out, having donned his cap

of invisibility, and regale himself upon his subjects' endeavours to cope with the hardships he had designed for them. Sometimes he would hold up the ceaseless self-dirtying of plates, put the children to sleep, and amuse them with the prospect of a matinee. He saw to it, though, that they had to queue up for the cheap seats, and arranged for it to rain. In the end, he would announce that the show was postponed.

He had a thousand other ways of tantalizing them: I shall not enumerate them all. One of the best was to send for any newly arrived young thing who was reported to be vain of her beauty, and give her the impression for an hour or two that she had made a conquest of him, and then (as far as was possible) undeceive her.

When the day's work was done, he sat down to cards with his principal officers, and sure enough everyone had a good hand, but his was the best. They drank like champions: the Devil was constantly sending over the choicest delicacies from Hell; the word "fine" was continually upon our hero's lips, and the time passed like lightning.

One day, towards the end of the second year, our potentate had just got through his levee, and was refreshing himself with a stroll on a little private terrace which he much affected, when word was brought to him that the senior port official desired an audience. Our hero was the easiest fellow in the world to approach; never stood upon his dignity. "Send the old chap along here," said he. "And, hi! Bring a bottle and a couple of glasses back with you when you come."

The fact is, George dearly loved a chat with these old petty officers, who occasionally brought him reports of

diverting little incidents at the Ellis Island of Hell, or scraps of gossip concerning the irrelevant affairs of the world, such as sometimes strayed in among Charon's cargo, as lizards or butterflies travel to Covent Garden among the bananas.

On this occasion, however, the harbour-master's face bore an extremely worried expression. "I'm afraid, sir," he said, "I've got a little irregularity to report."

"Well, we all make mistakes sometimes," said George. "What's the trouble?"

"It's like this here, sir," replied the old salt. "Young gal come along o' the last cargo—seems as if she didn't ought to be here at all."

"Oh, that'll be all right," cried George. "Bound to be. It's understood we take the whole issue in these days. She's a woman: that's enough. What's on her charge-sheet, anyway?"

"Lot o' little things, sir, what don't amount to much," replied the honest fellow. "Fact is, sir, it ain't added up." And he pursed his lips.

"Not added up?" cried George in amazement.

"That's how it is, sir," said his subordinate glumly. "This young gal *ain't properly dead*."

George was absolutely bowled over. "*Whew!*" said he. "But this is serious, my man."

"It *is* serious, sir," said the old chap. "I don't know what's to be done, I'm sure."

A score of fine legal points were involved. George dispatched an S.O.S. for one of the leading casuists of Hell proper. Unfortunately they were all engaged in committee, on some fine point concerning an illuminated address

which was being prepared for the saviours of Germany. George therefore had nothing but precedent to go on, and precedent made it clear that a mortal must sin in such and such a way, die in such and such a condition, be checked in, checked out: it was as complicated as a case in Court Leet under a Statute of Ed. Tert. Rex., that statute being based on precedents from the Saxon and Norman codes dually and differently derived from a Roman adaptation of a Græco-Egyptian principle influenced prehistorically by rites and customs from the basin of the Euphrates or the Indus. It was quite like an income-tax form. George scratched his head in despair.

What made it all the worse was, the Devil himself had given him most serious warning against the least infringement of privilege. "This is," he had said, "little better than mandated territory. We have built up, step by step, and with incredible ingenuity, a system under which we live very tolerably, but we have only done it by sailing devilishly near the metaphysical wind. One single step beyond the strict legal limits, and I am back on my red-hot throne, in that pit whose bottomlessness I shall heartily envy. As for you——"

George therefore had every incentive to caution. He turned over a large number of volumes, tapped his teeth: in the end he knew not what to make of it. "Send the young person in to me," said he.

When she arrived, she proved to be no more than seventeen years of age. I should be telling a downright lie if I said she was less beautiful than a peri.

George was not a bad fellow at heart. Like most of us, he was capable of tyranny upon the featureless mass, but

when he came to grips with an individual his bark was a good deal worse than his bite. Most of the young women he had had up for admonishment had complained of little except his fickleness.

This young girl was ushered into his presence; the very lackeys who brought her in rolled their eyes till the whites flickered like the Eddystone Lighthouse. She was complete in every particular, and all of the highest quality; she was a picture gallery, an anthology of the poets, a precipitation of all that has ever been dreamed of love: her goodly eyes lyke Saphyres shining bright, her forehead yvory white, her cheekes lyke apples which the sun hath rudded, her lips lyke cherries charming men to byte, her brest lyke to a bowle of creame uncruddled, her paps lyke lyllies budded, her snowie necke lyke to a marble towre; and all her body like a pallace fayre, ascending up, with many a stately stayre, to honours seat and chastities sweet bowre.

Her name was Rosie Dixon. Moreover she gained enormously in contrast to her surroundings, by the mere fact of being alive. It was as though a cowslip were to bloom miraculously between the dark and sterile metals of the Underground; as if its scent were wafted to one's nostrils on the nasty, sultry, canned sirocco of that region. It is no exaggeration to say that she was as good as she was beautiful. It is true her pretty face was a little blubbered with tears. "My dear," said George, taking her hand, "there is no reason for you to cry in that fashion. Don't you know the good old saying, 'Never holler before you're hurt'?"

"Pray, sir," cried she, having taken a long, dewy peep

at his monkey-phiz, and seeing a vast amount of good nature there. "Pray, sir," said she, "tell me only, where am I?"

"Why, in Hell, to be sure," said he, with a hearty laugh.

"Oh, thank goodness!" cried she. "I thought I was in Buenos Aires."

"Most of 'em think that," said our hero, "owing to the liner. But I must say you are the first who has shown any gratification on learning otherwise."

They had a little more conversation of this sort; he questioned her pretty closely as to how she came to be stowed away on Charon's vessel. It appeared that she was a shop-girl who had been much tormented by her workmates; why, she could not say. However, she had to serve a young man who came in to buy some stockings for his sister. This young man had addressed to her a remark that brought her soul fluttering to her lips. At that very moment, the cruellest of her envious colleagues had manœuvred to pass behind her, and had bestowed on her a pinch so spiteful, so sudden, and so intensely and laceratingly agonizing, that her poised soul was jolted from its perch: it had spread its wings and borne off her swooning body as a woodcock bears off its young. When she had regained her senses, she was locked in one of the narrow state-rooms of a vast ship, stewarded by what she took to be black men, and resounding with the hysterical laughter and screams of captives of her own sex.

George was very thorough: he minutely examined what little evidence she had to offer. "There is no doubt," said he at length, speaking in tones of the greatest sympathy, "that you have received a very cruel pinch. When

your tormentor comes into my hands, I myself will repay it a hundredfold."

"No, no," said she. "She did not mean so much harm. I'm sure she is a good girl at heart. It is just her little way."

George was overcome with admiration at this remark, which, however, caused a tremor to pass through the whole of the vast black palace. "Upon my word!" said he. "I can't keep you here. You will bring the whole place crashing about my ears. I dare not put you in one of our punishment cells, for, if I did so against your will, all our system of home rule would be snatched away from us, and we should return to the crude discomforts of primitive times. That would be intolerable. There is a museum over on the mainland that would make your blood run cold."

"Could you not send me back to earth?" said she.

"No woman has ever left this place alone!" cried he in despair. "My position is so delicate I dare not make an innovation."

"Do not take on so," said she. "I cannot bear to think of so kind a gentleman being plunged into fiery torments. I will stay voluntarily, and perhaps then no fuss will be made. I hope it will not be terribly painful."

"You adorable creature!" cried he. "I must give you a kiss for that. I believe you have solved the difficulty."

She gave him back his kiss, as sweetly and purely as you can possibly imagine. "Oh, hell!" he cried in great anguish of spirit. "I cannot bear to think of you undergoing the miseries of this place. My dear, good girl—"

"I don't mind," she said. "I have worked in a shop in Oxford Street."

He gave her a pat or two, and signed up a form for her: "Remanded in custody at own request."

"This is only temporary, after all," he said. "Otherwise I would not permit it."

Very well, she kept a stiff upper lip, and was carted off to a hateful box as cruelly equipped as any of the others. For a whole week George kept his head, reading love lyrics to distract his mind. At the end, he could put the matter behind him no longer. "I must go," said he, "and see how she is getting on."

In Hell, all the officials travel with incredible speed. In a very few minutes George had passed over a couple of continents, and was tapping at the mean front door of poor Rosie's little habitation. He had not chosen to put on his cap of fern-seed virtue, or perhaps he never thought of it: anyway, she came to the door with three or four of the imps hanging about her apron-strings, and recognized him at once. He observed that she had on the drab and unfashionable garments provided by the authorities, in which her appearance was that of a rose in a jam-pot.

What raised an intolerable burden from his heart was the fact that the superfluous hair had obviously failed to take root upon her living flesh. He found on inquiry that she had used it to stuff a pillow with, which she had placed behind the head of the snoring imitation husband who gracelessly sprawled before the fire. She admitted a little tuft flourished on the bruise, where she had been pinched.

"No doubt it will fall off," said our hero scientifically,

"when the tissues resume their normal condition. These things were designed to flourish upon carrion only, whereas you—" and he smacked his lips.

"I hope it will fall off," said she, "for scissors will not cut it. And since I promised some to the eldest of these toddlers, to make him a false moustache of, no more has arrived."

"Shall I try to cut it off?" said our hero.

"No, no," said she, with a blush. "He has stopped crying now. They were all very querulous when first I came here, but now they are improved out of all knowledge."

While she spoke, she busied her fingers with a succession of little tasks. "You seem to be terribly busy," complained George.

"Forgive me," said she, with a smile, "but there is such a terrible lot to do. Still, it makes the time pass."

"Do you never," said he, "wish to go to the matinee?"

"That would never do," she replied. "Supposing *he* should wake up" (pointing to the imitation husband) "and call for his tea. Besides, I have plenty of entertainment: the people next door seem always to have a party; it does me good to hear them laugh and sing. What's more, when I'm cleaning the windows, as needs doing pretty often, I always see the most beautifully dressed creatures go by. I love to see people in pretty clothes."

"Your own are not very attractive," said George in a melancholy tone.

"They are plain enough," said she, with a laugh. "But I'm far too busy to think about that. All I could wish is that they were of slightly stronger materials. The stock-

ings laddered so often I've had to give up wearing them. And whenever I go out shopping— Still, you don't want to hear all this."

George was so devoured by remorse that he had not the spirit to ask an interesting question. "Good-bye," said he, pressing her hand.

She gave him the sweetest glance: he felt it no more than his duty to offer her an encouraging kiss. The doors began to bang, the fire belched smoke, the imps opened their mouths to yell.

"No, no," said she, with just so much of inexpressible regret as to soften the cruelty of it. And she pointed to the dummy husband before the fire.

"Don't worry about him!" cried our hero. "He's only a dummy." With that, he gave the image a kick, capsizing it into the hearth.

"Well, if he's not a real husband," said Rosie, "I suppose there is nothing wrong in it." And with that she gave George a kiss, which he found altogether delightful, except that as it increased the high esteem in which he held her, so also it increased his misery in having placed her in such a condition.

When he got home, the poor fellow could neither eat nor sleep. He called up a few of his officers to pass away the night at poker, but though he held four straight flushes in succession, he could take no pleasure in it. In the morning, the telephone bell rang. George's was the only instrument on the planet which did not go wrong as soon as one began to speak; on this occasion he would willingly have surrendered the advantage. The Devil was at the other end, and he was in a towering rage. He

made no bones about accusing our hero of downright morality.

"You curse and swear very well," said the victim in an injured tone. "All the same, it was not my fault she came here. I clearly see she may prove a disintegrating influence if I keep her, but, if I may not send her back, I don't see what else I can do."

"Why, tempt her, you idiot!" replied the Devil. "Have you never tempted woman before?"

"As far as I know, no," said George frankly.

"Well, do so now," said the Devil in quite a silky tone, which nevertheless caused blue sparks to crackle from the instrument. "Once we get possession of her soul, there will not be much fuss made about her body. I leave the matter in your hands entirely. If you fail me, there are one or two ancient institutions over here which I shall take pleasure in reviving entirely for your benefit."

George detested the idea of tempting this singularly good and beautiful young girl; however, the prospect was not so unredeemably repulsive as that of immersion in boiling brimstone. He took a glass or two, to stifle what regrets he had, and sent for Rosie to attend him in a silken pavilion, which he had rigged up among the groves and fountains which enclosed his citadel. He considered this fabric to be preferable to blocks of black basalt, in the event of some disruptive phrase of hers bringing the roof about their ears.

It was not very long before she arrived, although it seemed so. Heaven knows how she preserved her radiant health in the nasty grey air of Hell's outer suburbs: she looked as fresh and bright as ever, and seemed to

glow through her cheerless wrappings as a peach glows through tissue paper. Nevertheless, George was naturally a slow starter, especially when his conscience was involved. He certainly greeted her very warmly, but if all the scientists in the world had had these hugs and kisses in a test tube, they could not have separated one atom of sin out of them, for they were as simple and natural as could possibly be desired.

I admit the simple and natural is as good a beginning as any other. George, however, proceeded only to the offer of a cup of tea, which is not sinful except at the University. They began to chat: he was unable to resist telling her of his joys and sorrows in the neighbourhood of the Tottenham Court Road, and the reason for this was that he wished her to know everything about him. She herself was no less frank: it is impossible to describe the emotion with which George heard that she had become an orphan at the age of fourteen, and had since then lived with an old aunt, who was inclined to severity. The moments passed like flowers of that precious edelweiss joy which blooms on the brink of the abyss.

The light began to fade; the warbling of blackbirds and thrushes now sank into a stillness from which soon arose the diviner strains of the nightingale. Our young people, seated at the entrance of the tent, found their tongues fall idle, and sat in a divine languor which, also, like a silence of the being, permitted the first faint notes of a new music to become audible in their hearts. In this far, wild corner of the garden, the effect was a little Chinese, with a profusion of willow trees, which now turned blue in the dimming air.

Their fingers interlocked. The moon, which in those parts is of gigantic size, being no other than Hell itself, rose behind the shadowy trees. "They say," said Rosie in a dreamy voice, "that those marks on it are craters."

One person's dream may well be another's awakening. George was at once galvanized into activity. "Come," said he. "It is time we began dinner. It's my birthday, so there's lots of champagne."

He hoped by these words to inveigle the simple girl into making a feast of it. However, he started under a handicap, for he was already as drunk as a lord on the very sound of her voice. A man's true nature appears when he is in that condition: George was prepared to jeopardize his whole future for an amorous whim. His brain reeled under the onslaught of a legion of virtuous thoughts. He even conceived the notion of suggesting to the Devil that it should be the dummy husband who should be cast into the boiling brimstone, and that he should take that useless effigy's place, but from this act of madness the thought of the imps restrained him.

The remembrance of his master brought him back to Hell for a moment. "My dear," said he, patting her hand, "how would you like to be a film-star?"

"Not at all," said she.

"What?" said he.

"Not at all," said she.

"Oh!" said he. "Well! Well! Well!"

He had a diamond necklace in his pocket, ready to tempt her with, but could not restrain himself from hanging it unconditionally about her neck, he was so delighted by this answer of hers.

She was pleased, even more than by the gift itself, by the spirit in which it was given. She thought George the kindest and the best of men, and (whether it was the wine or not, I'll not say) she would have even stuck to it that he was handsome.

Altogether, the meal went off as merry as a marriage bell; the only drawback was that George could see no signs of a fitting sequel. Some would say the brimstone was a sequel sufficiently appropriate: that was not George's idea at all. In fact, when he had played all his cards in this half-hearted fashion, he was suddenly overcome by a hideous prevision of his fate, and could not repress a most alarming groan.

"What is it, my dear?" cried Rosie, in the tenderest of voices.

"Oh, nothing," said he, "nothing at all. Only that I shall burn for ever if I fail to seduce you."

"That is what the young man said at the stocking counter," said she in dismay.

"But I mean it," said he dolorously, "and in brimstone, which, I assure you, is altogether a different proposition from love, whatever the poets may say."

"You are right," said she, in a happier voice than seemed entirely fitting, "love is altogether different from brimstone," and with that she squeezed his hand.

"I fear it will give me no peace in which to remember you," said he, positively photographing her with his eyes.

"You shall not go there," said she.

"He said I must!" cried George.

"Not," said she, "if—if it will save you to——"

"To what?" cried George.

"To seduce me," faltered Rosie.

George protested very little; he was altogether carried away by the charming manner in which she expressed herself. He flung his arms about her, and endeavoured to convey, in one single kiss, all his gratitude for her kindness, his admiration for her beauty, his respect for her character, and his regret that she should have been orphaned at the age of fourteen and left to the care of an aunt who was a little inclined to severity. This is a great deal to be expressed in one single kiss: nevertheless, our hero did his best.

Next morning, he had to telephone his report to the Devil. "I'll hold your hand," said Rosie.

"Very well, my darling," said he. "I shall feel better so."

His call was put through like lightning. The Devil, like thunder, asked him how he had got on.

"The young woman is seduced," said George, in a rather brusque tone.

"Excellent!" returned his master. "Now tell me exactly how it happened."

"I thought," said George, "that you were supposed to be a gentleman."

"I am inquiring," said the Devil, "in a strictly professional capacity. What I wish to get at is her motive in yielding to your almost too subtle charm."

"Why?" cried George. "You don't think that splendid girl would see me frizzling and frying in a lake of boiling brimstone?"

"Do you mean to say," cried the Devil in a terrifying voice, "that she has sacrificed her virtue merely to save you from punishment?"

"What other inducement," asked our hero, "do you imagine would have been likely to prevail?"

"You besotted fool!" cried his master, and proceeded to abuse him ten times more roundly than before.

George listened in fear and rage. When he had done cursing him, the Devil continued in a calmer voice, "There is only one thing to be done," said he, "and you may consider yourself very fortunate that you (you worm!) are needed to play a part in it. Otherwise you would be frizzling before sunset. As it is, I see I must give the matter my individual attention, and the first step is that you must marry the girl."

"By all means," replied our hero briskly.

"I shall send you a bishop to perform the ceremony," continued the fiend, "and next week, if I am better of my present fit of the gout, I shall require you to present me to your wife, and I myself will undertake her temptation."

"Temptation to what?" asked George, in a tone of great anxiety.

"To that sin to which wives are peculiarly fitted," replied the Devil. "Does she like a waxed moustache?"

"Oh dear! He says," whispered George to Rosie, "do you like a waxed moustache?"

"No, darling," said Rosie. "I like a bristly, sandy one, like yours."

"She says she likes a bristly, sandy one, like mine," said George, not entirely without complacency.

"Excellent! I will appear in one yet bristlier and sandier," replied the fiend. "Keep her by you. I have never failed yet. And, Postlethwaite—"

"Oh, yes, yes," said George. "What is it now?"

"Be discreet," said the Devil, in a menacing tone. "If she gets wind of my intentions, you shall be in the brimstone within an hour."

George hung up the receiver. "Excuse me, my dear," he said, "I really must go and think over what I have just heard."

He walked out among his groves of willows, which were then all freshened by the morning dew, and resounding with the songs of birds. It was, of all the mornings of his life, that on which he would most have appreciated his first cigarette, had it not been for his conversation with the Devil. As it was, he did not bother to light one. "The thing is," he said to himself, "he must either succeed or fail. In the latter case his fury will be intolerable; in the former case mine will be."

The problem seemed to defy solution, and so it would have done, had it not been that love, whose bemusing effects have been celebrated often enough in song and story, has another and an ungratefully neglected aspect, in which the mind receives the benefit of clarifying calm. When the first flurry of his perturbation had passed, our hero found himself in possession of a mind as cool and unclouded as the sea-strand sky of earliest dawn. He immediately lit his cigarette.

"After all, we have some days to go," he murmured, "and time is entirely relative. Consider, for example, that fellow Prior, who is at this very moment about to drink

up the universe, and who will still be arrested in the act of doing so long after all our little lives have passed away. On the other hand, it is certainly not for me to deny that certain delightful moments can take on the aspect of eternity. Besides, we might always escape."

The thought had entered his mind as unostentatiously as, no doubt, the notion of writing *Paradise Lost* entered Milton's—"H'm, I'll write *Paradise Lost*." "Besides, we might always escape." Just a few words, which, however, made all the difference. All that remained, in one case as in the other, was to work out the little details.

Our hero was ingenious. What's more, he was assisted in his reflections by the hoarse cry, like that of a homing swan, of Charon's siren. It was the hour when that worthy, having cast loose from the quays of Hell, where he dropped his male cargo, turned his great ship towards George's planet. It came into sight, cleaving the morning blue, flashing in the beams of the local sun, leaving behind it a wake like that of a smoke-trailing aeroplane, only altogether better. It was a glorious sight. Soon George could see the women scampering up and down the decks, and hear their cry: "Is that Buenos Aires?"

He lost no time, but, repairing to his palace, and seating himself in the most impressive of its salons, he sent forth a messenger to the docks, saying, "Bid the skipper come up and have a word with me."

Charon soon came stumping along in the wake of the messenger. He might have been inclined to grumble, but his eyes brightened at the sight of a bottle George had on his desk. This contained nothing less than the Old

Original Rum of Hell, a liquor of the fieriest description, and now as rare as it is unappreciated.

"Skipper," said George, "you and I have got on well enough hitherto, I believe. I have to ask you a question, which may seem to reflect a little on your capacities. However, I don't ask it on my own behalf, you may be sure, and in order to show my private estimation of you as a friend, as a man, and above all as a sea-dog of the old school, I am going to ask you to do me the favour of taking a little tippie with me first."

Charon was a man of few words. "Ay! Ay!" said he.

George then poured out the rum. When Charon had wet his whistle, "The chief," said George, "is in a secret fury with you over Mrs. Soames of Bayswater."

"Avast," said Charon, with a frown.

"Has it slipped your memory that I mentioned her to you on two previous occasions?" continued our hero. "She is now a hundred and four, and as cross as two sticks. The chief wants to know why you have not brought her along months ago." As he spoke, he refilled Charon's glass.

"Avast," said that worthy again.

"Perhaps," said George, "among your manifold onerous duties, his express commands concerning one individual may have seemed unworthy of your attention. I'm sure *I* should have forgotten the matter altogether, had I such a job as yours. Still, you know what he is. He has been talking of changes at the Admiralty: however, pay no attention to that. I have to visit the earth myself on important business, and I find that the young woman

you brought by such a regrettable mistake has had training as a hospital nurse. Between us, I assure you, we will shanghai the old geezer in a brace of shakes; the chief will find her here when he recovers from his gout, and foul weather between you will be entirely averted."

With that he poured the rest of the rum into the old salt's glass.

"Aye! Aye!" said that worthy.

George at once pressed the bell, and had Rosie ushered in, in a bewitching uniform. "To the ship, at once!" he cried.

"Aye! Aye!" cried Charon.

"I can take you back," whispered George to his beloved, "as long as you don't look round. If you do, we are lost."

"Depend upon me," she said. "Nothing will ever make me cast a single glance behind while you and I are together."

Very well, they got aboard. Charon believed all land-lubbers were mad; moreover, he had long suspected machinations against him at headquarters, and was obliged to George for giving him word of them. George ordered a whole case of the admirable rum (the last case in existence) to be placed in his cabin, lest Charon should remember that old Mrs. Soames had never been mentioned to him at all.

Amid hoots and exclamations in technical language the great ship left her moorings. George, on the pretext that he had to maintain constant communication with his chief, took over the wireless operator's cabin. You may be sure Satan was in a fury when he heard what

had happened; but the only effect of that was that his gouty members became a thousand times worse inflamed, and grew still more so when he found it impossible to establish communication with the ship.

The best he could do was to conjure up, in the trackless wastes of space, such dumb images as might tempt Rosie to glance behind her. A Paris hat would bob up like a buoy on the starboard bow, and a moment later (so great was the speed of the ship) be tossing far astern. On other occasions, the images of the most famous film-actors would be descried sitting on the silver planets of far constellations, combing their hair. She was exposed to a hundred temptations of this sort, and, what was crueller, she was subjected, by pursuant imps, to ceaseless tweakings of the hair, tuggings of the garments, sensations as of a spider down her back, and to all sorts of odious familiarities, far better imagined than described. The devoted girl, holding fast to the forward rail of the boat-deck, never so much as flickered an eye.

The result of this devotion, coupled with George's vigilance at the earphones and Charon's drunkenness below, was that they soon heaved to in the latitudes of the earth. George and Rosie were set to slide at dizzy speed down an invisible rope, and they found themselves safely in bed beside the old centenarian, Mrs. Soames.

She was in a tearing rage when she found this young couple beside her. "Get out of here at once!" she cried. "All right," they said, "we will."

The very next day I met them in Oxford Street, looking in the windows of the furniture shops, and George acquainted me with the whole story.

"And you say," said I, "that the universe is really a vast pint of beer?"

"Yes," said he. "It is all true. To prove it, I will show you the very place where Rosie was pinched by the envious young woman."

"The very place?" I cried.

"Yes," said he. "It was in that shop over there, at the counter to the right as you go in, just at the end of the stockings, and before the beginning of the lingerie."

Squirrels Have Bright Eyes

I HAD WHAT APPEARED TO BE THE MISfortune to fall in love with a superb creature, an Amazon, a positive Diana. Her penthouse *pied-à-terre* was a single enormous room, liberally decorated with the heads and skins of the victims of her Lee-Enfield, her Ballard, her light Winchester repeater. Bang—a hearth-rug. Crack—a fur coat. Pop, pop—a pair of cosy mittens.

But, as a matter of fact, clothes suffocated her. Supremely Nordic, she ranged her vast apartment clad only in a sort of kirtle. This displayed four magnificent limbs, sunburned several tones darker than her blonde and huntress hair. So I fell in love. What limbs! What hair! What love!

She only laughed. "Squirrel," she said—she called me Squirrel—"it's no good. You're a real pet, though; you remind me a little of Bopotiti: he lived in a tree on the Congo.

"Bogey," she said to her hateful little female adorer, who was always curled up on some skin or other, "Bogey," she said, "show him that snap of Bopotiti."

"Really," I said, "this is not like me at all. I am more graceful, more bird-like."

"Yes, but he used to bring me *mjna-mjnas*. Every morning."

"I will bring you love, at all hours. Marry me."

"No."

"Live with me."

"No, no. I live with my guns. The world cannot utter its gross libidinous sneers at a girl who lives chastely with her Lee-Enfield, her Ballard, her light Winchester."

"Love is better."

"Ha! Ha! Forgive me. I must laugh now." And she flung herself upon a polar-bear skin in a paroxysm of giant mirth.

Utterly crushed, I went out to do myself in. Racking my brain for the most expressive method, I suddenly remembered a man called Harringay, a taxidermist who was often at her cocktail parties, where he had eyed me with a friendly interest.

I went to his shop. He was there alone. "Harringay. Stuff me."

"Sure. What shall it be? Steak? Chop suey? Something fancy?"

"No, Harringay, bitumen. Harringay, I want you to employ your art upon me. Send me to Miss Bjornstjorm with my compliments. For her collection. I love her." Here I broke down.

Harringay, that owl-like man, acted magnificently. He gave me his philosophy, put new heart into me. "Go just as you are," said he. "Perhaps love will come. Fortunately

your eyes are somewhat glassy by nature. You have only to hold the pose."

"You think love will come?"

"She must at any rate recognize you as an admirably motionless companion for a—it's on the tip of my tongue—one of those things up in a tree to shoot from."

"It's on the tip of mine too. I'll gamble on it. Harringay, you are a friend."

"No, no. It will be an advertisement for me."

"No, no. You are a friend. In one moment I shall be ready."

I was. He carried me to her apartment. "Brynhild, here is something more for your natural history museum."

"Why, it's Squirrel! Is he stuffed?"

"For love of you, Brynhild."

"How lifelike! Harringay, you are the king of taxidermists."

"Yes, and I service him every day. It's a new method. It's all arranged for. Shall I put him in that alcove?"

"Yes, and we'll have a cocktail party. Right away. Everybody must come. Bogey, call everybody."

"Even Captain Fenshawe-Fanshawe?"

"Yes, by all means the Captain."

She collapsed, roaring with laughter, upon a flamboyant tiger-skin. She was still laughing when the guests poured in. The gigantic Captain Fenshawe-Fanshawe, my rival with the monocle and the Habsburg chin, taller than Brynhild herself, towered among them.

Everybody laughed, chattered, and admired. "Marvellous work, Mr. Harringay! When our dear Pongo dies, I shall send him to you."

"I hope you will do our Fifi, Mr. Harringay."

Harringay bowed and smiled.

"He did it for love, they say."

"Love!" boomed the Captain, filliping me under the nose. I trembled with rage and mortification.

"Be carefull! He is very delicately wired," said Harringay.

"Love!" boomed the Captain. "A squirrel! Ha! Ha! It takes a full-sized man to hold a worth-while amount of love. What sort of a heart did you find in him, Harringay?"

"Quite a good sort," said Harringay. "Broken, of course."

Brynhild's laughter, which had been continuous, stopped.

"A squirrel!" sneered the Captain. "Didn't know you went in for small deer, Brynhild. Send you a stuffed mouse for Christmas."

He had not observed Brynhild's expression. I had. It looked like one of those bird's-eye views of the world you see before a news-reel: everything going round and round; clouds, continents, seas, one thing after another. Suddenly, in a single convulsive movement, she was off her flamboyant tiger-skin, and stretched superbly prone on the funereal pelt of a black panther. "Leave me!" she cried chokingly. "Go away, everybody. Go away. Go away."

The guests felt something was wrong. They edged out.

"Does that mean me?" said the Captain.

"Go away!" she cried.

"Me too?" said Bogey.

"Everybody," sobbed Brynhild. Nevertheless a woman must have a friend; she clutched her by the hand.

"Brynhild! What is it? You are crying. I have never seen you cry. Tell me. We are alone."

"Bogey, he did it for love."

"Yes."

"I've just realized what that means, Bogey. I didn't know. I've been all my life hunting things—killing them—having them stuffed— Bogey, that's all done now. He's everything to me. I'll marry him."

"I don't think you can, if he's stuffed, Brynhild darling."

"Live with him, then."

"The world—?"

"The world's gross libidinous sneers can't touch a girl who lives with a man who's stuffed, Bogey. But I shall sit him at table, and talk to him, just as if he were alive."

"Brynhild, you're wonderful!"

I agreed. At the same time my position was a difficult one. It is no joke to have to seem stuffed when your beloved adores you, passionately, remorsefully, sits you up at table, talks to you in the firelight, tells you all, weeps even. And yet, if I unbent, if I owned up, I felt her new-born love might wither in the bud.

Sometimes she would stroke my brow, press a burning kiss upon it, dash off, fling herself down on a leopard-skin, and do her exercises, frantically, hopelessly. I needed all my control.

Harringay called every morning, "to service me" as he said. He insisted that Brynhild should go out for an hour, pretending that a professional secret was involved. He

gave me my sandwich, my glass of milk, dusted me thoroughly, massaged my joints where they were stiff.

"You can't massage the stiffness out of this absurd situation," said I.

"Trust me," he said.

"All right," I said. "I will."

Brynhild returned, as usual, five minutes or so too early. She couldn't stay away the full hour. "I miss him so," she said, "when I'm out. And yet, when I come back, he's stuffed. It's too terrible."

"Perhaps I can help you," said Harringay.

"I dare not believe it," she said, clutching her heart.

"What?" cried he. "And you the little girl who shoots tigers? Pluck up your courage. Would you be too scared to believe in an artificial leg?"

"No," said she. "I could face that."

"One of those modern ones," said he, "that walk, kick, dance even, all by machinery?"

"Yes," she said. "I believe in it."

"Now," said he, "for his sake, believe in two of them."

"I will. I do."

"Be brave. Two arms as well."

"Yes. Yes."

"And so forth. I can make his jaw work. He'll eat. He'll open and shut his eyes. Everything."

"Will he speak to me?"

"Well, maybe he'll say 'Mamma.'"

"Science! It's wonderful! But—but what will the world say?"

"I don't know. 'Bravo!' Something of that sort."

"No. Gross libidinous sneers. If I live with him, and

he says 'Mamma.' And I can't marry him because he's stuffed. Oh, I knew it would be no good."

"Don't worry," said Harringay. "These are just technicalities. I'll straighten it all out. More tomorrow."

She saw him out, and came back shaking her head. She was in despair. So was I. I knew the Diana element in her. So did she. She spent the afternoon weeping on the skin of a giant grizzly. I longed to be with her. I felt myself as if I were on the skin of a porcupine.

Suddenly, just as the shadows were falling thick in the vast apartment, there was a knock at the door. She opened. It was the abominable Fenshawe-Fanshawe.

"What do you want?" said she.

"Guess," said he.

"I wouldn't dream of it," said she.

"No need to," said he, removing his jacket.

"What are you doing?" said she.

"I have waited long enough," said he. "Listen, I don't like that kirtle. It doesn't suit you."

She made a bound, however, and reached the wall. Her guns were there. She pointed the Lee-Enfield. "Stand back!" she cried.

The Captain, sneering, continued to advance.

She pulled the trigger. A hollow click sounded. The Captain smiled and came nearer.

She caught up the Ballard. Click! The Winchester light repeater. Click! Click! Click!

"I removed the cartridges," said the Captain, "when you were laughing so heartily at the cocktail party."

"Oh, Squirrel! If you could help me!"

"He can't. He's stuffed."

"Oh, Squirrel! Help me! Squirrel! Squirre—" At that moment, he seized her. She broke free. "Help me!"

"You're durn tootin' I will," said I, rising stiffly from my seat. The effect, in the shadowy alcove, was probably uncanny. The Captain gave a throbbing cry. He turned and fled for the door. My blood was up, however, and regardless of the pins and needles I pursued him, snatching a prize elephant's tusk as I ran. While yet he scrambled at the latch I let him have it. He fell.

I felt Brynhild beside me, a true comrade. "Forgive me," I said. "I have deceived you."

"You have saved me. My hero!"

"But I am not stuffed," I murmured.

"At least," said she, "you have more stuffing in you than that great beast."

"He will need it now, Brynhild. Or there will be trouble."

"Yes. We will call in Harringay."

"Good old Harringay!"

"A clean kill, Squirrel mine! Great hunting!"

"Thank you."

I put one foot on the giant carcass, then the other. Our lips were on a level.

"Brynhild! May I?"

"Yes."

"Really?"

"Yes."

It was a divine moment. We sank upon the skin of a giant panda. Bogey knocked in vain.

Next day, of course, we were married.

Sleeping Beauty

ROGER PASTON HAD EVERYTHING IN the world that he wanted. He had a very civilized little Regency house, whose ivory façade was reflected in a lake of suitable proportions. There was a small park, as green as moss, and well embowered with sober trees. Outside this, his estate ran over some of the shaggiest hills in the South of England. The ploughed fields lay locked in profound woods. A farm-house and a cottage or two sent their blue smoke curling up into the evening sky.

With all this, his income was very small, but his land paid for itself, and his tastes, being perfect, were simple in the extreme. His dinner was a partridge roasted very plain, a bottle of Hermitage, an apple pie, and a mouthful of Cheshire cheese. His picture was a tiny little Constable, left to him by his great-uncle. His gun was Father's old Purdey, which fitted him to a hair; his dog a curly-coated retriever; his horse a cob, but a good one; he had the same three suits made for him every year; and when his friends went abroad it did not occur to him to find others.

In short, he was half a solitary, with a mild manner and a plain face. He was obsessed by the placid beauty of his quiet house, and by the rich, harsh beauty of the

wild farmlands on the hills. Perhaps he was a little precious in his insatiable devouring of these delights; at all events he seldom left home, and, though he was thirty, he had never fallen in love. Whenever he was attracted, he would think of his woods and his hills, and then he would find something a little cheap or smart or tinny in the young woman who had caught his eye.

However, one day, just as he was congratulating himself on being the happiest man in all the world, the thought occurred to him that he had never experienced the rapture of returning to his paradise after a long absence abroad, and, being a connoisseur of sensations, this thought stuck in his mind, and before very long he had set off to America, where the best of his friends was settled in San Francisco.

On his way back across the Middle West he stopped off at Hugginsville in order to sharpen his homesickness to the keenest possible pitch. Hugginsville is the dreariest town that ever sweltered on the devastated prairie. Sickly trees, tipsy posts, and rusty wire effectively dissipate all the grandeur of the endless plain. The soil was blown away in the droughts: the fields are nothing but hideous clay, with here and there the skeleton of a horse or a cow. A sunken creek, full of tin cans, oozes round a few hundred wooden shacks in the last stages of decay. The storekeepers have the faces of alligators; all the other people have the faces and the voices of frogs.

Roger deposited his bags in Mergler's Grand Hotel, which stank. He was regaled with a corned-beef hash more terrible than the town itself, because, after all, one did not have to eat the town. He toyed with the second

half of a tin of fruit which had been opened for some departed guest, and went out to stroll a few yards along the main street.

When he had strolled a few yards along the main street he had the impression he was going mad, so he went back to Mergler's Grand Hotel.

When he had been another half an hour in Mergler's Hotel he began to bite at the ends of his fingers, so he went out into the main street again, but the sight of the people soon drove him back into Mergler's Grand Hotel. Thus he spent alternate half-hours of the evening, and of the next three or four days. During this time he thought of his hushed woods and his rich fields, and particularly of his succulent partridges, and his homesickness was whetted to a razor edge.

On the fourth day his self-control broke, and with a terrible suddenness. He strapped up his bags, called for his bill. "What time is the next train?" he asked.

"Eight," said the hotelkeeper.

"Eight o'clock tonight?" cried Roger in a panic. "Ten hours! What shall I do?"

"Better go along by the creek," said the hotelkeeper.

"It's not deep enough!" cried Roger. "Ten hours!"

"You don't want to swim in that creek," said the hotelkeeper. "That's leechy. You come to where them three alder trees are——"

"Their branches are not strong enough," said Roger.

"From there you'll see the fair-ground," said the hotelkeeper.

"A fair?" cried Roger, as a man might cry, "A reprieve?"

"Yes, *sir*," returned the hotelkeeper. "Scheduled to start at one p.m. this very afternoon. Boy, will ya find a fair at any of these goldarn hick towns hereabouts? No, *sir*."

Roger needed no greater incentive than the hotelkeeper's recommendation, and the prospect of preserving his reason. At the stroke of one he was at the gate; the first blast of music engulfed him as he passed through.

"I must restrain myself," he thought, "from dashing too madly at the side-shows. I have seven hours to fill in. I will see the Calf at half-past one, the Fat Lady at half-past two, and the Pigtailed Boy at half-past three. At four-thirty, by way of a central prop, I will indulge myself in the glamour of the fan dance, the memory of which will colour the Giant Rat at five-thirty, and at half-past six I will see the Sleeping Beauty, whatever she may be, and that will leave me half an hour to pick up my bags, and a happy hour on the place where the platform would be if there was one. I hope the train will not be late."

At the appointed hours Roger gravely inspected the heads of the two-headed Calf, the legs of the Fat Lady, and the bottom of the Pigtailed Boy. He was glad of the fans when it came to the fan dance. He looked at the Giant Rat, and the Giant Rat looked at Roger. "*I*," said Roger under his breath, "am leaving on the eight o'clock train." The Giant Rat bowed its head and turned away.

The tent that housed the Sleeping Beauty was just filling as Roger approached. "Come on," cried the barker, "curtain just going up on the glamorous face and form

of the girl who's a problem to modern science, celebrated in Ripley's 'Believe It or Not.' In her night attire. See the most beautiful girl in America, passing away her youth and love-time in unbroken sleep."

Roger paid his five cents and entered the crowded tent. An evil-looking rascal, dressed in a white surgical coat and with a stethoscope hung round his neck, was at that moment signalling for the curtain to be drawn aside.

A low dais was exposed: on it a hospital bed, at the head of which stood a sinister trollop tricked out in the uniform of a nurse.

"Here we have," said the pseudo-doctor, "the miracle that has baffled the scientists of the entire world." He continued his rigmarole. Roger gazed at the face on the pillow. It was, beyond any question at all, the most exquisite face he had ever seen in his life.

He was as staggered as if he had seen a milk-white unicorn. He had believed this sort of face had vanished utterly from the world. "This is the sort of thing Lely painted," he said. "This explains Nelson. Good Lord, it explains Troy. It is *the* face of beauty that used to come once in a hundred years, and I thought it had gone for ever. I thought we had a film-star's face instead."

"Well, folks," said the pseudo-doctor, "I just want you to know, for the sake of the reputation of the scientific profession, that there has been absolutely no deception in the announcement made to you that this is the most beautiful young lady in the world. Lest you should be speculating on whether her recumbent posture, maintained night and day for five years, has been the cause

of shrinkage or wasting of the limbs, hips, or bust—Nurse, be so good as to turn back that sheet.”

The nurse, with a simper, pulled back the grubby cotton and revealed the whole form of this wonderful creature, clad in a diaphanous nightgown, and lying in the most graceful, fawn-like posture you can possibly imagine.

Roger was shaken to his very heart's root by a sort of ecstasy. “I knew,” said he to himself, “that my careful way of life had meaning. I knew that it led, or pointed, somewhere.” He remembered he had been called an ostrich, an escapist. “This,” said he, “is worth everything that has happened in the last two hundred years.”

He could not rid himself of a feeling that this nymph, this Arcadian being, would open her eyes, and that when they were opened those eyes would be fixed on him. He trembled. Then he became angrily aware of other people in the booth. “To think she should be exposed to these!”

“Gentlemen,” the hateful showman was saying, “the resources of world science have proved impotent to awaken this beautiful young lady from her trance that has lasted five years. Now, gents, the old fairy-tale you heard around that dear old mamma's knee assures each and every one of us the Sleeping Beauty woke up when Prince Charming happened along with his kiss. In order to contribute to the expensive medical attention required by this young lady, we are prepared, for the fee of one quarter deposited in the bowl on the bedside table, to allow any gentleman in the audience to try his luck at being Prince Charming. Now, gentlemen, take your places in a queue to avoid the crush.”

There was a shuffling of feet, a snigger or two, and a good deal of muttering.

"Yeah? What's he think he's got—Marlene Dietrich?"

"O.K., Irving. You step up when I'm through."

Roger, stuck fast in the middle of the pack, cursed them as swine for hesitating over a pearl, which might, he thought, irradiate and transform their abject lives by its contact, if they were not struck dead in the profaning act. But as he saw a grinning sheik push forward toward the barrier, applauded by some and followed by others, it occurred to him that he might have to do the striking. He made a desperate clutch at reason. "I must get out of this," he said.

He rushed off toward his hotel, hurrying fast, then slowing up, as men do who try to tear themselves away from terrifying destinies. He came to a stop at the sight of Mergler's Grand Hotel. He found that he was actually grinding his teeth. "It is impossible," he said, "to bear the thought of that shy, wild, innocent face being ravaged by those lecherous reptiles. And what is a hundred times worse," he cried (for beauty is always ravaged), "those blind mouths have kissed her, and I have not!

"It is seven o'clock," he said. "I might still get back there, and yet catch my train.

"Perhaps I had better not," he thought, as he set off faster than he had fled. "Perhaps I am making a fool of myself. There is only one sensible thing for me to do: that is to get home as quickly as ever I can."

He thought of his home. "But what is it all made for," said he, "except to be a shell for such a creature as this? Or for the hope of her? Or the image of her? I could carry

that kiss home, and live with the memory of it, and every shady oak would rejoice at the ghost of the Goddess. . . .”

His thoughts were becoming rather wild, but then the day was hot and he was walking at a tremendous speed. He arrived, flushed and panting, at a propitious moment, just as a batch of people were coming out of the booth. “How impossible it would have been,” he thought, “if I had had to kiss her in the midst of that hideous mob! Now the curtain will be lowered while the tent fills up. I shall have a chance to be alone with her for a moment.”

He found the back entrance, and squeezed through a narrow flap in the canvas. The doctor and the nurse were taking a little refreshment between shows. Roger did not dare look at the bed.

“Other way in, buddy,” said the doctor. “Unless you’re the press, that is.”

“I am not the press,” said Roger.

“Then the other way in,” said the doctor.

“Listen,” said Roger. “How long is it between shows? I want to spend a few minutes alone with this girl.”

“Yeah?” said the doctor, observing Roger’s flushed face and breathless speech.

“I can pay you,” said Roger.

“Stool-pigeon—vice-squad,” observed the nurse in a level tone.

“Listen, buddy,” said the doctor, “you don’t want to muscle in here with a low-down immoral proposition like that.”

“Can’t you see I’m an Englishman?” cried Roger.

"How can I be a member of the vice-squad or anything else? This is nothing immoral. I just want . . ."

"I wonder," said the doctor.

The nurse examined Roger with prolonged and expert attention. "O.K.," she said at last.

"O.K. nothing," said the doctor.

"O.K. a hundred bucks," said the nurse.

"A hundred bucks?" said the doctor. "Listen, son, it's true what Will Rogers said: 'We all been young once.' You want a private interview—maybe you *are* the press—with this interesting young lady. Well, mebbe. Mebbe a hundred bucks, and—what do you say, Nurse?"

The nurse examined Roger again. "Ten minutes," said she.

"Ten minutes," continued the doctor to Roger. "After twelve o'clock tonight when we close down."

"No. Now," said Roger. "I've got to catch a train."

"Yeah?" said the doctor. "And have some guy snooping to see why we don't begin on time. No, *sir*. There's ethics in this profession—*the show goes on*. Scram. Twelve o'clock. Open up, Dave."

Roger filled in part of the time by watching the thickening crowds file into the booth. As the evening wore on an increasing proportion were repulsively drunk. In the end he went away and sat down by the stinking creek, holding his head in his hands and waiting for the endless hours to drag by. The sunken water oozed past, darkly. The night over the great flat of lifeless clay was heavy with a stale and sterile heat, the lights of the fair glared in the distance, and the dark water crept on. Roger had

the vague but dangerous impression that here was the end of the world.

At last the blaze of lights was extinguished. A few were left: even these began to wink out one by one, like sparks on a piece of smouldering paper. Roger got up like a somnambulist and made his way back to the fair.

The doctor and the nurse were eating silently and voraciously when he entered. The single harsh light in the tent, falling on their ill-coloured faces and their fake uniforms, gave them the appearance of waxworks, or corpses come to life, while the girl lying in the bed, with the flush of health on her cheeks and her hair in a lovely disorder, looked like a creature of the fresh wind, caught in this hideous stagnation by some enchantment, waiting for a deliverer. Certainly the world seemed upside down.

"Say, you showed up!" said the doctor.

"Got the hundred simoleons?" asked the nurse.

"Here is the money," said Roger. "Where can I be alone with her?"

"Push the bed through the curtain," said the doctor. "We'll turn the radio on."

"Have you a light of any sort—a candle?" asked Roger, when this was done.

"You want a light?" said the doctor. "O.K. We'll pull the curtain down a bit at the top. Service, huh?"

"Ten minutes," said the nurse.

"Have a heart," said the doctor. "Give the poor guy fifteen."

"Ten minutes," said the nurse.

"Gee, it's tough!" observed the doctor. "O.K. Clock on."

Roger was alone with the beauty for which he, and his whole life, and his house, and his land, were made. He moistened his handkerchief and wiped away the blurred lipstick from her mouth. Fortunately they had not thought it necessary to add colour to her cheeks.

He tried to clear his mind to make it as blank as a negative film, so that he could photograph upon it each infinitely fine curve of cheek and lip, the sweep of the dreaming lashes and the tendrils of the enchanted hair.

Suddenly, to his horror, he found his eyes were dimming with tears. He had made his mind a blank in order to photograph a goddess, and now his whole being was flooded with pity for a girl. But almost at once he ceased to struggle against this emotion, and, borne away by it, he leaned forward and kissed her on the lips.

The effect was astounding. If he had somewhere at the back of his mind a faint hope that his kiss might awaken her, he forgot it now. It is the fate of those who kiss sleeping beauties to be awakened themselves, and all Roger's previous emotions, though they had seemed to shake him to the core, were the merest stirrings in a long sleep compared with the sudden leap he now made into the broad daylight of complete and unquestioning love.

At that moment he heard an admonitory cough on the other side of the curtain. He jerked it aside and went through.

"On time," said the doctor approvingly.

"How much," said Roger, "will you take for that girl?"

"Hear that?" said the doctor to the nurse. "He wants to buy the act."

"Sell," said the nurse.

"Yeah? You're jealous," said the doctor.

"Sell," said the nurse.

"Not under ten grand," said the doctor.

"Twelve," said the nurse.

"Twelve thousand dollars?" said Roger.

"She says," said the doctor.

This was not a matter for haggling over. "I will pay you that," said Roger. "It will take me a few days to get the money."

"Do you know what she grosses?" said the doctor.

"I don't want to know," said Roger. "I don't want you to tell me anything about her."

"Sure," said the nurse. "If he don't want to know, you keep your trap shut."

"You can bring her to the hotel," said Roger, "and stay with her till I hand you the money."

"Mergler's Grand?" said the nurse. "That's extra."

In the end everything was arranged. Roger cabled his lawyer to raise the money. In due course it arrived. He paid the doctor and nurse, who at once bade him farewell, and that evening Roger and his wonderful charge set off for Chicago, New York, and England.

The nurse had informed him that long stretches of travel were apparently not good for the sleeper. "Seems to give her the willies," she had said. "How do you know?" Roger had asked. "She squawks," the nurse had replied. "Sounds horrible."

This being so, Roger had determined to restrain his eagerness, and rest twenty-four hours in Chicago. When they arrived he went to a hotel, where Daphne, as he had decided to call her, was transferred to a comfortable bed,

and Roger, who had spent most of the night journey in watching over her, took the liberty of snatching a little sleep in the twin to it.

In the afternoon he awoke, and went downstairs to the lounge. The man at the reception desk signalled to him. "There's been a couple of people asking for you," he said, "only you left orders not to be disturbed."

"Who can they be?" said Roger. He was not left to wonder very long. "This couple coming here now," said the receptionist. Roger looked round and saw a man and a woman approaching. He thought they looked extremely unsavoury.

"This is the gentleman," said the receptionist.

"Mr. Paston?" said the man.

"We should like to have a word with you," said the woman.

"Better go somewhere quiet," said the man.

"What do you want to see me about?" said Roger.

"About my daughter!" cried the woman in a heart-rending tone. "About my little girl. My baby."

"Tell me exactly what you mean," said Roger, moving with them to a deserted entrance hall.

"Kidnapping, white-slave trade, and violation of the Mann Act," said the man.

"That doc sold her like a chattel!" cried the woman.

"What is the Mann Act?" asked Roger.

"You move a dame, any dame but your wife or daughter, outa one State into another," said the man, "and that's the Mann Act. Two years."

"Prove that she is your daughter," said Roger.

"Listen, wise guy," said the man, "if half a dozen of the

home-town folks aren't enough for you, they'll be enough for the district attorney. Do you see that dick standing outside? Boy, I've only got to whistle."

"You want money," said Roger at last.

"I want my Rosie," said the woman.

"We drew twenty per for Rosie," said the man. "Yeah, she kept her folks."

Roger argued with them for a time. It became abundantly clear that, whether or not they were her parents, they could very effectively prevent his taking Daphne any farther. There was nothing for it but to forsake her, or to agree to their demand. Their demand was for twenty thousand dollars. This meant selling almost all the stock he had left, and at the most unfavourable possible moment. He cabled to England, and soon afterward paid over the money and received in exchange a document surrendering all parental rights and appointing him the true and legal guardian of the sleeping girl.

Roger was stunned. He moved on to New York in a sort of dream. The phrases of that first appalling interview repeated themselves constantly in his mind: it was with a horrible shock that he realized the same phrases, or others very like them, were being launched at him from outside. A seedy, but very businesslike-looking clergyman had buttonholed him in the foyer of the Warwick Hotel.

He was talking about young American womanhood, purity, two humble members of his flock, the moral standards of the State of Tennessee, and a girl called Susy-Mary. Behind him stood two figures, which, speech-

less themselves, were calculated to take away the power of speech from any man.

"It is true, then," said Roger, "about hill-billies?"

"That name, sir," said the clergyman, "is not appreciated in the mountain country of —."

"And their daughter is named Susy-Mary?" said Roger.

"These humble, homely folk . . ." began the clergyman.

"And I have her upstairs?" said Roger. "Then the other parents were crooks. I knew it. And these want their daughter back. How did they hear of it?"

"Your immoral act, sir," said the clergyman, "has had nation-wide press publicity for the last three days."

"I should read the papers," said Roger. "So that is why the others were so eager to be paid. These people want to take the girl back to some filthy cabin . . ."

"Humble," said the clergyman, "but pure."

". . . till they can sell her to the next rascally showman who passes. I'll tell you the circumstances in which I found her. No, I won't, though." He endeavoured to convince the clergyman of his respectability and of the excellence of his intentions as far as Daphne-Rosie-Susy-Mary was concerned.

"That is all very well," said the clergyman, "but, Mr. Paston, have you ever thought what a mother's heart really means?"

"Last time," said Roger, "it meant twenty thousand dollars."

One should never be witty, even when in the depths

of despair. The words "twenty thousand dollars" were rumblingly echoed, as from a mountain cavern, from the deep mouth of the male parent, whose aged eye took on a forbidding gleam.

From that moment the conversation was mere persiflage. Roger was faced with the choice of paying another twenty thousand dollars or leaving his Daphne behind him. He asked leave to walk up and down by himself for a little time, in order to think and breathe more freely.

"This will take the last penny of my capital," he thought. "I shall have nothing to live on. Daphne will need the most expensive doctors. Ah, well, I can be happy with her if I sell the estate and retain only the keeper's cottage. We shall then have four or five hundred a year, as many stars as before, and the deep woods all round us. I'll do it."

He did not do quite that, for he found that hasty sales do not usually result in prices proportionate to the beauty and the value of estates. There were also some legal fees to be paid, one or two little presents to be made in the interests of haste, and some heavy hotel and travelling expenses.

When all was done, Roger found his fortune had dwindled to a very little more than two hundred a year, but he had the cottage, with Orion towering above it, and the mighty woods all round.

He was almost too happy. The lonely spot where he lived seemed to him to be more English and more beautiful even than his lost house. He would walk up and down outside, and watch the treacly yellow candlelight shine through the tiny pane, and exult in knowing that

all the beauty of the world was casketed there. He became dizzy with the poetry of it all, and forgot to shave.

There was only one fly in his ointment. His house, at its hasty auction, had been knocked down to the most hideous, brassy rascal imaginable: a big book-maker, he was told.

Roger seemed always to be meeting this flashy and beefy swaggerer, and every time he did so he took longer to get over it. He began to be oppressed by the thought that he had sinned in allowing his beautiful piece of country to pass into such defiling hands: "If I were a god, I should take vengeance for that." However, he had only to sit a little while beside Daphne's bed to forget all his hate and fear, in contemplation of the poetry book of her sleeping face.

The doctor came down once a month. Roger trembled to think of his bill. "I have some good news for you," said the doctor, brushing a cobweb from his sleeve. "This sort of thing you know . . . very mysterious. Well, we've narrowed it down to a gland or two . . . There's a johnny in Vienna . . . I think he's hit on something."

"You think you can wake her?" said Roger.

"I think we can," said the doctor. "As a matter of fact, I've brought the extract down with me. I'll show you how to administer it. You'll have to keep up the dose, you know. This is the secretion itself, which her gland should be turning out but isn't. Miss one day and she'll relapse."

Roger took all the instructions. The doctor went off, brushing away more cobwebs as he did so.

Roger walked alone under the stars. "I am going to wake her up," thought he. "Her eyes will open, and look

into mine, and I will take her by the hand and show her the apple tree and the tall edge of the woods and the hills rolling away, and Orion reeling over the dark blue. . . .” He walked about half the night. In the morning, with reverent trembling hands, he gave her the first capsule.

The doctor had told him he might expect results on the third day. All that day, and all the next, Roger scarcely left the bedside. Now and then he bit at a crust of bread he had put on the chest of drawers, but he neither slept nor washed nor shaved nor did anything but watch her drooped eyelids, waiting for the faintest flicker.

The night wore on, the candle guttered and went out: the dawn was already pale at the window. Soon the first rays of the sun struck aslant across the bed. They reached the face of the sleeper; she stirred, blinked, opened her eyes wide, and closed them again. She yawned.

“Gee-minnie-ikes!” she whined. “Gawd-amighty, what a hangover! What they done to me?”

She opened her eyes wide. “Who’re you, moonshiner?” she asked. “Eh, what dump’s this yere? What you done to me?”

“You are all right,” said Roger in some confusion. He had dreamed of various phrases that should be the first to drop from those perfect lips, but he had dreamed of nothing like this. What dismayed him most was the voice in which she spoke: it was the most grating, petulant, ill-conditioned whine he had ever heard in his life. “You are all right,” he said again.

“Awright nuthin’!” replied his beloved, cynically. “Paw’ll blow yer liver out fer this. Say, hobo, what’ll yer gimme not to tell Paw? Gimme a dollar?”

"Listen, my dear . . ." said Roger.

"Ow! My deelyal" cried she.

"You're in England now," said Roger. "And I have brought you here."

Her eyes rounded. "You a slaver?" she asked. "'M I goin' to be a sportin'-house gal? With an evenin' dress?"

"I can see," said Roger, "that this is going to take a lot of explaining."

He told her of her beauty, doubtless the outcrop of some pure old English strain preserved for centuries in the mountain settlements. She listened to this with a complacent giggle or two, but when he described how he had given up all he had, and how they were to live in this secluded beauty for ever, and she should love him if she could, and he would worship her anyway, her mouth took a downward turn.

"I wanna go home," she said. "I wanna go where there's fellers. I wanna go where Solly Bateson is; he said he'd get me into pichers."

"Listen," said Roger, with a sinking heart. "I'm your legal guardian now. Of course, you shall go home if you want to, but first of all you must give this place a trial. I'll do all I can to make you happy, and if it fails . . ."

His beloved cheered up a little. "Will ya gimme a nekkid-vamp dress?" said she. "One of them without no back?"

"If you're good," said Roger.

"Okky-doke," said she, opening her arms to him.

"Not that," said Roger. "But you shall get up and come and see the place, and I'll tell you all about it. Here's a dress and everything. I'll wait for you downstairs."

He went downstairs, and tried to escape his thoughts by building a fire, and setting out some breakfast. Soon his charmer joined him. Her method of eating was effective rather than delicate. Her further conversation was highly coloured rather than refined. "Come on," said she, as Roger led her outside, "we'll catch a gopher and cut his front legs off."

This was not a very good beginning. Roger, however, had sunk his whole life in this creature; he dared not admit to himself that it was hopeless. During the days that followed he faced every new revelation with a steely calm, and dealt with sulks, hysterics, whines, and screaming fits with exemplary patience.

Nevertheless, each new day added a little to his despondency. Daphne sulked more and more, and more and more frequently she demanded to be sent back to her home-town. Finally, after a scene that lasted two days, Roger went to see his lawyer, to ask if he could raise money for her passage.

"It would not be wise," said the lawyer. "I put the little that was left into some excellent shares, which I knew would drop heavily for a little while, and then steady at their true figure. Well, they're just at bottom at the moment. If you can wait three months, now . . ."

"I don't know," said Roger. "I'll think it over and write to you."

He returned to the cottage, where he found two little surprises. One was a bill from the doctor, for more than two hundred pounds; the other, which far outweighed any such evil, was that Daphne was in an entirely new

mood. She stroked his chin, sat on his knee, and declared she didn't want to go home after all. "Mebbe I gonna like the old shack," said she.

Roger did not persist after explanations, at which in any case Daphne was hardly an adept. He just took it as a gift from the gods, and he began to build hopes that this marked a turning point. "She is very young," he thought. "As the lovely seasons go round, they are bound to influence her. Perhaps in a year or two . . ."

His love sprang up in his heart again. He rejoiced over it, encouraged it, nourished it, for it was not only the most beautiful thing in the world, but the only thing he had. To raise it to its full ecstasy again, he made a practice of avoiding conversation with his beauty, and instead he took every opportunity of watching her when she thought herself alone. He would seat her under the apple tree in the hope that she would go to sleep there, for then her loveliness reached its height, or he would follow her into the woods, for which she showed an increasing fondness, and watch her scramble for nuts and blackberries, with her hair wild and a stained mouth—like the nymph he had dreamed of.

She went wild when she got into the woods, and often scampered so fast through the glades that Roger could not follow without betraying his presence, so generally he went back to the cottage, where there were a number of little household tasks awaiting his attention.

One day, however, he was so intoxicated by her wood-nymph loveliness that, after he had lost sight of her, he still persisted in the same direction, in the hope of find-

ing her sleeping under a tree, or paddling in the brook, or making some similar picture without which he felt he could not live through the day.

He looked here and there, moving very cautiously. At last he got to the bottom end of the wood near where his old house was, and then he heard voices from an old quarry that had crumbled to a mossy dell on the very edge. There was no mistaking one of these voices.

"Yeah, he came snoopin' along after me agin. But I ditched him, baby. Pore critter, he's just plumb nuts. Say, honey, when yer gonna take me up to the city?"

Roger peered over the edge. There was his nymph, and there was the satyr. It was the beefy book-maker from his old house.

There was a large stone lying at his feet. He thought a little of murder, but his brain was very cold. "Good Lord!" he thought. "At last I am done with impulsiveness!"

He walked quietly away, and returned to the cottage. Everything was as it was, except that the postman had called and left a duplicate of the doctor's bill which he had received a month ago.

Roger read the bill very carefully. "I shall soon have no money left at all," said he. "Yes, I've become practical all of a sudden. The question is, what shall I do?"

He saw a small box on the mantelpiece, and he eyed this small box for a long time. It contained the gland extract which kept Daphne awake. After a good deal of very matter-of-fact thinking, Roger took this small box and dropped it at the back of the fire.

Daphne came home and chattered a good deal. Roger

was even more silent than usual. Next day Daphne yawned a great deal, and slept for a very long time under the apple tree. The day after that she did not come down to breakfast. She stirred and murmured a little in the afternoon, soon she ceased even to murmur or to stir.

Roger went downstairs and wrote to a firm that advertised motor-caravans. Next summer he was at Blackpool, clad in a spotless white coat, addressing the multitude from under a sign that read:

THE SLEEPING BEAUTY
Dr. von Stangelberg exhibits
the Wonder of Modern Science
Adults only
THE SLEEPING BEAUTY
THREEPENCE

Possession of Angela Bradshaw

THERE WAS A YOUNG WOMAN, THE daughter of a retired colonel, resident in one of London's most select suburbs, and engaged to be married to Mr. Angus Fairfax, a solicitor who made more money every year: The name of this young woman was Angela Bradshaw; she wore a green suède cardigan, and had an Aberdeen terrier, and when open-toed shoes were in fashion, she wore open-toed shoes. Angus Fairfax was as ordinary as herself, and pleasant and ordinary were all the circumstances of their days.

Nevertheless, one day in September this young woman developed symptoms of a most distressing malady. She put a match to the curtains of the drawing-room, and kicked, bit, and swore like a trooper when restrained.

Everyone thought she had lost her reason, and no one was more distressed than her fiancé. A celebrated alienist was called in; he found her in a collected frame of mind. He made a number of little tests, such as are usual in these examinations, and could find none of the usual symptoms of dementia.

When he had done, however, she burst into a peal of

coarse laughter, and, calling him a damned old fool, she reminded him of one or two points he had overlooked. Now these points were extremely abstruse ones, and most unlikely to be known to a young girl who had never studied psychoanalysis, or life, or anything of that sort.

The alienist was greatly shocked and surprised, but he was forced to admit that while such knowledge was most abnormal, and while the term she had applied to him was indicative of the extreme of folly, he did not feel that she could be certified on these grounds alone.

"But cannot she be certified for setting fire to my curtains?" asked her mother.

"Not unless I find symptoms of insanity," said the specialist. "You can, of course, charge her with arson."

"What? And have her go to prison?" cried her mother. "Think of the disgrace!"

"I could undertake her defence, free of charge, and doubtless get her off with a caution," said Mr. Fairfax.

"There would still be the newspapers," said the Colonel, shaking his head. "At the same time, it seems extraordinary that nothing can be done about it." Saying this, he gave the eminent alienist his cheque and a look. The alienist shrugged his shoulders and departed.

Angela immediately put her feet on the table (her legs were extremely well turned) and recited a string of doggerel verses, celebrating the occasion in great detail, and casting scorn on her parents and her fiancé. These verses were very scurrilous, or I would reproduce them here.

During the next few days, she played some other tricks, all of them troublesome and undignified; above

all, she rhymed away like the principal boy in a panto. A whole string of doctors was called in: they all said her misbehaviour was not due to insanity.

Her parents then tried a few quacks, who, powerless to certify, were also impotent to cure. In the end they went to a seedy Madame who claimed to see into the soul. "The whole thing is perfectly clear," said this unprepossessing old woman. "Your daughter is possessed of a devil. Two guineas."

They asked her to exorcize the intrusive fiend, but that was ten, so they said they would think the matter over, and took Angela home in a taxi.

On the way, she said to them with a smile, "If you had had the decency to ask me, I could have told you that that was the trouble, all along."

When they had finished rating her for allowing them to go to so much expense unnecessarily, they asked her how she knew.

"In the simplest way," she said. "I see him very frequently."

"When?" cried the Colonel.

"Where?" cried her mother.

"What is he like?" cried her fiancé.

"He is young and not at all bad-looking," replied Angela, "and he talks most amusingly. He generally appears to me when I am alone. I am seldom alone but in my bedroom, and it is there that I see him, between eleven at night and seven in the morning."

"What does he say?" cried her father, grasping his malacca.

"Is he black?" cried her mother.

"What does he—? How do you know it is not a she-devil?" cried her fiancé.

"He expresses himself rather coarsely, but I believe sincerely," replied Angela. "I sometimes find the things he says quite beautiful. He is not black. He is not a she-devil."

"But how does he appear?" asked her mother.

"Frequently I find him beside me, when I have got into bed," said Angela, with the greatest composure in the world.

"I have always asked you to let me order a wider bed for that room," observed her mother to the Colonel.

"This fiend must be exorcized at once," said Angus Fairfax, "for there is no bed wide enough to sleep three, once we are married."

"I'm not sure that he wants to be exorcized," said Angela. "In any case, I must ask him first."

"Colonel Bradshaw," said Angus Fairfax, "I hope you realize my position. In face of these revelations, *and of all that lies behind them*, I cannot but withdraw from the engagement."

"A good riddance, *I say*," observed the fiend, now speaking for the first time.

"Be quiet, dear," said Angela.

Mr. Fairfax rapped on the glass, stopped the taxi, and got out.

"In face of what we have just heard," said he, "no action for breach of promise can possibly lie."

"It is not the custom of the Bradshaws to bring actions for breach of promise," said the Colonel. "No more shall we sue you for your share of the taxi-fare."

The fiend, while Mr. Fairfax hastily fumbled for his money, recited a valedictory quatrain, rhyming most obscenely upon his name.

To resume our tale: they got home. The Colonel immediately telephoned for the old Madame to come, regardless of cost.

"I'll have this fiend out before eleven tonight, anyway, Miss," said he to his daughter, who laughed.

The old Madame turned up, bearing a great box of powders, herbs, bones, symbols, and heaven knows what else. She had the drawing-room darkened, and the wireless disconnected from its aerial, just in case, and, as an afterthought, had the Colonel go out with a sardine to tempt a cat in from the street. "They often like to go into a cat," she said. "I don't know why."

Then, Angela being seated in the middle of the room, and the ornamental paper being taken out of the fireplace, because fiends very frequently like to make an exit by way of the chimney, the old woman lit a joss-stick or two, and began to mumble away for dear life.

When she had said all that was required, she set fire to a saucerful of Bengal Light. "Come forth, Asmodeus!" she cried.

"Wrong," said the fiend, with a chuckle.

"Bother!" cried the old woman in dismay, for the flare had shown the cat eating one of the bones she had brought. "That was a bone of St. Eulalia, which was worse than Keating's Powder to devils, and cost me twenty guineas," she said. "No devil will go into that cat now, and the bone must go into the bill, and the Colonel must go into the street to fetch a fresh cat."

When everything was resettled, she began again, and, lighting a new saucerful, "Come forth, Beelzebub!" she demanded.

"Wrong again," said the fiend, with a louder chuckle than before.

"They'll never guess, darling," said Angela.

The old beldam went on, at a prodigious expense of the Bengal Light, which was of a special kind. She called on Belial, Belphegor, Mahound, Radamanth, Minos, all the fiends ever heard of, and all she brought forth was taunts and laughter.

"Then who the devil are you?" cried the Colonel at last.

"William Wakefield Wall," replied the fiend.

"You might have asked that at the beginning," said Angela quietly.

"And who, if you please, is William Wakefield Wall?" inquired her mother, with dignity. "At least, dear, he is not one of these foreign fiends," she added to the Colonel.

"He is some charlatan," said the old woman. "I have never heard of him."

"Very few Philistines have," rejoined the fiend, with great equanimity. "However, if there is, by any odd chance, anyone in this suburb who is familiar with the latest developments of modern poetry, I advise you to make your inquiries there."

"Do you mean to say you're a poet?" cried the Colonel.

"I am not a Poona jingler," replied the other, "if that is what you mean by the term. Nor do I describe in saccharine doggerel such scenes as are often reproduced on

coloured calendars. If, however, by the word 'poetry' you imply a certain precision, intensity, and clarity of—"

"He is a poet, Father," said Angela, "and a very good one. He had a poem in a magazine printed in Paris. Didn't you, Will?"

"If the rascal is a poet," cried the Colonel, "bring in a bottle of whisky. That'll get him out, if I know the breed."

"A typical army idea!" replied the poet. "Perhaps the only one. No, Colonel, you need not bring whisky here, unless you need some yourself, and you may send away that old woman, at whom I do nothing but laugh. I shall come out on my own terms, or not at all."

"And your terms are—?" said the Colonel.

"Permission to marry your daughter," said the poet. "And the settlement upon her of a sum commensurate with the honour which my profession will bestow upon the family."

"And if I refuse?" cried the outraged father.

"I am very comfortable where I am," replied William Wall. "Angela can eat enough for two, and we are both as happy as anything. Aren't we, Angela?"

"Yes, dear," said Angela. "Oh, *don't!*"

"We shall continue to have our bit of fun, of course," added the poet.

"My dear," said the Colonel to his wife, "I think we had better sleep on this."

"I think it must be settled before eleven, my dear," said Mrs. Bradshaw.

They could see no way out of it, so they had to come to an agreement. The poet at once emerged, and proved

to be quite a presentable young man, though a little free in his mode of speech, and he was able to satisfy them that he came of an estimable family.

He explained that he had first seen Angela in the foyer of a theatre, during the *entr'acte*, and, gazing into her eyes (for he was much attracted), he had been amazed and delighted to find himself enter into possession of her. He was forced to reply in the affirmative to a certain question of Mrs. Bradshaw's: however, young people have their own standards in these days. They were married at once, and, as he soon took to writing novels, the financial side worked out very satisfactorily, and they spent all their winters on the Riviera.

The Invisible Dove-Dancer of Strathpheen Island

I CAME AGAIN TO DOYLE'S HOTEL, AT Ballymalley in Connemara, and unpacked my bags in a bedroom smelling of brine and damp towels. A little heap of sand lay in the grate, spilled out from someone else's shoes. Outside there was the wind and the dunes, and a sea already ragged with night. Downstairs was the bar.

Doyle was standing behind the bar, holding forth about Strathpheen Island. "And here," said he to his listener, "here is the gentleman to tell you it's the wonder of the world for the sight of the wild sea-birds, and the breeding places of them."

"No doubt about it," said I.

"A gentleman from America," said Doyle to me, indicating the stranger. "And him touring around, mourning over the graves of his forefathers."

The American gave me a big handshake. "Thomas P. Rymer," said he. "And I want to tell you, sir, this is the sort of place we read about in story-books, and can't altogether believe in."

"I'm only a visitor, myself," said I. "It's a romantic corner."

"Romance," said he. "Don't talk to me about romance. I'm what we call a hard-headed business man, but what this old Emerald Isle has done for me in the way of romance—! Nothing immoral, of course. Don't get me wrong."

"Is Mrs. Rymer with you?" said I.

"No, sir," said he. "I'm sorry to have to tell you, there isn't a Mrs. Rymer. Now don't laugh at me as a sentimentalist, or idealist, but a man in my line of business gets mighty particular about what I might call the finesse of the female form. Has to be. Foundation garments—girdles, corsets, brassieres. And, well, I've not seen just that bit of perfection— You know what I mean."

"Well, you won't see her on Strathpheen Island," said I. "All the same, why don't we go together? We'll get the boots here, the fellow they call old Danny, to help with the boat. Doyle'll pack us a bit of lunch."

"Now that's a grand idea," said he.

"Fine!" said I. "Tomorrow, then, if the weather's right."

It was. The sea was as flat as a mill-pond and as blue as a cornflower. We soon got out the creaky old boat, and were off on the three-mile trip to the island. Rymer was delighted. "To me, as a business man," said he, "this is something like a bit of *Man of Aran* got into the *March of Time*. Boy! Look at those rocks! Look at that colour! Look at the birds!"

Up they got. The whole blue sky was full of winging and crying. "Come ashore," said I. "This is just a sample."

"Just a minute," said Rymer, standing quite still on the beach. "I'm just trying to hear what this little out-of-the-world islet is saying to me. Now don't start calling me

poetical, but if ever I came to a place where the concentrated atmosphere and romance seemed to have a special message for me—this is it. Is this island by any chance in the market?"

"I don't think so," said I. "In fact, I know it isn't."

"That's tough," said he. "Never mind. Maybe it's just a feeling I had. I don't know if you've ever felt you've been sort of missing something all your life? You want to get out, make a break— I don't know. Let's get on."

We went on, through the bracken and the bluebells, where the terns' eggs were lying about on every side, round by the cliffs, and over to the flatter side of the island. By the time we got there, we were ready for lunch.

We were just finishing, when Rymer, looking over behind me, broke off in the middle of a sentence, and looked, and stared. "What is it?" said I, turning round.

"What in God's name," said he, "are those birds there? What are they doing?"

"Ah, 'tis them island pigeons the gentleman means," said old Danny. "And a surprising sort of bird entirely."

"It certainly is," said I. For there were five white pigeons, all close together in the air, four of them swooping and diving in and out, quite near the ground, and the fifth hovering and fluttering, more like a hawk than a pigeon, and staying always in the middle.

"And I'll be telling you the reason why," said Danny. "'Tis that old farm-house, and the walls of it standing to this day, just over the rise there. Now the farmer's wife, I've heard tell, was the one for keeping every sort of dove and pigeon, the white ones, and the fan-tailed ones, and the hairy-legged ones, and them that tumble in the air.

And now the folks are dead, and the house in ruins, and no farm on the island, and them birds have mixed and mingled with the wild pigeons of these parts, and many a time they'll be throwing up a white one, and one with a queer way of flying."

"Very queer," said I.

Rymer seized me by the arm. "Don't think I'm kinda crazy," said he, "but—but—I know the measurements. It's my line of business. I can't see her, but—there's a dove-dancer among those birds."

"A dove-dancer?" said Danny. "Would you be telling us what a dove-dancer may be?"

I told him of the World's Fair and its crowning symbol of peace and freedom.

"Would you believe it?" said he. "Flip over that bit of a stone, your honour, that lies against your hand. Make the brazen hussy skip a bit higher."

"Don't on your life!" cried Rymer. "Have you no reverence, man?"

"You're right," said Danny. "I'm thinking she may be one of the Good People and all—saints defend us!"

"Thirty-four to the fraction of an inch!" said Rymer.

"Thirty-four?" said I. "Thirty-four what?"

"Those hips," said he. "Thirty-four— Twenty-five— Thirty-five— Boy, it's perfection!"

"Listen," I said. "You've got a touch of the sun. There's nothing but the pigeons there."

"Watch their flight," said he. "I'm in the corset and girdle line: I got an eye for the measurements. I've been to the World's Fair. I know a dove-dancer when I see one, my boy—and even when I don't. And can she dance?"

What a peach! What a honey! Boy, is she the dove-dancing Venus of all time! Look, they're moving away!"

"So they are!" cried Danny. "And all in formation, like a flock of the government aeroplanes."

"Excuse me, please," said Rymer. "I can't pass this up. I can't let that wonderful little invisible lady go right out of my life like this."

With that he sprang up, and began to lumber after the pigeons, which increased their pace. Too astonished to move, we saw him trip, fall, pick himself up again, and rush after the retreating birds faster than before. Soon he disappeared over the little rise.

"Did you ever see the like of that?" said Danny.

"Look here," I said. "He may get over by the cliffs. I'll go round to cut him off. You follow him in case he goes the other way."

I hurried round to the cliff edge, but there was no sign of Rymer. After waiting a long time I saw Danny signalling to me from below.

"He's stretched out under a rock, poor man," said he. "With his wind gone, and the heart broken in him, and saying over his numbers like a reverend father telling of his beads, and measuring with his hands like a fisherman, and crying like a child. Will it be a madness on him, your honour, or was he after seeing something he couldn't see, entirely?"

"It must be the sun," said I. "We'd better get him home."

We went over to where Rymer lay. He was in a piteous state. "I'm beat," said he. "My approach was all wrong.

Rushing at her like that! She got the wrong impression."

"You come home," said I.

We rowed home in silence. When we landed, he looked back at the island. "If she'd given me just a chance!" said he. "Just a chance to explain!"

"You go up to your room," said I, "and lie down."

"That's what I mean to do," said he. "That's all I'm fit for."

He stayed in his room all that day, and all the next, and the day after. On the third day I was out for a while; when I came back I asked Doyle if all was well.

"Devil a bit of it," said Doyle, "for he's keening like a woman over the dead."

I listened at the foot of the stairs. "That's all right," said I, coming back. "That's just his version of a song—'Night and day, you are the one.' There's a note of optimism at the end of it. I've an idea he's bucking up."

Sure enough, we soon heard his foot on the stairs. He was in the highest of spirits, a tremendous reaction. "Well, pal," he said, "I'm afraid I've been a bit of a dead weight the last two or three days. She had me knocked right out, and that's the truth, brother. I didn't have an idea left in me. Mr. Doyle, I want you to hunt me up some canes or osiers or something, and I want your man Danny to help me build a little contraption I got in mind."

I gave Doyle the wink to humour him, and he took the particulars of what was wanted.

"You see the idea?" said Rymer to me. "I make me these two sort of cages, like the bird traps we used to make in the Midwest when I was a boy. In the little one,

I put some boiled corn. That's for the doves. The big one's for her."

"What's the bait there?" said I.

"She's a woman," said he. "Divine, if you like, but still a *femme*." With that he pulled out a leather case from his pocket and opened it to display a very handsome little wristwatch, set in diamonds. "Picked it up in Paris," said he, modestly. "Thought of presenting it to a young lady in Cleveland. Thirty-six hips, though. And here we have thirty-four, twenty-five, thirty-five! So this goes for bait, you see. It'll fetch her. And when I see it picked up in the air, I pull the strings, and I have them goddam doves in one cage and her in the other. Then I can talk. Nothing immoral, mind you. I want to proposition that little lady to be Mrs. Thomas P. Rymer."

"But if you can't see her—" said I.

"Wait," said he, "till I get the Max Factor Studios on her. A sort of simonizing job, only in technicolour, if you get me. It'll be," said he, bursting into song, "*Oh, say can you see, by the dawn's early light—*" Nothing unpatriotic, mind you, only it's kind of appropriate." Still singing, he went out to the wood-shed, where I heard hammering going on for the rest of the day.

Next morning, as I was shaving, I happened to glance out of the window, and there I saw the boat pulling out, with Danny at the oars, Rymer in the bow, and two vast and crazy contraptions swaying on the stern. I called out; Rymer waved his hand, and they went on towards the island.

That evening, as I approached the hotel, I saw the boat pulled up on the beach, and hurried in to find

Rymer. He was sitting in the bar, with a big whisky in front of him, looking very grim. "What happened?" said I.

"Don't ask me what happened," said he curtly. Then, relenting, "I'll tell you," said he. "I'm afraid that little lady's out to make a monkey of me. I don't like it."

"What did she do?" I asked.

"I had Danny land me on that island," said he, "and pull out and wait off shore so as not to crowd her. I fixed up my cages and my baits, and I got behind a rock, and I waited awhile. Then I saw those birds coming along, swooping and diving at top speed—I reckon it was a marvellous number—and the old hen in the middle fluttering her damndest to keep up with them. When they saw the traps, they slowed up: I could tell she was interested."

"Go on," said I.

"Well," said he, "they visited the small trap first, and the top left-hand dove flew down and picked up bits of the corn and fed all the others."

"I'll be damned!" said I.

"Then," said he, "they moved over to where the big cage was, and the dexter dove flew in and picked up the wristwatch in its beak, and she did a sort of humoresque dance with it, and threw it over the cliff into the sea in front of my eyes. What do you think of that?"

"That's pretty tough," I said.

"It's downright inconsiderate!" said he, banging on the table. "And if that dame thinks she's going to get away with it with Thomas P. Rymer, well— Landlord, I want another highball."

"Why don't you just give her the air?" said I.

"I'd have given her the world," said he. "And I would yet. But she's gotta see reason. I'll make her listen to me somehow. Let me get her within reach of my arms, that's all! Landlord, I'll have a bottle of this hooch up in my room, I reckon. I gotta do a bit of thinking. Good night, pal. I'm no company. She's roused up the old cave man in me, that's how it is. I'm not claiming to be any sort of sheik, but this little Irish wonder lady's gotta learn she can't make a monkey of a straightforward American business man. Good night."

Most of that night I heard him tramping up and down his room. It was pretty late when I got to sleep, and when I did I slept heavily and woke late. I went downstairs and looked about for my friend. "Where's Mr. Rymer?" said I to Doyle.

"God alone knows," said he. "Were you not hearing the great cry he gave in the grey of the dawn?"

"What?" said I.

"I woke up," said Doyle, "and heard him muttering. Suddenly he lets a yell out of him: 'Marriage licence! That'll get her!' And then he was silent entirely, and I dropped off to sleep again. And when I came down this morning, he was missing. And his car was missing. There was a note on the bar here: 'Back in a few days.'"

"He's gone to Galway," said I, "to get his confounded licence."

"Like enough," said Doyle. "It's a great affliction, to be sure."

Sure enough, after a few days I was wakened in the early morning by the sound of a car driving up. I looked

out in the half-light and recognized the impressive lines of Rymer's huge American roadster. At breakfast time I hurried downstairs, eager to have a word with him.

I met Doyle in the passage. "So Mr. Rymer's come back?" I said.

"He's come," said Doyle. "And he's gone."

"Gone? Where?"

"It must be to the island," said Doyle. "He must have drove up in the night and took the boat out right away. I've sent Danny for the loan of Murphy's boat from the fishing lodge. I told him to row straight out to the island, to see what's happened to the poor unfortunate gentleman."

There were no field glasses in the place. We waited impatiently till Danny came in sight, rowing the borrowed boat and towing the other. We saw that Danny was alone.

"Did you not find him?" shouted Doyle.

"Never the hide nor hair of him," said Danny, making fast the painter. "Sure it was one of the Good People he was after, right enough. The poor man has vanished entirely."

"Could he have fallen over a cliff?" said I.

"I see'd the pigeons," said Danny, shaking his head. "Four of 'em I saw, each sitting alone in a bush, just round the place we first saw them, and the creatures were mourning."

"And the fifth?" said I.

"The misfortunate bird was lying on the grass in the middle," said Danny. "With its neck wrung."

The Chaser

ALAN AUSTEN, AS NERVOUS AS A KITTEN, went up certain dark and creaky stairs in the neighbourhood of Pell Street, and peered about for a long time on the dim landing before he found the name he wanted written obscurely on one of the doors.

He pushed open this door, as he had been told to do, and found himself in a tiny room, which contained no furniture but a plain kitchen table, a rocking-chair, and an ordinary chair. On one of the dirty buff-coloured walls were a couple of shelves, containing in all perhaps a dozen bottles and jars.

An old man sat in the rocking-chair, reading a newspaper. Alan, without a word, handed him the card he had been given. "Sit down, Mr. Austen," said the old man very politely. "I am glad to make your acquaintance."

"Is it true," asked Alan, "that you have a certain mixture that has—er—quite extraordinary effects?"

"My dear sir," replied the old man, "my stock in trade is not very large—I don't deal in laxatives and teething mixtures—but such as it is, it is varied. I think nothing I sell has effects which could be precisely described as ordinary."

"Well, the fact is—" began Alan.

"Here, for example," interrupted the old man, reaching for a bottle from the shelf. "Here is a liquid as colourless as water, almost tasteless, quite imperceptible in coffee, milk, wine, or any other beverage. It is also quite imperceptible to any known method of autopsy."

"Do you mean it is a poison?" cried Alan, very much horrified.

"Call it a glove-cleaner if you like," said the old man indifferently. "Maybe it will clean gloves. I have never tried. One might call it a life-cleaner. Lives need cleaning sometimes."

"I want nothing of that sort," said Alan.

"Probably it is just as well," said the old man. "Do you know the price of this? For one teaspoonful, which is sufficient, I ask five thousand dollars. Never less. Not a penny less."

"I hope all your mixtures are not as expensive," said Alan apprehensively.

"Oh dear, no," said the old man. "It would be no good charging that sort of price for a love potion, for example. Young people who need a love potion very seldom have five thousand dollars. Otherwise they would not need a love potion."

"I am glad to hear that," said Alan.

"I look at it like this," said the old man. "Please a customer with one article, and he will come back when he needs another. Even if it is more costly. He will save up for it, if necessary."

"So," said Alan, "you really do sell love potions?"

"If I did not sell love potions," said the old man, reaching for another bottle, "I should not have mentioned

the other matter to you. It is only when one is in a position to oblige that one can afford to be so confidential."

"And these potions," said Alan. "They are not just—just—er——"

"Oh, no," said the old man. "Their effects are permanent, and extend far beyond the mere casual impulse. But they include it. Oh, yes, they include it. Bountifully, insistently. Everlastingly."

"Dear me!" said Alan, attempting a look of scientific detachment. "How very interesting!"

"But consider the spiritual side," said the old man.

"I do, indeed," said Alan.

"For indifference," said the old man, "they substitute devotion. For scorn, adoration. Give one tiny measure of this to the young lady—its flavour is imperceptible in orange juice, soup, or cocktails—and however gay and giddy she is, she will change altogether. She will want nothing but solitude, and you."

"I can hardly believe it," said Alan. "She is so fond of parties."

"She will not like them any more," said the old man. "She will be afraid of the pretty girls you may meet."

"She will actually be jealous?" cried Alan in a rapture. "Of me?"

"Yes, she will want to be everything to you."

"She is, already. Only she doesn't care about it."

"She will, when she has taken this. She will care intensely. You will be her sole interest in life."

"Wonderfull!" cried Alan.

"She will want to know all you do," said the old man. "All that has happened to you during the day. Every

word of it. She will want to know what you are thinking about, why you smile suddenly, why you are looking sad."

"That is love!" cried Alan.

"Yes," said the old man. "How carefully she will look after you! She will never allow you to be tired, to sit in a draught, to neglect your food. If you are an hour late, she will be terrified. She will think you are killed, or that some siren has caught you."

"I can hardly imagine Diana like that!" cried Alan, overwhelmed with joy.

"You will not have to use your imagination," said the old man. "And, by the way, since there are always sirens, if by any chance you *should*, later on, slip a little, you need not worry. She will forgive you, in the end. She will be terribly hurt, of course, but she will forgive you—in the end."

"That will not happen," said Alan fervently.

"Of course not," said the old man. "But, if it did, you need not worry. She would never divorce you. Oh, no! And, of course, she herself will never give you the least, the very least, grounds for—uneasiness."

"And how much," said Alan, "is this wonderful mixture?"

"It is not as dear," said the old man, "as the glove-cleaner, or life-cleaner, as I sometimes call it. No. That is five thousand dollars, never a penny less. One has to be older than you are, to indulge in that sort of thing. One has to save up for it."

"But the love potion?" said Alan.

"Oh, that," said the old man, opening the drawer in the

kitchen table, and taking out a tiny, rather dirty-looking phial. "That is just a dollar."

"I can't tell you how grateful I am," said Alan, watching him fill it.

"I like to oblige," said the old man. "Then customers come back, later in life, when they are rather better off, and want more expensive things. Here you are. You will find it very effective."

"Thank you again," said Alan. "Good-bye."

"*Au revoir*," said the old man.

Presenting Moonshine

BY JOHN COLLIER

Readers who keep their ears to the literary ground have been hearing, in the better periodicals of recent years, a merry, bubbling sound that made chills run up their backs. It was the voice of John Collier, gaily telling fairy tales that would cause the brothers Grimm to glance fearfully over their shoulders and Wilkie Collins to toss in his sleep.

Collected here by Mr. Collier are twenty-four astonishing and memorable accounts of the ways in which the normal individual may run afoul of the bizarre, the occult, and the openly fiendish. One discovers in this volume what lies beyond the upper end of the Indian fakir's rope; one learns the modern uses of love potions and how Sleeping Beauty acts when roused; one understands why one young man has his teeth pulled out, another skips naked into an empty trunk, and a third entrusts his outward semblance to the care of a taxidermist. One finds out what scandal occurs in the dark of night in a big department store like Bracey's. And as if that were not enough, these and many equally enthralling miracles are presented to one in an English prose that connoisseurs will roll upon their tongues like the finest tawny port.

There is but one explanation for this cunning of Collier or for the unquenchable flow of his chronicles—he has been doing the town with hobgoblins and standing drinks to Beelzebub in some shabby, gas-lit bar.

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