Men Without Bones
And Other Haunting Inhabitants Of The Wide, Weird World

"Kersh has a strange, perverted sort of genius. And how he can write."
—Virginia Kirkus
WHAT IS GERALD KERSH?

An eye (very keen), an ear (tuned to all things human, inhuman, and otherwise), a brain (with more twists, kinks, nooks and angles than the Roman catacombs) and a typewriter (played, virtuoso, in the dark of the moon). In short, Kersh is Kersh . . . there is none other like him.

WHAT DOES HE DO?

Looks at this world (and others) sideways, obliquely, inside-out and upside-down, spins tales of the bizarre and wonderful, makes you laugh, cry and yelp in horror (sometimes all at once), and leaves you hooked, permanently, on his peculiar brand of genius. (Kersh readers go around chuckling uneasily.)

Former baker, bouncer, wrestler and Coldstream Guardsman, Gerald Kersh is better known as a writer of unforgettable novels (including the classic Fowler's End and The Secret Masters) and short stories, which appear regularly in all the leading magazines. The following are his favorites . . . and ours.
MEN
WITHOUT
BONES

Gerald Kersh

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Men Without Bones

We were loading bananas into the *Claire Dodge* at Puerto Pobre, when a feverish little fellow came aboard. Everyone stepped aside to let him pass—even the soldiers who guard the port with nickel-plated Remington rifles, and who go barefoot but wear polished leather leggings. They stood back from him because they believed that he was afflicted-of-God, mad; harmless but dangerous; best left alone.

All the time the naphtha flares were hissing, and from the hold came the reverberation of the roaring voice of the foreman of the gang down below crying: “Fruta! Fruta! *FRUTA!*” The leader of the dock gang bellowed the same cry, throwing down stem after stem of brilliant green bananas. The occasion would be memorable for this, if for nothing else—the magnificence of the night, the bronze of the Negro foreman shining under the flares, the jade green of that fruit, and the mixed odors of the waterfront. Out of one stem of bananas ran a hairy grey spider, which frightened the crew and broke the banana-chain, until a Nicaraguan boy, with a laugh, killed it with his foot. It was harmless, he said.

It was about then that the madman came aboard, unhindered, and asked me: “Bound for where?”

He spoke quietly and in a carefully modulated voice; but there was a certain blank, lost look in his eyes that suggested to me that I keep within ducking distance of his restless hands which, now that I think of them, put me in mind of that gray, hairy, bird-eating spider.

“Mobile, Alabama,” I said.

“Take me along?” he asked.
“None of my affair. Sorry. Passenger myself,” I said. 
He’s the boss.”

“Would you happen, by any chance, to have a drink 
about you?”

Giving him some rum, I asked: “How come they let 
you aboard?”

“I’m not crazy,” he said. “Not actually . . . a little 
fever, nothing more. Malaria, dengue fever, jungle fever, 
rat-bite fever. Feverish country, this, and others of the 
same nature. Allow me to introduce myself. My name is 
Goodbody, Doctor of Science of Osbaldeston University. 
Does it convey nothing to you? No? Well then; I was as-
sistant to Professor Yeoward. Does that convey anything 
to you?”

I said: “Yeoward, Professor Yeoward? Oh yes. He was 
lost, wasn’t he, somewhere in the upland jungle beyond 
the source of the Amer River?”

“Correct!” cried the little man who called himself Good-
body. “I saw him get lost.”

Fruta!—Fruta!—Fruta!—Fruta! came the voices of the 
men in the hold. There was rivalry between their leader 
and the big black stevedore ashore. The flares spluttered. 
The green bananas came down. And a kind of sickly sigh 
came out of the jungle, off the rotting river—not a wind, 
not a breeze—something like the foul breath of high fever.

Trembling with eagerness and, at the same time, shak-
ing with fever chills, so that he had to use two hands to 
raise his glass to his lips—even so, he spilled most of the 
rum—Doctor Goodbody said: “For God’s sake, get me 
out of this country—take me to Mobile—hide me in your 
cabin!”

“I have no authority,” I said, “but you are an American 
citizen; you can identify yourself; the Consul will send 
you home.”

“No doubt. But that would take time. The Consul 
thinks I am crazy too. And if I don’t get away, I fear that 
I really will go out of my mind. Can’t you help me? I’m 
afraid.”
“Come on, now,” I said. “No one shall hurt you while I’m around. What are you afraid of?”

“Men without bones,” he said, and there was something in his voice that stirred the hairs on the back of my neck. “Little fat men without bones!”

I wrapped him in a blanket, gave him some quinine, and let him sweat and shiver for a while, before I asked, humoring him: “What men without bones?”

He talked in fits and starts in his fever, his reason staggering just this side of delirium:

“. . . What men without bones? . . . They are nothing to be afraid of, actually. It is they who are afraid of you. You can kill them with your boot, or with a stick. . . . They are something like jelly. No, it is not really fear—it is the nausea, the disgust they inspire. It overwhelms. It paralyses! I have seen a jaguar, I tell you—a full-grown jaguar—stand frozen, while they clung to him, in hundreds, and ate him up alive! Believe me, I saw it. Perhaps it is some oil they secrete, some odor they give out . . . I don’t know . . .”

Then, weeping, Doctor Goodbody said: “Oh, nightmare—nightmare—nightmare! To think of the depths to which a noble creature can be degraded by hunger! Horrible, horrible!”

“Some debased form of life that you found in the jungle above the source of the Amer?” I suggested. “Some degenerate kind of anthropoid?”

“No, no, no. Men! Now surely you remember Professor Yeoward’s ethnological expedition?”

“It was lost,” I said.

“All but me,” he said. “. . . We had bad luck. At the Anaña Rapids we lost two canoes, half our supplies and most of our instruments. And also Doctor Terry, and Jack Lambert, and eight of our carriers. . . .

“Then we were in Ahu territory where the Indians use poison darts, but we made friends with them and bribed them to carry our stuff westward through the jungle . . . because, you see, all science starts with a guess, a rumor, an old wives’ tale; and the object of Professor Yeoward’s expedition was to investigate a series of Indian folk tales
that tallied. Legends of a race of gods that came down from
the sky in a great flame when the world was very young. . . .

"Line by criss-cross line, and circle by concentric circle,
Yeoward localized the place in which these tales had their
root—an unexplored place that has no name because the
Indians refuse to give it a name, it being what they call a
'bad place'."

His chills subsiding and his fever abating, Doctor Good-
body spoke calmly and rationally now. He said, with a
short laugh: "I don't know why, whenever I get a touch
of fever, the memory of those boneless men comes back in
a nightmare to give me the horrors. . . .

"So, we went to look for the place where the gods came
down in flame out of the night. The little tattooed Indians
took us to the edge of the Ahu territory and then put down
their packs and asked for their pay, and no consideration
would induce them to go further. We were going, they said,
to a very bad place. Their chief, who had been a great man
in his day, sign-writing with a twig, told us that he had
strayed there once, and drew a picture of something with
an oval body and four limbs, at which he spat before rub-
ing it out with his foot in the dirt. Spiders? we asked.
Crabs? What?

"So we were forced to leave what we could not carry
with the old chief against our return, and go on unaccomp-
panied, Yeoward and I, through thirty miles of the rotten-
est jungle in the world. We made about a quarter of a mile
in a day . . . a pestilential place! When that stinking wind
blows out of the jungle, I smell nothing but death, and
panic.

"But, at last, we cut our way to the plateau and climbed
the slope, and there we saw something marvelous. It was
something that had been a gigantic machine. Originally it
must have been a pear-shaped thing, at least a thousand
feet long and, in its widest part, six hundred feet in diam-
eter. I don't know of what metal it had been made, be-
cause there was only a dusty outline of a hull and certain
ghostly remains of unbelievably intricate mechanisms to
prove that it had ever been. We could not guess from
where it had come; but the impact of its landing had made a great valley in the middle of the plateau.

"It was the discovery of the age! It proved that countless ages ago, this planet had been visited by people from the stars! Wild with excitement, Yeoward and I plunged into this fabulous ruin. But whatever we touched fell away to fine powder.

"At last, on the third day, Yeoward found a semi-circular plate of some extraordinarily hard metal, which was covered with the most maddeningly familiar diagrams. We cleaned it, and for twenty-four hours, scarcely pausing to eat and drink, Yeoward studied it. And, then, before the dawn of the fifth day he awoke me, with a great cry, and said: 'It's a map, a map of the heavens, and a chart of a course from Mars to Earth!'

"And he showed me how those ancient explorers of space had proceeded from Mars to Earth, via the Moon.

. To crash on this naked plateau in this green hell of a jungle? I wondered. 'Ah, but was it a jungle then?' said Yeoward. 'This may have happened five million years ago!'

"I said: 'Oh, but surely! it took only a few hundred years to bury Rome. How could this thing have stayed above ground for five thousand years, let alone five million?' Yeoward said: 'It didn't. The earth swallows things and regurgitates them. This is a volcanic region. One little upheaval can swallow a city, and one tiny peristalsis in the bowels of the earth can bring its remains to light again a million years later. So it must have been with the machine from Mars . . .'

"'I wonder who was inside it,' I said. Yeoward replied: 'Very likely some utterly alien creatures that couldn't tolerate the Earth, and died, or else were killed in the crash. No skeleton could survive such a space of time.'

"So, we built up the fire; and Yeoward went to sleep. Having slept, I watched. Watched for what? I didn't know. Jaguars, peccaries, snakes? None of these beasts climbed up to the plateau; there was nothing for them up there. Still, unaccountably, I was afraid.

"There was the weight of ages on the place. Respect old age, one is told. . . . The greater the age, the deeper the
respect, you might say. But it is not respect; it is dread, it is fear of time and death, sir! . . . I must have dozed, because the fire was burning low—I had been most careful to keep it alive and bright—when I caught my first glimpse of the boneless men.

"Starting up, I saw, at the rim of the plateau, a pair of eyes that picked up luminosity from the fading light of the fire. A jaguar, I thought, and took up my rifle. But it could not have been a jaguar because, when I looked left and right I saw that the plateau was ringed with pairs of shining eyes . . . as it might be, a collar of opals; and there came to my nostrils an odor of God knows what.

"Fear has its smell as any animal-trainer will tell you. Sickness has its smell—ask any nurse. These smells compel healthy animals to fight or to run away. This was a combination of the two, plus a stink of vegetation gone bad. I fired at the pair of eyes I had first seen. Then, all the eyes disappeared while, from the jungle, there came a chattering and a twittering of monkeys and birds, as the echoes of the shot went flapping away.

"And then, thank God, the dawn came. I should not have liked to see by artificial light the thing I had shot between the eyes.

"It was grey and, in texture, tough and gelatinous. Yet, in form, externally, it was not unlike a human being. It had eyes, and there were either vestiges—or rudiments—of head, and neck, and a kind of limbs.

"Yeoward told me that I must pull myself together; overcome my 'childish revulsion', as he called it; and look into the nature of the beast. I may say that he kept a long way away from it when I opened it. It was my job as zoologist of the expedition, and I had to do it. Microscopes and other delicate instruments had been lost with the canoes. I worked with a knife and forceps. And found? Nothing: a kind of digestive system enclosed in very tough jelly, a rudimentary nervous system, and a brain about the size of a walnut. The entire creature, stretched out, measured four feet.

"In a laboratory I could tell you, perhaps, something about it . . . with an assistant or two, to keep me com-
pany. As it was, I did what I could with a hunting-knife and forceps, without dyes or microscope, swallowing my nausea—it was a nauseating thing!—memorizing what I found. But, as the sun rose higher, the thing liquefied, melted, until by nine o’clock there was nothing but a glutinous gray puddle, with two green eyes swimming in it.

. . . And these eyes—I can see them now—burst with a thick pop, making a detestable sticky ripple in that puddle of corruption, . . .

“After that, I went away for a while. When I came back, the sun had burned it all away, and there was nothing but something like what you see after a dead jellyfish has evaporated on a hot beach. Slime. Yeoward had a white face when he asked me: ‘What the devil is it?’ I told him that I didn’t know, that it was something outside my experience, and that although I pretended to be a man of science with a detached mind, nothing would induce me ever to touch one of the things again.

“Yeoward said: ‘You’re getting hysterical, Goodbody. Adopt the proper attitude. God knows, we are not here for the good of our health. Science, man, science! Not a day passes but some doctor pokes his fingers into fouler things than that!’ I said: ‘Don’t you believe it. Professor Yeoward, I have handled and dissected some pretty queer things in my time, but this is something repulsive. I have nerves? I dare say. Maybe we should have brought a psychiatrist . . .’ I notice, by the way, that you aren’t too anxious to come close to me after I’ve tampered with that thing. I’ll shoot one with pleasure, but if you want to investigate it, try it yourself and see!”

“Yeoward said that he was deeply occupied with his metal plate. There was no doubt, he told me, that this machine that had been had come from Mars. But, evidently, he preferred to keep the fire between himself and me, after I had touched that abomination of hard jelly.

“Yeoward kept himself to himself, rummaging in the ruin. I went about my business, which was to investigate forms of animal life. I do not know what I might have found, if I had had—I don’t say the courage, because I
didn’t lack that—if I had had some company. Alone, my nerve broke.

“It happened one morning. I went into the jungle that surrounded us, trying to swallow the fear that choked me, and drive away the sense of revulsion that not only made me want to turn and run, but made me afraid to turn my back even to get away. You may or may not know that, of all the beasts that live in that jungle, the most impregnable is the sloth. He finds a stout limb, climbs out on it, and hangs from it by his twelve steely claws; a tardigrade that lives on leaves. Your tardigrade is so tenacious that even in death, shot through the heart, it will hang on to its branch. It has an immensely tough hide covered by an impenetrable coat of coarse, matted hair. A panther or a jaguar is helpless against the passive resistance of such a creature. It finds itself a tree, which it does not leave until it has eaten every leaf, and chooses for a sleeping place a branch exactly strong enough to bear its weight.

“In this detestable jungle, on one of my brief expeditions—brief, because I was alone and afraid—I stopped to watch a giant sloth hanging motionless from the largest bough of a half-denuded tree, asleep, impervious, indifferent. Then, out of that stinking green twilight came a horde of those jellyfish things. They poured up the tree, and writhed along the branch.

“Even the sloth, which generally knows no fear, was afraid. It tried to run away, hooked itself on to a thinner part of the branch, which broke. It fell, and at once was covered with a shuddering mass of jelly. Those boneless men do not bite: they suck. And, as they suck, their color changes from gray to pink and then to brown.

“But they are afraid of us. There is race-memory involved here. We repel them, and they repel us. When they became aware of my presence, they—I was going to say, ran away—they slid away, dissolved into the shadows that kept dancing and dancing and dancing under the trees. And the horror came upon me, so that I ran away, and arrived back at our camp, bloody about the face with thorns, and utterly exhausted.

“Yeoward was lancing a place in his ankle. A tourniquet
was tied under his knee. Near-by lay a dead snake. He had broken its back with that same metal plate, but it had bitten him first. He said: ‘What kind of a snake do you call this? I’m afraid it is venomous. I feel a numbness in my cheeks and around my heart, and I cannot feel my hands.’

“I said: ‘Oh, my God! You’ve been bitten by a jara-jaca!’

‘And we have lost our medical supplies,’ he said, with regret. ‘And there is so much work left to do. Oh, dear me, dear me! . . . Whatever happens, my dear fellow, take this and get back.’

“And he gave me that semi-circle of unknown metal as a sacred trust. Two hours later, he died. That night the circle of glowing eyes grew narrower. I emptied my rifle at it, time and again. At dawn, the boneless men disappeared.

“I heaped rocks on the body of Yeoward. I made a pylon, so that the men without bones could not get at him. Then—oh, so dreadfully lonely and afraid!—I shouldered my pack, and took my rifle and my machete, and ran away, down the trail we had covered. But I lost my way.

“Can by can of food, I shed weight. Then my rifle went, and my ammunition. After that, I threw away even my machete. A long time later, that semi-circular plate became too heavy for me, so I tied it to a tree with liana-vine, and went on.

“So I reached the Ahu territory, where the tattooed men nursed me and were kind to me. The women chewed my food for me, before they fed me, until I was strong again. Of the stores we had left there, I took only as much as I might need, leaving the rest as payment for guides and men to man the canoe down the river. And so I got back out of the jungle. . . .

“Please give me a little more rum.” His hand was steady, now, as he drank, and his eyes were clear.

I said to him: “Assuming that what you say is true: these ‘boneless men’—they were, I presume, the Martians? Yet it sounds unlikely, surely? Do invertebrates smelt hard metals and——”

“Who said anything about Martians?” cried Doctor
Goodbody. "No, no, no! The Martians came here, adapted themselves to new conditions of life. Poor fellows, they changed, sank low; went through a whole new process—a painful process of evolution. What I’m trying to tell you, you fool, is that Yeoward and I did not discover Martians. Idiot, don’t you see? Those boneless things are men. We are Martians!"
The Shady Life of Annibal

When I first met Bella Barlay face to face, she having for once consented to be interviewed, I wondered what two generations of European connoisseurs could ever have seen in her. My sort of article was of the half-scurrilous, city-slicker, sophisticated type: the sort of thing that, under the guise of urbane reportage, does a taxidermist’s job of flaying, stuffing and mounting. We were swift with our used razor-blades and black-headed pins in those days. It was fashionable, generally, to make specimens of those who spared us their time, and we could take a word out of context as neatly as a sandpiper picks a worm out of a beach at low tide.

Moth was the word I mentally noted, in connection with Bella Barlay, when I saw her sitting crouched in a powdery-looking fawn housecoat upon a great brocade sofa in her suite at the Hotel Élegant in London. I even had a brilliant opening paragraph half composed in my mind, the exact content of which I forget; but it would have raised many a curious half-laugh in the dentists’ waiting-rooms where my magazine was most widely read.

Then the moth stirred and spread itself, and here was no blundering booby that knocks its head against bright lights and makes itself conspicuous only by its nuisance value. Here was something rare and elusive. I knew then, why grand dukes had offered her marriage, although millions of ordinary women all over the world had clipped her picture from the illustrated papers simply to say to their friends: “I’m not vain, and I know I’m no beauty, but thank goodness I don’t look like Bella Barlay!”
Her features were undistinguished, and her face was too narrow. Her skin has been described as “olive”, and so it was—that of a green olive gone dry. Her eyes which were wide-set, were black, round and prominent, while her hair was tossed about rather than dressed. Yet when she smiled her countenance broke into a tantalizingly beautiful mosaic pattern: it made an abstract composition that got at your heart while your baffled intelligence grumbled admiration under protest. And when she talked, I noticed, first, that her voice had the quaint, husky lingering sweetness of a cowbell heard on a misty hill... then there crept into it a nostalgic quality, as of something half-lost and crying to come home to memory.

Seeing that I was abashed, Bella Barlay offered me a cup of tea. Her tea-cosy was a queer obus of straw and silk tortuously covered with wooden beads of various shapes and colors. It made the teapot look drunk. Quick to catch my glance she said, “Ah, that. That was not meant for a tea-cosy, my dear, but for a hat. Grosjean designed it exclusively for me in 1936. I am not in sympathy with male milliners. A man should make roads and bridges, not hats for actresses. This hat came in a box, and the box was in a green paper bag. I was having tea at the time. So I put the hat on the teapot to keep my tea warm, twisted the green paper bag into an intriguing shape and wore it with an emerald. For a week after that, women wore paper hats. You can put that in your article if you like.

“I love an article with human interest and a touch of the bizarre. Here is another bit of nonsense; when I first went to New York, two of my trunks were misdirected so that I discovered, at the last moment, that I had no evening dress. Now the shower-curtain in my hotel bathroom had a charming design of black fishes and white fishes upon a dull yellow ground. The fabric was a kind of oiled silk. I took it off the hooks, draped it upon myself, fastening it with an immense topaz—and it was a sensation. For you see, I am so odd-looking that the preposterous is becoming to me.

“But you must have your story. You are a lucky boy; I do not like to talk about myself, and I do not like what they
call "inside dope". How many volumes did the greatest of biographers devote to Dr. Johnson? And what emerged? A bully and a glutton. And you want to portray Bella Barlay in an article?"

Bella Barlay closed her eyes for a few seconds, smiling her provocative, close-lipped, lopsided, triangular smile. Then she said, "I think I will tell you how I became an actress. Take it down, if you please. It is an amusing story." So she told me, in a dreamy, reminiscent manner... but she always kept an eye on her watch:

... Although I was a born actress, my background is not actually theatrical. My parents were rich, but not otherwise distinguished. I always remember them as a pair of those soft, gentle, pastel-colored birds that seem to cease to be when you separate them: it is impossible to imagine one alone, they can exist only in couples. Everybody in Budapest liked the Barlays for their sympathy and because they were so genuinely happy together. It did people's hearts good to see them exchanging their delicate little courtesies and to hear how, so frequently, they spontaneously said exactly the same thing at precisely the same moment. When they did this they would blush slightly, make chains of little fingers, and make a wish. And of course each wished the other happiness.

The Hungarian—when not otherwise engaged—is a sentimental and romantic creature, and so my parents had a wide circle of quite sophisticated friends. Horrid old Dukes, notorious for their cynical dissipations, used to come to drink coffee at our house simply to enjoy the luxury of an afternoon's sugary remorse. "Ah, if only I could have been like that!" they said; and went away much refreshed to make a wild night of it.

My mother was the only daughter of a wealthy landowner, and my father had inherited a title and a comfortable fortune. They had no earthly cares. Yet it would seem that their bliss was not quite unadulterated. They had been boy-and-girl sweethearts and, during their long and innocent courtship, they had playfully talked about the family they were going to have after they were married. I
can see them in my mind’s eye, hand-in-hand in a sum-
mary garden, playing their pretty little game of make-
believe. Do not smile, my friend—there is nothing more
deadly serious than a child at play, and nothing that hap-
pens to him in later years can ever be so good or true as
that radiant dream in the sunlit garden.

They decided, my poor parents, that they were going to
have a son. There was, I believe, some battle of flowers
about his name, but they agreed at last that he must be
called Annibal. He was, as I surmise, to come into the
world prefabricated at the age of four in the image of one
of the Cupids in the Museum; spring into adolescence
looking like somebody or other’s statue labeled Youth
Holding Dove; and pass gracefully into Apollo (Anony-
mous). For a year or two before her marriage, Mama was,
somewhat to her mother’s embarrassment, already talking
of little Annibal as if he were well on the way. But to
remonstrate with her would have been too much like mock-
ing at a child.

According to my old friend and master, Jean de Luxe,
my sweet infatuated father was as silly if not more so. The
nearest they ever came to an argument was when, six
months before their wedding, Papa asked her whether he
should send the growing Annibal to Horvath or to LaSalle
for fencing lessons. She protested that she would not have
her Annibal fighting with swords, and my father argued
that it was his Annibal as well as hers—and what if, when
Papa was too old to fight, some brute insulted the boy’s
mother? Good old Jean de Luxe (even the most level-
headed of our friends found themselves involved in this
silly fantasy) settled the matter by saying to my mother,
“But, my dear, he will have wrists of steel, the eye of a
hawk, and will fence like the Three Musketeers.”

In due course they were married one idyllic day in
spring—alas, so long ago!—and all the countryside and
half the city danced at the wedding. The health of Annibal
Barlay was drunk almost as if it were a christening! And
thus this lucky couple went into their dream world in a
great radiance, and everybody waited more or less breath-
lessly for little Annibal.
My grandmother, completely befuddled by this myth, had made a gold christening mug and spoon engraved with the monogram A.B.; and even my paternal grandfather, who was supposed to be an astute man, put down a hundred dozen bottles of a very fine Tokay for Annibal’s twenty-first birthday. He argued that, in case of accident, he could drink them up himself; but it was easy to see that Annibal had captured his imagination too.

Hence, time went by and my parents’ friends began playfully to ask, “Where’s Annibal?” The Hungarians are a romantic people, but they take their nonsense seriously. They hate to be disillusioned, and there is nothing more dangerous than a disenchanted romantic—that is why the Hungarians are always revolutionaries. It was not that my father was a coward, exactly. He feared nothing but the ice-cold nakedness of exposure to everybody’s laughter; for we Hungarians are great jokers, but our jokes are not to be laughed at.

Therefore, after a little while, telling the world that Annibal was to be expected in due course, and pleading my mother’s health, he took her to the Italian Riviera—where she and her old nurse Ilonka occupied themselves with tiny garments of china-blue to match Annibal’s hypothetical eyes. I may add that Ilonka, a burly peasant woman, who could have balanced my mother on her great hand like a celluloid doll, was already fully convinced of her duty to Annibal, and did a lot of fine sewing for him in advance. Such is the power of suggestion.

Months passed. No Annibal. But—understand me—the less he was, the more he was! Ilonka was convinced that if my mother and father said that there was an Annibal, and her hands encompassed nothing, then she was somewhere at fault. At last, one fine evening, while Papa and Mama were at dinner, with a joyous cry, between two spoonfuls of chocolate mousse, my mother, laying down her spoon, cried, “Annibal is here!”

Thereupon Papa wept, and the household was turned upside-down. Ilonka, as my mother’s personal nurse, became an intolerable tyrant. It was like Hans Andersen’s fairy story about the Emperor’s new clothes, with a differ-
ent twist: the clothes were there, but the Emperor was not. Nobody ever saw such a turmoil of washing and nursing, of disinfecting and window-sealing, of whispering and tip-toeing, for my imaginary brother Annibal in his secret chamber.

Gifts came in: spoons, silver-gilt mugs galore, cashmere layettes, and so forth. Everyone plunged into the spirit of the jest, being half-convinced by now that there must be something—some canvas to support all this embroidery—some thread to give shape to this tenuous, lacy conception.

So Annibal came into being without ever having been born, and so he grew up. Jean de Luxe has told me—he was a cool old impresario—that, more than once, when my parents talked about the child they hadn’t got, he was hard put to it to keep his hands in his pockets for fear that he might applaud, and had to bite his tongue so as not to cry, “Almost perfect, children! Enough for today! Same time tomorrow!”

This, as you must understand, was before I was born. I am only fifty-nine years of age. Annibal would be nearly seventy by now—if he had ever existed . . . Poor Annibal—ah-ah! You see how easily one slips into the pattern of a tapestry? . . .

Time came when Annibal was old enough to have an English governess and a French tutor—Miss Smythe and M. de Mans—who also entered into the spirit of Annibal, but fell in love with each other and ran away to get married together; to my parents’ outraged disgust. What would servants think of next? After that, Annibal was sent to school, from where he sent home remarkably intelligent letters, which were quoted, not read. His grandparents remembered his birthdays, when there was generally a celebration, with fireworks; only Annibal was, on such occasions, confined to his bed with an infectious disease—or there was a contagion in the neighborhood to which it might be dangerous to expose him.

In this smooth, ready-made manner my fictitious brother Annibal reached the age of eleven years. And then something unforeseen happened.

My mother, on her thirtieth birthday, announced to my
father that she was, in honest truth, going to present him with a real child!

Now there is a considerable difference between an imaginary child and one of flesh and blood. I believe that the English essayist, Charles Lamb, was very eloquent on the subject of Dream Children—diaphanous things that came in imagination into the firelight, when he had taken a little too much gin. Charming. But he should have had me! I was ninety-nine per cent meat and voice, and did not care who knew it. He would have refilled his pipe and dreamed a different dream. Furthermore, as far as my mother was concerned, she learned reluctantly that there is a certain inconvenience connected with the bearing and raising of a child, which is on the whole an earthy creature in itself. Call a baby a crock of screams and dreams. Enough.

This real child of my parents was to be born about August, under the sign of Leo the Lion, by which token it was to be dominant and creative. The poet Longfellow was born under Leo, and so was Guy de Maupassant. Mama at once visualized him as a kind of poetic genius of military aspect with a blond mustache; a sort of General Wolfe, quoting Gray’s Elegy while attacking the Heights of Abraham. Its name was to be Béla, after one of our national heroes.

Imagine my parents’ horror when, instead of a dream, I was born!

Now, with nearly sixty years of poise and savoir-faire behind me, I am still nothing much to look at, but as a child, Jean de Luxe assured me, I was like something out of a comic strip. As he said, “It is not that I mind frogs, but I find it unnerving when a frog wears a frilly blue bonnet and makes a noise like a cat” . He was my godfather, and a broad-minded man—and he should have known.

I was, on the same authority, an intolerable nuisance, subject to all the more exasperating diseases of childhood, such as whooping-cough, croup, thrush, mumps, chicken-pox, tonsilitis, adenoids—anything to offend the sensitive eye and ear—and I had what are now known as allergies.
There was no scientific name for them then; it was simply said that such-and-such a thing did not agree with you. I was allergic to feathers, every kind of vegetation, and even to milk, so that, in the lap of luxury, I suffered from malnutrition, got rickets, and had to have irons on my legs for two or three years. My other allergies brought me out in giant hives and sent me into convulsive fits of sneezing. No doubt I suffered; I don't remember. It is certain that my poor parents did. You have, in your time, awakened out of a bright dream like Caliban, and cried yourself to sleep again? So it was with Papa and Mama.

So, as dreamers will, they kept me, the reality, out of sight as much as possible, and comforted themselves with the splendid vision of Annibal. My mother who, like most gentlewomen of her generation, had learned a little ladylike water-coloring, made dream pictures of Annibal in various stages of his development. The artist Laszlo Biro, commissioned to paint a family group, had to add an imaginary portrait of Annibal standing at my father's right hand and holding a book. I appeared as a non-committal bundle of flounced muslin in my mother's lap; in the background, landscape with trees.

Now I am not saying that they, bless them, were in any way unkind to me. It was not in their character to be unkind. Only there was, as far as I was concerned, what the psychologists might call, I think, a mental block: a kind of emotional stoppage. I was less real to them than the enchanted mist which was Annibal. And, do you know, although I was a child of wonderfully quick wit and perception, I was eight years old before I realized that there was no such person as Annibal?

I discovered this terrific fact for myself. Hampered by my weak legs, I was debarred from active play, so I used to make myself as happy as I could in my own cloud cuckoo-land, reading fairy-tales and playing with my dolls of which I had a prodigious family, each one with its own little characteristics. And the dolls became more real to me than my own father and mother—from this, I think, I derived some understanding. Also I had a dog, a great wolf-hound, whom I called Galahad, because he would
have fought dragons for my sake. I used to tell Galahad stories, some of which I had read, but the best of which I had got from my dear old nurse Ilonka. She was from the Romanian border, and could tell a tale.

One night she told me about Zerbin the Woodcutter, who helped a fairy in distress and was, therefore, granted three wishes. Zerbin’s first wish was, that his bundle of wood should cut itself; his second, that the sticks should gather themselves together and tie themselves up into a faggot; and his third, that instead of his carrying the bundle home, the bundle should carry him. All went well—stick stuck to stick, a vine came of its own accord and bound a huge faggot which sprouted four legs so that Zerbin could ride home as on a horse. He could have asked for the kingdoms of the earth, but this was the limit of his understanding, do you see? So he straddled his load of firewood like a lord; and now, if you please, it did not run fast enough for him! He cursed it and beat it with the back of his axe—upon which, the spell being broken, the collective bundle of sticks resumed their individualities, the knot in the vine gave way, and Zerbin the fool found himself sitting all alone with everything to do again.

Now, I find a moral in this story. Then, I liked to think that it was true. So, having caught and released a beautiful dragonfly in our garden—identifying it with the fairy in the tale—I made a bundle of twigs and told it to carry me back to the house. Then a cloud came over the sun—it was the shadow of dear old Ilonka, come to bring me home for supper. As she tucked me under her powerful arm, I remember crying, “I let the fairy go, but my bundle of wood wouldn’t carry me home! I wasn’t going to hit it, Ilonka.”

“That is only a silly old story,” she said, kissing me.

“A lie?” I asked.

“No, Miss Bella, a lie is different. A lie is something you tell a story and it deceives somebody that he believes. A liar, little sweetheart, is worse than a thief; a liar will swear your life away. But a story-teller is as good as a holiday among new things—he opens the world.”

I persisted, “But what if a story isn’t true? What if you
tell a story and it deceives somebody and he believes it? The story about Zerbin the Woodcutter wasn’t true—"

"—Oh hush, my darling," Ilonka said, "you will see enough of Truth before you are a hundred years older. Be thankful for a soft bed and a silly old nurse who knows how to tell a tale. Grown-ups also like to believe impossible stories; even I. Believe, and be happy. Enough."

I nodded, and said no more. I realized that there is more to Truth than blind faith in a persuasive voice. I was swindled, and my heart was sore.

In one step I had achieved a height of pity and of scorn which only defrauded children may reach.

Young man, when you disillusion a child you may spark such an explosion of blind enlightenment as might blast you out of the world! The child will become wise to you, and the wisdom of a child is terrible. All of a sudden—poor me!—I knew that Annibal was a silly story around which my father and mother had built their lives. Thinking of my own shock of revelation, and loving my kind papa and mama as I did, I lay awake half the night wondering how to explain to them that there was no Annibal.

My first gesture was to give away all my dolls and my story-books. I never wanted to see them again. Meanwhile, I wondered to whom I could turn for advice; for I was only a child. Yet I had come to consider my parents as younger and weaker than myself, poor sensitive old things that needed to be sheltered from the facts of life. They were caught fast in the web of their fiction. And even stout Ilonka was with them in her heavenly-earthly way.

To whom, then, could I turn but that worldly-wise gentleman, the theatrical producer, Jean de Luxe? To him, I uncovered my bruised being, while he fed me hot chocolate at an elegant pâtisserie. I said to him, "M de Luxe, my idea is that if papa and mama may have a dream-child, why should I not have dream-parents? I shall make them behave as I want them to!"

"No, no," he said, with a burst of laughter, "not so fast. Excellent as the idea is, you have not yet the wherewithal to carry it out. You are, God help you, my love, through
too much talking to your dogs, and to your dolls, and to the butterflies and the wolves that you make with the shadows of your hands on the wall, an actress: a pantomimist and a disease—undisciplined, I grant you, but with a natural talent. Still, I do not think that you could, without direction, handle an imaginary set of parents.

"But you might deal with what is already in the Barlays' imagination. I mean, Annibal. . . Remember, from now on, Annibal is your big brother and you are his adoring, crippled sister. You love each other, and there are secrets between you . . ."

Now Jean de Luxe gave me a small magazine and made me read it silently but thoroughly, carefully turning the pages; then he took the magazine away from me, and made me make the same expressions and perform the same actions over and over and over again, until empty space had bulk and weight. At intervals he told me to reach up and hug him with all my strength; in due course withdrawing himself, so that all my muscles were geared to fling themselves about an imaginary man in thin air, while Jean de Luxe stood by and chuckled, "Far from bad! . . . Bear in mind that henceforward Annibal sends you affectionate private letters. Not at regular intervals. Sometimes Thursday, sometimes Monday. And when you receive these letters, you smile like Mona Lisa."

It is difficult to make a mysterious smile when you are swollen and sticky with self-consciousness, and have a brace on your teeth, as I had. Thus the time came when letters came to me addressed in beautiful copperplate handwriting. The envelopes generally contained a small sheet of paper with a few scribbled words, such as: Having read this, you little imp, scream: "Annibal is interested in Scientific Agriculture!" Then, with a hop, skip and a jump, make your exit . . . Burn this!

And I did precisely what old Jean de Luxe said. Letter by letter, I believe, I almost drove my poor parents mad. But my good father, always recovering himself first, said to my mother, "Wilhelmina, the curse of my family has always been a lack of the agricultural sense. Sheep shave the grass like so many razors where steers might graze or
crops rotate. We are lucky in our Annibal” . . Where-upon Mama would see him in English riding breeches and boots mounted on an Arab horse (snow white, naturally), surveying a cover-design of a landscape in emerald green and gold, studded with embroidered peasants and suitable black-and-white cows. As a finishing touch, at his horse’s heels, two Dalmatian dogs exquisitely spotted.

But sometimes, when I threw myself into more than ordinary ecstasies, they exchanged uneasy glances; and I was now convinced that there was some hope for them, because they knew in their hearts that they were dreaming and felt, in their souls, that it was wrong to impose their dreaming upon me. Loving them all the more for this, I became quite intolerable in my sisterly affection for the unborn Annibal. You have to be cruel to be kind, as the proverb says; and if there is anything crueller than a precocious eleven-year-old girl, may I be preserved from it!

Soon I was receiving a letter every other day and, in obedience to Jean de Luxe’s instructions, dropping tantalizing details, such as Annibal has had a duel about a girl and but I promised not to tell! Or, Annibal has grown a golden mustache, and the wife of the—My father took to walking up and down, while my mother lost weight.

Thus—oh wise old Jean de Luxe!—I won my battle, jab by ruthless jab, letting my kind-hearted enemy defeat itself by the power of its own wrong-headed confidence. For I was striking at a hollow bag. Believe me, the poets are right—love conquers all—meaning, of course, true love for that which is. You can love a dream only within a dream, but the sleeper wakes to a loneliness, an emptiness, because a dream cannot love you in return and the purest love starves itself hollow left to itself.

Hence, after a few months of imaginary correspondence with my non-existent brother Annibal, the day came when I uttered a fine outcry and thrust de Luxe’s last letter into what was later to become my bosom. It slipped through a hollow in my chest and lodged in my bodice.
“Darling, what is it?” my mother asked. Father cried, “Yes, what is it? Speak!”

I had to be given sal volatile before I answered, “Annibal has married the daughter of a farmer—a widow with three children, from Soskut—and he is sublimely happy! She is only twenty-six, and looks younger!”

“What the devil is this foolishness?” my father asked, in utter consternation. “Soskut?”

I went on, “That’s what Annibal says. Annibal says that there is no worse run-down farming area in Hungary. Annibal says the water is brackish and the people are backward. Mama always wanted Annibal to be kind to the people, Annibal says, and Annibal says that Papa always wanted him to identify himself with the working classes. So he married Sari, and he is going to bring her home!”

“Exactly when?” my father asked, in a voice like nails going into an empty cardboard box.

“Day after tomorrow,” I replied, clapping my hands. “Oh Mama, may I have a new white dress, and will there be something for Sari’s father? Annibal says he likes slivovitz, but he’ll drink brandy if he can get it, or even wine. Sari’s brothers like wine, Annibal says—”

My father broke out in agony, “—Damn what Annibal says! Where did you pick up all this?”

But my mother, looking at him beseechingly, begged him to be still and, with a troubled expression on her charming face, asked me if she might read Annibal’s letter. Dancing from foot to foot I sang, “Annibal says I mustn’t, Annibal says I mustn’t,” until my unhappy father rushed out of the room clutching his head, while my mother sank into a chair and called for spirits of camphor.

I was tempted, then, to flinging myself upon her generous breast and confess everything; but the actress in me was already uppermost. I danced out and wept in Itonka’s generous lap, but she did not know what I was crying for. And I am not deceiving you, my friend, when I say to you that although I have played Camille while I had hay-fever when the goldenrod was out, and once played Titania with congestion of the lungs and a broken ankle, that was my most punishing rôlé!
A day passed. Then another. At last our butler Arpad came in, with an appearance of distress, and said: "Sir. Madame. There are some people—I do not know what to do—but they say they have the honor to be related to this family. There is with them, it seems, M. Annibal. What shall I do?"

I spared everyone trouble by screaming, "Annibal!"—and rushing to the door to embrace, with all the art Jean de Luxe had taught me, somebody who was not there; some imaginary person about six feet tall and broad in proportion. I swear I almost defeated the law of gravity and clung to empty air. It was a good performance, especially when I led Annibal into the room by the hand and said, "Papa, forgive him!" My parents were aghast. But imagine their reaction when, in all-too-solid flesh, the family Annibal had married into came in!

His wife came first, a buxom Slovak blonde, leading a chain of children in various stages of objectionableness. Then followed her mother, a monstrous simpering woman who kept curtsying to the butler; and her father, a brutal son of the soil who kissed my father on both cheeks, banged him on the back, and demanded something hot and strong to drink. In the rear came three of the most loutish oafs you ever saw in your life, who called for wine and kept fondling everybody.

Jean de Luxe had hired them, of course. They were actors, and they acted well. But my father could find nothing to say, until my putative sister-in-law Sari held up one of the children for him to kiss. Then he roared, "What the devil is this confounded nonsense?"

Taking my cue—Jean de Luxe had foreseen everything—I said: "Oh Papa, say something to Annibal!"

At this he burst out, "What Annibal? Where Annibal? Whose Annibal? To the devil with Annibal! Get these people out of here!"

Sari said, very solemnly, "Sir, do you deny the very existence of Annibal?"

My mother answered for him, and said with a dignity that touched my heart, "Madame, we have only one child,
by God’s grace; our daughter, Bella.” And she clasped me to her breast.

The old man shouted, “What, no Annibal?”
My father replied, “No! Only Bella.”

And then, do you know, he seemed to grow younger and taller, straighter and lighter, like a man relieved of a burden. He broke into an uncontrollable laugh. “No, there is no Annibal, and never was, thank heaven!” he cried. It is marvellous to see the effect of an old lie dying on the spot—it is as if the whole universe shakes its head to clear it, and sighs a weight off its chest. “If you have an Annibal, take him away, and much good may he do you. Bella, my sweet, kiss me and forgive me for a fool!”

“Pardon me, too,” said my mother.

Then, the unwelcome visitors having gone away laughing, I began to cry, and was much comforted.

After that there was no happier family than we three, and my easy-going dreamy father became a realist and an extrovert. With my mother’s encouragement, he speculated. He lost every penny he possessed. So, with Jean de Luxe’s help, I went on the stage, and supported them both in comfort for the rest of their lives. But I never married, and I do not dream . . .

“And how do you like that story?” Bella Barlay asked, smiling her three-cornered smile. “You have been very busy with your notebook.”

I had to ask, “Is it really true?”

Here her face underwent a transformation. You have seen a leafless tree on a bleak horizon in winter, and it has filled you with a feeling of desolation; but suddenly the sun shines through and lends to its nakedness a glory and a refulgence. So her old face became irradiated.

“With development, it could be a good idea for a play,” she said.
The Ape and the Mystery

While the young Duke had been talking, the aged Leonardo had been drawing diagrams with a silver point on a yellow tablet. At last the Duke said: "You have not been listening to me."

"I beg your pardon, Magnificence. There was no need. Everything is clear. Your water down there near Abruzzi is turbid and full of bad things, evil humors. Cleanse it, and this flux will pass."

"What," said the Duke, "I must wash my water?"

"You must wash your water," said Leonardo.

The young Duke stared at him, but he continued still drawing on his tablet: "You must wash your water. Tell your cooperers to make a barrel, a vast barrel, as large as this hall, and as high. Now in this barrel you must lay first, clean sand to the height of a man. Then charcoal to the height of a man. Above this, to the height of a man, gravel. Then, to the top, small stones. Now down here, where the sand is, there must be a pipe. The bottom of this great cask will incline at a certain angle. The pipe will be about as large as a man's arm, but a plate of copper, or brass, suitably perforated, will cover the end embedded in the sand and will be further protected by a perforated case so that it may be withdrawn, if choked with sand, and replaced without considerable loss of pure water."

"What pure water?" asked the young Duke.

"The pure water of Abruzzi, Magnificence. It will pour in foul at the top and come out clean at the bottom. These fluxes are born of the turbidity of the water."
"It is true that our water is far from clear."
"The purer the water, the smaller the flux. Now your water poured in at the top will purify itself in its downward descent. The greater pebbles will catch the larger particles floating in it. The smaller pebbles will take, in their closer cohesion, the lesser particles. The gravel will retain what the little pebbles let pass. The charcoal will arrest still tinier pollutions, so that at last the water—having completely purged itself in the lowest layer of sand—will come out pure and sweet. Oxen, or men (whichever you have most of) may pump the water by day and by night into my filter. Even your black pond water, poured in here, would come out clear as crystal."
"I will do that," said the young Duke, with enthusiasm. "The cooperers shall go to work, the rogues. This moment!"
"Not so fast, Magnificence. Let us consider. Where is the cooper that could make such a cask? Where is the tree that could yield such a stave for such a cask? Big pebbles, little pebbles, gravel, charcoal, sand. Yes, reinforce it at the bottom and construct it in the form of a truncated cone. Still, it crushes itself and bursts itself asunder by its own weight. No, Magnificence. Stone is the word. This must be made of stone. And—" said Leonardo, smearing away a design on his tablet and replacing it with another—"between every layer, a grill. To every grill, certain doors. Bronze doors. The grills, also, should be of bronze. As for the pipes—they had better be bronze. A valve to control the flow of the water, a brass valve. Below, a tank. Yes, I have it! We erect this upon. . . let me see. . . fourteen stone columns twenty feet high, so that, since water must always run down to level itself, it would be necessary for your servants only to turn a screw, to open a spring of pure water, gushing out of a bronze pipe in twenty places at once in your palace, as long as the tank were full. I have also an excellent idea for a screw, designed to shut off the water entirely or let it in as you will, wherever you will, either in a torrent or in a jet no thicker than a hair's breadth. In this case, of course, your
Magnificence will need a more powerful pumping engine. 

The young Duke asked: “What do you want all those bronze doors for?”

Leonardo said: “Magnificence, you have seen the pebbles in a stream.”

“Naturally.”

“You have seen them, and you have touched them no doubt?”

“Well?”

“They are slimy, are they not? They are covered with little green plants, you will have observed?”

“Well, well?”

“So will be the big pebbles, little pebbles, gravel, charcoal and above all the sand in your Magnificence’s filter. Slime and green stuff will choke it, or make it a source of even more noxious water than ever before. Hence, the bronze doors. Every month the stones, charcoal, sand and so forth, are raked out and the empty places refilled with fresh stuff.”

The young Duke did not know what to say. He was uneasy. Turning an enormous seal on the forefinger of his right hand he muttered: “This is all very well. I have the greatest respect for your knowledge, and all that. But stone, bronze doors, bronze gratings. I mean to say, bronze pipes, and God-knows-what made out of brass. You know all about these things, of course. But seriously, I really think we’d better let it drop. ..”

“If you liked the pipes could be simply lead. The gratings would have to be copper, of course, but in about thirty or forty years ..”

“Thirty or forty years!”

“What is thirty or forty years?” asked Leonardo, with a smile, combing his great beard with his fingers. “If you build, build for-ever. Long after you are dead, Magnificence, by what will you be remembered? The fight you fought with Colonna? The bad portrait of you which you hired poor little Ercole to paint? Oho, no, no, no! Your descendants will say: ‘Ah, that was the Duke who washed the water here in Abruzzi and cured his people
of their belly-aches.’ Therefore I say stone of the hardest and bronze of the toughest. I know, Magnificence; I know.”

“You know everything, Leonardo.”

“I know a little of everything, and not much of anything—with the possible exception of the art of painting. Of that I know something. Yes, I know a certain something about painting pictures. But what is that worth? Little, Magnificence—so little! Your wall, upon which I smear my blood and tears, will fall. The bit of wood that I give my life to cover with pigments will warp, Magnificence, crack and rot. I grind my colors and I refine and refine my oils, and hope and hope for a few years more of life, as Leonardo da Vinci, when I have gone where I belong. But mark my words! One cup of sweet water out of your river down at Abruzzi—one cup of water, pure water, in the belly of a grateful ploughman—will make you immortal, and you will be remembered long after my colors fade. Simply because of a cup of clean water, Magnificence! So I talk in terms of hewn stone and mighty bronze, thinking of that cup of good water.”

The Duke found his opportunity to change this subject. “Ah, yes,” he said. “Now that you mention it. Speaking of colors, and what not. You are the man who painted that picture of the Madonna Lisa, are you not? I mean the wife of Francesco di Bartolommeo di Zanobi del Giocondo—that one. Yes, of course you are.”

“Yes,” said Leonardo.

The Duke said: “Remarkable man that you are! Today you make drains. Tomorrow you cast cannon. The day before yesterday you make a sort of Icarus Machine, so that a man can fly like a bird. Ah... can you? Did it?”

“No, Magnificence, not yet.”

“It would not surprise me if you could transmute metals. They say that you are something of an alchemist. Can you turn base metals into gold, Leonardo?”

“I have never tried.”

“Try! try! Who knows? They tell me that the Valen-
tinois has a learned doctor from the Lowlands who—"

"The tank," said Leonardo, making a diagram, "could be of copper, lined with—"

The Duke said: "Yes, yes, yes, of course. Madonna Lisa was a Neapolitan, or at least she was from the South. Yes, she was a Gherardini. Do you happen to know whether she was related to the Florentine family of that name?"

"No," said Leonardo da Vinci, "I know only that she married del Giocondo—he bought a picture of Saint Francis from Puligo. I have seen worse pictures. He is something of a connoisseur, Giocondo."

"I saw your picture," said the Duke. "Between ourselves, it's not at all bad. La Gioconda is by no means a bad-looking woman. She's his third wife, you know."

"I know. Her predecessors were Camilla di Mariotto Ruccelai, and Tommasa di Mariotto Villana. They both died within four years."

"Ah, yes. There are some queer stories about that," said the Duke.

"But to return to the tank, Magnificence."

"To the Devil with the damned tank! Tell me, Leonardo—what was she always grinning about?"

"Madonna Lisa? She never grinned, Magnificence. She smiled, yes. Grinned, no."

"You must have been alone with her for a long time."

"Never for a moment," said Leonardo. "Never for one little moment. There were always waiting-women, secretaries, musicians, dress-makers, and frequently the lady's husband."

"A jealous man, that," said the Duke.

"Yes. He is going the way to hell, as I nearly did, trying to find the bottom of a bottomless pit."

"She always struck me as deep," said the Duke, "ever so deep—deep as the sea. D'you know what? She isn't by any means what you could call a beautiful woman. But, the few times I met her, I couldn't take my eyes off her. I am not," he said, curling the point of his red-blond beard between two fingers, "I am not altogether undesirable as far as women are concerned, and in any
case... well, I should have... however, there was something about that woman that froze me. In a way, she frightened me. She never said anything. You know, I suppose, that if I want to be amusing—if I go out of my way to be sprightly and entertaining—I could make St. Bartholomew roar with laughter at the stake. Well, d’you know what? With the Madonna Lisa I had no success whatever. I believe you must have heard that I tell a tolerably good story. I told her three of the raciest and best I ever knew. There was never anything but that strange little pinched-up smile. You caught it perfectly, Leonardo. God knows how you did it, but you caught it. I stood and looked at the picture for nearly five minutes, and I said to myself: ‘Aha—he has caught it. There is the smile. There she is. There is La Gioconda to the life. What is she smiling at? She might be the Mother of God or she might be the Devil’s Wife.’ And a sort of cold shiver went up and down my spine. Fortunately, at that time I was... anyway it was lucky for me that I had a certain other distraction just then. But one or two gentlemen I know completely lost their heads over her. Yet I am of the opinion—tell me what you think, Leonardo, because you have seen all the beautiful women in the world and know everything—in my opinion the Madonna Lisa is not beautiful.”

“No.”

“When you say ‘no’, Leonardo, do you mean ‘no, she is not beautiful’ or ‘no, I disagree with you, she is beautiful’?”

“She is not beautiful,” said Leonardo.

“It seemed to me that her hands were coarse and bony, but you painted them as if they had no bones in them. But she must have been an easy person to paint, because she moved less than anyone else I ever met in my life.”

“Yes, nothing but the blinking of her eyes told you that she was alive,” said Leonardo. “But sometimes she moved her hands. Occasionally she took her right hand from the back of her left hand, and loosely locked her fingers together. But generally she let her hands fall into her lap, where they lay relaxed, with the palms upwards.
You see such a disposition of the hands in good old women who have done their work and are content to sit and look at their grandchildren. I have seen hands like hers on death-beds—the death-beds of women who have lived contentedly and died in peace with all their sins forgiven.”

“Yes, she must have been easy to draw,” said the Duke. “She kept so still. Now if you were drawing me, Leonardo, that would be quite a different matter, because I can’t keep still. I pick something up, I put something down, I walk here, I walk there, I take hold of a curtain or a piece of tapestry . . . .”

“On the contrary, Magnificence, that would make you all the easier to portray.”

The Duke, putting forward his right hand, said: “And what do you think of my hand?”

“It is a perfectly good hand,” said Leonardo, without enthusiasm. “It will do everything you want it to do. I see by the third and fourth fingers that you are a horseman. The first and second fingers, and the thumb, tell me that you are a swordsman, and the tendons of your wrist tell the same story.”

The Duke said: “Her hands really were a little too large and hard. What made you draw them so round and soft?”

Leonardo replied: “I softened them to make a symbol of terrible strength.”

“I saw no terrible strength,” said the Duke, “only pretty hands—pretty, soft, yielding hands.”

Leonardo repeated: “Terrible strength. Soft and yielding. What is softer and more yielding than a quicksand or a quagmire? And what is stronger? What is more terrible? In the sea, what is stronger and more terrible than those soft, yielding things that lie still in the dark and lay their pliable fingers, or tentacles, upon the diver?”

“I don’t quite follow you,” said the Duke, “but, as I was saying, I could have fallen in love with that woman. I couldn’t get to the bottom of her.”

“You had better thank God that you did not fall in
love with her, Magnificence," said Leonardo, "and as for getting to the bottom of her, that is impossible."

"Yes, as I said, the Madonna Lisa is deeper than the sea."

"No. She has no depth to which you could dive and no height to which you could climb. She is nothing at all. Del Giocondo will have discovered that much by now. She is, as you might say, God's judgment upon him, that poor devourer of women. He loves her insanely—and she smiles. He bites his fingers, beats his head against the wall, and goads himself into madness in his hopeless endeavor to find something in her that is tangible—something upon which he may lay his hand and say: 'At last I have found you.' And all the time she smiles, and is silent. He may fall on his knees and weep on her feet. She will smile. He may lock her in her chamber and starve her: she will smile. He may humiliate her, beat her with sticks, strike her before the servants. She will continue to smile. This I say with authority, because I have seen it all. And he knows that if he cut her throat, she would smile that enigmatic smile even in death and he is exhausted, defeated. He is exasperated and worn out (just as I might have been) by his effort to know her."

"But you know her, Leonardo?"

"By the grace of God and an ape."

"How, an ape?"

Leonardo was tired of it all. He made a gesture like a man who is shaking water off his finger-tips, and said: "Oh. . . like del Giocondo, like you, like a dozen others, I lost sleep thinking of her. The smile, the smile, the smile. I have seen every face in the world, from the Throne to the gutter. I can read faces as your secretary can read a book. As a cut key fits the wards of a lock, so the shape of a face falls into position in a keyhole in my mind. Very good, this one baffled me," said Leonardo, laughing grimly. "I saw the agony of del Giocondo and the calm of the Madonna Lisa, and I wanted to know. I talked to her, watched her, employed ten thousand artifices to get her off her guard. And still she smiled.
That smile came between me and my sleep. I hated her bitterly because she was too much with me. Then, to be brief, when the portrait was finished and my brushes put away, God sent the ape.”

“What ape?”

Leonardo said: “Del Giocondo filled his house with musicians, tumblers, dancers, and all that, in order to amuse his wife. There was a choir of little boys that sang. There was a man who made me laugh—even me. Madonna sat with folded hands, quietly smiling. I finished the portrait. Then something happened. Del Giocondo had several large hounds. One of them, a buff-colored dog almost as big as a donkey, used to lie at her feet. This gigantic hound had hanging jowls and an expression of indescribable melancholy. When I showed the Madonna Lisa the finished picture, she nodded and said, through a pin-hole in her compressed mouth: ‘That is good.’ At this, the great dog, whose ears had caught some warmth in her voice, came forward lashing about with his great tail which disturbed a little sleepy ape no bigger than your two hands.”

The Duke looked at his hands.

Leonardo continued: “This absurd ape, enraged as little things are enraged, leapt upon the dog’s back and pulled his ears, grimacing and chattering. The patient dog looked up with such absurd melancholy that it was impossible not to laugh. There was this gigantic dog, which might have killed a leopard,” said Leonardo, half laughing at the memory of it, “and there was this preposterous ape chattering and chattering with ape-like anger while the dog feebly gesticulated with his tail, one friendly touch of which had been sufficient to knock his assailant head-over-heels. I laughed. Madonna Lisa laughed—and then, by God, in the bursting of a bubble everything was clear. Then, Magnificence, I was a happy man, because I had uncovered a trivial truth, so that a thousand unconnected pieces fell together and made sense. La Gioconda threw back her head and opened her mouth and laughed, and then I knew why she had always smiled that strange quiet smile.”
"Why?" asked the Duke.

"She has very bad teeth, that vain and empty woman," said Leonardo, laughing, "but I have been thinking—"

"Very bad?" asked the Duke.

"Rotten. Her smile is the secretive smile of a woman with bad teeth. Touching the matter of the water supply; I believe—"

"I detest women with bad teeth," said the Duke, yawning. "And to the devil with your pipes and water-tanks."
The Oxoxoco Bottle

The fact that the intensely red color of the glaze on the Oxoxoco Bottle is due to the presence in the clay of certain uranium salts is of no importance. A similar coloration may be found in Bohemian and Venetian glass, for example. No, the archaeologists at the British Museum are baffled by the shape of the thing. They cannot agree about the nature or the purpose.

Dr. Raisin, for example, says that it was not designed as a bottle at all, but rather as a musical instrument: a curious combination of the ocarina and the syrinx, because it has three delicately curved slender necks, and immediately below the middle neck, which is the longest, there is something like a finger-hole. But in the opinion of Sir Cecil Sampson, who is a leading authority on ancient musical instruments, the Oxoxoco Bottle was never constructed to throw back sounds. Professor Miller, however, inclines to the belief that the Oxoxoco Bottle is a kind of tobacco pipe: the two shorter necks curve upwards while the longer neck curves downwards to fit mouth and nostrils. Professor Miller indicates that smouldering herbs were dropped in at the "finger-hole" and that the user of the bottle must have inhaled the smoke through all his respiratory passages.

I have reason to believe that Professor Miller has guessed closest to the truth although, if the document in my possession is genuine, it was not tobacco that they burned in the squid-shaped body of the bottle.

It was intact, except for a few chips, when I bought it from a mestizo pedlar in Cuernavaca in 1948. "Genuine,"
he said; and this seemed to be the only English word he knew: "genuine, genuine." He pointed towards the mountains and conveyed to me by writhings and convulsions, pointing to earth and sky, that he had picked the bottle up after an earthquake. At last I gave him five pesos for it, and forgot about it until I found it several years later while I was idling over a mass of dusty souvenirs: sombreros, huaraches, a stuffed baby alligator, and other trifles, such as tourists pick up in their wanderings, pay heavily for, and then give away to friends who consign them to some unfrequented part of the house.

The straw hats and other plaited objects had deteriorated. The stitches in the ventral part of the little alligator had given way, and the same had happened to the little Caribbean sting-ray. But the vessel later to be known as the Oxoxoco Bottle seemed to glow. I picked it up carelessly, saying to a friend who was spending that evening with me: "Now what this is, I don't know—" when it slipped from between my dusty fingers and broke against the base of a brass lamp.

My friend said: "Some sort of primitive cigar-holder, I imagine. See? There's still a cigar inside it. Or is it a stick of cinnamon?"

"What would they be doing with cinnamon in Mexico?" I asked, picking up this pale brown cylinder. It had a slightly oily texture and retained a certain aromatic odor. "What would you make of a thing like that?"

He took it from me gingerly, and rustled it at his ear between thumb and forefinger much in the manner of a would-be connoisseur "listening to" the condition of a cigar. An outer leaf curled back. The interior was pale yellow. He cried: "Bless my heart, man, it's paper—thin paper—and written on, too, unless my eyes deceive me."

So we took the pieces of the bottle and that panatella-shaped scroll to the British Museum. Professor Mayhew, of Ceramics, took charge of the broken bottle. Dr. Wills, of Ancient Manuscripts, went to work on the scroll with all the frenzied patience characteristic of such men, who will hunch their backs and go blind working twenty years on a fragment of Dead Sea scroll.
Oddly enough, he had this paper cigar unrolled and separated into leaves within six weeks, when he communicated with me, saying: "This is not an ancient manuscript. It is scarcely fifty years old. It was written in pencil, upon faint-rulled paper torn out of some reporter's notebook not later than 1914. This is not my pigeon. So I gave it to Brownlow, of Modern Manuscripts. Excuse me." And he disappeared through a book-lined door in the library.

Dr. Brownlow had the papers on his table, covered with a heavy sheet of plate-glass. He said to me, in a dry voice: "If this is a hoax, Mr. Kersh, I could recommend more profitable ways of expending the Museum's time and your own. If this is not a hoax, then it is one of the literary discoveries of the century. The Americans would be especially interested in it. They could afford to buy it, being millionaires. We could not. But it is curious, most curious."

"What is it?" I asked.

He took his time, in the maddening manner of such men, and said: "Considering the advanced age of the putative author of this narrative, there are certain discrepancies in the handwriting. The purported author of this must have been a very old man in about 1914, at which I place the date of its writing. Furthermore, he suffered with asthma and rheumatism. Yet I don't know. If you will allow me to make certain inquiries, and keep this holograph a few days more . . . ?"

I demanded: "What man? What rheumatism? What do you mean?"

He said: "Beg pardon, I thought you knew. This—" and he tapped the plate-glass "—pretends to be the last written work of the American author, Ambrose Bierce. I have taken the liberty of having it photographed for your benefit. If we may keep this until next Monday or so for further investigation . . . ?"

"Do that," I said, and took from him a packet of photographs, considerably enlarged from the narrow notebook sheets.
"He was a great writer!" I said. "One of America's greatest."

The Modern Manuscripts man shrugged. "Well, well. He was in London from 1872 to 1876. A newspaperman, a newspaperman. They used to call him 'Bitter' Bierce. When he went back to America he worked—if my memory does not deceive me—mainly in San Francisco, wrote for such publications as The Examiner, The American, Cosmopolitan, and such-like. Famous for his bitter tongue and his ghostly stories. He had merit. Academic circles in the United States will give you anything you like for this—if it is genuine. If . . . Now I beg you to excuse me." Before we parted, he added, with a little smile: "I hope it is genuine, for your sake and ours—because that would certainly clear up what is getting to be a warm dispute among our fellows in the Broken Crockery Department . . ."

Mount Popocatepetl looms over little Oxoxoco which, at first glance, is a charming and picturesque village, in the Mexican sense of the term. In this respect it closely resembles its human counterparts. Oxoxoco is picturesque and interesting, indeed; at a suitable distance, and beyond the range of one's nostrils. Having become acquainted with it, the disillusioned traveler looks to the snowy peaks of the volcano for a glimpse of cool beauty in this lazy, bandit-haunted, burnt-up land. But if he is a man of sensibility, he almost hopes that the vapors on the peak may give place to some stupendous eruption of burning gas, and a consequent eruption of molten lava which, hissing down into the valley, may cauterize this ulcer of a place from the surface of the tormented earth, covering all traces of it with a neat poultice of pumice stone and a barber's dusting of the finest white ashes.

They used to call me a good hater. This used to be so. I despised my contemporaries, I detested my wife—a feeling she reciprocated—and had an impatient contempt for my sons; and for their grandfather, my father. London appalled me, New York disgusted me, and California nau-
seated me. I almost believe that I came to Mexico for something fresh to hate. Oxco, Taxco, Cuernavaca—they were all equally distasteful to me, and I knew that I should feel similarly about the (from a distance enchanting) village of Oxoxoco. But I was sick and tired, hunted and alone, and I needed repose, because every bone in my body, at every movement, raised its sepulchral protest. But there was to be no rest for me in Oxoxoco.

Once the traveler sets foot in this village, he is affronted by filth and lethargy. The men squat, chin on knee, smoking or sleeping. There is a curious lifelessness about the place as it clings, a conglomeration of hovels, to the upland slope. There is only one half-solid building in Oxoxoco, which is the church. My views on religion are tolerably well known, but I made my way to this edifice to be away from the heat, the flies, and the vultures which are the street cleaners of Oxoxoco. (In this respect it is not unlike certain other cities I have visited, only in Oxoxoco the vultures have wings and no politics.) The church was comparatively cool. Resting, I looked at the painted murals. They simply christen the old bloody Aztec gods and goddesses—give them the names of saints—and go on worshipping in the old savage style.

A priest came out to greet me. He radiated benevolence when he saw that I was wearing a complete suit of clothes, a watch-chain, and boots, however down at heel. In reply to his polite inquiry as to what he could do for me, I said: “Why, padre, you can direct me out of this charming village of yours, if you will.” Knowing that nothing is to be got without ready cash, I gave him half a dollar, saying: “For the poor of your parish—if there are any poor in so delightful a place. If not, burn a few candles for those who have recently died of want. Meanwhile, if you will be so good as to direct me to some place where I can find something to eat and drink, I shall be infinitely obliged.”

“Diego’s widow is clean and obliging,” said he, looking at my coin. Then: “You are an American?”

“I have that honor.”

“Then you will, indeed, be well advised to move away from here as soon as you have refreshed yourself, because
there is a rumor that Zapata is coming—or it may be Villa—what do I know?"

"Presumably, the secrets of the Infinite, padre, judging by your cassock. Certainly," I said, "the secrets of Oxoxoco. Now, may I eat and drink and go on my way?"

"I will take you to Diego’s widow," said he, with a sigh. "Up there," said he, pointing to the mountain slope, "you will certainly be safe from Villa, Zapata, and any other men in these parts. No one will go where I am pointing, señor—not the bravest of the brave. They are a superstitious people, my people."

"Not being superstitious yourself, padre, no doubt you have traveled that path yourself?"

Crossing himself, he said: "Heaven forbid!" and hastily added: "But you cannot go on foot, señor?"

"I’d rather not, padre. But how else should I go?"

His eyes grew bright as he replied: "As luck will have it, Diego’s widow has a burro to sell, and he knows the way anywhere. Come with me and I will take you to Diego’s widow. She is a virtuous woman, and lives two paces from here."

The sun seemed to flare like oil, and at every step we were beset by clouds of flies which appeared not to bother the good priest who seemed inordinately concerned with my welfare. His "two paces" were more like a thousand, and all the way he catechized me, only partly inspired (I believe) by personal curiosity.

"Señor, why do you want to go up there? True, you will be safe from bad men. But there are other dangers, of which Man is the least."

"If you mean snakes, or what not——" I began.

"—Oh no," said he, "up there is too high for the reptiles and the cats. I see, in any case, that you carry a pistol and a gun. Oh, you will see enough snakes and cats when you pass through the Oxoxoco jungle on your way. That, too, is dangerous; it is unfit for human habitation."

"Padre," said I, "I have lived in London."

Without getting the gist or the point of this, he persisted: "It is my duty to warn you, señor—it is very bad jungle."
“Padre, I come from San Francisco.”
“But señor! It is not so much the wild beasts as the insects that creep into the eyes, señor, into the ears. They suck blood, they breed fever, they drive men mad—"
“—Padre, padre, I have been connected with contributors to the popular press!”
“Beyond the second bend in the river there are still surviving, unbaptized, certain Indians. They murder strangers slowly, over a slow fire, inch by inch—"
“—Enough, padre; I have been married and have had a family.”

His pace lagged as we approached the house of Diego’s widow, and he asked me: “Do you understand the nature of a burro, a donkey?”

“Padre, I attended the Kentucky Military Institute.”
“I do not grasp your meaning, but they are perverse animals, bless them. Tell them to advance, and they halt. Urge them forward, they go sideways.”

“Padre, I was drummer-boy with the Ninth Indiana Infantry.”

“Ah well, you will have your way. Here is Diego’s widow’s house. She is a good woman.” And so he led me into a most malodorous darkness, redolent of pigs with an undertone of goat.

The widow of Diego, as the padre had said, was unquestionably a good woman, and a virtuous one. With her looks, how could she have been other than virtuous? She had only three teeth, and was prematurely aged, like all the women hereabout. As for her cleanliness, no doubt she was as clean as it is possible to be in Oxoxoco. A little pig ran between us as we entered. The padre dismissed it with a blessing, and a hard kick, and said: “Here is a gentleman, my daughter, who requires refreshment and wants a burro. He is, of course, willing to pay.”

“There is no need of that,” said the widow of Diego, holding out a cupped hand. When I put a few small pieces of money into her palm she made them disappear like a prestidigitator, all the while protesting: “I could not possibly accept,” etcetera, and led me to a pallet of rawhide strips where I sat, nursing my aching head.
Soon she brought me a dish of enchiladas and a little bottle of some spirits these people distill, at a certain season, from the cactus. I ate—although I knew that the hot, red pepper could not agree with my asthma; and drank a little, although I was aware that this stuff might be the worst thing in the world for my rheumatism. The flies were so numerous and the air so dense and hot that I felt as one might feel who has been baked in an immense currant bun, without the spice. She gave me a gourd of goat’s milk and, as I drank it, asked me: “The señor wants a burro? I have a burro.”

“So the reverend father told me,” said I, “and I hear no good of him.”

“I have never seen such a burro,” said she. “He is big and beautiful—you will see for yourself—as big as a mule, and all white. You can have him for next to nothing. Five silver dollars.”

“Come now,” said I, “what’s wrong with this animal that has all the virtues in the world and goes for next to nothing? I have lived a very long time in all parts of the world, señora, and one thing I have learned—never trust a bargain. Speak up, what’s the matter with the beast? Is he vicious?”

“No, señor, he is not vicious, but the good people in Oxoxoco are afraid of him, and nobody will buy him. They called him a ghost burro, because his hair is white and his eyes and nose are red.”

“In other words, an albino donkey,” I remarked.

At the unfamiliar word, she crossed herself and continued: “. And what need have I for a burro, señor? A few goats, a pig or two, a little corn—what more do I want? Come, caballero, you may have him for four dollars, with a halter and a blanket thrown in.”

“Well, let me see this famous burro, widow. I have ridden many a ghost in my time, and have been ridden by them in my turn.”

So she led me to a shady place near-by where stood a large white donkey, or burro as they call them, haltered, still, and seemingly contemplative. “Where did you get him?” I asked.
The question seemed to embarrass her, but she replied: “He strayed from up there——” pointing to the mountain “—and since no one has claimed him in three years I have the right to call him mine.”

“Well,” said I, “I am going up there. No doubt someone will recognize him and claim him, and I’ll be short one donkey. But give me the blanket and the halter, and I will give you three dollars for the lot.”

Diego’s widow agreed readily. I could see what was passing in her mind: the burro was economically valueless, and if Villa broke through, which seemed likely, his comissariat would take the donkey away to carry ammunition or, perhaps, to eat. She could not hide a donkey, but she could hide three dollars. Hence, she produced an old Indian blanket and a rawhide halter. Also, she filled my canteen with water and offered me a stirrup-cup of mescal, and pressed into my pockets some cakes wrapped in leaves. “Vaya con Dios, stranger,” she said, “go with God. When you pass the bend in the river and find yourself in the jungle, look to your rifle. But where the path forks, where the trees get thin, turn left, not right.” Then she threw over my head a little silver chain, attached to which was a small silver crucifix. I felt somewhat like the man in young Bram Stoker’s Dracula (which might have been an excellent novel if he could have kept up to the quality of the first three or four chapters), but I thanked her, and offered her another dollar which she refused. Perhaps, after all, she really was a good woman, as the priest had said?

The inhabitants of Oxoxoco came out of their divers lethargies to cross themselves as I passed, mounted on the white burro. But soon I was in the jungle, following a barely perceptible path up the mountain.

I detest the indiscriminately growing, perpetually breeding, constantly rotting, useless and diseased life of the jungle. It reminds me too much of life in the poorer quarters of such great cities as London and New York. Jungles—whether vegetable or of brick-and-mortar—are to hide in, not to live in. Where there is too much life there is too much death and decay. The Oxoxoco jungle was full of useless forms of life. The trees grew up to an immense
height, racing neck for neck to the sunlight; meeting overhead and grappling with one another branch to branch, locked in a stranglehold, careless of the murderous vines that were twining themselves about their trunks and sucking their life-sap while they struggled. There was no light, but there was no shade; only a kind of evil steam. In places I thought I would have to cut my way with my machete, but the donkey seemed to know his way through what, to me, seemed hopelessly impenetrable places. He paused, sometimes, to drink out of some little pool or puddle that had dripped from the foliage above. But he went on very bravely. I never spent three dollars on a better bargain, and wished now that I had not haggled with Diego’s widow who, I was by now convinced, was not merely a virtuous woman but a generous one. Or a fool. And I had reason to bless her forethought in filling my canteen with water and my pocket with cakes, because three laborious days passed before the air became sweeter and the vegetation more sparse.

But long before we got out of the jungle I heard myself talking to myself, saying: “So, you old fool, you have got what you deserve. Live alone, die alone . . .” There being no unlicked journalists to puncture with my tongue, I turned it against myself; and I believe that at last I met my match in piercing acrimony, because I was tongue-tied against my own onslaughts.

Then, having drunk the last drop of my water (which immediately sprang out again through the pores of my skin) I gave myself up for lost and started to become delirious. I thought that I was back in the log cabin in which I was born in Meigs County, Ohio, with my poor crazy father and my eight brothers and sisters . . . and I had made up my mind to run away . . .

Then, miraculously, there were no more trees, and the air was clean and cold. The white burro broke into a gallop, then a trot, then a walk, and so came to a halt. I raised my drooping head and saw, standing in our path, a tall, lean man dressed all in white, holding up a hand in an imperious gesture. He said, in a sonorous voice: “So, you bad burro, you have come home? Well, I will forgive your
going astray since you have brought us a guest." Then, to me, in pure Castilian: "Allow me to help you to dismount, señor, I fear you are exhausted, and your face is badly scratched by the thorns."

I managed to croak, in English: "For God's sake, water!"

Mine was the semi-imbecile astonishment of the helplessly played-out man when I heard him reply in perfect English: "Of course, sir. I am extremely thoughtless." I suppose he made some gesture, because two men lifted me, very gently, and put me in a shady place, while the gentleman in white held to my lips a vessel—not a gourd, but a metal vessel—of pure ice-cold water, admonishing me to drink it slowly.

It revived me wonderfully, and I said: "Sir, you have saved my life, and I am grateful to you—not for that, but for the most delicious drink I have ever tasted." Then my eyes fell upon the cup from which I had drunk. The outside was frosted, like a julep-cup, but the inside was not. Then I noticed the color and the weight of it. It was solid gold.

A servant refilled it from a golden ewer and I drained it again. The gentleman in the white suit said: "Yes, it is very good water. It comes unadulterated from the snows, which are unpolluted. But your voice is familiar to me."

I was traveling incognito, but in courtesy I had to give my host some name to call me by, so I said: "My name is Mark Harte——" borrowing from two of my contemporaries the Christian name of one and the surname of the other. Then I fainted, but before I quite lost consciousness I heard the gentleman in the white suit utter some words in a strange language and felt myself, as it were, floating away. I know that somebody put to my lips a cup of some bitter-tasting effervescent liquid. Then, curiously happy, I fell into oblivion as lightly as a snowflake falls upon black velvet.

It was one of those sleeps that might last an hour or ten
thousand years. When I awoke I was lying on a bed of the most exquisite softness, in a cool and spacious chamber simply but luxuriously furnished in a style with which I was unacquainted. My only covering was a white wrapper, or dressing-gown of some soft fabric like cashmere. There was a kind of dressing-table near the window upon which stood a row of crystal bottles with gold stoppers containing what I presumed to be perfumes and lotions. Above the dressing-table hung a large beveled mirror in a golden frame, wonderfully wrought in designs which seemed at once strange and familiar. My face, in the mirror, was miserably familiar. But my month-old beard was gone. Only my mustache remained; and my hair had been trimmed and dressed exactly as it was before I left San Francisco and came to Mexico to die. There were bookshelves, also, well filled with a variety of volumes. With a shock of surprise—almost of dismay—I recognized some works of my own. Upon a low table near the bed stood a golden ewer and cup, and a little golden bell. This last named I picked up and rang. The door opened and two servants came in carrying between them a table covered with a damask cloth and laid with a variety of dishes, every dish of gold with a gold cover. One of them placed a chair. Another unfolded a snowy napkin which he laid across my knees as I sat. Then he proceeded to lift the covers, while the other brought in a wine-cooler of some rich dark wood curiously inlaid in gold with designs similar to those in the frame of the mirror. Everything but the wine-glasses was of massive gold; and these were of crystal, that beautiful Mexican rock crystal. I picked up a champagne glass and observed that it had been carved out of one piece, as had the hock glass, claret glass, port-wine glass, and liqueur glass, etcetera. Many months of patient, untiring, and wonderfully skillful craftsmanship must have gone into the making of every piece. Gold never meant much to me, except when I needed it; and such a profusion of it tended even more to debase that metal in my currency. But those wine-glasses, carved and ground out of the living crystal—they fascinated me.

While I was admiring them, I touched a goblet with a
tentative fingernail and was enjoying its melodious vibrations when the sommelier, the wine waiter, went out on tiptoe and returned, wheeling a three-tiered wagon, upon every shelf of which was ranged a number of rare wines of the choicest vintages. It seems that I had touched a sherry glass; in any case he filled the glass I had touched from an old squat bottle. "Hold hard, my friend," I said, in Spanish. But he only bowed low and made a graceful gesture towards the glass. I believe that that sherry was in the hogshead before Napoleon came to hand-grips with the Duke of Wellington at Badajoz. Sherry is the worst thing in the world for rheumatism, and I meant to take no more than one sip. But that one sip filled me so full of sunlight that I felt myself responding to it as if to Spanish music, and my appetite came roaring back. I ate as I had never eaten before. With each course came an appropriate wine. At last I was served with coffee and brandy. The table was removed. In its place they brought in a low round table, inlaid like the wine-cooler, and upon a great gold tray, crystal glasses, a decanter, and all that goes with a Sèvres coffee-pot.

Now my host came in, and I had an opportunity to observe him more closely. "I trust that you have refreshed yourself, Mr. Harte," said he.

I replied: "My dear sir, it is you who have refreshed me. Never have I, in my wildest dreams, imagined such heliogabalian hospitality. I do not know how to thank you."

He replied: "You thank me by your presence. You reward me, Mr. Mark Harte. Let us take coffee and cognac together. I hope you slept well. I thought that it might please you, when you awoke, to find yourself looking a little more like the gentleman whose conversation I—inadvertently but with vast pleasure—happened to overhear in the Imperial Café in London, in the spring of 1873; and later at the Ambassador, not many years ago. But do taste this brandy. It was distilled, I think, about the time when Napoleon was a cadet—

Napoleon with his stockings half down
Is in love with Giannaconetta . . .
—You heard the jingle? Yes, Mr. Harte, the wine merchants speak of 'Napoleon Brandy', but I possess the last few dozen authentic bottles in the world."

"You have been so kind to me," said I, "that I feel bound to tell you: my name is not Mark Harte."

"Oh, but I knew that two days ago—yes, you slept forty-eight hours—and I was quite aware that you were neither Mark Twain, nor Bret Harte, nor any imaginable combination of the two. You are Mr. Ambrose Bierce and, to be frank with you, I would rather have you under my roof than the other two put together."

Always of an irritable turn, though somewhat mellowed by deep rest, good food and fine wine, I repeated what I must have said elsewhere a thousand times before: that Bret Harte was a cheap slangy upstart who had wheeled his way; and that Sam Clemens (Mark Twain) was better, but not much, or he would never have written such a puerile work as Huckleberry Finn.

I drew a deep breath, whereupon one of my asthmatic attacks took hold of me. An asthmatic should know better than to draw a deep breath too suddenly, even when he is about to launch a diatribe against his rivals. A certain mockery pervades such occasions. You need at least two good lungsful of air to blow up the epigram, which is, of course, the most brilliant thing that ever came to the tip of your tongue. Then your respiratory tracts close as surely as if a Turk had a bow-string about your throat, and the air you have inhaled refuses to come out. Suddenly, you develop the chest of a blacksmith and the complexion of a general. It is at once the most ridiculous and the most wretched of maladies torturing as it does sufferer and bystander alike. My host rang the little golden bell and in a moment an old woman came in.

He said to her three or four words in that unknown tongue which I had heard before, and she darted away to return with a most curious bottle with three necks, a small gallipot, and a vessel of boiling water. The contents of the gallipot she poured into a hole in the body of the bottle and added what I presume to be boiling water. Then, inserting two of the necks of the bottle into my nostrils and the
middle neck between my lips, she applied her own to the hole in the body of the bottle and steadily blew. I was first aware of something disagreeably pungent. Then the pungency became pleasurable. She withdrew the bottle and I found myself breathing, with a most charming sense of peace.

But my witticisms had been completely driven out of my mind.

"It is only asthma," my host said, in his powerful but gentle voice. "We can cure you of that, Mr. Bierce."

"Thank you, sir, thank you," I said. I was about to add that, with such a formula, he might make his fortune in the north; but I remembered that profusion of pure gold and said, instead: "It was that, that drove me here—that, and rheumatism. I thought that the hot, high, dry air . . ."

My host said, in his gentle voice: "Indeed, yes, Mr. Ambrose Bierce. You are right, as usual—and, as usual, somewhat wrong. Remember your story entitled The Damned Thing in which you indicate that there are sounds inaudible to the human ear and colors invisible to the human eye. If my memory does not deceive me, you concluded with the words: 'God help me, the Damned Thing is of such a color!' Correct me if I am wrong. Listen, Mr. Bierce—up here we can hear the high and the low, the squeak of the bat and the rumblings under the earth; and we know, believe me, we know." His eyes were like coals, but his face was bland as he said: "What do you know, Mr. Ambrose Bierce? . . . Let us change the subject. Tell me of your experiences in the Oxoxoco jungle. Were you troubled?"

"Excepting hunger and thirst," I said, "not a bit. Once or twice I thought I saw some red-brown faces peering at me, but then they disappeared almost as if they were afraid of me."

My host laughed, and said: "Do forgive me, Mr. Bierce. Those savages were not afraid of you, they were afraid of Tonto."

"I thought it might be my guns that frightened them, sir. But who is Tonto?"

"Tonto is a Spanish word meaning: silly, irresponsible,
stupid. It is the name of the *burro* upon which you rode here—and for bringing you I will forgive all that perverse donkey’s sins. Allow me to assure you, however, that if you had been riding any ordinary ass, both you and it, by now, would have been butchered, eaten, and forgotten. Thank Tonto. When those jungle beasts see one of my white *burros*—and they know them, the dogs—they hide their heads.” Then he mused, “Tonto was always a curiously rebellious animal. That is why we call him Tonto, Cross-grained. A donkey is not called a donkey without reason, sir.” He laughed. “It would be no use beating him even if I were so disposed. One must earn the affection of a donkey or a mule; otherwise they will stand and be beaten to death rather than take an order. Not that I have ever beaten beast or man. We are humane here, sir, and loathe violence. Mr. Bierce, sir, let it be quite plain that you do here as you will.”

“I like that donkey, or *burro,*” said I. “Somehow I find him sympathetic.”

“Then he is yours,” said my host.

After some interchange of courtesies, I said: “Here is something I do not understand, sir: you live here in the wilds, near a jungle inhabited by savages. Yet you live in a magnificent stone house, attended by servants who would be worth their weight in gold even in Mexico City. I speak of gold—you eat off gold platters, drink out of gold cups or glasses of pure rock crystal. You are an accomplished man; you speak several languages with remarkable purity. This, I do not understand.”

“Mr. Bierce, I am the head of a very ancient family, indeed—possibly the most ancient family extant upon the face of the earth. No, wait! I see, springing to your lips, an inquiry unworthy of you, which would not do justice to me. Did I come over with the Conquistadores? Were my predecessors with Cortez? The answer is, no. Then you will ask whether my forebears, the ancient Aztecs, came up here to escape from the Spaniards and their horses. Sir, you may believe me when I tell you that the Aztecs were mere upstarts by *my* family reckoning. The very house in which I have the honor of sheltering you is almost as old as the
pyramids in Yucatan. Do not speak to me, sir of the Aztecs—without entering into the detail, they were a foolish people though numerous. *My* people were kings, sir, before the Aztecs crept out of the jungle. The little they knew of architecture, carving, and so forth, they derived from *us*. You have seen the Yucatan pyramids? Have you ever seen anything so crude? The Aztec carvings? Put your fingers in the corners of your mouth, pull, and roll your eyes. They are out of drawing, too, if you observe the limbs.

"Now this house is made of volcanic rock—fused by the fires that die not—cut in cubes, mathematically precise, each side of the cube as long as my stride, which is about thirty-two inches. No baking, no plastering. It is not a house (humble though it may seem to you), it is an ancient jewel. The pyramids of Egypt themselves would, on analysis, look foolish beside this little house. . . . Now you will ask me about gold, etcetera. Sir, Mr. Bierce, we have almost inexhaustible funds of gold, and take it for granted. In effect, we of the Old People scarcely regard it except as a medium of exchange . . . and for certain other purposes. Personally, for utility, I prefer silver. Silver, I find, is lighter and more agreeable. And while I drink out of crystal—my men grind it to its proper proportions with wet sand, as the Chinese shape jade—I prefer a mixture of silver, gold and copper for my dishes. This is firmer than tedious gold. I would like to make an admixture with tin, which might be a very good thing. But I bore you."

"I assure you, not in the least, sir," I said. "I was only about to remark that you seem to have traveled greatly. You say that you have seen me in London, in San Francisco, and so forth—"

"—Why not, Mr. Bierce? Necessarily so, sir. You may have observed that we live, here, in something of a civilized way. You took (and I hope you enjoyed it) champagne, for example, with your meal. Where does it come from? Necessarily, France. How do I get it? Very simple; I exchange gold, of which I have an immense supply. There you have it."

"But, my dear sir, you are a man of the world. It seems
to me,” said I, “that you speak every language fluently—even including languages I have never heard spoken.”

“Oh, I move, here and there as necessity dictates. But this is my home. Not only do I speak languages, Mr. Bierce—I speak accents and dialects.” Then he made a chewing motion with his jaws, let the right-hand side of his mouth droop loosely, and spoke in the accents of a Calaveres prospector and pretended to spit as he said: “Mr. Ambrose Bierce, sir! Me and my folks sure would admire to have you for supper!”

I replied, in the same intonation: “Yes sir, you bet!”

We shook hands in the California style. His handshake was exploratory—he seemed to be feeling my hand joint by joint. Said he: “But we were speaking of rheumatism. We can first alleviate, then cure that. Nothing simpler, if you overcome your modesty.”

“My modesty apart,” said I, “what is your process?”

My host said: “There are two processes. The preliminary process is a form of massage. You have been massaged, no doubt, by shampooers in Turkish baths and Hummums in various cities. But only by ten fingers. Now my masseuses have seventy fingers. That is to say, there are seven of them. Each takes a joint, a muscle, or a place where certain nerves cross. The seven women—I am sorry, but only women can do it—work at the same time, in perfect co-ordination. They were trained from childhood, bred to the business. They will prepare you for the second treatment, which is sonic.”

“Sonic? That, sir, should pertain to sound.”

“Just so, Mr. Bierce. My masseuses will prepare you for the sound treatment that will take away the crystals that come between certain joints and fibres, and make you uncomfortable, With all your perspicacity you do not understand? Here, I’ll demonstrate.”

This extraordinary man now picked up a crystal water glass, and threw it down. It bounced—while I winced—and rocked itself still, undamaged. He picked it up and set it on the low table saying: “To all intents and purposes, Mr. Bierce, apart from a sudden shock this crystal is indestructible. But observe me closely.” While I watched, he
rang the glass with a fingernail. It gave out a gloriously melodious note, somewhere in the scale of D major. He listened intently; then, filling his lungs, which were the enormous lungs of the man who lives in the rarefied air of the uplands, he sang into the glass precisely the same note as it had sounded. Only that one note, and he sang it with tremendous volume and power. The glass quivered, appeared to dance—then suddenly burst asunder, fell to pieces.

He said: "One must take into consideration the natural cohesion of particles. The particles, or atoms, of all matter, living or dead, are obedient to certain natural laws of cohesion. They respond to their own vibrations, Mr. Bierce. By means of sound, and sound alone, I could—for example—have made that glass very light or very heavy. And when you are relaxed, almost inert, I will find the right vibration and, by the proper application of sound, I will break the tiny nodules and disperse the antagonistic acids that cause you so much pain. With your permission, let it be understood—not without your permission."

"If you can rid me, sir, of these aches and pains as you have rid me of this asthmatic attack, you have my permission to do anything."

He rang the little golden bell. A manservant came in, immediately, to whom he gave an order in that tantalizingly familiar yet utterly foreign tongue of the household. Then he said to me, in his impeccable English: "I must ask you, if you will be so kind, to remove your robe. I may say, by the bye, that the clothes in which you came have been cleaned and mended, so that they are as good as new; your boots likewise. They are in the cupboard by the door, together with your gun, your revolver, and your machete. Understand me: it is my desire that you be perfectly content. You have only to express a wish and it will be granted. . . . You may think this odd, Mr. Bierce?"

"Delightfully so," I said.

"Yes, by common standards it is. But I am of the Old People, and we live by the spirit of the great. I have sent out messages, north, south, east and west, to my scattered family. They will assemble here in a month, and then——"
But then eight women came into the room. An anthropologist would have been hard put to it to define their race. Presumably their heads had been bound at birth, because their skulls were curiously conical. Their faces were of the neutral color of weak coffee, and quite expressionless. While I lay on the bed, seven of them took positions around me. The eighth carried a golden bowl of some kind of aromatic oil, which she offered to the others who steeped their hands in it.

Then began the massage as my host had explained it—inch by inch, line by line, nerve by nerve and muscle by muscle—seventy skilled fingers working in perfect coordination. There used to be a masseur with a red beard in the Turkish bath at Covent Garden whom I regarded as a master of his profession. He could take away indigestion, muscular pains, or a headache simply by the application of his supple and intelligent hands. His name was Jim. Any one of these seven women was worth ten Jims. I had been tolerably comfortable before they went to work. But they brought to me a sense of tranquillity of which I should never have thought myself capable.

I fell asleep while they were still working. How long they worked I do not know, but the sun was setting when I awoke, and I was hungry and thirsty again. I rang my little bell and the two men who had previously attended me, came in again, this time with a larger table which they set for two. Now, my host dined with me, anticipating my every want. "With this meal," he explained, "you may eat only white meats—merely poultry of various sorts, unborn veal, fish, omelettes, etcetera. Hence, only white wine. Because, after an hour for digestion and a good cigar, you must come with me and we will complete the treatment. There will be no more rheumatism, no more arthritis, no more gout. Believe me, Mr. Bierce, we live by the spirit here and once purged of pain and hate, relieved of the necessity to earn a living, yours is the greatest spirit of the age and I want you to become one of us. We will make you perfect."

It was in my heart to say that I did not want to be perfect; that perfection was for saints and gods, and I had no
ambition in that direction; for they used to call me “Bitter” Bierce, not without reason. Certain souls thrive on bitter fruit; only fools love sugar, only madmen hope for perfection. But I was too comfortable to argue the point, and my host had been somewhat more than kind to me. I may have been born a farmer’s boy, but I have some of the instincts of a gentleman.

“A cigar, if you will, but no brandy until later. Then, anything you like. Later, nothing will hurt you, Mr. Bierce. I have had a steer killed, and the filet hung; likewise a five-year-old sheep, well fed, well penned, well killed—we shall eat the saddle . . .”

So, eventually, having dressed me in a suit similar to his own, he led me through a labyrinth of corridors, down and down from door to door, into the bowels of the mountain, and there we came into a great cave. One might put St. Paul’s Cathedral in London, entire, into the dome of St. Peter’s in Rome; but St. Peter’s itself might have been lost in the vastness of that cave. It was occupied by something, the sight of which impelled me to ask: “Is this an organ, sir?”

“An organ, of a kind,” said my host, “but of such a kind that I venture to say that its like will never be seen again. I suppose you know that the Indians in Yucatan, etcetera, have what they call ‘water-pipes’. These are a series of pottery jars of varying sizes, to the tops of which are attached a certain kind of whistle. By means of a primitive sort of spigot they regulate a flow of water into the largest jar, first of all. The water, rising, compresses the air which, being forced out through the whistle, makes a certain sound—with time the water, having reached a certain level, pours into the next jar and so on, until the air is full of mysterious music. It must be,” he mused, “a race memory. Crude, yes; primitive, unquestionably. But derived from the Old People, who used sound in its proper application before Atlantis sank into the sea. Now these things which seem to you to be the pipes of some colossal organ are water-pipes. They are grey only with the encrustations of age, but they are mostly of pure gold. The largest one, which is about the size of five hogsheads,
is of massive gold. The next is of silver. The following five are of gold and bronze. There are ninety-three in all. You yourself, Mr. Bierce, have written of colors the human eye cannot see, and sounds the human ear cannot hear. You cannot hear the great pipe because it is too deep; and you cannot hear the ninety-third pipe, which is thinner than a pencil, because its note is higher than the squeak of a bat. . . . Now you must take off your clothes and lie down on this pallet. Shut your eyes, open your mouth, and wait while I control the flow."

I asked: "What happens now?"

"There are sounds which it is not vouchsafed to man to hear, Mr. Bierce. You won't hear them—you will scarcely feel them. Breathe deeply, and let us have done with discussion. Listen and tell me what you hear."

"I hear," I said, "a pouring of water. A tinkling of water conjoined to something strangely compounded of melody and thunder."

"Aha! The great pipe fills. Now wait——"

My host held to my lips that bitter, effervescent drink which I so clearly remembered, and then as it were through a veil I sensed an agreeable numbness while, from basso to alto, the pipes made their music. I felt them rather than heard them. The first sensation was in the back of my head, in my cerebellum; then it was in my wrists and my elbows, my hips and knees and ankles. Soon this fabulous vibration, controlled as it was by my host, as it seemed took hold of the front of my throat. If I had the will of ten men I could not have resisted this spell. It is not that I swooned—I very gently became unconscious. It is common knowledge that I am a man of a certain strength of will: I held on to my senses as long as I could; was aware of strange vibrations in all my joints; and finally floated out of the world in a black sleep. The last thing I remember in this gigantic cave was the intolerably thin whistle of the smallest pipe, queerly compounded with the dull thunder of the great pipe. It was as if I were melting.

"—We only want your spirit," said my host.

I could not speak, but I remember saying within myself: "I hope you may get it."
Soon the music died. All I could hear was a sound of water running away. Somebody wrapped me in a soft blanket and I was carried away again, back through those labyrinthine passages, to my bedroom where I fell into a profound slumber. I did not awaken until about noon next day. One of my silent attendants led me to a bath of warm water delicately perfumed with something like sandalwood. Again, they shaved me while I slept. He had laid out a fresh white suit, a fine silk shirt, and a black cravat. Studs, cuff-buttons, and scarf-pin were of matched pearls. He was setting the table again, so that I had my choice of a dozen dishes. My host came in when I was dressed. "Now, Mr. Bierce," said he, "confess that our treatment is efficacious."

"I never felt so well in all my life," I said.

"I dare say not. And you will feel better yet. We will not need to repeat yesterday's treatment. Only, after you have taken luncheon and rested a little, I might advise the use of the bottle again. Two or three repetitions, and there will be an end to your asthma. Your rheumatism, sir, you may regard as cured for ever; but if you will allow me I shall have the Seven Sisters repeat the massage every night before you retire, to make you plump and supple. Repose, repose—refresh, refresh! Pray be seated with a good appetite. Will you take a glass of sherry with me? . . . Aha—here, I see, is this saddle of mutton. You must try it. It is of Welsh breed. Do you prefer capers or redcurrant jelly? You must eat, Mr. Bierce, and relax and be happy. Soon my family (what is left of it) will be here, and then we shall have a real feast, and you shall be one of us. . . . Allow me to serve you . . ."

After we had drunk each other's health he left me. The mutton was excellent. I also ate something which, if it was not real Stilton cheese matured with port wine, was remarkably like it. I opened the cupboard by the door and there, indeed, were my old clothes rejuvenated. Only they had thrown away my old straw sombrero and replaced it with a magnificent Panama lined with green silk. There was my gun cleaned and oiled, and my revolver too; both fully loaded. My machete stood in its scabbard, but they had
burnished the leather with a bone, as soldiers in England burnish their bayonet scabbards, so that it shone like glass. For my convenience, my host had placed next to it a walking-stick of some rare jungle vine with a handle of pure gold in the form of a lizard with emeralds for eyes. So I put on my hat and picked up the stick and prepared to go for a walk.

An attendant conducted me into the open. The air was keen and refreshing. Far below lay the dense and foetid jungle; but up here everything was sweet and fresh. I saw that the house, although it was only one story high, covered an immense area. Some distance away there stood a smaller, somewhat humbler, house which, as I guessed, was for the servants. Beyond there were erected other buildings, all of that ancient, diamond-hard volcanic stone. From one of these buildings came the braying of an ass. I strolled over. There were horses and mules, all white; and, segregated, a number of white *burros*, all beautifully clean and well fed. I called: "Hello there, Tonto!——" and sure enough, my old friend that I had bought for three dollars, blanket and halter and all, came running towards me to be stroked. I spoke to him with affection. "Well, Tonto, old friend," said I, "I believe I owe you a debt of gratitude, little *burro*, because you certainly did me a good turn when you brought me here. Yes, Tonto, you and I must have something in common. A restlessness, eh? Eh, Tonto? A misanthropy? Which, I wonder, is the donkeyest donkey of us two? You must be an ass, you know, to run away from a cosy crib like this to go to Oxoxoco—however virtuous Diego's widow may be. *Hasta luego*, my friend; *hasta la vista*, Tonto." Then I went slowly back to the house, twirling my stick.

But I was aware of a vague disquiet, which I could not define. My host was waiting for me. He too was wearing a Panama hat, but the handle of his walking-stick was of a translucent glowing red. He saw my curious glance and said: "It is cut out of a solid ruby. In Paris, say, a ruby like this would be worth a fortune. Here, its value is merely symbolical. Here, let us exchange walking-sticks. Carry it in good health. I beg." He took away my gold-headed
stick and pressed into my hand the ruby-headed one. I have seen rubies one-twentieth of the size that were valued at ten thousand dollars. Then, with many compliments he, followed by two attendants, conducted me to my room, saying: "You must rest. Yesterday's treatment shakes the very fabric of one's being. You have lived in England; have you acquired the English habit of taking afternoon tea? In any case, it shall be sent up, with buttered toast and cinnamon buns. I want to see you plump and hearty, Mr. Bierce, solid and vital, bursting with life. You must not over-exert yourself."

"I was not, sir. I was only making my courtesies to the burro that brought me here."

"Ah, little Tonto? He is an unpredictable burro, that one; temperamental, spasmodically seized with an itch to travel. Please rest, and if there is anything at all that you desire, you have only to ring the bell. But before you lie down"—he beckoned and an attendant brought a cup of that bitter, effervescent stuff—"drink this. It relaxes the nerves, it is good for the blood, and improves the appetite. In a manner of speaking, it loosens and clarifies the spirit."

I drank it, and lay down. But even as the soporific effort of that draught took hold, disquietude came back. I was on the verge of sleep when I sat up and snapped my fingers, having hit upon the cause of it. Simply, I was too contented—a condition to which I was unaccustomed, and which aroused in me the direst suspicions. Maddeningly incomplete yet indescribably sinister thoughts passed through my mind. In spite of the comforts with which I was surrounded and the charming courtesy and respect with which I was treated, I felt that something, somewhere, was wrong—wrong in a mad, unearthly way.

However, I slept very peacefully and awoke only when the seven masseuses and their cup-bearer came in. Again, when I was massaged and dressed, the attendants brought the table and my host came in, smiling. "I will wager," said he, "that you feel as you look—thirty years younger. I am delighted to see you looking so well, and I hope that you will do justice to the filet. My little herd is of interest-
ing stock, part Hereford, part Scottish. I keep it only for my table, of course."

"I have the appetite of an ostrich," said I, "and his digestion too. I am sure that I am getting fat."

"By the time the rest of my family are gathered here you will be in perfect condition, Mr. Bierce. Then we will have a true banquet—" he stopped himself abruptly and added "—of the spirit, of the spirit." He looked at me with curious intensity and begged me to try an avocado pear with a particularly rich and savory stuffing.

In spite of my nameless misgivings I ate like a fifteen-year-old boy. My host dined with me; but tonight he seemed to be beset with a kind of neurasthenic lassitude. He said: "I am in low spirits, this evening. Yes, I am in need of spiritual refreshment . Ah well, it will not be long now." And he poured me a glass of that superlative cognac, saying: "I will take a glass with you, and then I must sleep. You must rest, too. In a little while they will bring you your draught, and so good-night and pleasant dreams to you."

But I did not drink my draught that night. I say, I was weary of idleness and contentment, and wanted to think. I drowsed a little, however, and should eventually have slept—but then a frightful thought occurred to me, which jerked me like a hooked fish, cold and wet with panic, into bright consciousness. I remembered what my host had said when he had imitated the accents of the California squatter: *Me and my folks sure would admire to have you for supper . . .* and the peculiar expression of veiled mockery that flashed across his face when he said it. Then, I remembered all his talk about the banquet, the impending "feast of the spirit", and I recalled again certain cannibalistic practices of some ancient races who believed that partaking of a portion of the flesh of a dead friend or enemy, they absorb some of his spiritual and intellectual attributes. And now I began to understand the deadly terror in which the people up here were regarded. Also I perceived for the first time the nature of the pleasant-smelling oil with which I had been so carefully shampooed; I detected in its odor thyme, sage, basil, marjoram, hyssop and mint—herbs, in
fact, which belong not to the art of healing, but to the art of cookery. This was enough.

So, to clear my thoughts and to pass the time, I wrote the above in my notebook. I propose, in case I am caught and searched, to roll these thin pages into a tight little scroll and put it where no one will ever think of looking for it: into one of the necks of the inhaler-bottle which stands on my dressing-table. Then I will put on my own clothes, take up my old arms, go to the stable and call the burro Tonto. He found his way to Oxoxoco once; he may do so again. One thing is certain: no savage will touch me while I am mounted on his back. And once in the jungle, given a three hours' start, I shall have nothing but thirst to fear. I am reluctant to leave the stick with the ruby head but, although I was born an Ohio farmer's boy, nevertheless I trust I have the instincts of a gentleman. In any case, with my other equipment, I shall find it inconvenient to carry. The moon is setting. Gun, revolver, machete, canteen; and then, to horse.

(Signed) Ambrose Bierce.
May (?) 1914.

And that is the manuscript that was found in the Oxoxoco Bottle. The authorities have been reluctant to publicize it for fear of a hoax. The farce of the Piltdown skull still rankles in many academic minds. But, in my opinion, it is genuine. The holograph is undoubtedly in Ambrose Bierce's writing. The fact that it is no longer the writing of an old man may be attributed to the circumstance that he was relieved of his rheumatism up there, when the man in the white suit was making him "perfect" for the ghoulish "spiritual supper".

But exactly how one of the greatest American writers of his time died we still do not know. It may be—I hope not—that they pursued him and led him and Tonto back. It may be that he died in the jungle. It may be that he reached Oxoxoco and there—as is generally believed—was shot by Pancho Villa. One thing is certain: and that is, that the gentleman in the white suit, his house, his riches, and his tribe were wiped out when Popocatepetl
erupted some years later, and now are covered by an unknown depth of hard volcanic rock, so that no solution is to be looked for there.

Still I am convinced that this is the only authentic account of the last days of "Bitter" Ambrose Bierce.
Thicker than Water

PART ONE

"You always were such a confounded milksop," said my uncle. "I shall never forget that time when you came down from Cambridge, pure as a lily. I gave you a ten-pound note, and told you: 'Here's a tenner, Rodney—go to the West End, find some lively company; have a good time, make a man of yourself!' And out you went, buttoned up like a blessed parson. And you were back by midnight, all flushed. . . . What? You're blushing again, are you? Better watch out, Rodney. You make me think of the little train that used to run between Witlington and Ambersham—when the driver blew the whistle, the engine lost steam, and stopped. Don't blush; you can't spare the blood for it. Oh, you curd, you!"

I said: "Oh, Uncle—please!"

But he had no mercy. He was in one of his savage, comic humors. He went right on, in apostrophe, talking to the crystal chandelier: "... He comes back by midnight, does this Rodney, all of a glow. I say to myself: 'Well, now, at least this bookworm has made a bit of a fool of himself. About time! Let's have a little vicarious pleasure . . .' And I ask him to tell me how he has spent his evening—not, mark you, that he can have sowed many wild oats between tea-time and the Devil's Dancing Hour. 'Been dissipating, Rodney, my boy?' I ask him. And: 'Oh yes, Uncle Arnold!' says this little nobody. And, as I am a living sinner, he puts down nine pounds-three-and-six, with—Lord help us!—a look of guilt, saying: 'Here is the change!'"
He laughed his great, coarse laugh, and the crystals of that detestable chandelier vibrated with it, seeming to titter in sympathy. Knowing that it would be useless now to beg for mercy, I remained silent.

He continued: "Change, I ask you, changel—the chandelier sang: Change! Nine pounds-three-and-six out of a ten-pound note. And had he dissipated? 'Oh yes, Uncle Arnold.' . . . On sixteen shillings and sixpence, this fellow had had his first big night in town, by all that's marvelous! . . . 'The cost-of-living must have dropped,' I say, 'because when I was twenty-two, forty-odd years ago, and if my uncle had given me a tenner to blue in town, I'd have come home with an empty pocket and an unpaid bill from Gervasi in the Strand—yes, and had to borrow half a sovereign from the butler to pay the cabbie. . . . What in the world,' I ask this tame mouse, 'what in the world can a gentleman do, to have an evening in town on sixteen-and-six?' And he tells me, does this Rodney: 'I met my friend, Willikens, of Jesus College, and we went to a picture palace. We saw Rita Anita in Passion's Plaything, and after the show we went to a café in Soho and had ham and scrambled eggs.'"

I cried: "Oh, Uncle——"

"—Oh, nephew!" he snarled, glaring at me again. "I decided, from that moment on, that you were a beastly little prig. I promised my dear sister—your unhappy mother—that I'd look after you. Poor girl! Your father, whom she went and married—bolts and bars wouldn't hold her—against all our advice, was a blackguard and a scoundrel and a rogue and a vagabond. But at least he had the decency to go to the devil like a man, if not a gentleman. Whereas you—you whey-faced marigold——"

"—Uncle, I cannot help the color of my hair!" I said.

"You can't help anything, you!" said he. "I wonder that you have the nerve to interrupt me. Why, you spaniel, for less than half of what I've said to you, I would have struck my own father in the face! My elder brother practically did so to my father for much less, and was kicked out of doors, and went and made his fortune in Africa . . . and I wish I'd gone with him. . . . Oh, you spiritless
thing—I’d have thought better of you if you had knocked me down, just now, instead of whimpering: ‘Uncle, Uncle, Uncle!’”

And I could only say: “But, Uncle!”

“And yet,” my uncle said, “there must be some kind of a spark of spirit in you, somewhere, or you wouldn’t have had the nerve to fall in love with this Mavis of yours. All the same, you should have got that kind of nonsense out of your system, the time I gave you that ten-pound note. ‘He who commits no follies at twenty will commit them at forty.’ Whoever said that was quite right. So here you are, infatuated, at your age——”

“And Uncle, I’m only thirty-nine!” I said—and, to save my life, I could not have stopped my voice breaking—

“and it isn’t infatuation. It’s true love!”

“That would make it a thousand times worse, if it were true. Only it isn’t. It can’t be. True love, indeed—you, of all people!”

“And why not me, as well as anyone else?” I asked.

“Why not you?” he replied. “Because . . . you are you. True love’s for men. And what are you? A marigold, a carrot—aha, there he goes, blushing again like a tomato!—a weed, a vegetable; anything you like except a man. Love, young Rodney, takes blood and fire. All the fire in you has gone into your ridiculous hair; and all the blood in your body you need to blush with. . . . Infatuation, I say—don’t dare to interrupt—infatuation with a common dancing girl, who gets paid a couple of pounds a week for showing her fat legs to every Tom, Dick, or Harry who has sixpence to pay for a ticket!”

Even if I had not been choked with misery and rage, I dare say I should have held my tongue. My uncle was in one of his moods, and if I had told him that Mavis had slender and beautiful legs, he would have corrected himself into further offensiveness by saying: I beg your pardon, skinny legs. If I had argued that, say, Pavlova was also, by his definition, a “dancing girl”, and that Mavis was a serious Artiste in Ballet, he would have said, with an unpleasant leer: Oh yes, we know all about that! So was Signora Scampi, when my father set up an establishment
for her in Brook Street, in 1883. Brutal ignoramus as he was, he had a talent for turning any word to his own purpose. So I was silent, while he went on:

“Now, if you’d been anything like a Man, I’d have been the last to object to your marrying a dancer. I nearly did myself, once—wish I had—she had legs, at least, to recommend her, which is more than my barren scrub of a Lady had . . . and, as for morals, if any: better. At least, La Palestina was frank, which is more than could be said for our own skinny-shanked, goose-fleshed womenfolk . . . curse and confound them, from their droopy eyelids to their long cold feet! . . .

“However, let’s not waste words. Marry your dancer, and not only will I strike you out of my will, but I cut off your allowance. Now then! Decide.”

“But, Uncle!” I said. “I love Mavis, and she loves me.”

He said, with a sneer: “You are infatuated with your Mavis, and she is in love with the eight hundred pounds a year I allow you. I ask you, you radish, what else could any full-blooded woman find in you to love?”

I might have said that Mavis was not the type of ballet dancer of my uncle’s turbulent youth; that she was by no means what he, and his type, would have described as “full-blooded”, being dark and slender, petal-pale and serious. But then he would only have snarled a laugh and cursed himself, saying that it was just as he had thought all along—the girl was anaemic, unfit to breed from, and he would see himself damned before he countenanced such a blend of milk and water.

“Rodney, my boy,” he said, “I want your word, here and now. Give up any idea you might have of marrying this girl. If not, I send a note to Coote tomorrow, and that will cost you eight hundred a year while I’m alive, and my money when I’m dead. You know me, Rodney. I’m a bull-terrier when I lay hold, and my mind’s made up. . . . Well?”

I said: “I’ll do as you say, Uncle Arnold. I’ll give her up.”

Then he struck the table a blow with his purple fist, and shouted: “I knew you would! Oh, you milksop! If you
had defied me, I'd have raised your allowance to twelve hundred, and given you my blessing; and kissed your bride for you. As it is, you stick of rhubarb, your allowance is henceforward reduced to six hundred pounds a year. And let this be a lesson to you. . . True love, eh? And you'd sell it for eight hundred a year!"

"Oh, but, Uncle——" I began.

"—Oh, but, Uncle! Why, do you want to know something? If I had been you, I would have confronted my old uncle with a fait accompli. I'd have said: "Uncle, I have married such-and-such a girl. Take her, or leave her! And then—I'll tell you something—I'd have been for you one hundred per cent. Oh, you . . .!"

And, of course, it must be at this wrong moment that I find the courage to say: "Uncle, Mavis and I were married three months ago."

He started to puff out his cheeks, but, remembering that his doctor had warned him to control his temper, sucked them in again. When he subsided, I had never seen a more terrifying mixture of malignancy and mirth than his face expressed. He said: "Oh, you did, did you? And you have the gall to tell me so, now?"

I protested: "But, Uncle! You just said——"

"—I just said, you worm, that if you had had the spirit to tell me so in the first place, I'd have thought better of you. But no, not you! You've got to sniff and fumble your wormish way, you have; until I let fall a word, and then you're as bold as brass, you copper-headed Thing! . . . Oh, so! You married the girl, did you? Well, if I could half-guess that she loved you for yourself (as she might have loved me for myself) instead of for the money I provide you with, blast my eyes but I would have allowed you twenty-four hundred a year! But as it is, just because you're such a sniveller, I cut you down to . . . did I say six hundred a year? Beg pardon: four hundred. Your allowance is cut in two, young Rodney. And for every time, hereafter, you whine Oh, Uncle, I cut you another fifty. Now then!"

He knew my old servile habit; he tore the protest out
of me, as surely as if he had me on the rack. "Oh, Uncle!" I cried.

"Three hundred and fifty pounds a year," he said, with satisfaction.

"You don't do me justice," I said. "You have always made a mockery of me, just because I have red hair and never liked to hunt or shoot!"

Talking to the chandelier, again my uncle murmured, making a burlesque of my accent: "He didn't think it was fair for the Hunt to ride after one poor little fox . . . and when I winged a partridge and knocked its head against my boot, he burst into tears. . . . Poor boy!"

"I damned you, for a brute!" I shouted, and was appalled by the reverberation of my voice in that big old house. "A brute, a brute! Keep your dirty money! Damn you, keep it!"

His old servant, coming in with a great silver tray at that moment, stood aghast. But my uncle laughed, and said: "A show of spirit, Rodney, what? Back you go to four hundred a year. Bring in the oysters, Lambert!"

Lambert put down the tray. There were three oval silver platters, each platter indented at the periphery with twelve deep hollows. In each hollow lay a fat Colchester oyster in the deep-shell. In his ceremonious way, Lambert uncorked a bottle of Chablis, and poured a little into my Uncle Arnold's glass. He, sniffing and mouthing the wine, grunted: "Sound! Lambert, wine to Mr. Rodney." Then, to me, with a sardonic twist of the mouth: "You won't take an oyster, by any chance, will you, Rodney?"

I said: "Not for any consideration, thank you, Uncle Arnold. You know oysters disagree with me. They make me ill. No, thanks, really!"

He was at me again like a bull-terrier. "Oysters disagree with him!" he said, to the chandelier. "Disagree! As if any self-respecting oyster would condescend to agree or disagree with this grain of grit! An oyster would turn him into a seed pearl for a little girl's bracelet. . . . Oh, bah! Last of the season—isn't it, Lambert?"

Lambert said: "The last oysters of the season, Sir Arnold. This is the thirtieth of April. We'll not have
oysters again until there is an R in the month—September first, Sir Arnold, as you know."

When Lambert had left the room, my uncle grumbled: "May—June—July—August . . . four months, before the oyster season opens in the autumn. And what am I to live on until then? . . . Chicken, I suppose . . ." Then he glowered at me, and said: "Oysters disagree with you, Rodney, do they? They make you ill, what?"

"Yes, Uncle," I said. "I am what they call 'allergic' to shell-fish. They make me . . . they give me convulsions."

"Then I'll tell you what," my uncle said. "Here's three dozen oysters, the last of the season. I'm going to eat two dozen. You eat the third dozen, and I'll give you back your eight hundred a year. What say?"

The very smell of the oysters nauseated me. I could only say: "I can't, I won't!"

Eating greedily, my Uncle Arnold said: "I'll tell you what, young Rodney: for every oyster you eat, I'll raise your allowance fifty pounds a year. . . . Come on, now!" And he held out, on a three-pronged fork, a fat Colchester.

"Go to the devil!" I cried, starting back, and striking the fork out of his hand.

He grinned, taking up another fork, and said: "Spirit! Bravo! Your allowance is now four hundred and fifty."

"Oh, Uncle!"

"Four hundred," said he, swallowing another oyster. "Oh, dear me, how we go to the dogs, poor us! . . . What wouldn't I give, now, for a Saddlebag! You don't know what that is, do you, Rodney?——" my uncle slavered most unpleasantly, in reminiscence. "You take a great, thick, tender steak, and slit it down the middle on two sides so that it opens like a pocket. Stuff it with eight or ten succulent Whitstable oysters, with their juice, and sew up the open edges. Grill, preferably over charcoal. . . . Oh, the very idea of it turns your stomach, doesn't it? We used to wash it down with porter, and chase it with port, you milksop. . . . And all the damned quacks allow me, now, is fish and white meat. Not even salt. My blood pressure is high, they say, and my arteries hard. . . . I never noticed that my arteries were hard."
Here the old man held out a gnarled left fist, bulging with blue veins. He touched one of these veins with the forefinger of the other hand, and said, quite pathetically: "Springy as a pneumatic tire. What's hard about that? . . . Doctor says red meat and wine will make me drop in my tracks. . . . Salt, too, they deny me. And what is life without salt? . . . No excitement, they say. So what is left? Other people's excitement, vicarious pleasure . . . and you, Rodney, deny me even that. . . . Ninety-eight per cent water, you vegetable! At least I can live to watch you wriggle. . . . An oyster would make him ill. Go to bed, Rodney, go to bed—I'm sick to the heart at the sight of you! Go away!"

He looked so lonely as he sat there, feeling the big blue veins in his clasped hands, that I said: "Oh, my dear Uncle, forgive me if I have offended you——"

"—What was that you said?"

"Oh, Uncle——"

"—I thought you would come around to that again. Three hundred and fifty a year it is now. Go to bed."

Such was Sir Arnold Arnold, my uncle: a brutal old man, who had lived only for pleasure; a savage hedonist, whose appetites had outlived the means of gratifying them. Lusty, in spirit, as an uninhibited bon vivant of thirty, here he sat, at eighty, with half a million in the bank, and nothing to look forward to but the oyster season next September. For the fear of death was upon him. The doctors had warned him that, although he might be good for another ten years of life, if he took care of himself, a little over-indulgence in food, or wine, or emotional excitement could kill him as quickly and as surely as a bullet in the heart. Much as I hated him that evening, I was sorry for him. Going to bed, I reflected: Why, I don't believe that even his oysters give him any great pleasure, now that he can't spice them with pepper sauce. . . .

I thought of his many kindnesses to me—he may have been a ruffian, but his heart was in the right place—and, although he had just ruined me, I forgave him. In a way, I loved him—even admired him; and if I ever hated him, it must have been because I envied him. Examining my
inner heart now, I come to the conclusion that he was the man I should have inclined to be if Nature and Circumstances had given me half a chance.

I swear, I never really meant to kill my uncle.

... I could not sleep. I lay awake, reproaching myself, attacking myself from every angle. ... There was no doubt about it, my uncle was right in his estimate of my character. I was a milksop, a weakling, a vegetable, ninety-eight per cent water. I did cut a ridiculous figure. I had made a fool of myself that very evening, with my evasions, and my confessions which were not confessions. ...

... But was my marriage to Mavis something to confess, like a crime?

... I felt my face growing hot in the dark; and, remembering my uncle's constant allusions to my incurable habit of blushing, burned hotter. No one had the right, I told myself, to make game of a man because he blushes at a word. There is cruelty in that—schoolboy insensibility. You might as reasonably make mock of a man because he has one leg shorter than the other. And as for making a joke of my red hair—why, if you condoned that kind of humor, you condoned, in effect, the persecution of negroes because they are black.

I remembered a boy who was at school with me, at Eatonstowe. His name was Ward, and he was an albino. None of the other boys bore him any grudge—yet how pitilessly they persecuted him! One day somebody sent him a message saying that his cousin had come to see him; and there was a pink-eyed white mouse in a cardboard box. ... Yet he was silent. He made a pet of this mouse, kept it in his pocket. It used to run up his sleeve and sit on his shoulder. He used to take the mouse to bed with him. ... One morning, poor Ward woke us all up before the bell, I remembered: he had turned over in his sleep, and smothered the mouse; and that was the first time I had ever heard that lonely boy cry ... and oh, the desolate hope-
lessness of it, the woe, the helpless grief! It struck us silent, and afterwards we offered Ward toffee and fruit; but he would never speak to us any more, and soon his guardian took him away from school. . . Us, I remembered; because I—God forgive me—had been among the worst of Ward’s persecutors. Why? Because, before he had come to school, it had been I who was the butt of the form, on account of my fantastically red hair. It had been a relief to have someone else to persecute. . . .

Then I remembered Fatty Onslow, who had been the worst bully of the lot—a monstrously fat boy who, having been mercilessly teased for three terms, suddenly developed a giant’s strength, which he tyrannously used like a giant. I had thought I should never forgive the things he did to me. . . . Yet, when I ran into him fifteen years later, in Pall Mall, he was as quiet and gentle a fellow as you ever met . . . and died, as I wished I might die, heroically, in the North Sea. “Stand by to ram!” he roared, bleeding to death—and, with his destroyer, rammed and sank a German cruiser.

Such, again, was my Uncle Arnold, I thought. Only there was, perhaps, too much of the fourth-form bully left in him—that was all. I blamed myself for letting him treat me so. There was, I reasoned, never a man on earth who would not respect another, however puny, who was devoid of fear . . . and I was rotten with fear, eaten up with it!

In this respect, only Mavis understood me, because she was sensitive, too. It was she who made it clear to me that I was not really a coward; only sensitive. She loved the color of my hair, she said, because it reminded her of something out of Dubinushki’s setting for the Valse des Fleurs. . . . My heart ached then as I thought of Mavis.

She had had a hard life, poor girl. Almost literally, she had danced herself out of nowhere——

—Hey, wait a minute! I said to myself, trying to reason with myself—what do you mean, out of nowhere? She is still nowhere. But she relies upon you to help her dance her way somehow.

Mavis depended upon me so absolutely. She had such
faith in me, and relied so utterly upon my given word—and I had sworn to see her through her career... It is generally an excellent thing to have a woman pin all her faith and hope on you... but it may be sometimes a very bad thing. It takes a broad back to bear the weight of a woman’s trust. A woman’s unstinted faith may put a strong man’s head among the stars; on the other hand, it may put a weak man’s head into the gas oven. And I am a weak man.

Yes, I contemplated suicide that night in my uncle’s house; and I wish I had had the courage to commit it....

I had come, paying my duty-visit, with the intention of borrowing a little money—a matter of some few hundred pounds. Before I knew Mavis, I had regarded myself as quite a rich man: my uncle allowed me eight hundred pounds a year, and over and above that I had my salary, four hundred pounds a year from the High Commissioner’s office where I worked. Twenty-four pounds a week was affluence, to me. I had my little flat in Knightsbridge; my books and my gramophone records: my little self-indulgences. I could even lend a little to my friends. But after I fell in love with Mavis, somehow I could never make ends meet.

I met her at a meeting of the Little Ballet Group, in Russell Square. She performed the dance Riabouchinska used to do, with the little metal fawn... only Mavis was smaller than Riabouchinska: an animated ivory figurine, most beautiful! Mavis lived, she told me, only for The Ballet. But her health was not very good; one of her lungs was questionable—she had had a hard time of it in her early youth. Her father drank, her mother kept a little general store in a side street off the Gray’s Inn Road.... She had been sent out to work in a factory at the age of fourteen. But she wanted to dance—dancing was her life, she said, again and again.

She did that Fawn Dance in a borrowed costume, stained with someone else’s grease-paint. When I went to congratulate her, after the dance, and saw her weeping so forlornly in the little dressing-room, it was as if a hand
came out of the foggy night and squeezed my heart into my throat.

Mavis had such humility. . . . Now, here is a joke: it was I, of all created creatures, who coaxed and persuaded her into artistic arrogance! Seeds of my own destruction? Yes, perhaps I sowed them. It was I who said to Mavis: “You must not wait and hope; you must insist, demand!” I, mark you! . . .

She insisted. She demanded. I believe there is nothing quite so persuasive as the eloquence of a weakling who, genuinely despising himself for what he is, preaches in favor of that which he would be if he could.

I made Mavis hard. Soon my twelve hundred pounds a year was nothing. And, in talking my doctrine of Strength—Strength—Strength, I found that I had talked myself into contempt and out of existence as the man who had comforted the thin little girl when she was crying in the dressing-room.

I do not know whether Mavis had overestimated my fortune. I am sure I made my financial position pretty clear: eight hundred a year from my uncle, four hundred a year from my office. She thought herself lucky, at that time, if she drew a hundred and fifty a year, and had enough, at the end of the week, to satisfy her landlady in Bernard Street.

But when Mavis and I came to be together, the money went like water. There had to be supper parties, cocktail parties, and luncheon parties; because she had to “meet people”. And could she meet people in a shabby dress? Of course not. And could I do her discred it by appearing less elegantly turned out than an adagio dancer? No. I went to Savile Row for my suits, to St. James’s for my shoes, and to Bond Street for my shirts. Again, could we live in three little rooms in Knightsbridge? Knightsbridge, yes; three rooms, no. We needed a big lounge for “people”, and impressive furniture.

I got into debt. I mortgaged myself. And, at last, when the dressmakers, and the other tradesmen, were pressing for settlement of their accounts, I had gone to my uncle
to borrow five hundred pounds, and found myself with my allowance cut in two.

Mavis would have something to say about this!

I had not lied when I told my uncle that I could not live without her. She was all I had ever loved. Weary of turning over in my mind what I should say to her when I returned home, I began to consider ways and means of killing myself.

And then—at half-past three in the morning—someone knocked at my door. Lambert came into my bedroom, and said: “Oh, Master Rodney—Master Rodney—will you come down? Sir Arnold—I mean your uncle—is taken very bad!”

I put on dressing-gown and slippers, and followed him. As I went downstairs, I was aware of a sense of doom.

I wished my uncle dead, yes. I wished him dead, God forgive me, for his worth in money, considering the terms of his will. But I beg you to believe me—do, please, believe me—when I tell you that I loved the old gentleman very dearly, and had no intention of murdering him, as I did, that night.

PART TWO

You may imagine that, as I went downstairs—steadily, slowly, contemplatively—my thoughts were with my uncle. As a matter of fact, they were not. The date was 30 April, but the weather struck cold in the old house. I thought, first, that it might have been a good thing to put on my overcoat, over my dressing-gown; then it occurred to me how right Mavis was when she insisted that a woman had to have a fur coat. This being the case, therefore, I had bought her a fur coat.

Now there are fur coats and fur coats. Mavis had told me how a certain class of women could not distinguish between musquash and mink, or between mink and sable. Such women were earmarked for oblivion. But Mavis had “modeled” for furs, and knew what was what. She had a great deal of this kind of knowledge. Mavis knew, and
wanted to be one with, the kind of woman that recognizes—let us say—blue fox, blond mink, and Siberian sable. She could explain the difference between the pelts of certain rodents—for example, mole and chinchilla. The difference, generally, ran into many hundreds of pounds. Mavis made a social difference of it. Chinchilla and sables, perhaps, might come later. Meanwhile, she could wear nothing cheaper than mink. And wearing mink, how could she ride in a bus? Women wearing mink do not ride in buses—it is antisocial to do so—the proletariat stares. And what is a mink coat without a corsage of orchids, preferably purple? But what girl, who respects herself, wears a suit by a lesser craftsman than Vallombroso under a mink coat? Respecting herself in a Vallombroso suit, how could she feel comfortable with something inferior to Ambergh underwear next to her skin, a Bobini haircut, and shoes by Dupuy? The hat was another item. Nobody who was anybody wore a hat that was not made by Berzelius. And one became a Somebody by mixing with Somebodies. This was Mavis’s philosophy, and I could not disagree with it.

“*I always found,*” she had told me, “*that when I had supper for eighteen pence at the Café Mauve, I never had more than eighteen pence to pay for my supper. But when I started to have supper for three-and-sixpence at the Café Impérial, I managed to find three-and-sixpence .*”

This operates, in a way; the only drawback is that somebody must pay. . . .

It was of this that I was thinking when I went downstairs. My uncle was lying on his back, with his knees drawn up. His face was blue with pain, but still he fought. He said, gloatingly: “*You would have been dead three-quarters of an hour ago, I bet! It looks as if you might come into your inheritance yet, you worm.*”

“What is the matter, Uncle?” I asked.

He said: “*I don’t know. My belly is hard as a pumpkin, and it hurts like hell.* . . . *First I go hot, and then I go cold, and when I move my head . . . I seem to fade away, wash away on a kind of foggy wave. It pains, Rodney, it pains!*”

Then Lambert came in with a hot-water bottle. (I write
down these details to convince you that almost to the last
I wished my poor uncle nothing but well.)

"This sounds like appendicitis," I said. "Take that bottle
away, and make a pack of crushed ice in a towel."

Even in his agony, my Uncle Arnold sneered: "Male
nurse!" You see, my eyes were weak, so that in the war I
was only in the Medical Corps. He had been a rough-riding
cavalryman, and had been shot in the thigh at Rorke's
Drift—carried the Mannlicher bullet that disabled him on
his watch chain.

"Call Dr. Gilpin," I said to Lambert.

He hesitated, and said: "I wanted to, sir, but Sir Arnold
said not to."

Remember—all I had to do was temporize, humor my
uncle in his obstinacy for three or four hours, and he
would surely have been dead that day. But I said: "Uncle,
you have an appendicitis, very likely burst; and that 'fading
away' in waves is a hemorrhage. Lambert, call Dr.
Gilpin this instant!"

"No damned quacks!" my uncle groaned. "It's nothing
but a belly-ache. I can't imagine why Lambert called you
down, you Woman! ... Lambert, don't call Dr. Gilpin,
call Mr. Coote—if I die where I lie, I cut this milksop off
with a shilling."

That was the nature of the man; do you know, I hon-
ored him for it! But I rose to the occasion, and said: "You
may cut me off, or you may cut me on, as you please;
I am getting the doctor." And so I did.

The old gentleman was delirious when Dr. Gilpin ar-
ived. The diagnosis was as I had foreseen—a burst ap-
pendix, with a serious internal hemorrhage.

I went with my uncle and the doctor to the Cottage
Hospital. The surgeon there said: "We'll pull the old boy
through, I dare say. But I'll want somebody to stand by
for a transfusion of whole blood. ... How about you?"

I said: "My blood group is universal O."

"How d'you know?"

"I found that out during the war," I said. "I was in the
R.A.M.C."

"You'll do," said the surgeon.
At this point I murdered my uncle, Sir Arnold Arnold, for the sake of my love for Mavis. For, you see, an allergy may be transmitted in a transfusion of blood. I spoke the truth when I said that my blood group was Type O, which is universally transfusible. But some devil got hold of my tongue, so that when I intended to say, I am violently allergic to oysters, and Sir Arnold lives on them; therefore, if he receives my blood in transfusion now—his heart being weak, and his blood pressure high—he will almost certainly die in a fit of asthmatic coughing, or of convulsive colitis, when he celebrates the opening of the next oyster season with three dozen Colchesters next September... I was silent.

Premeditation here! When I let them siphon the blood from my arm into the bottle for transfusion, I knew that I was poisoning my uncle as surely as if I had been putting arsenic in his tea.

But I never spoke.

He was conscious by noon, and then he said: "Rodney, my boy, I'm an old man, and a little testy at times. Don't mind every word I say. Blood is thicker than water, old fellow; and you must have good blood in you. You behaved like a man and a gentleman, by God! Bring your Mavis to see me. I dare say she's a nice gel, really. Meantime, send Coote to me. I'm going to give you a thousand pounds for a wedding present."

"Oh, no, Uncle!" I said, almost crying.

"Don't interrupt. I haven't the strength to argue. Get Coote. I'll leave the Cottage Hospital five thousand, I will. . . . Go away now. No, wait a second. Rod——"

"Uncle?"

"Your allowance, henceforward, is a thousand a year. You're a good boy. Now go home."

Mavis was waiting for me when I got home. She said: "Good Lord, Rod! You look like death warmed up. Your eyes are all red. Have you been crying, or something? And where were you all last night?"

"My uncle was very ill, so I got no sleep," I said.

I was sick to hear her remark: "If only the old fellow would pop off! We'd have fun then, wouldn't we?"
“Very likely,” I said heavily.
She asked me: “But did the old bully come across? . . . He must have given you a hundred or two, at least, surely?”

Unfolding the cheque, I said: “He gave me a thousand pounds, and has raised my allowance to a thousand a year. Does that please you?”

It did. “Let’s celebrate!” she cried. But I said that I was tired, and wanted to rest. I said nothing about the blood transfusion—the thought of what I had done sickened me.

A little later, after she expressed a hope that my uncle might “pop off” soon, we had our first quarrel. After that we had our first delightful reconciliation, and I agreed to take her for a holiday to the Pyrenees. In this, as you will see, there was the sure hand of God.

Ah, but that was a holiday! We spent a delightful week in Paris, and then went south. It is a wonderful thing, to leave the station under a fine rain, and wake up under a blinding sun. Mavis had never been abroad before. As you must know, the greatest pleasure that things give their possessor is the delight he finds in sharing them with someone he loves. . . There was a forest, a road almost without perspective; a certain view of blue water, white foam, and yellow sand; above all, the little peak the peasants call “La Dent Gâtée”; and this I loved beyond everything.

You may keep your Matterhorn, your Mont Blanc, and your Dent du Midi. Give me my Dent Gâtée. To look at, it is not much. If it were much, no doubt I should never have gone beyond the base of it. My beloved Dent Gâtée is a very minor mountain, from the point of view of a climber—there is nothing difficult about it—the herdsmen follow their goats over the peak, and down over the Spanish border, without thinking twice. To a true mountaineer, the Dent Gâtée is what soldiers call “a piece of cake”. I loved it, though. It has hidden depths. Never mind the precipices that go rush-
ing a thousand feet down, buttressed like the walls of the great cathedrals; never mind the icy torrents that spring out of the living rock and go, in blown spray, down into the terraced valley! I like the Dent Gâtée for its silence, and for its mysterious caves.

The old cavemen lived here, scores of thousands of years ago. The great M. Casteret, I believe, began to explore the caves of the Dent Gâtée; one of his predecessors, in 1906, in a hole named Le Chasme Sans Fond, discovered an antediluvian carving of a buffalo, and the carefully arranged teeth of three cave bears. . . . There was an animal for you, if you like! From nose to tail-root, the cave bear measured ten feet, and he stood five feet at the shoulder. His haunches were considerably higher than his shoulders; so that when he reared up to attack, his forepaws must have hovered twenty feet high, armed with hooked claws ten inches long. His canine teeth were bigger than bananas. But around this creature, which was much bigger than a bull, you must wrap a pelt about three times as long and dense as that of a grizzly bear. This nightmare our ancestors fought with chipped flints lashed to the tips of wooden poles! . . . All this made me feel that Man is not called Man for nothing.

I tried to convey this to Mavis, but she felt the cold. She wanted to be over the mountain, and into Spain; where, she said, she proposed to hear a flamenco, learn a gypsy dance, and see a bull-fight. So we hurried up and up that tricky road until, a mile before we were to touch the mountain village called Lô, we crashed.

It was not my fault. It happened like this: Mavis was hungry and thirsty, and I was preoccupied. In my head something kept singing: *You murdered your Uncle Arnold—Murdered your Uncle Arnold—He will die in September—You have murdered your Uncle Arnold.* . . . Changing into second gear, coming into low, I encountered a cow, and swerved. My right-hand turn, thoughtlessly twisted on, took me up a steep bank. The car turned over. It stopped rolling at the edge of the road, the rear wheels spinning over the cliff.

Mavis's arm had gone through the windshield. I was
always a coward—I had ducked—I was merely stunned.

Coming to, I ran for help. It happened that an old man was going to Lô, mounted on a mule. I made a tourniquet of my tie, thrust five hundred francs into the man’s hand, mounted Mavis on the mule, and followed her to Lô, where there was a doctor.

I trembled for her, when I saw him: he was a French doctor of the old school, who used his ear for a stethoscope, and did not believe in new-fangled drugs. A rugged old fellow, jack of all medical trades and master of none—but no fool. He said: “Madame has lost too much blood and, what with that and the shock, I order a transfusion. But you are in no condition, m’sieur, to have half a litre of blood taken out of your arteries at the moment—”

“—No, no!” I cried. “I gave blood for a transfusion only a month ago. I am not fit, doctor; not healthy.”

“—If you will allow me to proceed?”

“I beg your pardon, doctor.”

“Il n’y a pas de quoi, m’sieur. . . .” As I was saying, since you are not in a condition to give blood to your wife, I have called in a woman of the village. A healthy animal, I assure you. She was wet-nurse to the Princess de Bohemond’s child, which I had the honor prematurely to deliver, after the Prince’s motor-car crashed on this self-same road. The baby thrived—at eight months, mark you! We can’t do better than take a little blood from young Solomona. They do not come much healthier than she—she is bursting with milk and blood.”

Then he introduced the woman Solomona, to whom I give a thousand francs. She bared a powerful brown arm and giggled as the needle went home in the artery at the crook of the elbow.

A little color came into Mavis’s cheeks as Solomona’s blood ran into her veins. It worked like magic. Her eyes opened, the lids fluttering, and she smiled.

I remember saying: “Now I can die,” and after that I must have collapsed. When I was conscious again, a day and a half later, the doctor told me that I had con-
cussion; for which, he said, the only remedy was ice-packs and rest.

But how could I rest until I had seen Mavis? I went into the room where she lay—and she looked even more beautiful than ever—and, taking her by the hand, begged pardon for my unskillful driving.

"It was all the cow's fault," said Mavis. "She wasn't looking where she was going . . ." Mavis was still a little light-headed. She rambled on, drowsily: "... Poor old cow. Didn't know where she was going... But do any of us? Couldn't see what harm she was doing. ... Can any of us? Kind of lost and frightened—her eyes looked lonely... But aren't we all? ... I hope I won't be too much scarred."

I said: "The doctor said that there'll be nothing that a bit of cosmetic won't cover. You'll be all right, my sweet."

"... Lucky it wasn't my leg," she said. "I couldn't afford that. ... Even so, Abaloni always kept nattering about my not knowing what to do with my arms and hands. Perhaps this will make me worse. Oh, Rod—don't let it!"

"Dearest Mavis, nothing is ever going to make you unhappy."

"That would be nice, Rod... I have made sacrifices for my Art, you know?"

I nodded, not knowing exactly what she meant. To tell you the truth (it might have been on account of my bang on the head) I was a little irritated with her now. I could not help thinking: Uncle Arnold, in her position, by this time would have been sitting up and shouting: "A scratch, damme, a bloody scratch! Get some wine—red wine—that makes blood! And steak, bleeding, underdone! Bustle about, you dago dogs!" ... I couldn't banish from my mind the image of the old gentleman as he lay in the Cottage Hospital: every inch a proper man, but smiling with a kind of tenderness, and eager to give, to pay, all rancor forgotten.

I said: "You have made sacrifices, Mavis, no doubt. For your Art. So have I made sacrifices, for your Art!"
She laughed, in a lightly-fluttering, high-pitched way, and said: "Oh no! What, you? Sacrifices? Oh no! I sacrificed my body for my Art!"

A great cold came over me then. "You sacrificed your body to whom?"

"To you, of course," she said.

Quite calmly, I believe, I said: "Very likely. But for your Art, and my love of you, Mavis, I have sacrificed my immortal soul."

"Don't let's be intense," said she, wearily, "because I don't think I could bear it."

A strange, unpleasant light made a sickly sunrise in my disordered head. "Why, I believe you were really in love with Abaloni!" I cried.

"Please, Rod, let's not go into that, now!"

And then I knew that it was the choreographer Abaloni whom Mavis had always truly loved. There surged up in me a great white hate—boiling bubble-to-bubble with my love for her. In circumstances such as this, a man feels at the tip of his tongue some stupendous speech... and comes out with something trite and silly.

I could only say: "Abaloni's fat!"

"You're no oil painting," said she.

Before I could find words to say in reply, Mavis sat up. For the moment, I thought that she was crying, because tears were running down her cheeks, and I said: "Dear Mavis, forgive my inadequacies, and pardon me if I hurt you. I love you most dearly. If it will be better for you to be with Abaloni, then go. I thought you loved me. I was a fool to think so. Take half of what I have, and go to Abaloni—"

But she was not crying. She could not catch her breath.

I called for the doctor. He said: "It happens, occasionally. There are people, especially women, who are affected like this in the mountains by changes in atmospheric pressure. Come away, and let her rest."

I came away with the nurse, who put me to bed with cold towels on my head. Next morning, when I went to see Mavis, she said: "I must have been sort of woozy
yesterday. Rod, did I say all sorts of silly things? . . . I can sit up today. Let’s go home soon. . . . But tell me—did I talk all kinds of silliness?”

“Not a word,” I said.

“I must have had a temperature,” she said. “I don’t know what’s the matter with me, but I seem to have caught a virus, or something—” Mavis began to struggle for breath, and the sound that she made—how can I describe it?—was as if she had been caught at that fine point between breathing-in and breathing-out. She agonized, at last, in a convulsive combination of coughing and sneezing.

“The doctor says this has something to do with atmospheric pressure,” I told her. “As soon as he gives permission, I’ll take you home. I’m sorry our little holiday turned out so wretchedly.”

Mavis said: “Please, Rod, let it be soon! I can’t breathe here. . . . Do you very much mind not kissing me, Rod? This might be catching. Yes, that’s it—it might be catching. Do you mind awfully leaving me alone a bit? Pretty please?”

I had to say: “Look, Mavis—did you mean what you said last night about loving Abaloni?”

She became angry at this, and cried: “Oh, for heaven’s sake, do try to be civilized just for once in your life! Please leave me alone, Rod. Sort of go away, kind of, for the moment; and tomorrow, perhaps.”

So I left her, and went to see the doctor. He handed me a cablegram. It was from my uncle’s solicitor, Mr. Coote. My uncle, Sir Arnold Arnold, had died suddenly in Paris: would I, his heir and executor, return to London at my earliest convenience?

When I read this, I put my head between my hands and sat for a while rocking to and fro in deep grief. Then this grief was overlaid with black fear. Was it I who killed him? I wondered. But I reassured myself—this could not be: oysters would not be in season until the first of September. So I went back to Mavis’s bedside.

“Oh, please, Rod—” she began.
"—I must go back to England immediately," I said. "My uncle's dead."

Her face was radiant as she cried: "Oh, how—terrible! Oh, I'm so—sorry!"

I could almost have killed her then. But I stooped to kiss her. I hope I shall not long remember—I am sure that I shall never forget—the quick little gesture of revulsion with which she turned away as soon as my lips touched her cheek. "Better hurry, Rod, darling," she said: and began to weep.

"You're crying!" I said.

"So are you," said she.

"I loved the old man very much, I think," I said, "and you even more, Mavis. Until soon. Good-bye."

I arranged for transportation to the nearest airport. Before I left I sent for the woman who had given of her blood to my wife and, in genuine gratitude, put some money into her hand, and thanked her most warmly.

She burst into tears and rushed out of the room.

When I went to see Mr. Coote in his office in Staple Inn, my worst fears were confirmed. Discreetly congratulating me upon my inheritance, which, even after death duties had been paid, would still leave me rich—Coote told me the story of my uncle's death:

"... As you no doubt know, the late Sir Arnold was of—de mortuis nil nisi bonum—an impatient, an impetuous disposition. Oh dear! In a nutshell: the oyster season being over, he resented having to live on 'slops'—he said he'd be damned if he would, and said in Paris they served oysters all the year round. 'And what the devil's the matter with a fat Portuguese oyster, damn it all?' Sir Arnold said."

"Go on, Mr. Coote!"

"To proceed Sir Arnold were to Paris. He went straight from the train to Fratelli's Restaurant, ordered three dozen of the finest Portuguese oysters and half a bottle of wine. He ate the oysters, drank the wine, and collapsed in a convulsion; a sort of asthmatic convulsion, but of the most violent kind. And this, I regret to say, was too much for his poor heart. ... Now, please, oh,
please, you really must pull yourself together! ... Dunhill!
A glass of water, quick!—"
For, at this, I fainted.

The Victorian novelists used to call it a "brain fever". Now, I believe, we refer to my condition then as a "nervous breakdown". I was put to bed and given opiates and sedatives—bromide of this, bromide of that. But always, when the world slipped away, and I slid out of it into the cool dark, I was snatched out of my black, drugged peace by fantastic nightmares.

In these, invariably, my Uncle Arnold appeared, curiously blue in the face and unpleasantly bloated, wheezing: "Give me credit for it, Rod, my boy—never dreamed you had it in you to kill your old uncle! . But you ought to have done it with a poker, or even the paper-knife, face-to-face like a man . I could have forgiven you for that, Rod. But yours was a woman’s trick, a poisoner’s trick. . I’ll lime you for that, my fine-feathered friend—I’ll give you a taste of your own medicine—I’ll give you a dose of your own poison, you woman, you!"

Then my uncle coughed himself into dissolution, and I awoke with a loud cry.

I might have lain there for a week or more; only on the third morning there came a telegram from Mavis, saying that she was arriving at Victoria Station by the boat train from Paris the following day. I got out of bed at once, and made myself presentable, and was pacing the platform a good hour before the train came in. She was more beautiful than ever. "Oh, Mavis, Mavis!" I cried, kissing her.

To my horror and astonishment, her eyes filled with tears, and her chest heaved in a fit of coughing that sounded like thin steel chains being shaken in a cardboard box. "For God’s sake go away!" she said, as soon as she could talk. "You make me ill!"

I am too tired to write more. What Mavis said is true.
Literally, I make her ill. I understand, now, the sudden violent emotion of the woman who gave Mavis her blood in that transfusion—Solomona, her name was, I think. I have inquired since, and tests have been made. Solomona is violently allergic to my kind of red hair.

Therefore Mavis, who is all I have to live for, finds that my presence is poisonous to her. So she has left me, and I am dreadfully alone.

It is impossible for her to live with me. But it is impossible for me to live without her.

I see no occasion further to prolong my existence.

With this, I end the narrative of my confession: God is just.
The Madwoman

The leader of the troupe, the actor-manager, who had hogged all the big speeches and expropriated all the great moments in the comedy, *Lust Must Rust*—flagrantly stolen by Hitchens from White’s translation of Curcio’s farce entitled *Pericoloso*—got into the Earl’s carriage, and was driven away to a good hot supper. One by one, the actors went away. A bitter wind, full of rain, was coming not only from the river, but from the thirty-two points of the compass. Willie lingered, hoping that little Sidney Snow, at least, would stay to keep him company and help him to talk away his awful loneliness over a bit of bread and cheese and a mug of beer. But Sidney Snow left the theatre with a barely polite “Good night, Willie,” arm in arm with a decaying actor of low comedy parts named John Bartlett, and Willie was alone in the world.

He had been angry, to begin with. Hitchens, that dolt, could not write a true line. One of Hitchens’s false metres kept going, threepence—twopence, through the boy’s brain:

Play is the toil of innocents,
And toil, the play of Man.

It was like listening to a club-footed man pacing the attic bedroom just above your head. Had people no ears?—the boy wondered. There was an excellent idea lost in those lines. Hitchens might, at least, have put them:—

For Play’s the Toil of Youthful Innocence,
And Toil the Play of Man’s Maturity.

He could have written it better himself, he decided. Meanwhile, he had stepped backwards into a doorway,
where an overhanging gable offered protection from the driving rain and the biting wind. He had to make a "line" even out of his discomfort:

The weakest Elements themselves conspire—
Wind lends blind Night her invisible feet
And, charitable, shoulders Water...

But this would never do. Good enough for Hitchens; good enough for Kyd. In other words, not good enough for him.

Then he trod upon something soft, that stirred and cried out, startling him so that he jumped back into the wind and the rain, while a terrifying apparition appeared to emanate rather than arise from the wooden flooring of the doorway.

It was a woman. Although she was wet and grey, and limp as linen beaten in a stream, there was that about her which suggested fire—something reminiscent of cinders not yet cooled. Somewhere inside her there lingered a dull glow which became visible when she opened her eyes; and audible, too, when she spoke. Her voice, though small, had a penetrative timbre—it got into your ears like the metallic crackle of a dying ember. She said: "Tread on me. Good. That is right. Tread, tread hard! Trample my feet, put your heels in my bosom, grind my face, stamp on my throat!"

And then she burst into wild laughter, whereupon—as if she had called it down—lightning cracked the sky, and there was a deafening peal of thunder. Simultaneously, someone threw out a pot of slops from an upstairs window and, as if to go one better, the heavens let fall a torrent of hailstones, sharp as gravel.

"Blow! Thunder, lighten, crack your black cheeks, Night!" the old woman screamed. She went into the street, threw back her head, tore open her ragged dress, held up her withered breasts for the hailstones to strike, shrieking: "Come to my breast, you good warm ice! Dry me, oh you rains! Touch me not, good lightning, lest I blast you!"

Then she threw herself down, half naked as she was, on the miry cobblestones of the pavement, moaning: "Comfort me, kind stones! Cleanse me, filth of the kennel! . . . Ah,
tender, tender, tender stone! Let me kiss you. You will let me lie here, kind stone? I may? Sweet stones, you are so much lighter than my old heart. . . Ah!"

She had cut herself on a flint. Blood was trickling from a small wound in her cheek. Blood and mud, matted grey hair and wild eyes—the frightened young man saw all these by the light of a lightning flash, ghostly behind the curtain of the rain. Above the thunder he heard the old woman cry: "Oh, sharper than a serpent’s tooth! Ungrateful stones! Oh, cruel—unkind! Then bite, bite, bite! . . . Oh me, oh me—poor, poor me! Must you, also, drink my blood? Oh Lord . . . from the perils and dangers of the coming night . . . and Gib, my cat, is dead, dead, dead!"

Young Willie was afraid to touch her. She got up, painfully, and came back into the shelter of the doorway, shaking her head very slowly. Sitting down again, covering herself decently with what was left of her dress—with a gesture of quiet dignity—she said: "Pardon, young man. Sometimes, to tell you the truth, I believe that I am not in my right mind. Not to lie to you, I think I am far from well . . ."

The young man stammered: "I would help you if I could, my good woman, but . . . to tell you the truth, I have nothing, too. Believe me when I tell you—I am an actor, I have nothing."

Then the old woman shrugged herself into a different attitude. She managed to raise her head. As the lightning flashed again, she said: "This is foul weather, sir. Come in, come in, out of the storm! My house is yours. . . . Kate, take the gentleman’s boots off! Bring hot spiced wine! . . . Give? Pardon me, I could not have heard you right, sir. Pardon me, it is I who give, I, you understand."

A wretched little grey cat crept in out of the storm. The old woman called: "Gib, Gib, Gib!" and when the cat approached her, she laughed, embracing it, and said, with a sob of relief: "It is Gib! Why, thank God, then it was nothing but a dream. Oh, sweet Jesu, thanks! Now let me sleep a little, and then I shall be awake."

Holding the cat, she closed her eyes. In her chest, or
low down in her throat, there started a noise which (the young man mentally noted) was not dissimilar to the sound made by Mr. Arthur's lute when some mischievous boy poured into it a handful of dried peas. The rain was falling less heavily. Tentatively, he looked out. He accosted a passing watchman, and said: "There is a woman here who is dying, as I believe."

"Then the Lord have mercy upon her. What am I to do? Am I a surgeon?" The watchman looked closer, in the light of his lantern. "Oh yes, poor soul," he said. "I know her. She's crazed. Poor soul, she was a gentlewoman, once. Her husband's name was Iremonger. He was a haberdasher. Time was when she was Mistress Leah. Her husband died, and everything went to the three sons, who played ducks-and-drakes with the money. Their wives couldn't bear the old lady, and sent her from pillar to post, from one to t'other. They put her out of house and home, in the end, having run through everything. One of the daughters-in-law even poisoned her cat, and it was then, as I guess, that Mistress Leah went mad."

"She's dying," said the young man.

The watchman said, in his watchman's way—as if he were allowing a suspect to go through a gate—"Let her pass, let her pass."

Suddenly, the rattling in Mistress Leah's throat ceased, and all that could be heard was the purring of the cat.

The rain had stopped. The young man went away. As he went to bed, he said to himself: "That was magnificent, the way she cried against the thunder! 'Crack your cheeks!'—and then that business with the paving stones. I mustn't forget that. Oh, the magnificent tragedy of it! And, at last, to die in a doorway, bemused. Crowning touch of pathetic irony, or ironic pathos—call it what you will—that cat! 'Gib, Gib, Gib!' she says, as the starved beast creeps for warmth to her starved bosom; and, touching its sad bedraggled fur, she shines with a glory of relief, and dies dreaming that her agony has been a dream—a dream within a dream encompassed by a sleep..."

He yawned, then wondered: "Would Burbage allow it—
an old beggar woman? No, he must play kings, and rant and rave. Pity. Still, the tragedy is there. Call Mistress Leah, King Lear. The public could never see tragedy in a haberdasher’s wife, anyway. Instead of a shop, a kingdom. Instead of sons, daughters. Instead of a cat, some kind of serio-comic clown, some faithful fool . . . By God, I’ll make shift to write it, when they let me, and call it *The Tragedy of King Lear*, or something like that.”

Falling asleep, young Willie Shakespeare lamented: “The business of the dream-within-the-dream is beautiful, but I don’t believe they’d let me use the device. . . . And the cat, I fear, would not be practical . . .”

Then he slept and, in the morning, believed that he had not dreamed.
"MADAME, I have the honor of wishing you a very good night," said Ratapoil, kissing his wife's fingers. She curtsied graciously. Tessier started then, for a three- branched candlestick seemed to detach itself of its own accord from the shadows in a far corner of the dining room. It was only a slave lighting Madame Ratapoil upstairs, but he was as dark and silent as smoke out of a magical Arabian bottle.

The lady having been bowed out, Ratapoil threw off his gold-buttoned blue coat and loosened his waistcoat, and the waistband of his trousers too.

Tessier said dryly, "Aie, Ratapoil, old wolf! You stand on ceremony nowadays!"

Ratapoil said, half apologetically, "Tessier, old comrade, in a savage country it is a gentleman's duty to preserve the decencies."

"You have done well for yourself," said Tessier, draining his glass. "You have come a long way, Ratapoil, since you and I dined off dried dates and crawling green water under the Pyramids—not that it is much cooler here in New Orleans." A great black hand came down over his shoulder and filled his glass from a crystal decanter. "Eh, Ratapoil! Is that a man or a ghost? Send him to bed! I hate people coming up behind me like that."

Ratapoil dismissed the slave with a jerk of the head. "Not a bad boy, that one," he said. "He is worth five dollars a pound and weighs a hundred and ninety-five, but I won him at piquet, as against three hogshead of rum."
"What, so now he deals in rum and slaves! Molière gave us the Bourgeois Gentilhomme; Ratapoil gives us the Gentilhomme Bourgeois! Ratapoil turns tradesman. Aie, but times have changed!"

Ratapoil said, "So they have, old fellow. And one must move with them; although, if anyone but you called me a tradesman he should feel a few inches of my sword in his tripes within ten minutes." He sighed. "But nobody would dare. Here, as heretofore, I am still Ratapoil, the Jack of Swords. Nobody dares to challenge me in New Orleans, any more than they did in Paris in the old days, unless they happen to be very drunk. Then I pink them in the arm to teach them better manners or, if they are very young, simply disarm them. Oho, I assure you, Tessier, the Creoles treat me with the respect to which I am accustomed. But among themselves they fight like the very devil, either with the colchemarde or else the sword cane. Not your line, eh, old comrade?"

Tessier shook his head, and said, "No. I used to have a tolerably light hand with a rapier fifteen or twenty years ago. Your colchemarde, however, you can keep; it is nothing but a triangular pig-sticker. I am an artilleryman, when all is said and done. Well, I take it that you have not made your fortune exclusively as master of arms in New Orleans? For example, this fine house, 'three hogshead of rum' for a slave in livery, et cetera."

"Oh, one thing leads to another," said Ratapoil. "In this country one finds oneself becoming a tradesman in spite of oneself. If you want to twist the play titles of Molière, you can call me 'Le Bourgeois Malgré Lui.' Clever, eh? I opened my little académie in the Vieux Carré, in the spring of 1813. It was not done, I may say, without a little bloodshed. The master of fence at that time was a Swiss named Harter. One word led to another, we measured swords, he was buried the following day—nothing keeps long in this humidity—and I took over. I challenged a Spanish fencing master and, on his decease, accommodated his pupils also. By way of advertisement, I then challenged the entire army of His Majesty, the King of Spain, to come on, one at a time, with saber, rapier or colchemarde, for
the honor of France. Only half a dozen Spaniards took up the challenge; if that child's play had gone on, His Catholic Majesty would have had to abdicate for lack of soldiers. Meanwhile, I played a little at cards and dice. Nobody dared to cheat me. I won. The stakes were money or money's worth—rum, molasses, cane sugar, coffee or what not. What do you do with a storehouseful of such truck?"

"Sell it," said Tessier.

"Exactly; thereby becoming a kind of merchant. For example, I bought this house with tobacco. I may also mention that at this time we were living at the St. Timothy Hotel, at a cost of thirty dollars a month. You may remember that my dear wife Louise was brought up by a most respectable aunt, who used to let elegant furnished apartments to unmarried gentlemen in one of the best quarters of Paris."

"I remember your attic room," said Tessier.

"To cut a long story short," said Ratapoil, "Louise said, 'They are robbing us, my dear. I could provide accommodation twice as good for twenty dollars a month. The steamboats are on the river now; elegant ladies and gentlemen are coming into New Orleans in place of the Kaïnoucks, the flatboat men. Let us build a fine hotel, stylishly furnished.' 'To provide good food and lodging, twice as good as at the St. Timothy, for twenty dollars a month?' I asked. She said: 'No; for forty dollars a month. And, since you must gamble, why not do it under your own roof? We could set apart a nicely appointed room for cards, and so forth, strictly for the nobility, and with you to keep order—' In brief, old comrade, I am merchant, innkeeper and anything you like. I am rotten rich. And I take this opportunity of telling you that, with the exception of my wife and my toothbrush, everything I have is yours to command."

"I do not want a wife," said Tessier, "and I have no need for a toothbrush." He bared his toothless gums.

"You used to have excellent teeth," said Ratapoil.

"I have none left that show—I was kicked in the face by a horse."
“Then drink, Tessier, drink. Brandy needs no chewing.”

Tessier drank, muttering, “The devil take all horses, and, in particular, dapple-gray mares that show the whites of their eyes. Believe me, Ratapoil; men, women and horses are never to be trusted when they show the whites of their eyes below the iris. Also, beware of Roman noses; they, also, are signs of danger in men, women and horses.”

“I detest horses,” said Ratapoil. “But then, I am an infantryman, born and bred. I’d rather trust myself to my own two legs than to the four legs of that most hysterical and cowardly of beasts, the horse. Still, horses have their place in the world.”

“You are even beginning to think like a bourgeois,” said Tessier. “All the same, you are right. Every grain of sand has its assigned position in the scheme of things.”

“I should say so! Do you remember when I fought little LeGrand with pistols in Egypt? A grain of sand flew into my eye just as the handkerchief dropped, so that I missed him clean; otherwise I should certainly have shot him. As it turned out, I was in the wrong, and LeGrand and I became good friends, until he was killed at Eylau. It goes to show. But what were you doing on horseback at your time of life, Tessier?”

“Taking my place in the scheme of things,” said Tessier somberly, “dust that I am.”

His pale, toothless mouth pulsed like a frog’s throat as he sucked his cigar alight at a candle. Then he went on:

You Ratapoil, were always a Legitimist at heart. I, at bottom, was always a good Republican. But both of us loved France first and foremost; therefore, we gave of our best to Napoleon for the greater glory of France. And, after we had grown old in his service, Bonaparte brushed us off, like dust from his cuffs; you for breach of discipline, me as a political suspect. Then we said, in effect: “Beware of the dust, O Emperor! The wrath of God waits in the dust!” Only you said “God,” and I said “History.” And we joined little anti-Napoleonist clubs.

You were in the Malet Plot; I was a member of the
Brutus Club. Still, we were old comrades and helped each other. You escaped from France by the skin of your teeth in 1812, and came here to America. I stayed, more fool me!

I still clung to some mad hope of a republican coup. If that hope had been realized—which it could not have been, because the time was not ripe for it—I should now be a general. As events occurred, Louis XVIII came back to France when Napoleon went to Elba.

You, wisely, stayed in New Orleans. But where was I to go? Whichever way the cat jumped, I was the mouse. At that time, the Bonapartists hated me; the Legitimists hated me; the Republicans, driven underground, split into a hundred tiny sects, every one of which execrated me as a heretic, a Republican of the old-fashioned classical school.

I got out of Paris and wandered, living from hand to mouth. For a while, I was a waiter in Antwerp, and then I worked for a bookseller in England, compiling a French grammar and phrase book for young ladies. Then I went to Belgium, as courier and what-you-will to an Anglo-Indian gentleman. But not long after Napoleon returned from Elba and the infantry hailed him again as Emperor, my nabob paid me off and made for Flushing and the sea in a light carriage, leaving me with a trunkful of soiled linen and one of his horses—a dapple-gray mare named Cocotte.

Before my nabob left me, Cocotte had cast a shoe on that appalling stretch of road between Marchienne and Fontaine l’Évêque, by the River Sambre; a most desolate and dreadful place. It was a wet spring, that spring of 1815, and nowhere wetter or more somber than at Marchienne.

We had put up at a questionable kind of inn. Originally it had been named L’Aiglon, the Young Eagle. As soon as Napoleon was deposed the landlord had painted out his sign, leaving it blank. Later he had daubed on a fleur-de-lis. When we arrived he was trying to smear back the eagle—the news of the Emperor’s return from Elba had already broken.
This innkeeper's name was Morkens, and he was a boor. He had some arrangement with the local blacksmith: if a traveler lost a tire, a horseshoe or the merest linchpin, the blacksmith would detain him, so that he was compelled to stay with Morkens. Morkens charged the traveler treble, and the blacksmith charged him quintuple; each paid the other commission.

We paused at this inn—call it what you will—intending to stop for two hours. Two days later the mare was still unshod. "Is it my fault?" whines this execrable Morkens. "If milord is in a hurry, I can sell him a horse."

"Do so," says my master, and Morkens sells him an abominable screw for the price of a thoroughbred, swearing that he is taking the bread out of his children's mouths.

"I'll pay!" cries my nabob, dashing down golden guineas. Then, to me, "Here's your money, my good man. Can't take you with me. Traveling light; can't spare weight. Here's another ten guineas for you."

"Your trunk, milord? The mare?" I ask.

"Oh, damn the trunk and confound the mare! Keep 'em! I'm away!" cries he. And off he went.

The chaise was not out of sight when this Morkens turned to me and said, "The linen he left behind in that trunk is of the finest cambric."

"How do you know?" I asked.

"Oh," said Morkens, "I gathered as much from the quality of the stuff your master had on his back. Why do you ask? Would I look in his trunks?"

"Of course not," I answered.

You understand; my instinct warned me to continue to play the perfect courier cum valet de chambre with this Morkens. I spoke primly, but at the same time gave him a sidelong glance, smiling with the right-hand corner of my mouth, while I winked with the left eye, falling impassive again, upon the instant.

"Now, look here," said he; "then we'll go halves."


"Oh, linen and what not," said Morkens. "The linen, the horse—"
"But milord gave the horse and the linen to me, my friend," I said. "You heard him."

He shouted, "Hey, Marie!" and his wife came out. She was good-looking in the Flemish style—a skin like cream and hair like copper. The cream soon goes cheesy and the copper tarnishes; still, while their looks last, Flemish women, as you know, are very pretty, if you like something to get hold of—if you understand what I mean. Marie Morkens must have been a good twenty years younger than her hogshead of a husband, and she had the sleek look and something of the coloring of a fine, healthy, tortoise-shell cat. I remember that she had golden eyelashes; never trust a woman with fair eyelashes.

"My darling," said Morkens, "did we hear milord giving his horse and his linen to this gentleman?"

She answered, "Of course not, my dear. Hey, Cornelys, come here!"

Cornelys, the blacksmith, whose smithy was only twenty yards away, come running, hammer in hand, and stood open mouthed, a veritable Vulcan with his leather apron and his blackened face. He stood, grinning like an idiot, rolling his inflamed eyes at the innkeeper's wife, with whom he was obviously head over heels in love.

"Cornelys," said she, "you did not hear the English milord giving his horse and his linen to this gentleman here, did you?"

"No."

"You heard him giving them to my husband, didn't you?"

"Did I? Oh, yes, I remember now. That's right; to your husband, certainly," said this idiot.

Morkens said, "So there you are!"

You know, my friend, that I am nicknamed The Fox. I am supposed to be incredibly clever. In point of fact, I am not; I pass as clever only because, in an emergency, I keep a cool head, hold my tongue, keep my temper and wait to see which way the cat jumps. I hold by the old apothegm, "To the ignorant much is told," moreover. I give way as little as possible, and prefer to profess, above all, an abysmal ignorance of foreign languages when in
out-of-the-way places. In Flanders, for example, I pretended not to understand Flemish, although I understand it perfectly; thus, I overheard many interesting things, as will soon be evident.

Now, the woman turned to her husband and in the barbarous dialect of the locality—it always reminds me of a dog with a bone in his throat—said, "Joris, give him the horse. One side or the other will be advancing or retreating any day now, and horses will be commandeered anyway."

"Give him the horse? Are you out of your mind, wife?"
She purred in her throat, "Give him the horse, I say, husband; and sell him a saddle."
"You are right, my heart."

"I am not your heart, you fat lump; I am your brain, you fool. Let me handle this," said she. Then to me, in French: "Nevertheless, monsieur, it is not in my character to see a traveler stranded in this Godforsaken mud. My husband is willing to lend you milord's horse. A light rider, like yourself, can easily overtake milord's coach, which will be going heavily, the roads being as they are. You can join milord at Flushing, and all's well that ends well. No?"

I said, with simulated reluctance, "Very well. I see that I am outnumbered here. Shoe me the mare and let me go."

The blacksmith said, "Oh, as for that—ten minutes! The shoe is made."

So I led the dapple gray mare out of the stable and to the forge. Madame Morkens accompanied me. She stood, hugging herself as if in secret delight at some incommunicable titillating thought, as such women will, while Cornelys went to work with rasp and hammer. That lovesick clown's mind was not on his work. Every other second he paused to make sheep's eyes at Madame Morkens. Once, indeed, while he was driving home the first nail, the mare Cocotte almost kicked him into his own fire.

"Easy, there!" I said. "Do you want to lame the beast?"
"She's vicious," he said.
"You are clumsy," said I; "you are not nailing a plank to a joist!"

He cursed me obscenely in Flemish, and when I said, "I
beg pardon?” he said in French, “I was simply saying ‘You are quite right, monsier.’”

So, at last, Cocotte was shod and I led her back to the inn. Madame Morkens lingered for a few seconds. I heard the smack of a boorish kiss, and when she joined me, she was wiping soot from her face with her apron. And then the rain came down again—but what rain! Every drop hit the mud with a smack and a splash like a musket ball.

The landlord had prepared some pleasant concoction of mulled spiced wine. He said, “Well, so now you have your horse all right and tight. No doubt monsieur is an expert bareback rider, like the ladies in the circus?” I asked him what he meant, as if I did not know. He continued, “Monsieur proposes, no doubt, to ride to Flushing without a saddle?”

“Oh, oh!” said I. “I never thought of that. Oh, dear!”

“As luck will have it,” he said, “I have a fine English hunting saddle, almost brand-new. I can let you have it dirt-cheap, if you like.”

“I’d like to have a look at it,” I said.

You see, it was my intention to have him saddle and harness Cocotte, and then, pretending to try the saddle for comfort, to get my feet in the stirrups, give the mare the edge of my heel, and so away.

But he said, “Oh, the saddle’s in the stable and the rain is coming down in bucketfuls. Let it give over. Why hurry?”

The saddle was in the stable, then; that was something worth knowing.

She said, “In any case, it will soon be dark, monsieur, and the roads are terrible. Best take your dinner at your ease and stay the night, and make a good start at daybreak,” and gave her husband a quick, sidelong look that chilled my blood.

She had seen milord give me my pay, thirty guineas, and ten guineas over and above that for a tip; besides, I had twenty guineas more in my purse. And I have seen a throat cut for five francs in wayside inns in Flanders!

Morkens muttered in Flemish, “It’s dangerous.”

“Fool!” she said. “In a few days, after the battle, the
whole countryside will be littered with stabbed carcasses. Who will count one more or less?"

I said, "I beg pardon?"

She said, "I was saying 'More haste, less speed,' and telling my husband to go and kill a capon for dinner."

"Oh, well," I said, "no doubt you are right. The weather is, as you say, impossible. I will go to my room and pack my little valise in readiness for the morning."

They had given me a horrid little closet of a room overlooking the yard, and smelling abominably of the stable, but I was glad of it now. If the window was too small to let the daylight in, it was not too small to let me out, and if I hung by my hands from the sill, I should have only a six-foot drop to the yard. So far, so good.

Also, I had another idea. You know that I am still troubled periodically with my old Egyptian dysentery. When it begins to trouble me, I take ten drops of tincture of laudanum, which is nothing more nor less than opium. In case of emergency, I always carry a vial of it wherever I go. I took this vial out of my valise now and slipped it into my pocket—a good two ounces of the stuff.

Then I went downstairs and waited. Madame Morkens was roasting the chicken, and her husband was setting the table. I guessed that their plan was to make me comfortably drowsy with good food and wine—he had brought up a couple of sealed bottles of his best from the cellar—and then, quite simply, knock me on the head. The woman alone would have been more than a match for a shrimp like me, to say nothing of her ox of a husband. I carried a little pair of pocket pistols, it is true, but I always keep my small arms for use if all else fails.

So. While we were picking the bones of the capon, I, pretending to be a little lively with wine, said, "Upon my word, madame, you are a cook fit for a king, and beautiful as a queen! And you, Monsieur Morkens, are a jolly good fellow! I'll tell you what—I'll stand you a bowl of rum punch in the English style, and mix it myself according to Lord Whiterock's own secret recipe. You, old fellow, will be so kind as to fetch me a bottle of rum, a bottle of brandy and a bottle of port wine. . . . You, madame, will get me
lemons and sugar, nutmeg and ginger, cinnamon and cloves. And I see a fine old ale bowl over there which will be the very thing to mix it in!"

It worked. He went to fetch the spirits and the wine; she took her keys to the spice cupboard; and I, uncorking my bottle, emptied it rapidly into the bowl. It went without a hitch. In fifteen minutes the punch was mixed. Laudanum has a bitter, cloying taste, but the rum, the brandy, the port, the sugar and the spices that I mixed in that punch would have disguised it if it had been so much asafetida. I insisted on filling immense bumpers. You understand, I had been taking laudanum therapeutically for twenty years or so, so that what I swallowed in my punch was merely a homeopathic dose. But the effect of the drug on the Morkenses soon became apparent. Their minds wandered; the pupils of their eyes contracted. They drank again and again, not knowing or caring how much they drank, never noticing that I had taken no more than one glass. All the same, they were tough, those two!

It was eleven o'clock before Madame Morkens became unconscious. Her husband saw her fall across the table. He pointed at her, chuckling stupidly, and then rolled sideways out of his chair and fell to the floor with a crash. "Hodie mihi, cras tibi," I said, "today for me, tomorrow for thee, my friends. And now I think I will punish you a little. A vindictive man would burn your inn over your heads. But I——"

In short, I went through their pockets, et cetera, for their keys. As I had guessed, it was the woman who had in her keeping the most important of the keys—one in particular, a little one, suspended on a piece of string which she wore about her neck. The key of the cashbox, evidently. And where would they hide their cashbox, these two? Unquestionably under their bed. It was so. After twenty years in the Grande Armée one acquires experience in looting, eh?

I found the loose plank and had that cashbox open in five minutes. It contained bank notes and gold to the value of about seventy thousand livres, which I stuffed into my pockets.
Then I took my little valise and put on my cloak and my hat and went out. The landlord and his wife were snoring loudly. I had nothing to fear from them. The great dog in the yard barked furiously, but luckily for me he was chained. I got into the stable with the aid of Morkens’ key, and lit the lantern, by good luck, in no time at all. I always keep my tinderbox dry, as you know. The saddle was hanging on a nail. It was a moldering old English hunting saddle, but I made shift to buckle it on the mare Cocotte.

I had my foot in the stirrup and was ready to mount, when I heard another horseman approaching.

Now the manner of his approach made me pause. A bona fide traveler, coming to an inn at night, makes a noise, shouts, “Landlord! Landlord!” Is, in fact, in a devil of a hurry to get in out of the rain; especially, on such a night as this was. Furthermore, I heard him speak to the dog in Flemish, and the dog was silent. A friend of the family, evidently. He tried the front door and found it locked. Then, leading his horse, which was very weary, he came around to the back.

Believe me when I tell you that I slid out of the stirrup and into the hay as I heard that fellow approach. His horse, alone, came into the stable before him; he had been there before; he knew his way. I could not see him; he was of the color of the darkness, an iron-shod shadow, only I heard him walking and breathing.

Also I heard the rider knocking upon the back door of the inn and calling in a kind of subdued shout, “Morkens, Morkens!” There was no answer. He came stumbling and splashing back, cursing at the end of his teeth, and I heard him call the name of Cornelys. The rain washed most of his voice away; all the same, I heard him between the drops: “Cornelys! Cornelys!”

Here, you may say, was the time to get out. So it was. But you know that there are times when curiosity is somewhat stronger than the desire to live. I had guessed that this night bird, since he was in the confidence of Morkens, who was a cutthroat, must be some sort of highway robber—especially since he came quietly by night, on an exhausted horse. I wanted to know more, quite simply; therefore, I
waited, particularly after I heard him call for Cornelys, the blacksmith, who was another thoroughgoing rascal.

Cornelys came soon, with a lantern. By the sound of him I knew that he was booted and spurred—a nice way for a simple blacksmith to be at that time of night, on a lonely road! Furthermore, his voice had changed somewhat since last I had heard it; now he spoke hard and tight.

Following the newcomer into the stable, Cornelys said, “What’s this? What’s the matter with Morkens and Marie?”

He spoke in Flemish, and in Flemish the other man replied, “Dead drunk in the kitchen.”

“Impossible,” said Cornelys. “Can’t be. Not now!”

“No? Go and see.”

He went, but soon returned, grunting incredulously, “This night of all nights!”

The other man groaned.

“What’s the matter with you, Klaes? Are you hurt?” asked Cornelys.

“No; tired, dead tired, Cornelys. Dropping where I stand,” said the man who had been addressed as Klaes. Indeed, he sounded tired.

“Makes no difference. So much the worse for them,” said Cornelys, the blacksmith. “In any case, it was I who was to carry the word. I am ready. . . . Well?”

“Well,” said the man called Klaes, speaking very deliberately, like a man who is drunk or used up. “Get it right the first time, Cornelys, because I swear I’m in no condition to repeat it. . . . Oh, dear God, how tired I am! . . . Listen carefully, now; the password is the English word, ‘Ditch.’ Have you got that?”

“Ditch,” said Cornelys.

“You will pass that word to Collaert’s vedettes,” said Klaes.

“Where?” asked Cornelys.

“Between here and Braine-le-Comte,” Klaes said.

“I will pass the word ‘Ditch’ to Collaert’s vedettes between here and Braine-le-Comte,” Cornelys said. “And then?”

“Then you will be conducted at once to General Collaert of the cavalry, by his aide-de-camp, Brigadier de Beuke-
larer, who will have a fresh horse waiting. You will tell your message to Collaert in person. This is what you will say: ‘That you come from Jan Klaes’—that, of course, is myself. ‘That Klaes has been compelled to take devious roads because he has been shadowed. That Jan Klaes has been forty-eight hours in the saddle, and, therefore, sends you to deliver to Collaert a message which should have gone in advance to Wellington at Brussels.’ Is this fixed in your mind?”

Cornelys repeated it, word perfect. He was not the fool that he pretended to be. Or was he? I don’t know. I have known congenital idiots and nagging women who had that same curious knack of repeating, with just such exactitude, precisely what vibrated the nerves of their ears. Empty domes throw back the most perfect echoes. This Cornelys repeated the very inflection of the man Klaes, who, in something between a groan and a yawn, expressed approval, and then went on.

“Excellent. You will say this to Collaert, then: ‘Our man de Wissembourg,’ whom Collaert knows, ‘has taken the place of Lacoste as Napoleon’s guide. Napoleon is completely ignorant of the terrain around St. Lambert. It is reasonably certain that the Emperor will deploy his cavalry before the plateau of Mont St. Jean. This force of cavalry will consist mainly of Milhaud’s cuirassiers—twenty-six squadrons supported by Lefebvre-Desnoyette’s division. Altogether, between three and four thousand of the cream of Napoleon’s heavy cavalry.’ Have you got that?”

“I have. Continue.”

“Good. Listen again: ‘If Wellington makes a show of English infantry on the plateau of Mont St. Jean, behind a light covering fire of canister from the masked batteries on the Nivelles road, the odds are that Napoleon will make one of his master strokes—his heavy cavalry, en masse, will charge the English infantry line, with a view to smashing it and cutting the Allies in two, before the German reinforcements arrive; Blücher and Bülow being already delayed.’ Is that clear?”

“Perfectly clear—not that I understand. Go on. It is written in my head as on a slate.”
"You are neither expected nor required to understand, only to remember. Listen again: 'Before the French cavalry can reach the English infantry, therefore, they must cross a certain little road that runs across the plain from Ohain to Mont St. Jean.'"

"Cross it, how?" said Cornelys. "I know the Ohain road. Road? It is a ditch, twelve feet deep, banked up steep on either side. Mountaineers cross such a road, not cavalry. I know the Ohain road."

"All the better. Tell Collaert so, and answer clearly any questions he may ask. Meanwhile, remember again: 'If Wellington, having arranged his foot guards above the Ohain road, draws the main charge of Napoleon's heavy cavalry, he will break the head of Napoleon's sledge hammer and break off the jaws of his tongs too. It is Jan Klaes who says so, having received word from de Wissembourg, alias Lacoste, Napoleon's own guide.' For heaven's sake, is all I have said impressed upon your memory, Cornelys?"

"Every word," said the blacksmith, "firm as print, clear as ink—-Aie, aie! What's this?" He had put out his hand, instinctively stroking and stroking as blacksmiths will feeling the back of the mare Cocotte. "Why, may I die, if Morkens hasn't saddled the Englishman's mare!"

"What Englishman? What mare?" Klaes asked.

"A bony dapple-gray, sixteen hands. I shod her myself today. Fed like a fighting cock. Broken to shafts and saddle, and good for anything; a horse for a lady or a gentleman."

"What Englishman?"

"Oh, a millionaire, a nabob. He left the horse as a tip for his valet; simple as that! Not to go into details, I guess that Morkens had her saddled and ready, knowing that my little gelding is a bit too light for my weight. This dapple-gray will carry two hundred pounds over fifty miles of mud. A good idea!" said Cornelys.

"The Englishman is gone. And the valet?" Klaes asked.

Cornelys said, "I think the valet won't be needing the dapple-gray tonight." I almost felt the darkness contract and expand as he winked unseen.
"Good," said Klaes. "To horse and away, hell for leather! Be off!"

But now Cornelys became insolent and, quoting some clownish proverb, "Patience, fleas, the night is long!" he then said, "Those two sots have left the best part of a half bowl of punch, eh?"

"Hurry," said Klaes.

But Cornelys insisted: "A stirrup cup first, and then we're off!"—and splashed back to the house.

Crouching in the hay with my hands on my pistols, I was almost sorry, then, for the man Klaes, squatting on his truss of straw; for I perceived the weary misery of him when—believing himself to be alone in the dark—he moaned, "O Lord, Lord, Lord! Is it for me to choose Your instruments? I can no more, I have done my best." Wow, but that man was tired?

Then the oaf Cornelys came back chuckling, saying, "May the Lord forgive all the sins of the man who mixed that punch! It goes down well on a night like this. I finished it to keep out the damp."

So, Cornelys had drunk the rest of my punch then! Good.

"Away with you!" cried Klaes. The blacksmith swung himself into Cocotte's saddle, said au revoir and was off.

I kept still in the hay, working over in my mind the tremendous significance of the message which Klaes had conveyed to Cornelys, and which Cornelys was to carry to Wellington. The weight of this message crushed the breath out of me, because the fate of an empire depended upon it. I knew that this messenger Cornelys must, at all costs, be intercepted and his message diverted. But, I ask you, how? Violence is not in my line—I live or die by my wits. He was a powerful and resolute man, mounted on a strong, fresh horse. I was a shrimp of a man with nothing to put between my thighs but an exhausted scrub. True, I had a pair of pistols in my pockets; so, without doubt, had Cornelys.

But the odds, as I counted them, were evened by the laudanum in the punch Cornelys had drunk. He had told Klaes that he had drunk half a bowl of the mixture; so he
had—the shallower half of the bowl, which was, therefore, only a third of the total volume. Still, that should be sufficient, in a literal sense, to tip the balance—Cornelys’ equilibrium—in my favor.

In a flash, you realize, I had seen my duty. I did not like Napoleon; indeed, in my time I had plotted against him. But in this moment I saw him not as the renegade republican, not as the ingrate, not as the ambitious little deserter of Egypt and of Russia; I saw him as the old eagle, hatched again. I saw in him something symbolic of the spirit of the man that goeth upward. In this extraordinarily indomitable little rogue returned from Elba to confront the gathered might of the Allies, I saw—forgive the comparison—something of myself. I recaptured a little of the old enthusiasm. Yes, old comrade, I saw again the red dawn of Egypt. I knew then that I must, by hook or by crook, warn Napoleon of the menace at his elbow.

Ah, if only I had had with me, then, you or any one of half a dozen other stout fellows I could name! Then I should have let Cornelys carry his message to Collaert, while you carried to Napoleon the intelligence of that message well in advance. Thus, forewarned, having allowed the English infantry to form, Napoleon would have fallen upon their left flank and carried the plateau of Mont St. Jean!

But I was alone, and only one course was open to me: I must intercept Cornelys before he reached Collaert and cut him down. This, as a first move, was the wisest for me, situated as I was. I had something like a dog’s chance of overtaking Cornelys, and then, mounted on the mare Co-cotte, making my way to the French lines. And this I resolved to do.

Hence, when the tired man Klaes dragged himself back to the inn, I mounted that weary horse of his and, using my penknife for a spur, made after the blacksmith. That horse had heart. He drew a long breath and hit the road.

And do you know what, old comrade in arms? Then, it was as if I had shed the weight of a quarter of a century. I felt as I had felt on a certain dawn in the spring of 1795, when, seeing sunlight through the powder smoke, I first
realized that I was a grown man and, therefore, too old to be afraid. Then my heart, which had been flapping and fluttering somewhere below my belt, found its wings and soared, singing to high heaven; fear of death was a shadow in the valley far below and far behind me; and I laughed and cried, delighting in my new-found freedom from that fear.

So I felt, then, when I nudged and goaded Klaes' weary horse back into the mud and the darkness. Ah, but that was an enchanted moment! How good it was to feel that rain, and to see so far away that struggling, watery moonlight!

The horse seemed to catch my exhilaration. He was winded so that I might have been sitting astride Cornelys' own heaving, wheezing bellows, but still he galloped. All the same, exaltation apart, my reason had not deserted me. The blacksmith was mounted on Cocotte, who was strong and fresh and had the start of my poor nag. But I had not forgotten that within the hour Cornelys should be most insecure in that little hunting saddle, if he was seated at all. By the time I overtook him he must in any case be too befuddled to aim a pistol, and then I should have him.

I planned to put a ball in his thick head, take his mount and ride belly-to-earth northeast to the first French outpost, where I would pass the word: "The so-called Lacoste, the Emperor's guide, is an enemy agent; beware the sunken road between Ohain and Braine la Leud, between the French front and the plateau of Mont St. Jean."

So, I rode, only God knows how, for that road was rutted inches deep under a layer of red clay whipped by the rain and mashed by a million wheels and hoofs into a most dangerous mire. And then, that rain! The Deluge was come again. I believe that summer of 1815 was the wettest summer in the history of the world. It was as if Fate, in a sporting mood, seeing two tremendous adversaries coming to hand grips, had said, "You shall wrestle in the Indian style, my children—in a pit of slippery mud, just to make the game a little more difficult."

A storm broke, and at every clap of thunder the whole black sky splintered like a window struck by a bullet—
starred and cracked in ten thousand directions letting in flashes of dazzling light, so that I was stunned and bewildered. Doctor Mesmer—he also dressed all in black—used to daze his subjects with little mirrors revolving before their eyes in order to put them to sleep. So the elements under the black cloak of the night seemed resolved to mesmerize me.

But my brave horse carried me on until, at a bend in the road, he stumbled and shuddered, went down on his knees and rolled over on his side. I sprang clear just in time; tugged at the reins, shouted encouraging words; then let go his head. He was dead. He had burst his heart.

I stood by my dead horse, sick with hopelessness. But then the lightning flashed again, and I saw, not a hundred paces in front of me, the big gray mare, Cocotte, walking very slowly, riderless in the rain. I made my way to her, and you may rest assured that I had my hands on my pistols under my cloak. When I reached her, I saw in the light of another flash why she was walking slowly. The blacksmith, Cornelys, had tumbled out of the saddle, his left foot had caught in the stirrup, and she was dragging his enormous bulk in the clinging mud.

Hope flamed high again. I was sure, then, that Fate was on my side. Cornelys was not dead; only drugged and stunned. In a little while he would recover and continue on his errand as best he could. But first he would have to find another horse; he would be seriously delayed. Before he could be well on the road again to carry his message to Collaert at Braine-le-Comte I should be halfway to Genappe, where Napoleon was!

I disengaged his boot from the stirrup. His ankle was broken: So much the better! I sprang into the little hunting saddle on the back of the gray mare, turned her head, cried, "Hue! Hue! Hue, Cocotte!" and galloped back down the road over which I had traveled; away, away, past that accursed inn, through Fontaine l'Évêque, and so in the direction of our French outposts; past Drapçeu, through St. Estelle-sur-Ruth; and, as I rode, I dreamed fine dreams and even—could I have mixed that punch too strong even
for my own head?—made up little songs which I sang inside myself to Cocotte’s hoofbeats:

*Rataplon, rataplon,*  
*Napoléon,*  
*Éveille, éveille,*  
*Tessier,*  
*Au tron, au tron,*  
*Napoléon.*

And then, not far from Trois Ruisseaux—you know my luck—the rhythm halted and changed. The mare Cocotte had gone lame and was limping on her off hind leg.

I assumed that she had picked up a flint or, perhaps, a bit of a broken spike from those deplorable roads. So, saying, “Patience, Cocotte, my darling; we will put you right in no time at all, and you shall yet help Tessier to save France,” I dismounted, took out my pocket knife, and lifting up the mare’s lame hoof, explored it with my fingertips, since there was no light to see by. I could feel nothing amiss. Then I remembered how Cocotte had started and kicked while Cornelys, the blacksmith, driving home a nail, was making eyes at the innkeeper’s wife, and my heart sank. He had lamed her through his inattention, the accursed idiot! I realized then that I would have done better to let Cornely’s go unpursued to find himself stuck in the mud with a lame mare, while I took my chance in the direction of the French lines. But I ask you, how was I to have foreseen this?

Full of bitterness, I let go Cocotte’s hoof. She shook her leg, and kicked me in the face. I do not know, my friend, how long I lay unconscious in the ditch. I know that when I came to myself I was lying on my back, blinking at a dirty sky from which the rain was no longer falling, and that for the moment I thought that I was again in Spain, when the English stormed the battery and an infantryman knocked me down with the butt of his musket. I was in the most atrocious pain, and my throat was full of blood. It was this very blood, this very pain, that brought me back to consciousness; for the blood made me cough, and the
cough shook my head, and my lower jaw was badly broken. Several of my teeth were embedded in my tongue, which was half bitten through.

I have, in my time, been wounded in almost every conceivable way. I have survived grapeshot in my ribs, a musket ball in the stomach, a pistol ball in the shoulder and, most miraculous of all, a biscayen ball in the hip—I say nothing of a bayonet thrust or a saber cut here and there—and I have had most of the fluxes, dysenteries and agues that our frail flesh is heir to; together with a rheumatic fever which, I believe, was the ultima Thule of punishment. But the gathered might of all my enemies, my friend, never inflicted upon me one half of the anguish I suffered under the hoof of that white-eyed devil of a dapple-gray mare!

The pain of the broken bones in my face was terrible. The agony of my bitten tongue was worse. But worst of all was the pain of a shattered nerve on the left-hand side of my face. It was as if some fiend had delicately pushed a wire into my left nostril, up through some fine passage at the back of the eyeball, and out at the ear—and then applied a powerful current of electricity. My face twitched and jerked like Galvani's frog.

However, never mind that. I took off my cravat and tied up my jaw, and then staggered away in search of my horse. Puzzle: find her! She had bolted, God knows where, sore foot and all. Blind with misery and the night, I walked, I cannot tell you how far or for how long, until at last I saw the lights of a wayside inn.

With my muddy, bloody, smashed face and my sodden black cloak, I must have looked like the Angel of Death himself, for the innkeeper fell back a pace when he saw me. I tried to speak, but I could not, so I pushed past him, seated myself, put down a gold napoleon and, taking out tablet and pencil, wrote the word: Cognac.

He shook his head; he could not read. Then, as best I could, I drew the outline of a bottle and a glass. I am no draftsman, but he understood, and brought brandy and a glass. Heavens above, but the raw spirit stung like a swarm of bees! Yet it stung me alert. I beckoned the man to my side and drew the outline of something like a horse, sad-
died, and put down on the table a handful of Morkens' gold.

He said, "Monsieur wants a horse? Monsieur is in luck, then. I have one only, a beautiful gray mare. She belonged to a Belgian colonel of cavalry. I could not part with her for less than a hundred louis d'or, but, seeing it's you, I'll throw in the saddle, a beautiful light saddle, the property of Milord Wellington himself. He brought it over from England when he hunted the fox in a blue coat to pass the time away, at the time of the Spanish blockades. The mare has been eating her head off in my stable for the past six months—God strike me dead if I lie! Well?"

I counted the rascal out his hundred gold pieces and followed him to the stable.

"I had her shod only this morning," said he, holding high his lantern.

And what did I see? You have guessed. Cocotte, Roman-nosed and supercilious as a camel, rolling her eyes at me in the dim yellow light.

There was nothin' to be gained by argument; there was no time to lose, and I was growing weaker and weaker. Cursing the innkeeper in my heart, I mounted, thinking, Filthy Cocotte. If I get off your back between this and Genappe, it will be to fall dead into the road. And, curse you, if you cannot take me there on your four legs, you must carry me on three.

So I rode again, still mounted on Cocotte. The rain was falling again, and now every drop of cold water on my sore head was like a blow with a hammer. Somewhere between my eyes something was revolving like one of those children's rattles composed of a springy strip of wood and a cogged wheel.

Brother, when you were a boy at school you learned the nature of the ancient Roman catapult? It was a system of stiff, springy beams mounted on a ponderous base. With ropes and winches, the ancient artillerymen dragged down the topmost end of the upright beam until it was bent almost to breaking point. To this beam was fastened a cup. In this cup they placed a great net bag filled with loose stones to the weight of about sixty pounds. The catapulter
pulled a trigger. The agonized, bent beam snapped upright, struck the crossbeam with a horrible jolt, thus sending the bag of stones whirling away in a giddy parabola. You remember? Believe me, I remembered! My spine was the strained upright, my shoulders were the crossbeam, my skull was the cup, my brains were the rattling stones; and every step Cocotte took pulled a trigger. I was too wretched even to cry out, because when I cried my tongue vibrated, and I could not bear that.

Yet, agonized as I was, I continued to think, asking myself, Dumb, wounded beast that I am, how shall I pass the sentries? How shall I deliver my message to the Emperor?

I answered myself, How, but in writing? I must write a series of messages on little pieces of paper; keep these messages in separate pockets of my waistcoat, and present them in their proper order.

I stopped again at a wretched farmhouse, Staying in the saddle—I should not have had the strength to remount—by the light of a lantern I wrote my notes and put them into their respective pockets. After that I bullied Cocotte back to the road, and so we struggled, splashing, on our way.

What was the name of that Greek who was doomed to push a great boulder up a steep hill forever and forever? I think his name was Sisyphus. I drink, comrade in arms, to Sisyphus; I think I know something of what he went through. It seemed to me—pain of bitten tongue and broken jaw apart—that I was condemned to ride eternally, through blinding rain and endless night, upon a lame mare, on a mission of honor, slipping back two paces for every pace that I covered. Soon I felt Cocotte weakening under me. Ah, well, poor beast, she, too, had her troubles!

I remembered that my great cloak, sodden with the rain, must weigh heavy, so I unclasped it at the throat and let it fall behind me. Everything was spinning and spitting sparks. There were fireworks in my head, I tell you! Still, I remembered that it is the odd, superfluous pound of weight that tries you at the last mile—and I was carrying in my pockets something like thirty thousand livres in gold and forty thousand in good paper. My friend, it was not entirely
delirium that inspired me to put my hands in my pockets and scatter to the mud and the rain more gold than I had ever touched in my life. The tail pockets of my coat were heavy with the stuff, after I had emptied the side and breast pockets; these same coattails were slapping heavily against Cocotte's belly.

My mind was set now on my objective. I unbuttoned my coat and let that fall, too, and felt lighter for the loss of it. Gold and bank notes were in that coat and my pistols too. I tore off my watch and chain, which also I tossed into the ditch. I would have kicked off my boots, only I dared not take my feet from the stirrups.

Now, then, I was riding in my shirt, trousers and waistcoat; there was no more to jettison. All the time, notwithstanding, Cocotte went slower and slower.

At last—it was dawn, I think—to my infinite relief, I heard a hoarse voice cry, “Who goes there?”

I could not speak, of course, so I pulled out my first written message. It said:

I have intelligence of the utmost importance to the Emperor. Conduct me to him immediately.

Tessier,
Colonel, Artillery.

A mounted trooper took the paper and handed it to another man. Seen through the curtain of the rain, through my tired eyes, he looked like one of those terra-cotta soldiers on terra-cotta horses that we used to play with when we were children; he was so plastered with mud. But he spoke very civilly in the French of Paris, saying, “What is your message, Colonel Tessier?”

I felt myself fainting, fading away. I had done all that I could do. I tapped my right-hand waistcoat pocket. It seems, then, that I slid out of the saddle; because I know that I had a sensation of falling, as it were, down the side of a mountain, and uppermost in my mind was a dread of what I should feel when my cracked face hit the road.

The terra-cotta man caught me. I heard him cry, “Hold up there, sir!”
I became senseless, as much from horror as from pain and exhaustion. He had cried out in English.

When I came to life again, I was lying on the floor in the kitchen of a farmhouse. My clothes had been stripped off, and I was wrapped in a dry cloak. They had put me by the fire, which was blazing bright. I saw, still dimly, a tight-faced officer in a blue uniform, sitting at a table between two pairs of candles. Standing beside him and behind him were four other officers in blue. I recognized that tight face; it belonged to Collaert, of the allied cavalry.

Also I saw my muddy waistcoat and trousers on a chair. Collaert was holding between a fastidious thumb and forefinger a little piece of paper which I knew. It was my second note. It said:

Sire! Your guide is a spy. His name is de Wissembourg. He is in the pay of the allies. He intends to misdirect you between Genappe and the plateau of Mont St. Jean. Wellington will place his infantry there, behind a sunken road, which leads from Ohain to Braine le Leud. For heaven’s sake, make reconnaissance of this terrain, against which Wellington hopes you will send cavalry.

Tessier,
Colonel (late), Artillery

It was anguish of spirit that made me cry out at this, not pain of the body. Someone put something like a rolled-up greatcoat under my head, and the voice of the terra-cotta man murmured in English, “No shame in missing your way on a night like last night, in weather like this. Cheer up, monsieur; better luck next time!” He was Captain Conconnel, of Lord Wellington’s staff, but I did not learn that until later.

I made certain unmistakable motions with my fingers. The Englishman said, “He wants to write something.”

They gave me pencil and paper, and I wrote: “Please give me a pistol and allow me to kill myself.”

But they did not. Couriers were dispatched to Wellington with the intelligence which I had believed I had de-
livered to Napoleon. A doctor came to set my jaw, and later, locked in a bedroom, guarded by a grizzled old English trooper, I lay and listened to the rain on the shutters; and soon I heard the guns of Waterloo, and oh, but I wept bitterly! I had not the strength to lift my hand to wipe my eyes. The trooper came and wiped them for me. He had no handkerchief, so he offered me his cuff, saying, "Easy does it, mounseer; steady on, froggie. You'll be a man before your mother yet." But he, also, was listening to the guns.

I need not tell you what happened. Blücher was delayed, indeed. The English cavalry was cut to pieces, and we had the balance of artillery in our favor. It remained only to break that infernal English infantry and the battle was in our hands. Napoleon knew this, and, therefore, he ordered that terrible charge of cuirassiers at the plateau of Mont St. Jean. The guide Lacoste—in other words, the spy de Wissembourg—was at his elbow at the very moment when he gave that order. Lacoste, as he is called, omitted to mention the "hollow road" of Ohain. There is no stopping a full charge of armored cavalry, as you know. Before they could begin to pull up, two thousand cuirassiers were in the ditch of Ohain; the remainder were flying in disorder under volley upon volley of musket fire; demoralization had set in; the English had re-formed and were attacking; and that was the end of us. Napoleon fled. So, brother, France fell. I blame myself for that.

Tessier sighed and lit a fresh cigar. Ratapoil said, "Come now, old mustache. How can you talk like that? There are more causes than one to any conclusion. You might, for example, also say that Cornelys, the blacksmith, won the Battle of Waterloo because, making eyes at the innkeeper's wife, he lamed your mare. No one is to blame—though, had I been you——"

"Don't say it," said Tessier. "You asked me to tell how I lost my teeth, and I have told you. And now, with your kind permission, I will go to bed."
The Dancing Doll

"In your shallow and filthy horse-ponds," said Leonardo da Vinci to the young Duke, "there lives a certain maggot or larva. It is most interesting. I have observed it closely. It has a tail like a whip—"

"Oh, damn your miserable grubs!" cried the young Duke. "My race is threatened with extinction, and here he talks of larvae, worms, grubs, maggots! Ser Leonardo, make me some sense, or else!"

Leonardo da Vinci, smoothing his blond beard, said: "Your Magnificence's race is threatened with extinction. Just so. Pardon, pardon; I forgot—your son is ill. It is as I foresaw. He has the flux that comes from the dirty water of this place, together with the fever out of the swamps. That fever, that intermittent fever with delirium! How often have I seen it in the Abruzzi, or in the Campagna, where the mosquitoes are!"

"Here he goes again, with his insects!" cried the Duke. "What, am I to kill flies, with an armed enemy at my gates!"

Leonardo said: "Magnifico, all flesh is grass. All grass is water. Let us not go into this matter again, until you are calm enough to consider it objectively. I am at fault, and I beg pardon. You have great affairs upon your mind—and I talk of insects."

The Duke said: "Great affairs! You aren't far wrong. The enemy is over the river, and my little Ercole is dying. . . . Easy for you, fellow, to talk of my affairs! I can capitulate, yes; but then—what? If only the dogs would fight in the open, like men! Even a siege, even a war of attrition,
I could bear, if it were not for my little Ercole." He gripped Leonardo by the shoulder, and shouted: "My son, damn you! My son—save me my son!—and let the enemy come in."

Leonardo da Vinci said: "Be calm, Magnifico. The little boy will live. He has swamp fever. It is necessary only to keep him warm—"

"Warm? The child burns, and you say: 'Keep him warm.'"

"Keep him warm, and give him hot infusions, together with as much water as he can drink. To every cup of water add a pinch or two of salt," said Leonardo. His hands were busy, meanwhile, with a sheet of parchment, and a pen-knife.

"And you can only talk of maggots!" said the Duke. "I have half a mind—"

"To hang me up? You have the right, Magnifico; but don't do it! Wait a bit. . . . Touching the matter of these grubs, or maggots—these larvae—be pleased to let me finish."

The Duke started up in exacerbated fury, but da Vinci waved him back to his seat with a gesture so imperious that the Duke, sitting down in spite of himself, muttered: "Who is the master here?"

Leonardo da Vinci continued, still cutting shapes out of the parchment: "Now, it is written in the Vulgate that Samson found a hive of bees in the carcass of the lion he tore asunder. This, of course, could not be, because bees are clean creatures, and do not breed in carrion."

"Well? Make your point, man, make your point!"

Unperturbed, the other man went on: "I say, the insects Samson found in the carcass of the lion were not bees, but drone flies."

"But what has this to do with—"

"Oh, please! Allow me to finish, Magnifico. This drone fly, such as we see in such numbers on our battlefields, is the product of a certain grub, after it has pupated. . . . Be patient with me for a while. This grub, which is about as long as the middle joint of of your forefinger, but only a quarter as thick—the grub that becomes the drone-fly—"
lives, as I have observed, at the bottom of any foul pond."

"What are you cutting out there?" the Duke asked.

"Oh, a head, torso, and limbs. Then, I will paint them, and make a little marionette. The limbs, as you will see, will be divided in three. Each to each, I will join them with a tiny knotted string. Then, running my string down the back, and connecting it with the knots at the neck, shoulders, and hips, your son will have a little man who will dance on a thread..."

"I don't quite see that," said the Duke.

"You will, Magnifico, in ten minutes," said Leonardo, mixing colors. "The boy needs the wherewithal to occupy his little mind. Well, well, he shall have a soldier in red and blue, who dances. . . Patience, Magnifico—it will be done in no time at all, no time at all."

The Duke came to look over Leonardo's shoulder.

"Your hands are as quick as flies," he said, with admiration.

"Flies? Oh yes, as I was saying—these grubs of the drone fly, I have watched them. They live in the muck at the bottom of one of your horse-ponds, and grow from their bodies a thing like a hair which is, in fact, a fine tube. Through this tube they draw down air. Do you begin to follow me?"

"I never know what is in your mind. On the one hand you devise dancing dolls, and on the other you talk about drone flies. Go on, Ser Leonardo, and then I may follow you."

"It makes itself apparent, therefore, that what may apply to a maggot may similarly be applicable to a man. And here is where it comes close to Your Magnificence's business."

"How so?"

Da Vinci said: "Why, the enemy has chosen a fine strategic position. He has arranged his artillery at the foot of a precipice, so that you must cross five hundred yards of river, twenty feet deep, to attack him. You have made five attempts, always without success. You can hold out against a siege for two years. Oh yes! But who knows what may happen in the meantime? Times change fast these
days, Magnifico.” Leonardo da Vinci could not be bothered to remember the enemy’s name. He said: “Smash what’s-his-name and his condottieri now, and who knows what comes? . . . It reduces itself to the filthy little maggots in your ponds.”

“No metaphysics!” said the Duke, imperiously. “This, I don’t understand.”

“Oh, but here are no metaphysics,” said Leonardo, “only plain sense, upon my word. Get your smiths to work under my direction, and I promise you that I will get you two hundred men, fully armed, over the river. It is very simple, Magnifico. Follow the worm, learn from the maggot, take example from that which is most humble. Ask yourself: How does the lowliest survive? You will find that it survives, and ultimately conquers, by lying low. There is a lesson to be learned from the snail that creeps under his armour, and from the limpet that sucks himself to the rock. For the time being, Magnifico, be guided by the drone fly who will, one of these days, breed in our lions’ carcasses!”

“What a fine hand you have with a knot!” said the young Duke.

“Magnifico, a clip to close the nose, an air-tube of oiled linen kept above the surface of the river by a cork float on a calm, dark night; and I win you a battle!” cried Leonardo da Vinci.

“Yes, yes, yes—in a minute, in a minute!” cried the young Duke. “You muddle my head, skimming here, there, and everywhere, all at the same time, like a water-skipper on a pond. There now, he has got me talking about his filthy insects! . . . First things first, Ser Leonardo. Finish what you are doing. I cannot, for the life of me, quite understand how this dancing doll of yours will work.”

With a sigh, Leonardo da Vinci explained: “Much as you or I work, Magnifico, only somewhat less intricate and marvelous. See, a jerk at the thread at the back of the head brings into play other connected threads, and the doll dances.”

The toy being finished, and crudely colored, he demonstrated the working of it. Delighted, the Duke snatched it
from him and ran out of the room. Abstractedly, on the remains of the parchment, Leonardo da Vinci, with his silver pencil, made a rough diagram. It represented the head and shoulders of a man, wearing a peculiar mask which covered his nose and mouth, and was fastened with a buckle at the back of his skull. From the center of this mask protruded a jointed tube which went up vertically, terminating in a large cork disc like a fisherman’s float. To indicate that this man was under water, he added a fish and (he always loved the fantastic) a squid.

This engrossed him. He began to think of the Cave of Dogs, which is filled, to a certain level, with carbon dioxide, so that a man may walk in it without danger, while the dog at his heels will die, asphyxiated. He thought: *For any considerable period under the water, a man would need two tubes; one to inhale through, and the other to exhale through . . . since air, once breathed, puts out the little candle that burns within us . . . Wait a moment, now! A helmet, perhaps? The water spider makes a bubble, and carries her atmosphere with her into the depths. Then, why not—*

But then the young Duke came back. He took from his finger a gold ring set with rubies and pearls, and gave it to Leonardo, saying: “My little Ercole is crowing like a young cock over your dancing doll. Thanks. You must make him some more, Leonardo mio!”

“Now, touching the matter of breathing under the water,” said Leonardo da Vinci. “Since there is only a matter of five hundred paces to go, and no great depth of river—and, at this season of the year, no strong current—pick yourself only fifty good men. Mask them, and provide them with breathing tubes, such as I have drawn here, and on the next moonless night march them across the river into the enemy’s camp. Preferably, two hours before dawn, when life ebbs and fear hangs heavy. Then, fall on them like Gideon, and you will cut them to pieces.”

The Duke said: “Well, perhaps there is no harm in trying . . .”

Five days later he put Leonardo da Vinci’s scheme into practice. One of his captains led fifty tried men-at-arms
across the river, breathing through jointed reeds covered with oiled linen. They came out of the water like demons, being half-crazed with fear of the dark, cold depths, and charged where the camp fires burned brightest. They scattered the terrified mercenaries of the enemy, and took the camp. The battle was won.

Leonardo da Vinci waited for his patron to fill his cupped hands with gold. But the young Duke, though in high good humour, spoke to him almost severely:

"I have been speaking to Dr. Theophrastus about that trick of yours under water. Beetles do it. Spiders do it. Anyway, Pliny thought of it a thousand years ago. Here is work more in your line: paint me a picture of my little Ercole playing with that dancing doll of yours, and I will pay you well."

So Leonardo da Vinci put the diagrams of his diving suits into a portfolio, and went back to his brushes and pigments, thinking: *It would be possible to put fifty men-at-arms into a kind of brass carcass...*

He was about to invent a submarine, only he did not have the time to spare.
The Hack

"The doctor told me that if I keep on drinking sherry early in the morning, I am not long for this world," said the old theatrical man, filling his glass with an unsteady hand. "'You have been warned,' he said, 'it is felo de se, self-destruction, suicide!'"

"So I said to him: 'I am not a very religious man, sir. A priest once told me that suicides go to Hell. Well,' I said, 'I wish the Devil joy of me. I am already burnt out.' . . ."

"He is one of those canting, ranting fellows that make a song and a sermon of every sentence—and, at that, sing it through their noses. 'You have lived a sinful life,' he has the temerity to tell me, 'and are paying for it.'"

"Did you ever hear of such a thing? Sinful life—me? I ask you, old friend, what time have I had to sin? God is my judge that I scarcely found time to beget my family—and never quite enough time to be a father to the poor girls . . . or a husband to my poor wife," he added as an afterthought. "For God's sake, Benjamin, you know show business?"

The other man nodded so vigorously that his heavy purple jowls shook and quivered. "To my cost, brother, to my cost," he said. "And yet you don't seem to have come too badly out of it all. You are envied, in fact. Here you sit like a gentleman in your own house, bought and paid for, in the bosom of your family, with plenty of money put aside, and servants to wait on you; while, in London, a good half of the profession is sponging for something to eat—"

"And who worked harder for it? And who paid more
and got less for it?” cried his host, with an actor’s gesture expressive of tragic despair.

“I set out with a soul full of hope and a high heart,” he said. “Now I am empty. I had it in me—I swear to you—I had it in me, to be great. When I went to town, all the stars of heaven were singing and dancing in my head, so that I couldn’t feel the road under my feet. Yes, I felt fit to conquer this world and the next—I mean, Today and Tomorrow—to sing my song, old friend. . . . Poor me!

“It is all illusion, believe me. It is all a dream. Comrade, every man lives, as it were, on a magic island in an enchanted sea. Wherever he turns, he sees that which is not and never was. Brother, at the moment, I see the world as . . . well, you know how, on a hot day you see the summer heat dancing in the light?

“I see a world made of intersecting sheets of this dancing heat, illuminated by the summer lightning, and tied with gossamer. Nothing but a bright bubble shivers between us and the eternal dark.”

He sighed so deeply that his friend, who was generally garrulous—what they call an extrovert—sighed with him. Observing this, his host said, with a flicker of lively interest: “I sigh; therefore, you sigh. There is a contagion in the mere machinery of it. If you yawned, I’d yawn. Yet I should not yawn because I felt your weariness any more than you have sighed because you knew my grief. Oh dear me, everything is epidemic except understanding.

“You have seen it yourself, old friend, in the theatre: it is one laugh, all laugh; one jeer, all jeer; one weep, all weep; and if some frantic fool, smelling smoke, cries ‘Fire!’ they will trample their best friends to death, contaminated by this same imitative fever, the apes! Do you know, Ben, if I dared I would put out a kind of comedy, or fantasy, or morality—call it what you will—based upon the idea that man is akin to the ape?”

Big Ben Jonson, swallowing another cup of sherry said: “God’s name, man—don’t!” To change the subject, he went on hastily in his stentorian bass voice: “Come, old fellow, tell us what weighs on your heart so heavy. It is a new piece that gives you no peace? (Forgive me the pun;
it was unintentional.) Unburden, Will; unburden, man!"

William Shakespeare, sighing again, became suddenly interested in his own sigh. He said: "Some slobbering little philosopher told me, once, how it is said in the Orient that a man's soul is seated in his stomach. I believe it."

"The soul is in the head, the head!" cried Ben Jonson.

"Quiet, quiet, Boanerges," said Shakespeare, with a weary gesture. "Pour more wine. The soul, the soul is everywhere. It is in your toes, your guts, your head—in side and outside of you. Who understands these mysteries? Once, I turned hope of good news into some sonnets. Where lies hope, but in the head? Another time, a disappointment in love transmuted itself into a fine speech. So, the soul is in the organs of reproduction? And yet again: many was the time when a cut off a buttock of beef gave me courage and inspiration. So, the soul is in the stomach, then?

"Believe me, Ben, I have known heaven in a full belly, and touched the depths of hell in the tiny cavity of an aching tooth. and now my midriff troubles me, my soul is in my stomach and burning in hell there. In the head, says you, you noisy fellow! You are positive of this, no doubt, because one night you went to bed with an inspiration and awoke with a headache—which won the day, I guess."

Ben Jonson was disposed to make a quarrel of it, and he might have done so twenty years ago. But he had learned not only to love William Shakespeare, but to honor him more than he chose publicly to admit. If this conversation had taken place in one of those taverns between Fleet Street and Millbank, Jonson would have bellowed like the high wind, spluttered like the sleet, and made thunderbolts of his big red fists on the table. He would have run through all the furies of Earth, Air, Fire, and Water.

Here, however, away from an audience, and with the murmuring of the Avon in his ears, much of the turbulence was stroked out of him, and he was content with the sweet air and the sugared sherry. Furthermore, there was that about little William Shakespeare which made him believe
him when he said that he was not long for this world. So, mildly (for him) Ben Jonson asked: "Who told you the seat of the soul was in the stomach?"

William Shakespeare replied: "A little fellow, a little fellow. A miserable, dreary little fellow. To the devil with him! But what was I to do, tell me, Ben? God knows, you have had your ups and downs ."

"God knows I have," said Ben Jonson, solemnly. "My father was nobody, I came from nowhere. I trailed my pike in the Netherlands, you and some others got me out of gaol after I'd killed my man—"

"Yes, yes, yes! But you are you, and contented with yourself. You have sung your song, Ben. But I am William Shakespeare, and I am dying before I have even learned to whistle, dying at Oh, pardon, you were asking me of the little fellow who opined the stomach was the seat of the soul. You have met him, I believe. He used to come to the Globe, incognito, less for love of the drama than for other considerations less creditable.

"Now I ask you, Ben, to put yourself in my position. You know show business—either you are everybody's slave or everybody's master; in which latter case, becoming a tyrant, you are your own slave; from which slavery only death can liberate you. Thus, with me, it was always that I was receiver of stolen property for Procrastination the Thief of Time.

"All the years I have lived—may I be forgiven!—I have hidden from myself, like a ruffian or a debtor in St. Paul's, under a shadowy dome. And always cheating myself, as a bully cozens a tailor, with 'Tomorrow, tomorrow, tomorrow.' Burbage wants a speech and a part with a lot of meat in it for him; so, I write for him, faithfully promising myself: 'When I get my pay, by God, I write for myself!'

"Then, there are mouths to be fed, and what I am writing for myself comes slow; meantime Tom, Dick, and Harry want something to mouth. Money is low again. I put aside, therefore, The Tragedy of Belisarius, and scribble Titus Andronicus for Harry, Dick, and Tom. Soon, someone comes to me with a piece by some poor poetaster—Kyd, I think his name was—and asks me to rewrite it
with fine speeches and soliloquies for another strutting ape. Into the closet goes my Belisarius, and I am off again on such offal as Hamlet, Prince of Denmark.”

Ben Jonson began with heavy condescension: “I have read worse but—”

“You have read worse and, by God, written worse! By my soul, hack as I have been and am, I have had it in me to be great. Ay, and still have, if it were not—” William Shakespeare laid a hand upon his stomach.

“If it were not for the seat of your soul,” said Ben Jonson, with difficulty controlling his temper.

William Shakespeare said: “After the eighth cup of sugared sherry, Ben, you arrive at the argumentative or disputatious. Not here, and not with me, old Ben! ‘Seat of the soul’—s’truth! Why, I see by your fiery face, where the pincers of hell will soon be nipping you—in the joints, the joints of the knees and the articulations of the feet.

“Drink while you may, good Ben; and when you awake to shriek in the night, dreaming of some learned pentameter, remember with regret your little ironies, and your old friend, Will Shakespeare. Because then the seat of your uproarious soul will be at the big joint of your great toe, while the gout gets his teeth between . . . Fill, brother, fill; and spare me your satire.

“Laugh, if you like, at ‘The stomach is the seat of the soul.’ I say, I do not know what a soul is, or where, but I tell you this: The stomach is the midriff of the Stage. I have written—and played, too—cold and empty, and have seen some of my betters doing likewise. Bear with me for a moment, Ben, before you begin to holler at me!

“I have seen you, even you, roaring like a brute for lack of bread and wine—now don’t be angry!—with all your scholarship forgotten, animated by nothing but the rampant beast that, dined and wined and warmed, is my sweet Ben Jonson. Also, I have seen a good troupe of players lose their lines, and let the virtue evaporate out of them, for the want of something hot to eat, more than one winter’s night.

“So, the soul is—do not ask me where, Ben. It is some-
where near the breastbone; and I can tell you that when you are empty, and you sink within yourself so that your body wants to peel itself away, inside out, and cast itself over its own shoulder like a soiled glove—why, curse me if I lie, a weight hooks onto your heart that the belly must lift. And if it does not, comes then the triumph of the soul. This triumph, I may say, is—as it were—from the stomach which hardens itself and lifts itself—"

"The point, the point, man!" Ben Jonson shouted. "To the 'Seat of the Soul,' Will—the soul, the seat of it!"

In anguish between the contemplation of his wine and the anticipation of the consequences of drinking it, Shakespeare took a sip, which he turned into a gulp, before he said, almost tearfully: "Oh, you! You never could put your flat feet in another man's shoes, Ben! Say you were I, for instance.

"You must write for Tom, Dick and Harry; you must write for Dick, Harry and Tom; for Harry, Tom and Dick. Why? That the show may go on. Do you understand me? All of a sudden, you find yourself father to a fabulous family and farther than ever from your best children.

"There is no way of conveying to you the loneliness, the ultimate sense of excellent things thrown away! I never did finish my Belisarius. The show must go on, as they say. This means that one man, and one man alone, in the end, must find speeches and lines, entrances and exits, meat and drink, for a whole cry of fellows from the top to the bottom... and eat his heart that some Burbage, sleek and contented as a cat, may moan of the slings and arrows of outrageous Fortune, while the boy who plays Ophelia wants a little money for his aged mother, and oneself (God save us all!) has mouths to feed, and a position, an appearance, to keep up.

"Why, how do you think they ate and drank, the dogs, after I took over the theatre? Of my flesh they ate. Of my blood they drank. And now—"

"If, after a certain number of cups, I am disputatious, brother Will, then you slip into the maudlin," said Ben Jonson. "Go on with your 'Seat of the Soul,' and spare us what everyone on Millbank knows inside out."
Shedding tears and clutching his stomach, Shakespeare groaned: "It catches me right in the middle, the span of three fingers above the navel; and it is as if I had swallowed a nest of young rats. They grow with their appetites. I am their prey, heaven comfort me!"

"You know, Ben, what I have been through in part, I believe? Judge for yourself: I am well into the Third Act of Belisarius, when the King, crazed about witches and such old wives' tales, requires a piece about witches. 'Send him to the devil; send him back to Scotland, with his witches, and his tobacco, and his counterblasts'—says you!—'and go on with your Belisarius.'

"Brother, I couldn't. I remembered certain old aches of cold and pangs of hunger. The troupe had something of the hungry greyhound in their eyes. Back goes Belisarius into the closet, and out comes my flibbertygibbet of a Macbeth. Of the prose I have written for hire I say nothing—"

Ben Jonson said: "Prose? Prose? What prose did you write, Will?"

"Oh, hack work, hack work. And time enough and trouble enough it cost me... only I got enough out of it to turn the kids into goats, and support the other playhouse.

"This is in confidence, you know. There came to me, one night, the slobberly, sly-looking, crafty little man, to whom I have referred, and takes me to dine, and fills me with rich food, fine wine, and fulsome flattery; telling me this and that about my turn of phrase, my command of English, and what-not. And would I, for a consideration, put into coherent English—in fact, develop and elaborate—certain notes of his, for a consideration that was to be considerable?

"Would I? I wanted the money for the new stage. But nobody will ever know what I suffered, listening to that lisping voice, so disgustingly compounded of the lawyer and the woman—let alone what I went through, turning into passable reading his turgid philosophies and thrice-thought thoughts. ... Give me some more wine, Ben."

Ben Jonson began: "Why, surely, I member the man—"

"Yes, yes, yes!" said William Shakespeare, with a weary
gesture. "If I had my time over again, the show might go to the devil before it went on. As things were, heaven help us, I was reduced—hack as I am—to writing the works of Francis Bacon . . .

"Tell me some of the gossip around Millbank."
Ladies or Clothes

It is possible that the negro slave was dreaming of the steamy green jungle from which he had been taken. Perhaps he was careless. The fringe of the great palm-shaped fan brushed the old lady’s cheek and startled her so that she dropped her wine-cup; whereupon she got up nimbly, in spite of her ninety-odd years, and screamed: “You black dog-headed ape! You savage beast! Abomination that you are! . . . Hey there! Steward! What is this rotten-ness?”

“Oh, Lady . . .”

“Oh Lady, oh Lady! Silence! Or shall I take the skin off your back, you snuffling swine? What is this? Speak! Or shall I tear out that tongue of yours?”

“Lady—”

“Away with him to the mines! But first of all give the hoof-handed lout something to remember me by—with a scourge of riverhorse hide. And listen, you—kill me another slave as you killed the last, and may I go to hell if I don’t sell you up the river, or, by the Gods, send you to the brickyards to take some of the fat off your rotten bones, you slobbering eunuch. Go!”

“Dear Grandmother, compose yourself,” said a dandified, obsequious little man of forty who was sitting at a respectful distance. “Your health, dear Grandmother, your health! Remember your health!”

“You hypocritical little painted image! You dare to say ‘your health, dear Grandmother’? You lying rat, do you deny that you pray to all the gods all day long that I may
fall down dead? I know what you want from me—money. I know you. I know men. Gods how I know men!"

"Dear Grandmother, you do me wrong. I still have a little money and some pride."

"You are a dirty little liar. I know that you are in debt. Why otherwise would you come all this way to sit with ashes," said the old lady, touching her hair and her eyes, "ashes and dust?"

"Ah, but in your ashes and dust, noble Grandmother, I see fire and smoke."

"You’re lying again. You’re a born liar. And flattering me—I hate flatterers."

"Dearest Grandmother, I cling to you because you are symbolic of the great old days. The way you dealt with that clumsy slave, for example. Ah, you were born to rule. What fire, what passion!"

"How much is it this time? Get it over. Don’t sit there looking out of the corner of your cunning little pig-eyes, you parasite."

"Dear Grandmother," said the dandified obsequious man, "it is as follows:— First of all, my wheat—"

"Great old days. Ha! Slave, did you say! Ha! Fire, passion he says—this pink-eyed earthworm. Bah! What does he know of fire and passion, this puppy?"

"Dear Grandmother, I couldn’t begin to tell you how fiery and passionate I am. But to return to that other little matter—"

The old lady drank some more wine and said:—

"Good Gods, to sit like this in twilight! I am paying for what I have taken. Hai! The living death! Yet I was very beautiful once. Let me have some more of this wine. It has no taste. It is not good wine He dares to talk to me, this little bankrupt, about fire and passion, and that kind of thing! Idiot. Why, puppy, in your grandfather’s day I could have taught you a thing or two—and all those insipid little slave girls you mess about with. Men were men then, and slaves were slaves. Fire burned bright and passion was passion. Now it is all fumbling and giggling and fiddling. Ah yes, men were men, and women were women. Why, you miserable creature, this raddled old creature,
this shrunken mummy that you see before you (give me some wine) has been in love... dear Gods, more times than I can remember, and has been loved—I mean loved to desperation—by half Egypt. Your grandfather was not much of a man, but he could have devoured seven of you before his evening meal, and spat your bones over his shoulder. He was not an exceptional man, your grandfather. An exceptional soldier, yes. I speak of him in relation to myself. Go on, look at me, laugh if you like. I am a mummy before my time, but when I was young... Oho! Did I ever tell you the story of the punitive expedition? It is too long to tell now, and I can't remember some of the details. It must have happened seventy years ago, now. Ho-ho, what a tale that would be if I chose to tell it! I was not wrinkled and empty like a sucked-out grapeskin then, I can tell you. Such was the power of my beauty and the subtlety of my tongue that I insidiously planted the idea of revolt in the mind of a visiting barbarian king, so that when he returned to his own country—still pining for love of me, by-the-bye—he refused to pay his taxes and defied us. My husband was sent with a small army to teach the barbarians better manners, and after a year of bitter fighting, the tribe was exterminated—as a lesson to the rest. My kinglet killed himself to avoid the disgrace of being captured. And do you know why I did all that? Because I had fallen in love with a young man of humble birth, and wanted my husband out of the way. I always had a weakness for the lower forms of life—working men, foreigners, professional athletes, and so forth. And the cream of the joke is, that by the time your grandfather was safely out of the way, I had lost interest in that young man!

"All this I would do, and more, to gratify a whim, a caprice, a passing fancy. Yet good came out of it. I saved many thousands of lives in the end, for the tribes thereabout had been secretly arming for war, and my punitive expedition reminded them that we could sweep them away like dust if we so desired. They dropped their swords and their bows, and paid their taxes long before they were due. So you see that I have been a powerful instrument for
peace on the earth; and mark my words, the gods are not likely to forget it. They will overlook my little irregularities of conduct and receive me. I have never failed in my respect to the gods.

"No indeed. And what is more, I am convinced that the gods sent me to earth for a special purpose and that my 'fire' as you call it is a special sort of divine fire. I have been the means whereby a great deal of wicked pride has been humbled and much unholy vanity exposed. I have on several occasions had to do with so-called Great Lovers, foolish creatures who had been encouraged to believe themselves to be irresistible to women. I showed them what was what, I can assure you. Oh fools, fools! A green girl here, a bored matron there, a depraved noblewoman somewhere else flatter these creatures into an absurd self-confidence until they actually begin to despise women! There was one very famous one, a prince, who was known as The Breaker of Hearts. Ha ha!" The old lady drank another cup of wine, and laughed with indescribable malevolence.

"Breaker of Hearts," she said. "Bah! I said to myself, 'come along now, most noble Breaker of Hearts, and try your strength on mine.' I breaker of hearted him! Within fifteen days he was on his knees with the tears streaming down his face. Within twenty days he was swearing that if I would not be his he would kill himself. Be his! I had simply been playing with him in order to make it quite clear that he was mine. 'Very well, go and kill your silly little self and be damned to you,' I said. He was the only man I ever knew who, having threatened to kill himself in such circumstances, actually went home and did it. Poison of some sort. He did not attract me in the least: it was the conceit of the man that annoyed me. But there again, you see, I was the means of preventing untold misery and saving weaker members of my sex from sinning and suffering. The gods must have been with me, because I have sinned and they have in my case withheld the suffering that is a normal consequence of sinning.

"And it seems to me that this is adequately proved by the fact that I was made to suffer by one man, one alone
in all the world who did not desire to sin with me. Yes, and by all the gods of heaven and all the gods of hell, even now, when I think of it, I feel something like the ache your grandfather used to feel in damp weather, when the old arrow wound in his thigh began to throb and ache.”

The old lady sighed. She was less than half sober. Her grandson said: “He must have been a most exceptional man who could resist you, most noble and beloved Grandmother.”

“I suppose he must have been,” she said, dreamily. “I am convinced that he was sent to me to remind me that Virtue... that Virtue, in general, especially to humble people, brings great rewards. I was never more thoroughly convinced that I was an agent of the gods. They do not generally bother to give such demonstrations to mortals. No doubt they were reminding me that although I could slay princes and enslave kings with my beauty, I was only a human being. Because of all men, the one of whom I could not make my slave was my slave.”

The phrase pleased her, and she repeated it.

“He must have been as handsome as a god,” said the grandson.

“If you don’t stop rolling your eyes I’ll throw this cup at your head. ... Handsome? No, not handsome. I have fallen in love with hideously ugly men—one of them had been kicked in the face by a camel and had no nose. But this man was not even ugly. How can one describe him? He had the power to please, yes; his personality was agreeable. But that is nothing. I have known many men like that who have not merited more than a second thought. It may be that it was because there was a certain quiet strength about him, and that when I watched him I was reminded of a bent bow in that little moment when the Bowman having drawn the arrow to his ear, narrows his eyes before letting the string twang. It may be, I don’t know. It was certainly not his body, as a body, that attracted me. He was one of those thin rats of desert men who roam about, always half hungry, from water-hole to water-hole, living on burnt mutton and goat’s milk—a bar-
barian, to whom a clean garment is a rare luxury. In fact, these nomads, these rats of the desert, do not concern themselves with cleanliness. Their clothes are clean, more or less, when they are new. A drop of water is like a diamond in the desert, so that on the rare occasions when they do wash, washing is a ritual, something solemn. And they can think of no greater sacrifice to their gods than the offering of an unblemished sheep or goat.

"He was one of these. He came in as part of the stock of some traders who had picked up a few slaves on the way, and your grandfather, seeing him in the market, took a fancy to him and had him sent home. His beard had not properly started to grow. He was burnt black, and although the merchants had given him a good wash and made him tolerably presentable, there was still sand in his hair. And when I tell you that your grandfather, who was a careful man with money, paid more for this boy than he would have paid for a good heavy worker, you will see what I mean when I repeat that there was something about him that pleased you—the gods know what, who sent him to me. So he came into our house, and all of a sudden he made himself necessary about the house. He was one of those men who have eyes to see into the hearts of other men, but who can hide their own hearts. Yes, he was calm, perfectly calm, and quiet, very quiet. Ha! It occurs to me! Although he was beyond all question a proper man— I noticed that—he had something of the woman about him. He was everything and everybody. In the kitchen he knew how to talk to the cook. Having exchanged conversation with the hairdressing woman, he could talk to her for an hour about the mysteries of the toilet. Although he had come out of the dust of the desert he understood the art of growing corn in a week. He never slept. He invented a weighing machine and thought of a new method of counting and measuring grain. He even learned to write. Your grandfather depended on him. There was little he did not know, especially about sheep. He brought in some of the hardier breeds, improved our flocks, and even changed the nature of them so that some of them could be bred for
meat and others for wool. Is it possible that this man of all men lit a lamp in my heart because he was the only man who thoroughly understood me and divined what I was about to do?

"Always, as I was opening my mouth to ask a question, he would answer it before the first two words had passed my lips. Again, he moved in every way faster and more smoothly than any other man I had ever known; always with the flat-footed gliding step of the man who walks in the dust. He was always in conversation, drinking in everything that came his way as the desert drinks water; always thirsty. Nothing was too high or too low for him. He changed his face and his voice according to his company. In the presence of your grandfather he was quick and quiet, deeply respectful, always full of information and suggestions; yet he contrived always to blow up your grandfather like a fish bladder by making him feel that it was he and not his slave who had thought of such and such a thing. On the other hand, with the black savages who came in with gold and ivory from the mysterious lands in the South, he was friendly and generous. He would embrace some shrivelled eater of unclean things, and, giving him a few colored beads, and a bit of spiced meat, talk of the weather. And so he could tell, by smelling the water of the River, of rainfalls in mountains further away than the moon. He never told us how he could tell, but smiled, put on a mask of mystery, and changed the subject.

"At first I hated him. And then, after a while, I changed. I fell in love with him. Oh, I had fallen in love and out of love more times than I could count, even then. But this was a new thing. It was more urgent than hunger, thirst, the need to sleep, or any other ordinary bodily need. And he knew it. Yes, he knew it. I could tell. I could guess what was passing through his mind. He was saying to himself: ‘Here am I, a slave. My lady has taken a fancy to me. I know my lady’—and rest assured, he knew me to the backbone; perhaps that is why I loved him—‘I know my lady. If I succumb, it will be very pleasant for a few days, and then she will find me irksome; in which case I am a dead man.
At the very least I should be sold again to someone a long way away. I am comfortable, even influential around here. Better the devil you know than the devil you don’t know.

“At this time your grandfather, who had never before expressed any concern as to my health, began to ask me how I felt, and how my headaches were. I had frequently told that damned slave, and of course others of the household, that my head pained me. I had been making pretexts in order to have him put his cool hand on my brow—which was, indeed, feverish just then. If it was not it became so when he touched it. Perhaps that is why his hands seemed so cool.

“Give me another cup of wine and let me finish. One morning, awakening from a dream better not described, I felt that I could tolerate this state of affairs no longer. I called for the Steward. He came—trust him—with two attendants carrying writing materials and begged to know my pleasure. I asked him to dismiss his clerks because what I had to say was in confidence. As soon as the writers were gone I told him of my feelings and embraced him. He told me, very respectfully, that he could not betray his Master who had honored him with his confidence. I suppose that I must have been mad. This was some of the ‘fire and passion’ of which you—you ignorant mouse—were talking the other day... or whenever it was. I clutched at him with all my might and his outer garment came off—or else he slipped out of it. Then he ran out of the room. And then I hated him again, hated him so terribly that I nearly died of hate as I had been nearly dying of love. When your grandfather came home I was almost delirious. I told him that this ungrateful slave had abused his confidence and tried to ravish me.

“But your grandfather said that I was sick, not quite myself. The more he protested the more I insisted. I wanted that slave killed, preferably with preliminary torture. I was humiliated. Can this be why, after all these years, I still love that man? Because he humiliated me? I don’t know. The slave went to jail instead of to the executioner, and I was left biting my fingers. Your grandfather said that he
liked the man, and so, before giving judgment in the case he would consider.

"Of course, he got out of jail. He would, and after that, much later, we understood exactly what he had had in his mind when, having watched the floods, he had talked to the black men from up the river. He foresaw the Great Harvests and the Great Famine. Thus he became very great himself. It seems that he had an aged father, innumerable brothers, sisters-in-law, nephews, nieces, cousins, uncles, aunts, cousins five times removed, and great-uncles. He brought them all under his wing, and they all became great, so great that we have had to take certain measures... confiscation, forced labor, readjustment of civil rights. And who knows how it will all end?

"... I hear that just recently there has been rioting in the brickyards. I am convinced, however, that mine was a Mission. Things are not what they used to be. In my day a nobleman was a nobleman. He scarcely ever noticed the rabble. My father could not even have told you the color of a slave. And now I hear that a nobleman has got into a scrape for beating the brains out of a foreman in a brickyard. Between ourselves... ah, wine must take the place of blood in an old woman's veins... he is supposed to be of the blood royal. A trouble-maker. What do they call him? I have drunk too much wine. I mean that Monotheist, Moses, whom Pharaoh's daughter said she pulled out of the River. Aie, aie, aie, who knows the will of the gods? If that fool of a slave—Yôsif was it, or Jôsif?—had done my bidding all this need never have happened. They called him the Reader of Dreams. His brothers sold him into slavery because his father gave him a coat of many colors. There's men for you, eh?" Potiphar's widow sneered and hiccuped.

She was falling asleep. Her Steward, taking some coins from her grandson, whispered: "She'll be in a bad temper tomorrow. Come back the day after, my lord."

The old lady murmured: "Ah, Jôsif, Dreamer and Reader of Dreams, best servant Potiphar ever had... if you had let me make you happy—if only for a little while
—I'd have solved our Jewish Problem for Pharaoh... Or might it be read that the gods attach a certain importance to many-colored coats? *Aie, aie, aie.* "

She slept. Her grandson went out on tip-toe, and the house was quiet.
"If it could only be like this forever!" said the quiet girl called Linda, looking over Jimmy's shoulder at the dim gray face of the clock. "Oh, Jimmy, this is heaven! How happy I am! What can I have done to deserve such happiness?"

She felt Jimmy smiling. "Are you happy too?" she asked Jimmy. He nodded, observing the reflection of the clock face in the long mirror on the wardrobe door. He had been grimacing.

Last year, he thought, chafing and trying not to fidget, I made a hundred four thousand, five hundred pounds. It works out at . . . what? Twelve-pound-ten an hour. I have given this girl twenty-five pounds' worth of my time, at that rate. Four shillings and twopence a minute—nearly a penny a second. I've thrown away twenty-five pounds, being gracious to Linda for two hours. And she talks of this going on forever—forever, at a penny a second! There isn't that much money in the world!

Linda, with a luminous glory behind her somewhat faded face, closed her eyes and, resting her chin upon his shoulder and caressing his cheek with her forehead, said: "How sweet, Jimmy! How sweet! How can I ever tell you how grateful I am to you for making me so happy? Ah, my dear darling—now, just now, do you know what? I'm so full of love and happiness that another tiny bit would be too much. . . I'd die. But this is heaven: I'll never want any heaven but this—to be here with you exactly like this, loving you as I do and knowing you love me. You do love me?"
Jimmy was inclined to say: *Oh, nonsense! Love? Ha! You? Bah! What, me? Love you? Who are you? A laundress. I am Jimmy—you know who I am—Jimmy, the Star. I could have world-famous actresses, take my choice of the beauties of five continents. The world is mine, and all the women in it. Titled women, even. Because a whim takes hold of me, and I beckon to a poor pale creature in a clutching crowd of infatuated fans—because I, like a god, confer upon you the glory of my intimacy for a moment, you talk of love? Love? My love? For you? At four-and-two-pence a second, do you realize what a lingering look is worth?*

But he said, “Of course I love you,” and he looked at the reversed reflection of the clock that told the time.

“All my life,” said Linda, “all my life I’ve dreamt of such a moment. Don’t laugh—I felt somehow that it might happen to me. I never dared to say to anybody that I had a dream of love. They would have laughed; I’m so plain and ordinary. Oh, dear God, but I love you, Jimmy! You’re too good for me!”

In spite of his seething distaste, Jimmy muttered, “Nothing of the sort. Charming girl!”

“Ah, my own dear love! My dream-come-true! Do you know what? I believe you if you say so. I believe! I believe in you. This morning I was washing sheets, and you were only a picture, a splendid vision. And now I’m here, with you, in your arms, hearing you tell me you love me. There is a God! Where is yesterday? Where is the gray when the sunlight bleaches it away? Why do you love me?”

“Sweet,” said Jimmy, with his eye on the coin-silver gray of the time. The movement of the big hand was worth thirty-four shillings an inch.

He was in an ecstasy of boredom and vitiation. *Oh, to be rid of this ridiculously happy woman!* he thought. *Why did I do it? Why? Why?*

“Tell me why you love me,” she said. “No, never mind. Just say it again.”

What was Jimmy to say? If he could have said: *I only said so to please you. It tickled my vanity to beckon you*
out of the mob around the stage door. You helped me to condescend; you made me feel greater—then he would have been talking like an honest man. If he had had the courage to say: You were such a wholehearted worshiper that I wanted to be a god—then he would not have been where he was at that moment. If he could have told the truth he would have been an honest man, not a man in anguish, caressing a woman with his hand while he gritted his teeth and watched the clock.

But he said, "Of course I love you!"

There was a silence: it seemed to cling to his ears for a lifetime. Then it came away with a sort of thick sucking noise, and he heard the sharp tick of the round white clock. His face looked drawn in the darkening mirror. He had a desperate yearning to speak a little truth.

"And you promise to stay with me always?" Linda asked.

He had meant to say, "No," but he heard himself muttering, "Mm."

"Jimmy! Hold me!"

Although he had intended to get up and go away, Jimmy found himself embracing Linda and looking into her eyes.

"Always?" she whispered.

He answered, "Always." Candor stuck in his throat.

"Oh, Jimmy, if this could go on and on forever!"

Unutterably weary, he muttered, "Uh-uh; sure!" He was sick, sick to the heart of pent-up truth.

"Did you say 'sure'? Do you mean it?"

"Yes."

"If you say you mean it, I know you mean it," said Linda. "Dearest, there is a God. There is a heaven!"

"Oh, yes, yes. Sure, sure," said Jimmy, with a half laugh. "This is heaven, isn't it?"

He shifted, meaning to pull himself away from her. Something happened; he moved in the wrong direction. Linda was in his arms.

"It is! It is!" she whispered.

He sneered. "And hell? Where's hell?"

Something comparable to a bladder, a gray, strained,
veinous membrane, seemed to burst in a splash of pure, cold light. Out of the indefinable center of this light a grave, clear voice said, "Think!"

Jimmy looked at the clock. Its hands still marked seven minutes to four of a drizzling February afternoon.

He remembered that there had been a judgment, a hundred thousand years ago. Linda, on his shoulder, had achieved paradise; and he was damned. And for all eternity the clock had stopped.
Clock Without Hands

Several years ago, when newspapers had space to spare for all kinds of sensational trivialities, John Jacket of the Sunday Special went to talk with a certain Mr. Wainewright about the stabbing of a man named Tooth whose wife had been arrested and charged with murder. It was a commonplace, dreary case. The only extraordinary thing about it was that Martha Tooth had not killed her husband ten years earlier. The police had no difficulty in finding her. She was sitting at home, crying and wringing her hands. It was a dull affair; she was not even young, or pretty.

But Jacket had a knack of finding strange and colorful aspects of drab, even squalid affairs. He always approached his subjects from unconventional angles. Now he went out on the trail of Wainewright, the unassuming man who had found Tooth’s body, and who owned the house in which Tooth had lived.

Even the Scotland Yard man who took down Wainewright’s statement had not been able to describe the appearance of the little householder. He was “just ordinary,” the detective said, “sort of like a City clerk.” He was like everybody: he was a nobody. At half-past seven every evening Wainewright went out to buy a paper and drink a glass of beer in the saloon bar of the “ Firedrake” —always the Evening Extra: never more than one glass of beer.

So one evening at half-past seven John Jacket went into the saloon bar of the “Firedrake”, and found Mr. Wainewright sitting under an oval mirror that adver-
tised Bach's Light Lager. Jacket had to look twice before he saw the man.

A man has a shape; a crowd has no shape and no color. The massed faces of a hundred thousand men make one blank pallor; their clothes add up to a shadow; they have no words. This man might have been one hundred-thousandth part of the featureless whiteness, the dull grayness, and the toneless murmuring of a docile multitude. He was something less than non-descript—he was blurred, without identity, like a smudged fingerprint. His suit was of some dim shade between brown and gray. His shirt had gray-blue stripes, his tie was patterned with dots like confetti trodden into the dust, and his oddment of limp brownish mustache resembled a cigarette butt, disintegrating shred by shred in a tea-saucer. He was holding a brand-new Anthony Eden hat on his knees, and looking at the clock.

"This must be the man," said Jacket.

He went to the table under the oval mirror, smiled politely, and said: "Mr. Wainewright, I believe?"

The little man stood up. "Yes. Ah, yes. My name is Wainewright."

"My name is Jacket; of the Sunday Special. How do you do?"

They shook hands. Mr. Wainewright said: "You're the gentleman who writes every week!"

"'Free For All'—yes, that's my page. But what'll you drink, Mr. Wainewright?"

"I hardly ever—"

"Come, come," said Jacket. He went to the bar. Mr. Wainewright blinked and said:

"I take the Sunday Mail. With all due respect, of course. But I often read your efforts. You have a big following, I think?"

"Enormous, Mr. Wainewright."

"And so this is the famous . . . the famous . . ." He stared at Jacket with a watery mixture of wonder and trepidation in his weak eyes. "With all due respect, Mr. Jacket, I don't know what I can tell you that you don't know already."
“Oh, to hell with the murder,” said Jacket, easily. “It isn’t about that I want to talk to you, Mr. Wainewright.”

“Oh, not about the murder?”

“A twopenny-halfpenny murder, whichever way you take it. No, I want to talk about you, Mr. Wainewright.”

“Me? But Scotland Yard——”

“—Look. You will excuse me, won’t you? You may know the sort of things I write about, and in that case you’ll understand how this Tooth murder affair fails to interest me very much. What does it amount to, after all? A woman stabs a man.” Jacket flapped a hand in a derogatory gesture. “So? So a woman stabs a man. A hackneyed business: an ill-treated wife grabs a pair of scissors and—pst! Thousands have done it before; thousands will do it again, and a good job too. If she hadn’t stabbed Tooth, somebody else would have, sooner or later. But . . . how shall I put it? . . . you, Mr. Wainewright, you interest me, because you’re the . . .”

Jacket paused, groping for a word, and Mr. Wainewright said with a little marsh-light flicker of pride: “The landlord of the house in which the crime was committed, sir?”

“The bystander, the onlooker, the witness. I like to get at the, the impact of things—the way people are affected by things. So let’s talk about yourself.”

Alarmed and gratified, Mr. Wainewright murmured: “I haven’t anything to tell about myself. There isn’t anything of interest, I mean. Tooth——”

“Let’s forget Tooth. It’s an open-and-shut case, anyway.”

“Er, Mr. Jacket. Will they hang her, do you think?”

“Martha Tooth? No, not in a thousand years.”

“But surely, she’s a murderess, sir!”

“They can’t prove premeditation.”

“Well, Mr. Jacket, I don’t know about that . . .”

“Tell me, Mr. Wainewright; do you think they ought to hang Martha Tooth?”

“Well, sir, she did murder her hubby, after all . . .”

“But how d’you feel about it? What would you say, if you were a juryman?”
"The wages of sin is . . . ah . . . the penalty for murder is the, ahem, the rope, Mr. Jacket!"

"And tell me, as man to man—do you believe that this woman deserves to swing for Tooth?"

"It's the law, sir, isn't it?"

"Is it? They don't hang people for crimes of passion these days."

At the word "passion", Mr. Wainewright looked away. He drank a little whisky-and-soda, and said: "Perhaps not, sir. She might get away with . . . with penal servitude for life, Mr. Jacket, do you think?"

"Much less than that."

"Not really?" Mr. Wainewright's voice was wistful. "She might even be acquitted."

"Well, sir . . . that's for the judge and jury to decide. But to take human life . . ."

"Do you dislike the woman, Mr. Wainewright?"

Jacket blinked at the little man from under half-raised eyebrows.

"Oh good Lord no, sir! Not at all, Mr. Jacket: I don't even know her. I only saw her for an instant."

"Good-looking?"

"Good-looking, Mr. Jacket? No, no she wasn't. A . . . a charwomanish type, almost. As you might say, she was bedraggled."

"As I might say?"

"Well . . . without offense, Mr. Jacket, you are a writer, aren't you?"

"Ah. Ah, yes. Not a handsome woman, eh?"

"She looked—if you'll excuse me—as if she . . . as if she'd had children, sir. And then she was flurried, and crying. Handsome? No, sir, not handsome."

"This Tooth of yours was a bit of a son of a dog, it seems to me. A pig, according to all accounts."

"Not a nice man by any means, sir. I was going to give him notice. Not my kind of tenant—not the sort of tenant I like to have in my house, sir."

"Irregular hours, I suppose: noisy, eh?"

"Yes, and he . . . he drank, too. And worse, sir."

"Women?"
Mr. Wainewright nodded, embarrassed. "Yes. Women all the time."

"That calls for a little drink," said Jacket.

He brought fresh drinks. "Oh no!" cried Mr. Wainewright. "Not for me: I couldn't, thanks all the same."

"Drink it up," said Jacket, "all up, like a good boy."

The little man raised his glass.

"Your good health, Mr. Jacket. Yes, he was not a nice class of man by any means. All the girls seemed to run after him, though: I never could make out why they did. He was what you might call charming, sir—lively, always joking. But well; he was a man of about my own age—forty-six, at least—and I never could understand what they could see in Tooth."

He swallowed his whisky like medicine, holding his breath in order not to taste it.

Jacket said: "Judging by his photo, I should say he was no oil painting. A great big slob, I should have said—loud-mouthed, back-slapping, crooked."

"He was a big, powerful man, of course," said Mr. Wainewright.

"Commercial traveler, I believe?" said Jacket.

"Yes, he was on the road, sir."

"Make a lot of money?"

"Never saved a penny, Mr. Jacket," said Mr. Wainewright, in a shocked voice. "But he could sell things, sir. He wouldn't take no for an answer. Throw him out of the door, and back he comes at the window."

"That's the way to please the ladies," said Jacket. "Appear ruthless; refuse to take no for an answer; make it quite clear that you know what you want and are going to get it. He did all that, eh?"

"Yes, sir, he did. Oh, you really shouldn't've done that: I can't—"

More drinks had been set down.

"Cheers," said Jacket. Wainewright sipped another drink. "Are you a married man, Mr. Wainewright?"

"Married? Me? No, not me, Mr. Jacket."

"Confirmed bachelor, hm?"
Mr. Wainewright giggled; the whisky was bringing a pinkness to his cheeks. "That's it, sir."

"Like your freedom, eh?"

"Never given marriage a thought, sir."

"I shouldn't be surprised if you were a bit of a devil on the sly, yourself, Mr. Wainewright," said Jacket, with a knowing wink.

"I . . . I don't have time to bother with such things."

"Your boarding-house keeps you pretty busy."

"My apartment house? Yes, it does, off and on."

"Been in the business long?"

"Only about eight months, sir, since my auntie died. She left me the house, you see, and I thought it was about time I had a bit of a change. So I kept it on. I was in gents' footwear before that, sir, I was with Exton and Co., Limited, for more than twenty years."

"Making shoes?"

Mr. Wainewright was offended. He said: "Pardon me, I was a salesman in one of their biggest branches, sir."

"So sorry," said Jacket. "Did Tooth yell out?"

"Eh? Pardon? Yell out? N-no, no, I can't say he did. He coughed, kind of. But he was always coughing, you see. He was a heavy smoker. A cigarette-smoker. It's a bad habit, cigarettes: he smoked one on the end of another, day and night. Give me a pipe any day, Mr. Jacket."

"Have a cigar?"

"Oh . . . that's very kind indeed of you I'm sure. I'll smoke it later on if I may."

"By all means, do, Mr. Wainewright. Tell me, how d'you find business just now? Slow, I dare say, eh?"

"Steady, sir, steady. But I'm not altogether dependent on the house. I had some money saved of my own, and my auntie left me a nice lump sum, so . . ."

"So you're your own master. Lucky fellow!"

"Ah," said Wainewright, "I'd like a job like yours, Mr. Jacket. You must meet so many interesting people."

"I'll show you round a bit, some evening," said Jacket.

"No, really?"

"Why not?" Jacket smiled, and patted the little man's arm. "What's your address?"
“77, Bishop’s Square, Belgravia.”

“Pimlico . . . the taxi-drivers’ nightmare,” said Jacket, writing it on the back of an old envelope. “Good. Well, and tell me—how does it feel to be powerful?”

“Who, me? I’m not powerful, sir.”

“Wainewright, you know you are.”

“Oh, nonsense, Mr. Jacket!”

“Not nonsense. You’re the chief witness; it all depends on you. Don’t you realize that your word may send a woman to the gallows, or to jail? Just your word, your oath! Why, you’ve got the power over life and death. You’re something like a sultan, or a dictator—something like a god, as far as Martha Tooth is concerned. You have terrible power, indeed!”

Mr. Wainewright blinked; and then something strange happened. His eyes became bright and he smiled. But he shook his head. “No, no,” he said, with a kind of sickly vivacity. “No, you’re joking.”

Jacket, looking at him, said: “What an interesting man you are, Wainewright! What a fascinating man you really are!”

“Ah, you only say that. You’re an author, and you can make ex-ordinary things out of nothing.”

“Don’t you believe it, Wainewright. You can’t make anything out of nothing. There’s more in men than meets the eye, though; and you are an extremely remarkable man. Why, I could make fifteen million people sit up and gape at you. What’s your first name?”

“Eh? Er . . . George Micah.”

“I think I’ll call you George. We ought to get together more.”

“Well, I’m honored, I’m sure, Mr. Jacket.”

“Call me Jack.”

“Oh . . . it’s friendly of you, but I shouldn’t dare to presume. But, Mr. Jacket, you must let me offer you a little something.” Wainewright was leaning toward him, eagerly blinking. “I should be offended. Whisky?”

“Thanks,” said Jacket.

The little man reached the bar. It was his destiny to
wait unattended; to be elbowed aside by newcomers; to cough politely at counters.

At last he came back with two glasses of whisky. As soon as he was seated again he said:

“Mr. Jacket ... you were joking about ... You weren’t serious about making fifteen million people ...”

“Sit up and gape at you? Yes I was, George.”

“But Mr. Jacket, I’m nobody of interest; nobody.”

“You are a man of destiny,” said Jacket. “In the first place—not taking anything else into account—you are an Ordinary Man. What does that mean? All the genius of the world is hired to please you, and all the power of industry is harnessed in your service. Trains run to meet you; Cabinet Ministers crawl on their bellies to you; press barons woo you, George; archbishops go out of their way to make heaven and hell fit your waistcoat. Your word is Law. The King himself has got to be nice to you. Get it? You are the boss around here. All the prettiest women on earth have only one ambition, George Wainewright—to attract and amuse you, tickle you, excite you, in general take your mind off the harsh business of ruling the world. George, you don’t beg; you demand. You are the Public. Let anybody dare lift a finger without keeping an eye on your likes and dislikes: you’ll smash him, George! Rockefeller and Woolworth beg and pray you to give them your pennies. And so what do you mean by saying you’re nobody? Where do you get that kind of stuff, George? Nobody? You’re everybody!”

Mr. Wainewright blinked. Jacket drank his health, and said: “So now tell me more about yourself.”

“Well ...” said Mr. Wainewright. “I don’t know what to say, I’m sure. You know everything already. You want me opinion, perhaps?” In Mr. Wainewright’s eyes there appeared a queer, marsh-light flicker of self-esteem.

“Perhaps,” said Jacket.

“In my humble opinion,” Mr. Wainewright said, “the woman deserves to die. Of course, I admit that Tooth was a bad man. He was a drunkard, and a bully, and went in
for too many women. He ill-treated them, sir; and he was a married man too. I couldn't bear him."

"Then why did you let him stay in your house?" asked Jacket.

"Well. I don't know. I had intended to give Tooth notice to quit more than once, but whenever I began to get around to it . . . somehow or other he managed to put me off. He'd tell me a funny story—never a nice story, but so funny that I couldn't help laughing. You know what I mean? He had a way with him, Mr. Jacket. He must have. He sold Poise Weighing Machines. He told me, once, how he had sold a sixty-guinea weighing-machine to an old lady who had a sweet-shop in a little village—it was wicked, but I couldn't help laughing. And then again, his success with the women. But all the same, you didn't ought to be allowed to get away with murder. I mean to say—he was her husband, wasn't he? And a human being, too. And I mean to say—the fact remains, doesn't it? She stabbed her husband to death with a pair of sharp scissors."

"All right," said Jacket. "But can we prove that Martha Tooth meant to do it, eh? Can we prove premeditation?"

"I don't know anything about all that, I'm afraid," said Mr. Wainewright.

Jacket said: "They don't hang you for murder without malice aforethought in a case of this sort. And incidentally, there isn't any actual proof that Martha Tooth really did stab her pig of a husband, is there?"

Mr. Wainewright was shocked. "She must have!" he said. "Who else could have, if she didn't?"

"Anyone might have done it, my dear George. I might have done it. You might have done it. The charwoman might have done it. Did anyone see her do it?"

"Well, no, I suppose not," said Mr. Wainewright. "But the evidence! The evidence, Mr. Jacket!"

"Call me Jack, George old man."

"Jack," said Wainewright, shyly and with some reluctance.

"But go on, George," said Jacket. "What evidence?"
"The evidence, J-Jack. (Jack, sir, since you insist.)"

John Jacket felt a strange, perverse desire to provoke, to irritate this respectable little man. "Evidence," he said, "evidence! I spit on the evidence. A woman comes into a house; a woman goes out of a house. The man she visited is found, stuck like a pig—which he was—with a pair of long, sharp, paper-cutting scissors in his throat near the collar-bone. So what? So what, George? He was in the habit of smuggling women into his room. Isn't that so?"

"Yes, that's true."

"Say, for example, this man Tooth had a woman in his room before his wife—this wretched Martha Tooth—turned up unexpectedly. Say, for example, he hides this hypothetical woman in a cupboard... Was there a big cupboard, closet, or wardrobe in Tooth's room?"

"There is a big wardrobe," said Mr. Wainewright, meditating.

"Say, then, that Tooth, hearing his wife's voice downstairs, hid his concubine in the wardrobe. The wife comes in. She talks to Tooth. She goes away. As the door closes, the enraged woman in the wardrobe comes out fighting, with a pair of scissors, and—jab! An overhand stroke with something like a stiletto, striking the soft part of your throat just where the big artery runs down. A child could do it. What?"

"Possible, I dare say," said Mr. Wainewright, tapping his foot in irritation, "but I don't see the point. Mr. Jacket—I'm sorry, I mean Jack. Jack, since you say I may call you Jack. If there had been any other lady in Tooth's room I should have known it."

"How could you know?" asked Jacket.

Mr. Wainewright meditated, marking off points with his fingers: he was somewhat drunk. He said, laboriously: "In the first place, I have a respectable house. When my auntie died I converted it into little furnished flatlets. People can do as they like in my place, within reason, Mr. Jacket. I mean to say Jack, Jack. By 'within reason' I mean to say that people can have visitors... within reason, visitors. As the person responsible for the
house, I was always on the spot—or nearly always. A person can’t be sure of anybody, and you don’t want your house to get a bad reputation. So I to be frank, I listened to how many footsteps were going up to this floor or that floor. And as it happened my little room was next door to Tooth’s. And I can assure you that Mrs. Tooth was the only visitor Tooth had that night. Mrs. Madge, the lady who does the cleaning, let Mrs. Tooth in. I passed her on the stairs—or rather, I stood aside to let her pass on the first-floor landing. I had seen Tooth only about two minutes before. He’d just got home from Bristol.”

“Did he say anything?” asked Jacket.

“He . . . he was the same as usual. Full of jokes. He was telling me about some girl he met in Bristol, some girl who worked in baker’s shop. The, ah, the usual thing. Mrs. Madge let Mrs. Tooth in while he was talking to me. He said: “I wonder what the,—the Aitch—she wants.” And he said that she had better come on up. He’d been drinking. I went down because, to be quite frank, I’d never seen Tooth’s wife, and wondered what kind of a woman she could be.”

“And what kind of a woman was she, George?”

“Not what I should have expected, Mr. Jacket—I mean J-Jack. One of the plain, humble-looking kind. You wouldn’t have thought she’d have appealed to Tooth at all: he went in for the barmaidish type, sir.”

“You never can tell, George, old boy. After that you went up to your room, if I remember right.”

“That’s right. My room was next door to Tooth’s. I mean, my sitting-room: I have a little suite,” said Mr. Wainewright, with pride.

“Have a little drink,” said Jacket, pushing a freshly-filled glass over to him.

“I couldn’t, really.”

“No arguments, George. By the by, remind me to let you have some theatre tickets. You and I’ll go to the first night of Greek Scandals next week. Drink up. Well, go on, George.”

“Where was I? Oh yes. I had some accounts to do, you
see, so I went to my sitting-room. And I could hear them talking."

"What were they saying, George?"

"I couldn’t quite get what they were saying, Mr. Jacket."

"But you tried?"

Mr. Wainewright fidgeted and blushed. "I did try," he admitted. "But I only gathered that they were having a quarrel. Once Tooth shouted. He said ‘Go to the devil.’ She started crying and he burst out laughing.

"A nice man, your friend Tooth, George."

"Yes, sir. I mean no, Mr. Jacket—not at all nice."

"And then?"

"About a quarter of an hour later, I should say, they stopped talking. They’d been raising their voices quite loud. I knocked on the wall, and they stopped. Then Tooth started coughing."

"Was that unusual?"

"No, not at all unusual. He was a cigarette-smoker. In the morning, and at night, it was painful to listen to him, sir. And then his door opened and closed. I opened my door and looked out, and Mrs. Tooth was going downstairs crying, and there was some blood on her hand. I asked her if she had hurt herself, and if she wanted some iodine or anything, and she said ‘No, no,’ and ran downstairs and out of the house."

"She’d cut herself, it appears."

"That’s right, ah . . . J-Jack."

"That’s it, George. Call me Jack and I’ll call you George," said Jacket. "What made you go into Tooth’s room later on?"

Mr. Wainewright said: "He always borrowed my evening paper. I nearly always used to hand it over to him when I’d done with it." He held up a copy of the Evening Extra, neatly folded. "When I got back from here—I come her just for one quiet drink every evening, and read the paper here as a rule, you see—I went to his door and knocked."

"And, of course, he didn’t say ‘Come in,’ " said Jacket.
"No. So I knocked again. No answer. I knocked again—"

"—And at last you went in without knocking, eh?"
"Exactly. And there he lay across the bed, Mr. Jacket—a horrible sight to see, horrible!"
"Bled a good deal?"
"I never thought even Tooth could have bled so much!"
"That shook you, eh, George?"
"It made me feel faint, I assure you, sir. But I didn’t touch anything. I phoned the police. They were there in ten minutes."
"Detective Inspector Taylor, wasn’t it?"
"Yes, that’s right. A nice man."
"He collects stamps for a pastime. Have you any hobbies, George?"

Mr. Wainewright giggled. "It sounds silly," he said. "When I haven’t got anything else to do I cut pictures out of magazines."

"And what do you do with them when you’ve cut them out, George?"
"I stick them in a scrap-book."
"An innocent pastime enough."
"In a way, sort of like collecting stamps—in a way," said Mr. Wainewright.

"Yet you never can tell how that sort of thing may end," said Jacket. "Look at Tooth. He got his by means of a pair of scissors—editorial scissors, paper-cutting scissors. Lord, how often have I wanted to stab the Sub with his own scissors!"

"That’s right," said Mr. Wainewright. "Long pointy scissors. They were part of a set—scissors and paper-knife in a leather case. I’d borrowed them myself a few days before. Very sharp scissors."

"Little did you think," said Jacket, "that that pair of scissors would end up in your lodger’s throat!"

"Little did I, J-Jack," said Mr. Wainewright. "It makes a person think. May I ask . . . are you going to put something in the paper about me?"

"I think so," said Jacket.
Mr. Wainewright giggled. "You wouldn't like a photograph of me?"

"We'll see about that, George. We'll see. What are you doing on Saturday?"

"Next Saturday morning I get my hair cut," said Mr. Wainewright.

"Matter of routine, eh?"

"Yes, sir. But—"

"No, no, never mind. You get your hair cut on Saturday, George, and I'll give you a tinkle some time. Right. And now if I were you I'd go and get some sleep, George, old man. You don't look quite yourself," said Jacket.

"I'm not a drinking man... I oughtn't to drink," muttered Mr. Wainewright, putting his hat on back-to-front and rising unsteadily. "I don't feel very well..."

Poor little fellow, thought Jacket, having seen Mr. Wainewright safely seated in a taxi. This Tooth affair has thrown him right out of gear. Bloodshed in Wainewright's life! A revolution! It's almost as if he found himself wearing a bright red tie.

Jacket, who was on the edge of the haze at the rim of the steady white light of sobriety, began to work out a story about Mr. Wainewright. He thought that he might call it The Red Thread of Murder. Never mind the killer, never mind the victim—all that had been dealt with a hundred times before. What about the Ordinary Man, the Man In The Street, who has never seen blood except on his chin after a bad shave with a blunt blade, who opens a door and sees somebody like Tooth lying dead in a thick red puddle? Jacket laughed. In spite of everything Mr. Wainewright had to get his hair cut on Saturday. There was, he decided, something ineffably pathetic about this desperate doggedness with which people like Wainewright clung to the finical tidiness of their fussy everyday lives.

He went to sleep thinking of Mr. Wainewright. Mr. Wainewright lay awake thinking of John Jacket, but went to sleep thinking: To-morrow is Friday: I put a new blade in my safety-razor.
So that Saturday, Mr. Wainewright went to his barber. Friday was New Blade Day; Monday was Clean Shirt Day; Sunday morning was Bath morning; and he had his hair cut every third Saturday. This was law and order; a system to be maintained. System; routine—in the life of Wainewright inevitable laws governed collar-studs, rubber heels, sheets of toilet-paper, the knotting of neckties, the lighting of pipes, the cutting of string and the sticking-on of stamps. He ate, drank, walked and combed his hair in immutable rhythm. He was established to run smoothly for ever. Every habit of Wainewright’s was a Bastille; his every timed action was housed in a little Kremlin. Therefore, to-day, he had to get his hair cut. But Jowl’s display made him stop for a few minutes.

Jowl, who owned the antique shop on the corner, had stripped some bankrupt’s walls of a great, gleaming yata-ganerie of edged and pointed weapons. They hung on sale: double-handed swords, moon-faced battle-axes, mailed fists, stilettos, basket-hilted Italian daggers, Toledo rapiers, needle-pointed Khyber knives, adze-shaped obsidian club-axes, three-bladed knuckle-duster daggers, arquebuses, and a heap of oddments of sixteenth-century body-armor. Wainewright stood, smoking his pipe, looking hard. He stopped and examined some assassin’s weapon of the fourteen hundreds—a knife with a spring. You stabbed your man, and—Knutch!—it flew open like a pair of scissors.

At the back of the window stood a complete suit of jousting-armor, with a massive helmet shaped like a frog’s head. Wainewright looked up and, as it happened, he saw the reflection of his face exactly where his face would have been if he had been wearing the armor.

Then, in his breast, something uncoiled. He gazed, whistling. “Ye Gods!” he said. “Ye Gods!” But even as he looked he was inclined to laugh: his reflection was wearing a bowler hat.

Still, why not? thought Mr. Wainewright. But then he remembered that he was an important person, that the glaring eyes of the world were focused on him. He
walked across the court and pushed open the door of Flickenflocker's Select Saloon.

_Calm!_ thought Wainwright. _Calm! Keep calm!_ The door of the barber's shop was fitted with a compressed air brake: it hissed behind him and closed with a gentle tap.

As the door hissed, Wainwright stood still, tense. Then he also hissed: he had been holding his breath. When the door closed, he also made a tapping noise: he had been standing on his toes.

Flickenflocker said, "Harpust one! Quarder-nour late! For fifteen years so I never knew you to miss a second! Eh? _Tsu, tsu tsu!_"

"Am I late?" asked Wainwright.

"Fifteen minutes in fifteen years," said Flickenflocker. "One minute every year. In a hundred-twenty years, so you could save enough time to go to the pictures."

"The usual," said Wainwright, sitting in a chair.

"Nice and clean back and sides," said Flickenflocker.

Wainwright nodded. But as he did so he noticed that a peculiar quietness had come over the people in the shop. They were exchanging hurried words in lowered voices, and looking at him out of the corners of their eyes. Deep in the breast of Mr. Wainwright something broke into a glow which spread through him until he felt all his veins were burning brilliantly red like neon-tubes. He knew exactly what was being said: That is Wainwright, the witness for the prosecution in the Tooth murder case.

In a clear, slightly tremulous voice, he said:

"And I'll have a lavender shampoo."

"Why not?" said Flickenflocker, as his long sharp scissors began to nibble and chatter at the fine, colorless hair of the little man in the chair. "Why not?"

Flickenflocker worked with the concentration and exalted patience of a biologist cutting a section, and as he worked he whistled little tunes. His whistle was a whisper: he
drew in the air through his teeth, for he had been taught never to breathe on customers. At all times he seemed to be working out some problem of fabulous complexity—breathlessly following a fine thread through infinite mazes of thought. Occasionally he uttered a word or a mere noise, as if he had found something but was throwing it away... *Tss!*... *Muhuh!*... *Tu-tu-tu!*... *Oh dear!* Wainewright liked this strange, calm barber who demonstrated no urge to make conversation; whose shiny yellow hands, soft and light as a pair of blown-up rubber gloves, had touched the faces of so many men whose pictures had filled posters while their names topped bills.

For Flickenflocker's was a theatrical establishment, or had been. A hundred photographs of forgotten and half-remembered actors hung on the walls. As small boys cut their names on desks and trees, actors and sportsmen pin their photographs to the walls of pubs and barbershops. Thus they leave a little something by means of which somebody may remember them... until the flies, in their turn, deface the likenesses which Time has almost wiped away; and the dustbins, which gape around the relics of little men like sharks in a bitter sea, close with a clang. Even in the grave nothing is completely lost as long as somebody can say: *Lottie had a twenty-four-inch thigh;* or *Fruitcake bubble-danced;* or *J. J. Sullivan could have eaten Kid Fathers before breakfast.* We hang about the necks of our to-morrows like hungry harlots about the necks of penniless sailors. So, for twenty-three years, singers, boxers, actors, six-day cyclists, tumblers, soubrettes, jugglers, dancers, wrestlers, clowns, ventriloquists and lion-tamers had given Flickenflocker their photographs—always with a half-shrug and a half-smile of affable indulgence. Flickenflocker hung up every one of them: he knew that the day always came when a man returned, if only to look at the wall and dig some illusion about himself out of the junk-heap of stale publicity.

They always came back to Flickenflocker, whose memory was reliable and unobtrusive as a Yale lock. One sidelong look at a profile opened a flap in his head and
let out a name. After ten years he could glance at you, name you with matter-of-fact enthusiasm, and make appropriate casual chatter. As soon as the shop door closed and your heels hit the street he kicked the flap back and waited for the next customer. looked up, segregated; silent except for hisses, gulps, and mono-
syllables.

Yet Flickenflocker could talk. Now, while Pewter's flat French razor chirped in the lather like a sparrow in snow and, on his left, the great hollow-ground blade of Kyropoulos sang Dzing-dzing! over the blue chin of a big man in a pearl-grey suit, Flickenflocker talked to Mr. Wainewright.

The barber made conversation with the least distinguished of all his customers.

"You’re the man of the moment, Mister Wainewright."
"Nonsense, Mister Flickenflocker."
"I can read the papers, thank God, Mister Wainewright. I’m not altogedder blind yet, God forbid. Hm!"
"It’s all got nothing to do with me."
"No? Your worser enemies should be where that poor woman is now. In your hands is already a rope. A . . . a . . . a loop you can tie; you can tie a noose round her neck."
"It’s the Law, Mister Flickenflocker."
"You’re right there, Mister Wainewright. That’s what the law is for. That’s what we pay rates and taxes for. You want to kill somebody: right, go on. But afterwards don’t say: ‘Huxcuse me, I forgot myself.’ Don’t say: ‘Once don’t count—give me just one more charnsh.’ A huxcuse me ain’t enough—murder ain’t the hee-cups. Murderers get hung: good job too. Poor woman!"
"But if she’s guilty?"
"Mmmmyes, you’re right. But a woman’s got a lot to put up with. With a certain class of man a woman can put up with a lot, Mister Wainewright."
"But murder!"
“Murder. . . . Mnyup. Still, in a temper. . . I knew a baker, a gentleman. In . . . in . . . in the electric chair he’d of got up to give a lady his seat. So one day in a temper he put his friend in the oven. They found it out by trousers-buttons; by trousers-buttons they found it out. Afterwards, he was sorry. Still, I didn’t say it was right; only I don’t like hanging ladies. N-hah, mmmmhyah! Well, you got nerve!”

“Why? Why have I got nerve?”

“Judge, juries: I’d be frightened out of my life.”

“But why?”

“They can make black white. White black they can make.”

“I’ve nothing to fear: I can only tell the plain truth.”

“And good luck to you! What class of people is a murderer? No class. A man in the prime of life, so she goes and kills. With scissors, eh? She kills her husband with scissors! It shows you. Scissors, pokers—if somebody wants to murder a person, hm! Daggers they can find in . . . in . . . in chocolate cakes, if they put their minds to it. Even a razor they can kill somebody with. Present company excepted. With a murderer, everything is a revolver. But what for? Why should she do it to her own husband?”

“For love, I think, Mister Flickenflocker.”

“Eeeeh! Love. People should settle down, with a home, and plenty children, with plenty work; happy they ought to be, people. If there’s an argument, so sometimes one gives way, sometimes another gives way. For peace in the house, you got to give way. It looks bad to fight in front of the kids. So in the end you have grandchildren. What do they mean, love? To kill a person for love? In a book they read such rubbish, Mister Wainewright. For hate, for money, for hunger kill a person. For your wife and children kill a person. But love? Never heard of such a thing.”

“We’d better leave it to the judge and jury,” said Wainewright, coldly.

“We got no option,” said Flickenflocker. “We got to leave it to the judgen-jury. Anyway, it didn’t have nothing to do with you, thank goodness.”

“No?” said Wainewright.
“No,” said Flickenflocker, easily.
“It happened in my own house. I was in the next room. It does affect me a little bit,” said Wainewright, frowning.
“It’s all for the best I dessay,” Flickenflocker picked up a pair of fine clippers. “Lots o’ people’ll want to live there now.”

“More likely they’ll want to stay away from my house, Mister Flickenflocker.”

“Don’t you believe it! If there was a body (God forbid) in every cupboard, people’d pay double to stay there. For every one that don’t like a murder, there’s ten that’d rather have a murder than a . . . a . . . a hot-water-bottle. Don’t you worry. I know people, so they’d give fifty pounds to have a murder in their place.”

“Dry shampoo, please,” said Wainewright.
Flickenflocker unscrewed the top of a bottle. “Curiosity,” he said.

“Hm?”

“Curiosity. Were they open or shut?”

“Were what?”

“The scissors. The scissors the lady killed the gent with.”

“Shut.”

“It only shows you, eh? What can cut, can cut out lives from people. Psss! Hwhee! Even a road—fall on it from a high roof, and where are you? Scissors, eh? Temper, that’s what it is: temper. A stab and a cut, and there you are: you’ve hanged yourself.”

Wainewright did not want to talk any more. He was looking into the mirror. Two men, awaiting their turn, were exchanging whispers and looking in his direction. He knew what they were saying. That’s Wainewright, they were saying; that quite ordinary-looking man having the lavender shampoo is Wainewright, the Wainewright who has the house where Tooth was murdered by his wife.

He smiled. But then old Pewter flipped the linen cover from the man in the chair on Wainewright’s right—a big, swaggering man with a humorous, rosy face. One of the whispering men got up and said, in a voice that shook with awe: “Excuse me, but aren’t you Al Allum?”
The big man nodded gravely. "That is my name," said.

"May I shake hands with you? Would you mind?"
"Not at all." The big man held out a heavy, manicured fist, caught the stranger's hand in a grip that made him jump, gave Pewter a shilling, and went out with a cordial and resonant "Good-bye".

The man who had shaken hands with him said to Pewter: "I'll give you two shillings for that shilling Al Allum gave you just now."

The old man handed him a shilling with a faint smile. The other man, putting it in his breast-pocket, explained: "It's for my boy. He's crazy about Al Allum: you know what kids are."

Somebody else said: "The greatest comedian alive today, Al Allum. Ever see his fake conjuring sketch? Brilliant!"

"Brilliantine?" asked Flickenflocker.
"Cream," said Wainewright.
"Mmmmyah! There."

As Wainewright was paying his bill he said to the cashier: "Is your clock right?"

The girl replied: "It wouldn't be working in a barber-shop if it was." Everybody laughed. A man said: "Dead clever, that!"

Mr. Wainewright went out.

The city muttered under dry dust and blue smoke; the day was warm. Girls passed looking like bursting flowers in their new summer dresses. Wainewright looked at them. Here—passing him, jostling him and touching him with swinging hands in the crowded street—here walked thousands of desirable young women with nothing more than one-sixtieth of an inch of rayon, linen, or crêpe de Chine between their bare flesh and his eyesight. Why—ah, why—did his destiny send him out to walk alone? What's wrong with me? Wainewright asked himself. Tramps, cripples, hunchbacks, criminals, horrible men deformed and discolored and old—they all know the love of women. What's wrong with me? What have they got that I haven't got? I am a man of property... still a young man. He stared
piercingly at a pretty girl who was slowly walking towards him. Wainewright felt that his eyes were blazing like flood-lights. But the girl, looking at him incuriously, saw only a small ordinary man with mild, expressionless eyes; if she thought of him at all, drawing conclusions from what she saw, she thought of him as a dim and boring little family man—a nobody—the same as everybody.

Mentally addressing the passing girl, *That's what you think*, said Wainewright. *If I told you who and what I am you'd change your ideas quickly enough, Blondie!* He stopped to look at hats in a shop window. A furry green velour caught his eye, and he decided to buy a hat like that—a two-guinea hat, a real Austrian hat and not a ten-shilling imitation such as Tooth used to wear. That, and a younger-looking suit, a tweed suit; a colored shirt, even...

... *Why have I waited so long?*

Wainewright was not a drinking man. Alcohol gave him a headache. But now he felt that everything was changing inside him: he was getting into step with life. Now he wanted a drink. He walked jauntily to the "Duchess of Douro". Tooth had taken him there once before, one Saturday afternoon several months ago. Wainewright remembered the occasion vividly: he had not yet come into his inheritance; he worked for his living then. His aunt was still alive. He was waiting: she could not live forever. His little Personal Expenses Cash Book said that Wainewright had had seven hair-cuts since then. This made five months since his last drink of beer with Tooth.

Tooth was a tall dark man, strongly built, bright with the sickly radiance and the good-fellowship of the traveling salesman. He resembled one of those wax models that make cheap clothes attractive in the windows of mass-production tailors: he had the same unnatural freshness of complexion, the same blueness of chin, agelessness of expression, and shoddy precision of dress. Tooth wore Tyrolean hats and conspicuous tweeds. He liked to be seen smoking cigars. Yes, with his fivepenny cigars he was a man of personality with a manner at once detestable and irresistible—a way of seeming to give himself body and soul to the achievement of the most trivial objects. He
could not accept the finality of anybody's "No". Argument, with Tooth soon became acrimonious, full of recrimination. Women described him as "masterful"; Tooth would shout for twenty minutes over a bad penny, a bus ticket, or an accidental nudge of the elbow.

"Have a drink," Tooth had said.

"I couldn't really, Tooth."

"You can and will, cocko. There's a girl in the 'Douro' I want to introduce you to. A blonde. Genuine blonde: I found out. Eh? Ha-ha! Eh? Come on."

On the way to the public-house Tooth talked:

"Having the car painted. Just as well: I always seem to get myself into bother when I'm out in the car. Be lost without it, though. Tell you about the other night? Listen: I'm on my way to Derby. Listen. Listening? Well... listen:

"On the way I met two girls, sisters. Both ginger; one slim and the other plumpish. So I say: "Want a ride?" And so they say: "Yes". And well... after a few miles we pull up..." Tooth became briefly but luridly obscene. "But listen: the joke of it was this; I ran 'em about fifteen miles farther on and we pulled up at a sort of tea-shop place and went in for a cup of tea. Listening? Well, I order tea and cakes and things, and I say: "Excuse me, my dears, I've got to see a man from the Balkans about a boarhound," I say. "Pour my tea out and I'll be right back," I tell 'em. So I nip out, start up the old jam-jar, and scam before you can say knife. Eh? Ha-ha! Eh? Eh?"

"But what happened to the girls, all that way from home?"

"That's their look-out. I told you I had to get to Derby, didn't I? What was I going to do with 'em in Derby? Have a heart! Ah-ah, now you're coming in here to meet the nicest barmaid in London. No nonsense. Shut up. Come on in now."

He crashed through the grouped drinkers, pulling Wainewright after him. A tall young woman with honey-colored hair, whose face was strangely expressive of lust and boredom, dragged languidly at the handle of a beer-engine. But when she saw Tooth she smiled with unmis-
takable sudden joy. Only a woman in love smiles like that.

"Baby," said Tooth, "meet Mr. Wainewright, one of the best."

"Why, Sid! Why haven't you been to see me for such a long time?"

"Been busy. But I've been thinking of you. Ask George Wainewright. We met in the City. He wanted me to go with him to a posh week-end party in Kingston. (He's a very well-to-do man.) But I insisted on coming here. Did I or did I not, Wally?" said this pathological liar.

The compulsion of Tooth's glance was too strong. Wainewright nodded.

"See, Baby? Now, what'll we have?"

"I, ah, a small shandy."

"Oh, no, George. Not if you drink with me, you don't. None of your shandies. Drink that stuff and you don't drink with me. You're going to have a Bass, a Draught Bass. That's a man's drink. Baby, two Draught Bass."

"He always has his own way," said the girl called Baby.

"Skin like cream," whispered Tooth, with a snigger. When the girl returned with the beer he leaned across the bar and stroked her arm. "This evening?"

"No, I can't."

Tooth grasped her wrist. "Yes."

"Leave go. People are looking."

"I don't care. I'll wait for you after eleven."

"I shan't be there. Let go my arm, I tell you. The manager's coming over."

"This evening?"

"Stop it, you'll get me the sack."

"I don't care. This evening?"

"All right, but let go."

"Promise?"

"Promise."

Wainewright saw four red marks on the white skin of her arm as Tooth released her. She rubbed her wrist, and said in a voice which quivered with admiration: "You're too strong."

"Eh, George?" said Tooth, nudging Wainewright and grinning.
“You must have one more drink with me,” said Wainewright, emptying his glass with a wry face, “and then I must be off. Excuse me, miss. One more of these please.”

“Eh? Eh? What’s that? Oh no, damn it, no, I don’t stand that. You make it two more, Baby. Do you hear what I say?” Fixing Wainewright with an injured stare, Tooth added: “On principle, I don’t stand for that kind of thing.”

“Very well.”

“So I should think! No! Fair’s fair! Well, and where are you staying now?”

“In my aunt’s place still.”

“Hear that, Baby? Looking after his old auntie, eh? His nice rich old auntie. Ha-ha! He knows which side his bread’s buttered, George here. No offense, George. I’m going to look you up in a week or two. I want a nice room, reasonable.”

“We’re full right up just now, Tooth.”

“Ah, you old kidder! Isn’t he a kidder, Baby? You’ll find me a room all right. I know.”

And surely enough, a fortnight later Tooth came, and by then Wainewright’s aunt was dead, and there was a room vacant in the solid and respectable old house in Bishop’s Square. So Tooth had come to live with Wainewright. Yes, indeed, he had blustered and browbeaten his way into the grave, as luck ordered the matter; for there Mrs. Tooth had found him.

And therefore all Britain was waiting for a Notable Trial and, under rich black headlines, the name of George Wainewright was printed in all the papers, called by the prosecution as witness in the Victoria Scissors Murder.

Mr. Wainewright smiled as he entered the “Duchess of Douro”: this pub had brought him luck. In this saloon bar he had found power.

The barmaid called Baby was still there. Wainewright stood at the bar and waited. “What can I get you?” she
With a gulp of trepidation Wainewright said. “Whisky.”
“Small or large?”
“Ah . . . large, please.”
“Soda?”
“Yes, please.”
“Ice?”
“Please.”
He looked at her. She did not recognize him. He said:
“You don’t remember me.”
“I’ve seen you somewhere,” she said.
“I was in here some time ago with a friend of yours.”
“Friend of mine?”
“Tooth.”
“Who?”
“Tooth. Sid Tooth.”
“Sid! I didn’t know he was called Tooth. I thought his name was Edwards. He told me his—— Well, anyway . . .”
“If you didn’t know his name was Tooth, you don’t know about him, then,” said Wainewright, gulping his drink in his excitement.
“Know what?”
“Victoria Scissors Murder,” said Wainewright.
“What’s that? Oh-oh! Tooth! Was that Sid? Really?”
“Yes, that was Sid. It happened in my house. I’m Mr. Wainewright. I’m witness for the prosecution.”

She served another customer: Wainewright admired the play of supple muscles in her arm as she worked the beer engine.
“Want another one?” she asked, and Wainewright nodded.
“Will you have one?”
“Mustn’t drink on duty,” she said. “So that was Sid! Well.”
“I’m sorry to be the bearer of sad tidings,” said Wainewright.
“Sad tidings? Oh. I didn’t know him very well. We were just sort of acquaintances. Scissors, wasn’t it? Well, I dare say he deserved it.”
Wainewright stared at her. “I was in the next room at the time,” he said.
“Did you see it?”
“Not exactly: I heard it.”
“Oh,” said the barmaid. “Well . . .”
She seemed to bite off and swallow bitter words. “WELL what?” said Wainewright, with a little giggle.
She looked at him, pausing with a glass in one hand and a duster in the other, and said:
“That makes one swine less in the world.”
“I thought you liked him,” Wainewright said.
“I don’t like many men.”
“Oh,” said Wainewright. “Um . . . ah . . . oh, Miss,”
“Yes?”
“Tooth. Did he . . . ah . . .”
“Did he what?”
“Oh, nothing.”
“Yes, he did,” said the barmaid.
“Did what?”
“Nothing,” She turned away. “Excuse me.”
Wainewright wanted to talk to her. “May I have an-
other?” he asked. “Do you mind?”
He emptied his third glass. “You don’t like me,” he said.
“I don’t know you.”
“Do you want to know me?”
The barmaid called Baby said: “Not particularly.”
“Don’t go,” said Wainewright.
She sighed. There was something about Wainewright that made her uneasy: she did not like this strange, dead-
looking empty-eyed man. “Do you want something?”
He nodded.
“Another double Scotch?”
Wainewright nodded absently. Baby replenished his
glass: he looked at it in astonishment, and put down a ten-
shilling note.
“You’ve got some silver,” she said.
“I haven’t got anything at all,” said Wainewright, “I’m
lonely.”
The barmaid said, in a tone of hostility mixed with pity:
“Find yourself somebody.”
“Nobody wants me. I’m lonely.”
“Well?”

“What for?”

A buzzer sounded. A voice cried: “Order your last drinks please, gentlemen! Order your last drinks!”

“She was eight-seven when she died. She was an old woman when I was a boy.”

“Who was?”

“Auntie. I waited twenty years.”

“What for?”

“Eight thousand pounds. She left it to me. I’ve got eight thousand pounds and a house. Furnished from top to bottom. Old lease. It brings in seven pounds a week clear.”

He groped in a fog, found himself, and dragged himself up.

“Pardon me, Miss,” he said. “I ought not to drink.” He felt ill.

“That’s all right,” said the barmaid.

“Will you excuse me, Miss?” asked Wainewright.

The girl called Baby was turning away. Something like rage got into his throat and made him shout: “You think I’m nobody! You wait!”

A doorman in a grey uniform, a colossus with a persuasive voice, picked him up as a whirlwind picks up a scrap of paper, and led him to the door, murmuring: “Now come on, sir, come on. You’ve had it, sir, you’ve had enough sir. Let’s all be friendly. Come on, now.”

“You think I’m nobody,” said Mr. Wainewright, half crying.

“I wish there was a million more like you,” said the doorman, “because you’re sensible, that’s what you are. You know when you’ve had enough. If there was more like you, why…”

The swing-door went whup, and Mr. Wainewright was in the street.

He thought he heard people laughing behind him in the bar.

“You’ll see, tomorrow!” he cried.
The doorman’s voice said: “That’s right. Spoken like a man. Here you are, then, sir. Where to?”

A taxi was standing, wide-open and quivering.

“77, Bishop’s Square, Belgravia,” said Mr. Wainewright. “Bishop’s Square, Victoria,” said the taxi-driver.

“Belgravia,” said Mr. Wainewright.

The doorman was waiting. He fumbled and found coins. “Here,” he said. The doorman saluted and the taxi-door slammed. Everything jolted away. At Whitehall, Mr. Wainewright realized that he had given the doorman four half-crowns instead of four pennies. He rapped at the window.

“Well?” said the driver.

“Oh, never mind,” said Mr. Wainewright.

Let them all wait until tomorrow. They would know then to whom they had been talking.

But on that Sunday, for the first time in ten years, the editor of the Sunday Special cut out John Jacket’s article. Twenty minutes before midnight, formidable news came through from Middle Europe. Jacket’s page was needed for a statistical feature and a special map.


On Tuesday, Mr. Wainewright arrived at the offices of the Sunday Special before half-past ten in the morning. Jacket arrived at a quarter to twelve. He saw that the little man looked ill.

“How are you, George?” he asked.

“Mr. Jacket,” said Mr. Wainewright, “what’s happened?”

“Happened? About what?”

“I hate to disturb you——”

“Not at all, George.”
"We met, you remember?"
"Certainly I remember. Hm?"
"The piece you were going to put in the paper about . . . about . . . my views on the Tooth case. Did you . . . ?"
"I wrote it, George. But my page was cut last Sunday. On account of Germany. Sorry, but there it is. Feel like a drink?"
"No, nothing to drink, thank you."
"Coffee?"
"Perhaps a cup of coffee," said Mr. Wainewright. They went to a café not far away. Jacket was aware of Mr. Wainewright's wretchedness: it was twitching at the corners of the nondescript mouth and dragging down the lids of the colorless eyes. "What's up?" he asked, as if he did not know.
"Nothing. I simply wondered . . . I wondered . . . ."
"About that story? Take it easy, George. What is there that I can do? Bigger things have happened. As for this Tooth murder case—if you can call it a case. Martha Tooth is certain to get off lightly. Especially with Concord defending. I must get back to the office."
In Fleet Street Mr. Wainewright asked him: "Is the trial likely to be reported?"
"Sure," said Jacket.
"I suppose I'll be called, as witness?"
"Of course."
"But I'm detaining you, J-Jack."
"Not at all, George. Good-by."
"Good-by, sir."
Jacket hurried eastwards. Mr. Wainewright walked deliberately in the direction of the Strand.

Sumner Concord was perhaps the greatest defender of criminals the world had ever known. He could combine the crafty ratiocination of a Birkett with the dialectical oratory of a Marshall Hall, and act like John Barrymore—whom he closely resembled. The louder he sobbed the closer he observed you. In cross-examination he was
suave and murderous. Birkenhead himself was afraid of Sumner Concord. Yet Concord was an honest man. He would defend no one whom he believed to be guilty.

"Tell me about it," he said, to Martha Tooth.

"What do you want me to tell you?" she asked.

"You must tell me exactly what happened that evening at Number 77, Bishop's Square. The truth, Mrs. Tooth. I want to help you. How can I help you if you do not tell me the truth?"

She said: "There isn't anything to tell."

"Now you are charged——" began Sumner Concord.

"Oh, what do I care? What do I care?" cried Martha Tooth. "Charge me, hang me—leave me alone!"

Sumner Concord had strong tea brought in before he continued. "Tell me, Mrs. Tooth. Why did you visit your husband that night?"

Martha Tooth said: "I wasn't well. I couldn't work. There were the children. I wanted Sid to do something about the children. I was his wife. He was my husband, after all. . . . I only wanted him to give me some money, just a little, till I could work again."

"Work again at what, Mrs. Tooth?"

"I'd been doing housework."

"And it had been some time since your husband had given you any money?"

"Three years."

"You had been supporting yourself and your two children all that time?"

"Yes."

"He had sent you nothing?"

"Not a penny. I left Sid over three years ago."

"Why did you leave him, Mrs. Tooth?"

"He used to beat me. I couldn't stand him beating me in front of the children. Then—it was when we had two rooms in Abelard Street near the British Museum—he brought a woman in."

"Are there, Mrs. Tooth, by any chance, any witnesses who could testify to that?"

"Mrs. Ligo had the house. Then there was Miss Bundidge; she lived downstairs. I ran away with the children
and went to my aunt’s place. She still lives there: Mrs. Lupton, 143, Novello Road, Turners Green. Her friend, Mrs. Yule, she lives there too. They both know. We stayed with them once. Sid used to knock me about. The police had to be called in twice. He wanted to kill me when he’d been drinking.”

“. . . In twice,” wrote Sumner Concord. “Novello Road. Novello Street Police Station, um? Take your time. Have some more tea. A cigarette. You don’t smoke? Wise of you, wise. He was a violent and dangerous man, this husband of yours, then?”

“Yes.”

“He threatened, for instance, to kill you, no doubt?”

“No,” said Martha Tooth, “he never threatened. He just hit.”

“And on this last occasion. You called to see him. Hm?”

“Yes, that’s right.”

“You hadn’t seen him for some time?”

“About three years.”

“How did you find out his address?”

“From his firm, Poise Weighing Machines.”

“You hadn’t tried to find out his address before, eh?”

“All I cared about was that Sid shouldn’t find out my address.”

“But you were at the end of your tether, hm?”

“I was supposed to be having an operation. I’ve still got to have an operation. And I thought Sid might let me have something . . .”

“There—there, now—now! Calm. Tears won’t help, Mrs. Tooth. We must be calm. You saw Sid. Yes?”

“Yes, sir. But . . . he’d been drinking, I think.”

“Tell me again exactly what happened.”

“I called. A lady let me in. I went up, and Sid was there. He said: “What, you?” I said: “Yes, me.” Then he said—he said——”

“Take your time, Mrs. Tooth.”

“He said: ‘What a sight you look.’”

“And then?”

“I suppose I started crying.”

“And he?”
"He told me to shut up. And so I did. I think I did, sir. I tried to, I asked him to let me have some money. He said that I'd had as much money as I was ever going to get out of him—as if I'd ever had anything out of him!" cried Mrs. Tooth, between deep, shuddering sobs.

"There, there, my dear Mrs. Tooth. You must drink your tea and be calm. Everything depends on your being calm. Now."

"I said I'd go to his firm. I told him I was ill. I told him I'd go to his firm in the City. Then he hit me, sir."

"Where?"

"In the face—a slap. I started to cry again. He hit me again, and he laughed at me."

"He hit you in the face again?"

"Yes, with his hand."

"This is very painful to you, Mrs. Tooth, but we must have everything clear. Your hand was wounded. How did your hurt your hand?"

"All of a sudden... I didn't want to keep on living. I was so miserable—I was so miserable—I was——"

Sumner Concord waited. In a little while Martha Tooth could speak again.

"You hurt your hand."

"I wanted to kill myself. There was a knife, or something. I picked it up. I meant to stick it in myself. But Sid was quick as lightning."

There was a ring of pride in her voice, at which Sumner Concord shuddered, although he had heard it before.

"What happened then?" he asked.

"He hit me again and knocked me over."

"You fell?"

"Against the bed, sir. Then Sid hit me some more and told me to get out. He said: 'I hate the sight of you, get out of my sight,' he said."

"Above all, be calm, Mrs. Tooth. What happened after that?"

"I don't know."

"After he hit you the last time—think."

"I don't know, sir."

"You got up?"
“I can’t remember.”
“You can’t remember. Do you remember going out of
the room?”
“I sort of remember going out of the room.”
“You got back to your home?”
“Yes.”
“You remember that?”
“Yes, sir. I know, because I washed my face in cold
water, and moved quietly so as not to wake the children
up.”
“That, of course, was quite reasonable. That would ac-
count for the blood in the water in the wash-bowl.”
“I dare say.”
“Your throat was bruised, Mrs. Tooth. Did your hus-
band try to strangle you?”
“He got hold of me to keep me quiet, I should think,
sir.”
“Before you picked up this knife, or whatever it was? Or
after?”
“I couldn’t say. I don’t know. I don’t care.”
“I suggest that you picked up this sharp instrument,
knife, scissors, or whatever it may have been, after your
husband took you by the throat.”
“Very likely,” said Martha Tooth, dreakily, “I don’t
know. I don’t care.”
“You must pull yourself together, Mrs. Tooth. How can
I help you if you will not help yourself? You picked up this
knife, or pair of scissors, after your husband began to
strangle you with his hands. Is that so?”
“I should think so.”
“He was an extremely powerful man, I think?”
“My Sid? Sid was as strong as a bull, sir.”
“Yes. Now can you give me a list of the places—rooms,
flats, houses, hotels, any places—in which you and your
husband lived together from the date of your marriage un-
til the date of your separation?”
“Yes, I think I could, sir.”
“You lived together for several years, didn’t you?”
“Nearly seven years, off and on.”
“He ill-treated you from the start?”
Martha Tooth laughed. "He beat me the first time two days after we were married," she said.

"However, you managed to keep this matter secret?"

"Oh, everybody knew."

"Hush, hush, Mrs. Tooth. Everything depends upon your self-control! He can't hurt you now."

"I'm not crying because of that..." Martha Tooth bit her sleeve and pressed her fingers of her free hand into her eyes. Still, tears came out between her fingers.

"Why are you crying, then?"

"You're so good to me!"

"You must be calm," said Sumner Concord, in a cold, hard voice.

She stopped crying. "Everybody knew how he treated me," she said.

"You must try and remember everyone who might make a statement concerning the manner in which your husband treated you, Mrs. Tooth. You must try and remember. Is that quite clear?"

"Yes, sir, but I'm afraid. I'm afraid of being in the court. They'll make me swear black is white. I don't know what to do. I don't know what to say. I don't——"

Sumner Concord stopped her with a gentle, but imperious gesture, and said: "Mrs. Tooth, you mustn't persuade yourself that there is anything to be afraid of. You will be given a perfectly fair trial. The clerk of the court will say to you: "Martha Tooth, you are charged with the murder of Sidney Tooth on the 7th of May of this year. Are you guilty or not guilty?" And you will say: "Not guilty." This I believe to be the truth. I believe that you are not guilty of the murder of your husband. I believe that, desperate with grief and pain and terror, you picked up the scissors intending to kill yourself, and not to kill your husband."

Martha Tooth stared at him in blank astonishment and said: "Me, pick up a pair of scissors to kill Sid? I shouldn't have dared to raise a hand to Sid."

"Just so. He had you by the throat, Mrs. Tooth. He was shaking you. Your head was spinning. You struck out wildly, blindly, Mrs. Tooth, and it happened that the point of that sharp pair of scissors struck him in the soft part of his
neck and penetrated the subclavian artery. You had not the slightest intention of hurting him in any way,” said Sumner Concord, holding her with his keen, calm, hypnotic eyes. “What happened after that, Mrs. Tooth?”

“I don’t know what happened,” she cried. “As he let go of my neck, I ran away from him, that’s all I know.”

“Exactly. You ran away blindly, neither knowing or caring where you were going. Is that not so? And later they found you wringing your ice-cold hands and crying, while the children lay asleep in your poor furnished room. Is that not so?”

“My hands were ice-cold,” said Martha Tooth in a wondering undertone. “How did you know my hands were ice-cold?”

Sumner Concord smiled sadly and with pity. “Be calm, my dear lady, be calm.”

“But how did you know my hands were ice-cold?”

“They frequently are in such cases,” said Sumner Concord. “And now you must eat your meals and rest and get your poor nerves in order again, Mrs. Tooth. You are to banish this matter from your mind until it is necessary for us to talk about it again. You are to leave everything in my hands. I believe that you have been telling me the truth, and in that case I give you my word of honor that I believe that no great harm can come to you. Now you must rest.”

“I don’t care what happens to me, sir, but the children—what about the children?” asked Martha Tooth, twisting her wet handkerchief in her skinny, little chapped hands.

“Put your mind at rest, they are being well looked after, I promise you.”

A shocking thought seemed suddenly to strike her and she gasped: “They can send me to prison for years. And then what would happen to them?”

Rising, and laying large, gentle hands on her shoulders, Sumner Concord replied: “Even if you had known that you were striking your husband, you would have been striking him without premeditation, and in self-defense, because in the hands of this crazy drunken brute you were in peril of your life, and if there is any justice in the world, you need not necessarily go to prison at all.”
Then he went away and obtained the statements of Mrs. Ligo, Miss Brundidge, Mrs. Lupton, Mrs. Yule, and half a dozen others. He obtained certain evidence from the police at the Novello Street Police Station. A few days later, everybody began to take it for granted that Martha Tooth would get away scot-free.

Because it was Sumner Concord who was defending Martha Tooth, the Central Criminal Court was crowded. Mr. Wainewright, glancing timidly from wig to horsehair wig, felt his heart contract and his stomach shrink, and when his fascinated gaze fell upon the hard, white, turkface of Mr. Justice Claverhouse, who sat in his great robes under the sword, he was seized by an insane impulse to run away and hide. Yet, at the same time, he was aware of a certain spiritual exaltation as witness for the prosecution in Rex v. Tooth.

Mr. Sherwood’s speech for the prosecution was longer than one might have expected. He had put a lot of work into it. If he could hang Martha Tooth, snatching her from the protective arms of Sumner Concord, he was a made man. His manner was cold and precise. His voice was—as one journalist described it—winter sunlight made articulate. As he spoke, members of the public who had hitherto believed that Martha Tooth could not possibly be convicted changed their minds. One or two sportsmen who had laid five to four on her acquittal began furtively to try to hedge their bets. Mr. Sherwood’s sentences struck home like so many jabs of an ice-pick. Here was an angry woman, may it please His Lordship and the members of the jury. Here was an embittered woman, a jealous woman. Here was a woman scorned. She had brooded over her real or imaginary wrongs until at last she had decided on a bloody revenge. Under the cover of the gathering darkness, she had gone stealthily out of her house, to the house of her husband. And there she had stabbed him to death with this pair of scissors, paper-cutting scissors with a shagreen handle. (The pair of scissors was unwrapped from some
tissue paper in a little cardboard box, into which they had been packed with loving care.) She left the scissors in the wound, knowing that no fingerprints would be visible on the rough shagreen handle. Then she slunk out of the house. But her cunning had not been quite deep enough. She had forgotten to wipe her fingerprints from the door-knob on the inside of Mr. Tooth’s bed-sitting-room door. There were witnesses who could swear to having seen her come and seen her go. Medical evidence would prove that this murderous stab in the throat, which had gone down through the subclavian artery, had been inflicted at such-and-such a time. She was arrested almost literally red-handed, for she had not yet had time to empty certain blood-stained water from a basin in her room. While her husband’s innocent children lay asleep in her bed, the murdereress had crept back to wash away the evidence of her guilt, and so on and so forth. And now with the assistance of his learned friend, Mr. Bottle, he would call the evidence before the court.

At this point, Mrs. Madge was called. She remembered everything. She had let Mrs. Tooth in on the evening of the murder. She knew at exactly what time she had let that party in. How did she know the time? She had every reason to know the time because it was time for Mrs. Madge to go home and she had paid a certain amount of attention to the clock. She was not a clock-watcher but she did her duty, and was not paid to stay more than a certain number of hours. On this particular evening she had an appointment with a friend, Mrs. Glass, with whom she had arranged to go to the pictures in time for a certain performance. Therefore she had particularly desired to get away in time to change her clothes and make herself decent. Therefore—give or take half a minute—she could fairly exactly say at what time the lady came to the door and asked for Mr. Sidney Tooth and she could swear to the lady: she was in the habit of keeping her eyes open; it was her hobby, sizing people up. Mrs. Tooth was wearing a very old loose black coat, the sort that the Jewish shops sell for a guinea, and one of those black hats you could get for three-and-six-pence at Marks and Spencer’s. She was carrying an old
black handbag, and her shoes must have been given to her by a lady, a bigger lady than Mrs. Tooth who had worn them out and was about to throw them away. She could take her oath on it that Mrs. Tooth was the person she had let in on that fatal evening.

Then came Mr. Wainewright. He had bought a new suit for the occasion—a smart, well-cut suit, with the first double-breasted coat he had ever worn. He had gone to the West End for a shirt that cost eighteen shillings. His tie must have cost as much again, and there was a pearl pin stuck into the middle of it. An equilateral triangle of white handkerchief protruded from his breast pocket. He looked respectable and intensely uncomfortable as he gave his evidence, which was as he had outlined it to John Jacket that evening in the “Firedrake”.

Cross-examined, he gave the defense nothing to work on. It was apparent that Wainewright was telling the truth. Then came the turn of the defense.

To the astonishment of the public, Mr. Sumner Concord did not attempt to break down the evidence for the prosecution. There was no doubt at all, he said, that the unfortunate Mrs. Tooth had called on her husband at that time. But he happened to know that she had called in order to plead with him. Tooth had callously deserted her and his two children. He was earning a good salary and substantial sums in commission, which he devoted entirely to dissipation. Mrs. Tooth, the deserted woman, had been compelled to support the children and herself by menial labor. Medical evidence would indicate that it was necessary for this lady to undergo a serious internal operation in the near future. She had visited her husband merely in order to beg—to beg on her bended knees if necessary—for the wherewithal to feed their children, his children and hers, until such time as she could find strength to go out again and scrub other women’s floors to earn the few shillings that she needed to maintain them.

Sumner Concord drew the attention of His Lordship and the jury to the fact that Mrs. Tooth had a separation order but had never received a penny: her forbearance was inspired by mercy and also by fear, because Sidney Tooth,
as he was about to prove, had been one of the most murderous bullies and unmitigated scoundrels that ever polluted God's earth. This poor woman, Mrs. Tooth, did not care whether she lived or died—her husband by his persistent brutality and ill-treatment had beaten the normal fear of death out of her. Evidence was forthcoming which would prove that this wretched, persecuted woman had for many years gone in terror of her life and had frequently interposed her broken and bruised body between the drunkenly raging Sidney Tooth and the undernourished, trembling bodies of his children. Mother-love was stronger than the terror of bodily harm. Knowing that in a little while her exhausted frame could no longer support the strain imposed upon it—knowing that the time was fast approaching when she must go into hospital—Martha Tooth went to plead with her husband, and he mocked her. He laughed in her face. He struck her. She, driven to desperation, God forgive her, driven to self-destruction, picked up that pair of scissors to stab herself. In doing so she wounded her hand. Then Tooth, who was drunk and who—a brute at the best of times—was murderous when drunk, as evidence would prove, took her by the throat and began to strangle her. She struck out blindly and he let her go. She went weeping, she ran out blindly into the night. Mr. Sumner Concord did not deny the validity of the evidence of Mr. Wainewright and Mrs. Madge. Mrs. Tooth believed that she must have killed her husband, and she was horrified at the very thought of it. As for killing him by intention—she could never have thought of that, she loved him too much and she feared him too much. She wanted to kill herself. There was medical evidence to prove that the blood in the hand-basin was her own blood from her own hand which she cut in so blindly snatching the scissors with which Tooth had been killed. That her life was in danger might be indicated by the evidence of eleven witnesses, three of them doctors...

Mr. Wainewright, wondering at the complexity of it all, looked away. He looked away from the face of Sumner Concord, scanned the faces of the jurymen (one of them was surreptitiously slipping a white tablet into his mouth)
and blinked up at the ceiling. A piece of fluffy stuff, such as comes away from a dandelion that has run to seed, was floating, conspicuous against the panelling. It began to descend. Mr. Wainewright's eyes followed it. It came to rest on the judge's wig, where it disappeared. Mr. Wainewright was conscious of a certain discontent.

After that nothing of the trial struck in his mind except Sumner Concord's peroration, and Mr. Justice Claverhouse's verdict.

The peroration was something like:

"Here was a beast. He tortured this woman. She trusted him and gave him her life. He accepted it brutally and threw it away. She had been beautiful. He had battered her with his great bony fists into the woman you see before you. That face was offered to Tooth in the first flush of its beauty. He beat it into the wreck and ruin of a woman's face—the wreck, the ruin that you see before you now. She did not complain. He mocked and humiliated her. She was silent. She wept alone. He made her an object of pity, this mad and murderous bully, and she said nothing. He deserted her, leaving her with two young sons whom she loved very dearly: she was sick and weak, and still she never spoke! The prosecution has raised its voice: Martha Tooth suffered in silence. She worked for her children, happy to bring home a little bread in her poor cracked hands.

"You have heard the evidence of those who have known her. She was a woman without stain, a woman undefiled. But when, at last, she went ill—dear God, what was she to do? She wanted nothing for herself. But there were her children. Her husband was prosperous. She asked him only for bread for his children—he laughed in her face. He struck her and ordered her to go. She pleaded—and he beat her. She cried for mercy and he abused her, reproaching her for the loss of her beauty, the beauty he himself had savagely beaten away.

"At last, driven mad by despair, she picks up the first thing that comes to hand, a pair of scissors, and tries—poor desperate woman—to kill herself. Laughing, he takes her by the throat. These hands, strong enough to break a
horseshoe, are locked about her frail throat. Imagine them upon your own, and think!

“She struggles, she cannot speak, she can only struggle while he laughs in her face, because these murderous thumbs are buried in her windpipe. She strikes out blindly, and this great furious hulk of bestial manhood collapses before her. Sixteen stone of bone and muscles falls down, while seven stone of wretchedness and sickness stands aghast.

“And looking down she sees the scissors embedded in that bull neck. By some freak of chance—by some act of God—she has struck the subclavian artery and the great beast has fallen. She runs blindly away, weeping bitterly, half demented with anguish, and when the police find her (which was easy, since she had not attempted to conceal herself) she is crying, and the blood in the basin is her own blood. The children lie asleep and she begs the police to take her away, to take her away anywhere out of this world. She asks for nothing but death, and there, there is the pity of it! . . .”

After an absence of twenty-five minutes the jury returned a verdict of Not Guilty.

Then, although everyone said he had known from the beginning that Martha Tooth would be acquitted, London went wild with delight. The Sunday Extra sent Munday Marsh to offer the bewildered woman five hundred pounds for her life-story. Pain of the Sunday Briton offered a thousand. She shook her head wearily and dispiritedly. “Twelve hundred and fifty,” said the Sunday Briton. The Extra said: “Fifteen hundred.”

“I can’t write stories,” said Martha Tooth. “Any—
way——”

“I can,” said Pain.

“Calm, gentlemen, calm,” said the sardonic voice of John Jacket. They turned, and saw him dangling an oblong of scribbled paper between a thumb and a forefinger. “I’ve got it.”
The Sunday Special had given Jacket authority to pay as much as two thousand pounds for Martha Tooth’s story. Ten minutes before Munday Marsh arrived, Jacket had bought the story for six hundred pounds.

“Oh well,” they said, without malice, and went away. Pain said: “To-day to thee, to-morrow to me, Jack,” and they shook hands. Ainsworth of The People said nothing: he knew that in a year’s time the whole business would be forgotten, and then, if he happened to need a human-interest murder-feature, he could re-tell the story from the recorded facts.

So John Jacket wrote fifteen thousand words—four installments, illustrated with photographs and snapshots—under the title of DIARY OF AN ILL-USED WOMAN. What Jacket did not know he invented: Martha Tooth signed everything—she still could not understand what it was all about. Soon after the first installment was published she began to receive fan-mail: half a dozen religious leaflets, letters urging her to repent, prophecies concerning the Second Coming, and proposals of marriage, together with frantically abusive notes signed Ill-used Man. She also received parcels of food and clothes, and anonymous letters enclosing postal orders. An old lady in the West Country, saying that she had wanted to kill her husband every day for forty years, enclosed sixty twopenny stamps.

Martha Tooth was taken in hand by a lady reporter, who carried her off to a beauty parlor, compelled her to have her hair waved, and showed her how to choose a hat. In three weeks she changed; paid attention to her finger-nails and expressed discontent with the Press. The Press, she complained, wouldn’t leave her alone, and everyone wanted to marry her. Before the fourth installment appeared she had received eleven offers of marriage. Martha Tooth had become whimsical, smiled one-sidedly, and took to lifting her shoulders in a sort of shrug. “Men,” she said, “men! These men!”

After the fourth week, however, she got no more letters. She was out of sight and out of mind.

She went to the offices of the Sunday Special to see Jacket. Someone had told her that she ought to have got
thousands of pounds for her story, and that there was a film in it. When she told Jacket this, he drew a deep breath and said:

"Mrs. Tooth. Your story is written, read, and wrapped around fried fish, and forgotten. You forget it too. Be sensible and forget it. You've lived your story and told your story. Go away and live another story." He added: "With a happy ending, eh?"

She went away. Soon, a paragraph on the gossip page of an evening newspaper announced that she had married a man called Booth. Her name had been Tooth—there was the story. Mrs. Tooth married Mr. Booth. He was a market-gardener, and, strangely enough, a widower. Mr. Booth had proposed to her by letter.

John Jacket had forgotten the Tooth case when Mr. Wainewright came to see him for the second time, twelve weeks later.

It struck Jacket as odd that Mr. Wainewright was wearing a jaunty little green Tyrolean hat and a noticeable tweed suit.

"Is it fair?" asked Wainewright. "Where do I come in?"

"Come in? How? How d'you mean, where do you come in?"

"Well," said Mr. Wainewright, shuffling his feet, "I mean to say . I hear that Tooth's good lady got thousands and thousands of pounds."

"A few hundreds, George," said Jacket.

"It isn't that, Mr. Jacket. It's——"

"The credit?" asked Jacket, twitching an ironic lip.

"Who is she to be made a heroine out of?" asked Wainewright, looking at his finger-tips.

"What exactly are you trying to get at, George?" asked Jacket.

"Get at? Who, me? Nothing, Mr. Jacket."

"Then what do you want? What do you want me to do?"

Mr. Wainewright looked at the ball of his right thumb
and shook his head. "There was nothing about me at all in the papers," he said. "I've got a story, too."

"Be a pal," said Jacket, "and go away. I've got work to do, George, old man, work. So be a pal."

"Right," Mr. Wainewright got up.

"Don't be angry with me. Things come and things go," said Jacket, "and a story is a nine-days' wonder. Wash this murder out of your head."

Mr. Wainewright said: "Well, you know best. But I've also got a story——"

A telephone bell rang. "See you some other time," said John Jacket, lifting the receiver. "So long for now, George."

Wainewright went out without saying good day. Shortly after he had gone, John Jacket, hanging up the telephone, found himself wondering about something. There had been something wrong with Wainewright. What?

Jacket gnawed a fat black pencil.

He had eaten his way to the last letter of the pencil-maker's name before he knew what he was trying to remember. He laughed, and said to himself: That silly little man has gone and got himself up in a furry green hat and a tweed suit. What on earth for?

Jacket felt that he was on the verge of a discovery—not a Sunday Special story, but something interesting all the same.

Then his telephone rang. By the time he had stopped listening new things were in his head, and Mr. Wainewright, being gone, was forgotten.

Three weeks later, as Jacket was leaving the office at lunch-time, he heard Mr. Wainewright’s voice again. The little man came breathlessly out of the cover of a doorway and said: "Mr. Jacket, sir. Please. One moment. Just one moment."

"Well, what is it?" said Jacket, looking down at him with an expression of something like loathing. "What is it now, Wainewright?"
“It’s something important, sir. Something very important. I give you my word, my word of honor, you’ll never forgive yourself if you don’t listen to me.”

“I’m in a hurry.”

“I’ve been waiting for you here in the street for an hour and a half,” said Mr. Wainewright.

“You should have telephoned.”

“If I had, you wouldn’t have spoken to me.”

“True,” said Jacket. Then he blinked, and said: “What the devil have you been doing to yourself?”

Mr. Wainewright was dressed in a tight-fitting, half-belted jacket of white stuff like tweed, an orange-colored shirt and a black satin tie with a diamond horseshoe pin, blue flannel trousers, a panama hat, and brown-and-white buckskin shoes. He had trimmed his mustache to a fine straight line, above and below which Jacket could see a considerable area of tremulous white lip, beaded with perspiration. And he could smell lavender-water and whisky.

“Doing to myself? Nothing, sir,” said Mr. Wainewright.

“I like your hat.”

“It’s real panama.”

“Um-um!” Jacket considered him for a second or two, and then said: “Come on, then. Tell me all about it. Come and have a drink.”

“It’s very private,” said Mr. Wainewright. “It’s not something I could talk about if there was anybody around. Look, Mr. Jacket, it’ll be worth your while. Come home with me, just for a few minutes.”

“Home with you?”

“To Bishop’s Square—ten minutes in a taxi, no more. I’ve got plenty of drinks at home. Have a drink there. Ten minutes. I’ll show you something. . . . I’ll tell you something. Please do! Please do, Mr. Jacket.”

“All right, then. But I haven’t long,” said Jacket.

They got into a taxi. Neither of them spoke untīl Mr. Wainewright said: “After you,” as he unlocked the street door of Number 77, Bishop’s Square. “Lead the way,” said Jacket. The little man bobbed in a shopwalker’s obeisance. They passed through a clean, dim passage hung with
framed caricatures out of *Vanity Fair*, and climbed sixteen
darkly-carpeted stairs to the first floor. Mr. Wainewright
opened another door. "This used to be my auntie's room,"
his said, rather breathlessly.

"Charming," said Jacket, without enthusiasm.

"It was Tooth's room, too."

"Oh I see. The room in which Tooth was murdered,
eh?"

"Yes, sir. It's my bedroom now."

"And is this what you brought me here to see?" asked
Jacket.

"No, no," cried Mr. Wainewright, splashing a quarter
of a pint of whisky into a large tumbler, and pressing the
nozzle instead of the lever of a soda-water syphon. "Please
sit down."

"That's a massive drink you've given me," said Jacket.
He observed that his host's drink was not much smaller.

"No, not at all."

"Cheers." Jacket emptied his glass in two gulps. Mr.
Wainewright tried to do the same, but choked; recovered
with a brave effort, and forced the rest of his drink into his
mouth and down his throat. Jacket could hear his heavy
breathing. "Now, tell us all about it," he said.

"There was," said Mr. Wainewright, swaying a little in
his chair, "there was a . . . an astounding miscarriage of
justice."

"In what way, Wainewright?"

"In every way, Mr. Jacket, sir. In every way. What I
have to say will shock you."

"Go ahead."

"Sid Tooth died just about on the spot where you are
sitting, sir."

"Well?"

"The rug, of course, is a new one. They couldn't clean
the old one. . . . But your glass is empty."

"I'll pour drinks. You go on," said Jacket, rising.

"Listen," said Mr. Wainewright. . . .

•     •     •     •     •
Mr. Wainewright said, dreamily:

"What I want to know is this: where's your justice? Where's your law? If justice is made a mockery of, and law is tricked—what do I pay rates and taxes for? The world's going mad, sir. A woman is accused, sir, of killing her hubby with a pair of scissors. It's proved that she did it, proved beyond doubt, Mr. Jacket! And what happens? This woman, a nobody, mind you; this woman does not pay the penalty of her crime, sir. No. She is made a heroine of. She is cheered to the echo. She has her picture in all the papers. She has her life-story published. She marries again, lives happy ever after. Is that fair? Is that right?"

"What's on your mind, Wainewright? It was pretty well established as a clean-cut case of self-defense."

Mr. Wainewright, with extraordinary passion, said: "She was lying! Tooth was still alive when she left this house! He was hale and hearty as you or me, after the street door closed behind Martha Tooth. Alive and laughing, I tell you. She's a perjurer . . . a perjureress. She's a liar. She got what she got under false pretenses: all that money, all that sympathy. 'Ill-Used Woman', as you called her! She never killed Tooth. The world must be going mad."

"What about your evidence?" asked Jacket, skillfully pouring half his drink into his host's glass.

Mr. Wainewright snapped: "Evidence! Don't talk to me about evidence!"

"You drink up your nice drink," said Jacket, "and go over it all again."

"I hated that man," said Mr. Wainewright. "Who did he think he was, that Sid Tooth? He was no good. And all the women were in love with him. He was a bully, a dirty bully. A drunkard, a bad 'un—bad to the backbone. He practically forced his way into this house. A laugh, a joke, a drink, a bang on the back—and before I knew where I was, there was Tooth, in auntie's old room. I'm not used to that sort of thing, Mr. Jacket, sir. I'm not used to it. He borrowed money in cash, and ran up bills. He told me he'd done a deal with a new department store, for weighing machines—over a thousand pounds in commission he had to collect. So he said. All lies, sir, all lies, but I swallowed
'em. I swallowed everything Tooth said. Bad, sir, bad! He was bad to the backbone."

Jacket asked: "Why didn't you tell him to get out?"

"I meant to," said Mr. Wainewright, "but he always saw it coming. Then it was a laugh, and a joke, and a drink, and a bang on the back. . Tomorrow: he'd pay me tomorrow. And tomorrow, he said, tomorrow. And then he had to go to Leeds, or Bristol. It was drinks and women with him, sir, all the time. He used to bring women into this very room, Mr. Jacket, sir, into this very room. And I was next door. No woman ever looked twice at me, sir. What's the matter with me? Have I got a hump on my back, or something? Eh? Have I?"

Jacket said: "Far from it, old friend."

"And I sat in my room, next door, with nothing to do but get my scrap-book up to date."

"What scrap-book?" asked Jacket, refilling the little man's glass.

Mr. Wainewright giggled, pointing to a neatly-arranged pile of red-backed volumes on a shelf by the bed. Jacket opened one, and riffled the pages. Mr. Wainewright had meticulously cut out of cinematic and physical-culture magazines the likenesses of young women in swimming suits. He had gummed them in and smoothed them down. Here, between the eight covers of four scrap-books, lay his seraglio. His favorite wife, it appeared, was Ann Sheridan.

"You think I'm pretty terrible," he said, rising uncertainly and taking the book out of Jacket's hands.

"Go on," said Jacket.

"No, but I don't want you to think . . ."

"I'm not thinking anything. Go on, pal, go on."

"I think there's something artistic in the human form, sir. So for a hobby, you see, I collect it in my scrap-books."

"I understand, I understand," said Jacket. "You were sitting in your room next door to this, with nothing to do but get your scrap-books up to date, when—go on, go on, George."

"I asked you here to tell you this," said Mr. Wainewright. "You don't need to . . . to draw me out. I'm telling you something. A story—worth a fortune. No need to screw
your face up. No need to pretend to treat me with respect. I know what you think. You think I’m nothing. You think I’m nobody. Let me tell you.”

“You were sitting in your room—”

“I was cutting out the picture of the young lady called Pumpkins Whitaker, sir—an artistic figure—when Mrs. Tooth came to visit him.”

He pointed to the floor under Jacket’s chair.

“Go on.”

“Yes, Mr. Jacket. I listened. What happened was as I said in court. They quarreled. She cried. He laughed. There was a scuffle. In the end Mrs. Tooth ran out. Just like I said, sir.”

“Well?”

Mr. Wainewright leaned forward, and Jacket had to support him with an unobtrusive hand.

“Then, sir, I went into Tooth’s room, this very room, sir. I knocked first, of course.”

“And there was no answer?”

“There was an answer. Tooth said ‘Come in.’ And I came in, Mr. Jacket.”

“You mean to say Tooth was alive when you came in here, after his wife had left?”

“Exactly, sir. I was curious to know what had been going on. I made up an excuse for coming to see him just then. I’d borrowed his scissors, you see, the ones she is supposed to have killed him with. I’d been using them—they were very sharp—for cutting things out. They were part of a set—scissors and paper-knife in a shagreen case. I came to give them back—it was an excuse. Actually, I wanted to know what had been going on.”

“Go on, George,” said Jacket, quietly.

Mr. Wainewright said: “He was sitting on the bed, just about where you are now, in his shirt-sleeves, laughing and playing with the paper-knife. He started telling me all about his wife, Mr. Jacket, sir—how much she loved him, how much the barmaid at the ‘Duchess of Douro’ loved him, how much every woman he met loved him. His collar was undone.” Mr. Wainewright paused and moistened his lips. “His collar was undone. He had one
of those great big thick white necks. I had that pair of scissors in my hand. He threw his head back while he was laughing. I said: 'Here's your scissors.' He went on laughing, and coughing—he was a cigarette-smoker—at the same time. 'Here's your scissors,' I said. I think he'd been drinking. He roared with laughter. And then, all of a sudden, something got hold of me. I hit him with my right hand. I couldn't pull my hand away. It was holding on to the scissors, and they were stuck in his neck, where his collar was open. He made a sort of noise like Gug—as if you'd pushed an empty glass into a basin of water, sir, and simply went down. I hadn't intended to do it. I hadn't even shut the door of this room when I came in. But as soon as I saw what I'd done I wiped the scissors with my handkerchief, in case of fingerprints, and I slipped out, shutting the door from the outside, and went back to my room. Do you see?

"Martha Tooth never killed anybody. It was me. I killed Sid Tooth, Mr. Jacket, in this very room.

"And so you see, sir. There was a miscarriage of justice. Martha Tooth hasn't got any right to be made a heroine out of. She never killed that beast, sir. I killed Tooth. But she," said Mr. Wainewright, with bitterness, "she gets acquitted. She is made a fuss of. Her life-story is all over your paper. Her picture and her name is all over the place. And the honest truth of it is, that I did it!"

John Jacket said: "Prove it."

Mr. Wainewright drew a deep breath and said: "I beg pardon, sir?"

"Prove it," said Jacket. "Prove you did it."

"Do you think I'm crazy?" asked Mr. Wainewright.

"Of course you're crazy," said Jacket.

"I swear before the Almighty," said Mr. Wainewright, with passionate sincerity, "I swear, so help me God, that I killed Tooth!"

Jacket, who had been watching his face, said: "I believe you, Wainewright. I believe you did kill Tooth."
“Then there’s your story,” Mr. Wainewright said. “Eh?”

“No,” said Jacket. “No story. It’s proved that Martha Tooth killed her husband and was justified in killing him. It’s all weighed and paid. It’s all over. You can’t prove a thing. I believe you when you say you killed Tooth. But if you weren’t a lunatic, why should you go out of your way to tell me so after everything has been resolved and poor Martha Tooth has been comfortably provided for?”

Mr. Wainewright sat still and white. He was silent.

Jacket rose, stretched himself, and said: “You see, George old man, nobody in the world is ever going to believe you now.” He reached for his hat.

“Still, I did it,” said Mr. Wainewright.

“I begin,” said Jacket, “to understand the way you work. Tooth was a swine, a strong and active swine. I see how you envied Tooth’s beastly strength, and shamelessness. I think I get it. You wanted to ill-treat Tooth’s wife and betray his girl friends. You were jealous of his power to be wicked. You wanted what he had. You wanted to be Tooth. No? So you killed Tooth. But all the while, George, in your soul, you were Tooth! And so you’ve gone and killed yourself, you poor little man. You tick unheard, George; you move unseen—you are a clock without hands. You are in hell, George!”

John Jacket put on his hat and left the house.

He did no work that afternoon. At five o’clock he telephoned Chief Inspector Dark, at Scotland Yard, and said: “Just in case. That little man Wainewright has just been telling me that he killed Tooth in Bishop’s Square.”

Chief Inspector Dark replied: “I know. He’s been telling the same story around here. He was in yesterday. The man’s mad. Damned nuisances. Happens every time. Dozens of ’em always confess to what they haven’t done every time somebody kills somebody. Have to make a routine investigation, as you know. But this Tooth business is nothing but a lot of Sweet Fanny Adams. Pay no attention to it. Wainewright’s stone crackers, plain crazy. Forget it.”

“Just thought I’d tell you,” said Jacket.

“Right you are,” said the chief inspector, and rang off.
So Jacket forgot it. Great things were happening. Everyone knew that England was about to go to war against Germany. The nights were full of menace, for the lights were out in the cities. London after dark was like something tied up in a damp flannel bag. Jacket, who preferred to work a little ahead of time, was preparing certain articles which, he was certain, were going to be topical. He wrote a thousand words about a gas attack, under the title They Thought This Was Funny, and had it set up, illustrated with a cartoon from a 1915 issue of Simplicissimus. He wrote an impassioned obituary on the first baby that was to be killed in London, for immediate use if and when the war broke out. He compiled and elaborated monstrously scurrilous biographical articles about Hitler, Goebbels, Goering, etcetera.

But one evening, as he sat refreshing himself with a glass of beer and a sandwich in the “Duchess of Douro”, he saw Mr. Wainewright again. Mr. Wainewright could not see him: a twelve-inch-square artificial mahogany pillar stood between them, and the hot, smoky bar was crowded. Mr. Wainewright, dressed in a tight-fitting black suit with red chalk-stripes, was conversing with a thick-set sweaty man in a light tweed sports coat.

The conversation had touched the perils and the dangers of the coming night. The thick-set man was saying:

“Buy torches! Buy bulbs, buy bulbs and batteries! At any price—any price at all, wherever you can lay your hands on them. Buy torches, bulbs, and batteries. Prices are going up by leaps and bounds. A good torch is going to be worth its weight in gold. Everybody is stumbling about in the dark. There’s going to be accidents in the black-out. Mark my words. Accidents. And crime. Look out for crime.”

“Crime?” said Mr. Wainewright.

“Crime. Forgive me if I can’t offer you a drink,” said the thick-set man.

“Oh please, have one with me.”

“No, no! Well, a small one. You’re very kind. . . Yes, crime. Robberies, murders—the black-out sets the stage for robberies and murders.”
The barmaid whom Tooth had called Baby said, as she put down two drinks: “Are you still on about murders?”

Mr. Wainewright, paying her, said: “You look out. This gentleman is right. You can’t be too careful. What’s to stop anybody following you home in the dark and sticking a knife in you?”

The thick-set man said: “Exactly, sir. Exactly.”
“I don’t go home. I’ve got no home,” said the barmaid. “I live here. You and your murders!”
“Yes, but you go out sometimes,” said the thick-set man.
“Only on Tuesday,” said the barmaid, with a tired laugh. “If you want to stick a knife in me, you’d better wait till Tuesday.” She pushed Mr. Wainewright’s change across the bar and served another customer.

“Tuesday,” said Mr. Wainewright.

The thick-set man was pleased with his idea. He said: “I’m a man who is as it were professionally interested in crime.” He looked sideways and laughed.
“Oh, indeed?” said Mr. Wainewright.
“As a writer,” said the thick-set man, suddenly grave. “My name is Munday Marsh. You may have come across one or two of my little efforts in the Roger Bradshaw Detective Library.” He cleared his throat and waited. Mr. Wainewright said:
“Oh yes, yes I have indeed!”
“I hate to have this drink with you because I can’t return it. No, no—not again! You’re very good! As I was saying. Assume there is a sort of Jack the Ripper; a murderer without motive—the most difficult sort of killer to catch. The lights are out in this great city. The streets are dark. Dark, and swarming with all kinds of men from everywhere. Now, say a woman—Blondie there, for instance—”

“She is called Baby,” said Mr. Wainewright.

“Baby. Baby is found dead, killed with a common kitchen knife. There are thousands of kitchen knives. I’ve got half a dozen at home myself. Say I kill Baby with such a knife. All I need is nerve. I walk past her, stab suddenly, and walk on, leaving the knife in the wound. If necessary I turn back as the lady falls and ask ‘What’s the trouble?’
Do you get the idea? I simply kill, and walk coolly on. Who could swear to me in this blackout, even if anyone saw me? Eh?"

"What a clever man you must be!" exclaimed Mr. Wainewright.

Jacket, who could see his face, saw that the scanty eye-brows arched upwards, and observed a strange light in the colorless eyes.

"Of course," Mr. Wainewright continued, thoughtfully, "you'd use—in your story, I mean—any sort of knife. Something anyone could get anywhere. A common French cook's knife, say: a strong knife with a point. Um?"

"Any knife," said the writer who called himself Munday Marsh. "Anything. You don't wait to get your victim alone. No. All you need is nerve, sir, nerve! A quick, accurate stab, and walk calmly on your way. I'd write that story, only I can see no means of catching my murderer."

The barmaid heard the last word and said: "My God, why is everybody so morbid? Murder, murder, murder—war, war, war. What's the matter with you? You got a kink or something?"

"Wait and see," said Mr. Wainewright. "I'm not so kinky as you think."

Jacket, still watching, saw Mr. Wainewright's pale and amorphous mouth bend and stretch until it made a dry smile. For the first time he saw Mr. Wainewright's teeth. He did not like that smile.

The barmaid raised her eyes to the painted ceiling with languid scorn. Jacket observed that she looked downward quickly. Then he heard the whup-whup-whup of the swinging door, and noticed that Mr. Wainewright was gone.

A week passed. John Jacket was eating and drinking at the bar of the "Duchess of Douro" before one o'clock in the afternoon, the day being Wednesday.

"How's life?" he asked the barmaid.

"So-so," she said.

"Doing anything exciting?"
She hesitated, and said: "I ran into a friend of yours last night."

"A friend? Of mine?"

"That little man. What's his name? A little man. You remember! That funny little man. Old Murders—I forget what he calls himself. The one that gets himself up like a gangster. Used to go about in a bowler hat. Talks about murders. What is his name?"

"You mean Wainewright?"

"That's it, Wainewright."

"How did you manage to run into him, Baby?"

"It was a funny thing. You know Tuesday's my day off. I generally go to see my sister. She lives near High Road, Tottenham. I left here about eleven in the morning and there was little what's-his-name. Wainewright. I walked along Charing Cross to get the tram at the end of Tottenham Court Road—you like to stretch your legs on a nice morning like yesterday, don't you?"

"Well?"

"I walk to Hampstead Road, and there he is again."

"Wainewright?"

"Yes. Well, I pay no attention. I catch my tram, I go to my sister's and spend the afternoon, and we go to the pictures. We get the tram back and go to the Dominion. And when we get out, there he is again!"

"Wainewright?"

"That's right. There he is. So my sister says: 'A nice night like this—let's walk a bit. I'll walk back with you.' So we walk back here. Well, when we get to the National Gallery, we wait for the lights to change before we cross the road—there he is again."

"There Wainewright is again?"

"Uh-huh. So I say to him: 'Hallo.' And he says 'Hallo,' and walks off again along Charing Cross Road. It was almost as if he was following us."

"That's funny," said John Jacket.

"Coincidence, I dare say. But he's a funny little man. Do you like him, Mr. Jacket?"

"No, Baby, I can't say I do."

"Well," said the barmaid, reluctantly, "he seems to be
all right. But somehow or other I don't seem to like him very much myself. What's the matter? What're you thinking about, all of a sudden?"

"Nothing, Baby, just nothing." Jacket finished his drink, and said: "He was outside here. He was at the tram-stop in Hampstead Road. He was at the Dominion. And then he was here again. Is that right?"

"Yes. Why?"

"Nothing. When's your next day off?"

"Tuesday."

"Are you going to your sister's again?"

"I generally do," said Baby, turning away to serve a soldier.

"What time d'you get out?" asked Jacket, when she returned.

"About eleven or so. Why?"

"I just wondered. And you get back before the pub closes, I suppose? Before half-past eleven, I mean. Eh?"

"We've got to be in before twelve o'clock, you know," said Baby. "Why do you ask?"

"Curiosity. Your movements fascinate me," said Jacket. Then the lunch-hour rush began to come into the "Duchess of Douro", and Jacket went out.

He went to see Chief Inspector Dark. "Listen, Dark," he said, "you know me."

"Well?" said the chief inspector.

"You know I'm not crazy."

Chief Inspector Dark pursed his lips and said: "Well?"

"You remember that crazy little man Wainewright, the witness in the Tooth case?"

"Well?"

"I think he's getting to be dangerous."

"How?"

"You remember how he kept confessing to the killing of Tooth?"

"Well?"

"Well, Dark, I believe he really did do it."

"Well?" said Chief Inspector Dark.

"If I were you I'd keep an eye on Wainewright."

"Why?"
“Because I believe that Wainwright’s gone really mad, dangerously mad at last, Dark.”
“What makes you think so?”
Having explained why he thought so, Jacket concluded: “Wainwright’s feelings are hurt. He is determined to make you believe, at any cost.”
“Look,” said Chief Inspector Dark. “With one thing and another I’m rushed off my feet. I’m short-handed, and I’m busy. Is this all you’ve got to say?”
“Keep an eye on Wainwright,” said Jacket. “He’s after the barmaid, Baby, at the ‘Duchess of Douro’.”
“Following her about? So would I, if I wasn’t a married man, and had time to spare,” said Dark. “Keep an eye on Wainwright yourself. I don’t think there’s anything to it. I’m short-handed, and I’m busy, Jacket. Will you take a hint?”
Jacket said: “Oh well, I can’t blame you for not seeing my point.”
“Much obliged,” said Dark. “See you some other time.”
Jacket left, grinding his teeth. *I’ll keep close to Baby myself*, he said to himself, as he waited for a taxi in Whitehall. *I’ll show them. I’ll make Dark feel small!*
But on the following Sunday, Mr. Chamberlain announced that England was at war with Germany, and ten days passed before John Jacket had time to think of Baby and of Mr. Wainwright.
By then, something had happened.

It happened on the night of 5 September 1939. The Germans had destroyed the 7th Polish Division, and the French Army had engaged the Germans between the Rhine and the Moselle. U-boats had sunk British merchant ships. The blonde called Baby had her day off, and Mr. Wainwright followed her. She did not leave until half-past five that day.
He had learned something of the technique of pursuit. Instinct had warned him to put on again his dark suit and his bowler hat. He wore, also, a grey overcoat. The blonde
called Baby could be kept in sight without his being seen. Mr. Wainewright knew how to play his cards. He saw her coming out of the side entrance of the "Duchess of Douro", and kept her in sight: she wore a fur that resembled a silver fox, and a diminutive yellow hat. It was not difficult to keep her within your range of vision.

Mr. Wainewright followed her to St. Martin's-in-the-Fields, and right, into Charing Cross Road. Something had happened to the current of life in the town. There was a new, uneasy swirl of dark-clothed civilians, like tea-leaves in a pot, together with a rush of men in khaki uniforms.

Baby walked on: she had to walk. Once she tried to stop a taxi, but the driver waved a vague hand and drove towards Whitehall. So she walked, until she caught her tram. Baby climbed to the upper deck to smoke a cigarette. Mr. Wainewright sat below. When she got out, he got out. She disappeared into a little house beyond Seven Sisters corner. He waited.

As he waited he thought:

"*Nobody believes me. I've confessed to a murder. They throw me out. They laugh at me. They take me for a lunatic. To the police, I'm one of those madmen who go about confessing—saying they've committed crimes they haven't committed. I killed Tooth, and I tell them so. But no! I'm crazy, they say. Good. I'll kill her. I'll kill her with a common knife. When the papers report it, I'll mark it with a pencil and go along and confess again. Nobody will believe."

The light was fading. Keeping his right eye on the ground-floor window of the house into which Baby had disappeared, Mr. Wainewright stepped sideways into the road. He put his right hand under his coat and chuckled. Then he heard something coming. He hesitated, leapt backwards—saw that the truck had swerved into the middle of the street to miss him, and tried to jump back to the pavement.

But the driver, having seen his first leap in that treacherous autumnal light, spun back to the left-hand side of the road, and knocked Mr. Wainewright down.
The light truck squealed to a standstill as its rear wheels came back to the surface of the road with a soft, sickening jolt. Somewhere a woman screamed, and a man shouted. A policeman came running, and as he ran he switched on the beam of an electric torch which waggled in front of him.

A few minutes later an ambulance came, with a high, flat clangor of bells. Mr. Wainewright was carried away.

He was horribly crushed. But he also had a knife-wound. A long, wide, triangular cook’s knife—what they call a French knife—was embedded in his stomach.

The surgeon came to the conclusion that Mr. Wainewright must have been carrying the knife in his inside breast pocket.

When, at last, Mr. Wainewright opened his eyes he knew that he was dying. He did not know how he knew, but he knew. A cool hand was upon his left arm, and he could discern—in a big, shadowy place—a white coat and a white face.

"I killed Sid Tooth," he said.
"There, there," said a voice.
"I tell you I killed Sid Tooth!"
"That’s all right, there, there . . ."

Something pricked his left arm, hesitated, went in deep, and threw out a sort of cold dullness.

Pain receded, tingled, and went away.

Mr. Wainewright said: "I swear I did it. Believe me, do please believe me—I did it!"

"There, there, there," said a whisper.

Looking down at his blank, white, featureless face, the surgeon was reminded of the dial of a ruined clock, a mass-produced clock picked to bits by a spoiled child, and not worth repairing.
The Epistle of Simple Simon

From Simon of Caesarea, called Simon the Simple-minded, to his brother in Christ Jesus, Jochanaan in Rome.

Greetings:
Brother, I have not a strong head. I have nothing but faith, and that is enough for me, or for any man. Lame Joseph is writing this down for me, just as I say it. He also sends you greetings, and hopes, as I do, that your leg is better now and that the Light is spreading.

I returned only yesterday, after three years among wild men in savage places, and was surprised to hear that you thought I had perished. This, my dear Brother, is not so, for here I am, stronger than ever before, though a black man, kicking me in the face with his heel, caused me to lose some of my front teeth, and inflicted other painful wounds besides. I was also a little mauled by a leopard, and on five occasions beaten almost to death by misguided lambs. But I have not yet proved worthy of a martyr’s death.

I know I am the least worthy of us all, and that I am sometimes laughed at for my thick head and feeble memory. But let me, my dear Brother in Jesus Jochanaan, tell you my poor little story, so that afterward it may be said that Simon the Simpleton also loved God and suffered just a little.

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The people of the outer wilderness are savage and impatient. Poor wretches, they still worship stones and carved sticks, and their carryings-on, Brother, are pretty well as scandalous as those of the Romans, about which I have heard so much. They put strangers to death with the most unspeakable tortures, giving them to be eaten by ants, and so on. They live poorly in spite of their habits of rape and pillage, marry promiscuously, commit unheard-of sins, and hate God. They impaled me on a sharp stake, once, for two days; slit my nostrils, notched my ears, and branded my skin with white-hot irons. I forgot to mention that I have no toenails. They were torn out. Also, Brother Jochanaan, my left eye. I can assure you that there are excellent opportunities for the martyr in the lifeless lands beyond the desert.

On one occasion, I really felt that I was on the very edge of Heaven. It happened in a place to which I could lead you, but the name of which I never found out. I shall go back soon, and it would make me very happy, Brother, if you came, too. It is a place of sand and stones, a little way out of a small but extremely wicked city. The people there are all different. It seems to be a stronghold of robbers and escaped slaves. For instance, I recognized Romans, Greeks, Ethiopians, and Egyptians, together with a multitude of men and women of mixed colors. It is a kind of cloaca, into which the world has thrown the dung of humanity. The Chief there has a hundred and eighty wives, and hopes to have more if he can steal them somewhere.

I approached the town, calling upon it to repent. A dozen men came out to meet me. Oh Brother, they looked like devils! One of them had something wrong with his face, was swollen like the muzzle of a lion. He carried a staff shod with copper. I spoke to them. I exhorted them, and told them how Jesus died for us. The man with the lion’s face understood our language. He laughed, and asked, “Which Jesus?”

I said, “Jesus Christ.”

They made a ring round me. I spoke of the life everlasting. The man with the lion’s face told them what I was
saying in a jargon composed of the off-scourings of a dozen tongues. I gathered a little of what he said. It was evil. They laughed. One of them pricked me with a spear. I blush to say it, but I started. Then they danced around me, striking at my legs and feet, one with a staff, another with a whip as thick as a man’s arm and ten times as long, which cut like a steel knife. They made me dance with them, leaping over the whip, and shrinking under the staff. And all the time I pleaded with them, begging them humbly only to listen. For I pitied them in their childishness, Brother, and felt no anger.

At last they were tired. The man with the lion’s face, tiring of the game, broke my arm with his coppershed staff. I embraced him. He threw me to the ground and beat me. I felt a rib go and praised the Lord. A Negro drove his heel into my face. My mouth poured out blood and blessings. It seemed, then, that the end was near. I raised my good arm to heaven. A spear-shaft knocked it down. Then, as it were from a great distance, I heard the lion-faced one say, “It is bad luck to kill a madman.”

The earth was spinning. The sand was heaving like the sea. I saw a ball of light surrounded with rings of blue, yellow, and red, and this ball of light beat like a heart. Then something struck my head. The light broke up into stars which flew away. A voice said: “You fool, he is dead.” I was sure, then, that I should sup that night with Jesus in Paradise. My soul laughed, and everything was black. I felt myself falling, and after that knew nothing more.

But when, Brother Jochanaan, I found that I suffered pain, I knew that I was still on earth. I awoke in a pool of my own blood on the sand. It was evening. With my one eyes I looked at the round white moon and at the stars. Something was moving near by. I thought the men were still there, and, through broken lips, mumbled words of love and forgiveness. But it was a jackal. He crept up to me and licked the wounds in my legs. In my vanity, I thought that God had sent this jackal to help me. Next moment he bit me. I groaned. He ran away and then re-
turned.
I closed my eyes, waiting for death. Then I heard a crack and a cry. I looked. The jackal was running away, howling, and a man stood over me.

My fading senses perceived him very clearly. He was tall and gaunt, naked to the waist. The sun had burned him red and brown. He stooped. I looked straight into his eyes. They were large and black in the moonlight. The moon shone down on his great white beard and upon the outer edge of his nose, the bone of which had been shattered. This much I saw. I saw, also, that he smiled at me as he felt my body with his hands, saying, "Ah!" whenever he found a broken bone.

"God bless you, Brother," I said.

"Peace be unto you," he replied. Then he put his arms about me and lifted me, holding me under the thighs and shoulders, just as a woman lifts her babe. I was very thin; but he must have been a man of power.

"God bless you," I said again. The cold of the night passed away. I felt peace. A sleep as deep as death came over me. Yes, Brother Jochanaan, as this old man carried me across the sand, I lay in his arms and slept. I awoke only once, when the splintered edges of my arm grated together. I think I cried out. But the old man walked on, saying in a soothing voice, "Now gently, Brother; gently now, Brother."

Then everything grew dark again, and when I came back to my senses, I was lying on a sheepskin in a strange shadowy place, a sort of cavern, a hole in the rocks such as a wild beast might have hidden in. A little fire was burning, and the old man who had carried me there was stirring a strong-smelling concoction, which was boiling in a copper pot. My broken arm was compressed between two pieces of wood and firmly bound with strips of linen. My other wounds also were bandaged with linen, and, observing the remains of a very fine garment lying in shreds and tatters by the fire, I knew that this excellent stranger had torn up his clothes for my sake—for which, Brother, I have not the slightest doubt that God will reward him. Yes, when he arrives in Paradise, we may be certain that God will say to him: "My son, on such and such a day you tore up your
linen to bind the wounds of a poor stranger whom you found in the wilderness, and for that my angels shall dress you in marvelous robes softer than clouds and woven of all the colors of the rainbow. Furthermore, you went hungry that the same poor stranger might eat and grow strong again, and for that you shall sit at a golden table and feast on peacocks, remarkable fishes, several different kinds of honey, and anything else you may happen to fancy; for the dirty, ugly old fool whom you succored in the wasteland was my humble, weak, foolish, but well-meaning servant Simon of Caesarea, otherwise known as Simon the Simpleton, or Simon the Feeble-Minded, who lived to spread the Word of my Son, Christ Jesus.”

I opened my mouth to bless him, and he stopped it with a draft of bitter stuff out of the copper pot, and, as I swallowed it, a drowsiness came upon me and I slept again. When I awoke, which must have been after a very long time, all the pain was gone and I felt weak but wonderfully happy. I did not know whether it was day or night, because there was no light in the cave except the firelight. The old man put his hands upon my head, and there was a certain virtue in his hands. From his fingertips there seemed to flow a sort of cool sunlight. Then he said that he was satisfied, that my bones were knitting together, and that if I lay quite still and kept my mind free of all thought of my condition, I should be as strong as ever in a little while.

I thanked him and blessed him in the name of Jesus. Looking at me with a little smile, he asked me which Jesus I meant, because he said, Jesuses are as numerous in Judaea as Jochanaans, Davids, and Jacobs. You may rest assured, dear Brother in Christ, that in my clumsy way I did my best to make it clear that there was only the one Jesus, the Son of God, who came into the world to die for us all; who hung on the Cross of Calvary in order that we might all find Paradise.

At this my host expressed an almost frivolous astonishment.

"Why," said he, "the cross is the Roman gallows, and Calvary is a common place of execution, and dozens of Jesuses must have died on the cross there for this offense
or that.” He said, “I was born in that part of the world, and spent part of my life there, so I may speak with some authority. Where do you come from?”

I told him, Caesarea, at which he almost laughed, but did not quite laugh, and, feeding me from the copper pot as a woman feeds a sick child (tenderly yet firmly) he said, “You come from Caesarea. You were, I believe, an artisan—a glassmaker. Do not waste your breath asking me how I know—your hands tell me that. Yet you leave a good trade in a gay city to go out alone, living more wretchedly than the meanest beggar, inviting violence in lawless and desolate places, for the sake of the Word of a hanged felon. Why?”

I told him that I had found the Way, the Truth, and the Light, and that the hanged felon (as he called Him) was God’s Only-Begotten Son, who died the bodily death only to rise again, to rise again in the flesh after three days.

I believe, Brother in Christ Jesus Jochanaan, that this old man was, in spite of his doubts, a very good man, because all the time he tended me as well as if he had been my mother—who is in Heaven, I trust. I have never known gentleness like the gentleness of that man’s hands. He must have been very old, indeed, and he was so thin that there was nothing left of him but a net of sinews and veins in a bag of burnt brown skin. Yet I saw him lift a stone that a gladiator would have had to exert himself to move. Brother, there was virtue of a sort in the old man. Although he was scarred from forehead to ankles, there was no questioning that he had never wanted to return the punishment he had received. He inspired me with love. There was a sweetness in him, so that I wished that we might have been born of the same mother.

He could do strange things. One day, while I was lying still, half asleep, I heard the sound of breathing at my feet and, starting wide awake, saw two great green eyes watching me in the shadows. I was surprised into a kind of terror. I heard a low, terrible growl, and then I saw in the uncertain light of the fire a huge lioness. Between her forepaws, which were stretched straight in front of her (she was lying on her belly) sat three cubs. Their eyes took up the
firelight so that they looked like six winking red stars. As the lioness growled, the old man put out a hand and caressed one of her ears, and then she rolled over on her side while he rocked her to and fro with his foot.

Again, some time later, there was a high wind in the desert, and all kinds of animals came to the cave in which I was lying. The lioness came with her cubs, followed by her mate. Then two gazelles came in, as it were, on tiptoe, and the wonder of it was that they had no fear of the lions. Rabbits came into the cave, and lizards, and last of all two frightful serpents—the ones that have little horns, and hide themselves in the sand, and puff themselves up with their breath until they are thicker than a man's leg. They came in, coiled themselves as sailors coil ropes, and went to sleep; and the old man looked tenderly from beast to reptile and from reptile to beast, smiling with strange sweetness. With his left hand he fondled the ears of a gazelle, and with his right he scratched the belly of the lioness, while one of the cubs played with a young rabbit as a small girl plays with something she (in her childish way) loves and fears to break.

Every day, while I was lying still, my host brought me milk. Yet there were only wild creatures in that wilderness. I asked him where he kept his cows. He said that he had none, and then looking at my empty bowl and smiling, went to the mouth of the cave and whistled. "Here is my cow," he said, and I heard the thud of hoofs, and then a great fierce wild ass came in stamping and snorting and he milked her into the bowl.

I am not strong in the head, and what I say is of no importance, yet I believe that such a man has virtue, un-enlightened unbeliever though he be.

On one occasion I said to him, "Brother, if I may say so without giving offense, you also appear to have got more wounds than caresses in your lifetime. I speak in love and friendship and gratitude. But one might say that you, in the course of your business, have been knocked about even more than I have in the course of mine. That must have been a strong and angry man who smashed your nose."
He said, "That was done by a soldier, nearly fifty years ago."

I said, "You will not regard me as impudent, I hope. Who knows? With God's help and by the grace of Christ Jesus, who made the blind to see and the lame to walk, I might be able to help you. I have been near death many times, praise God, and have more than once been compelled to fly from the wrath of the godless. I, too, in all humility, claim to have sharp eyes, and I should say that those scars on your back—those wide, shallow scars—were left after a Hebrew scourging of thirty-nine strokes with a rawhide strap."

My host said, "You are quite right. So they were."

I knew then that, good and gentle though he was, this man had fled into the wilderness out of fear of the law, and was therefore living like a beast in a cave beyond the reach of his fellow men. I told him that no matter what he had done, there was hope for him if only he were contrite. I explained to him the words of Jesus, who spoke of the joy in Heaven over the one sinner that repenteth. The old man laughed as a man laughs in order that he may not weep. After a while, he said, "My friend, the law has taken its course with me. I am betrayed, tried, condemned, and executed."

I did not understand this and asked him to explain what he meant. Then he told me that he had been sentenced to death under Roman law for an offense against the State; or so it seemed to me. He had been condemned to die on the cross like a common felon. I told him that he ought to have rendered unto Caesar that which is Caesar's. He laughed. He told me that he was one of the few men that ever lived to talk of his execution. I believe, Brother in Christ Jochanaan, that he acted with the best intentions. Judge not lest ye be judged. Who am I to judge? He was an honorable but misguided man, and was condemned to the death of a thief. He was crucified, curiously enough, on Calvary—with nails, not ropes. The pain of stretched and strained muscles, he told me, was far worse than the pain that came of the nails in the hands and feet. There is good in everything, my dear Brother in Christ Jochanaan;
as my host hung there, a Roman soldier soaked a sponge in the vinegar-and-water with which soldiers filled their drinking bottles, and raised it to the old man’s lips on the point of a spear. My host was fortunate. He happened to be crucified on the eve of the Feast of Passover, during which no dead bodies were allowed to infect the air. The other men who were crucified with him had their legs broken with an iron bar and were buried alive. My host had an influential friend whose name was Joseph, who, by bribery, I fear, had him taken down and carried to a tomb, in which there was laid out a change of clothes and some ointment for his wounds, so that he got away. Limping down the road, he met some of his old coadjutators, who thought that he was a disembodied spirit. They ate fried fish together, and my rescuer went away on bleeding feet into the wilderness, walking on his heels and supporting himself with a staff.

Here, I thought was an opportunity to bring a good heathen to God, for, as I have told you, he was a man of power. Rightly or wrongly, dear Brother in Christ Jesus, I felt that this man, who could make the wild beasts of the wilderness obey him and who had no fear of lions or of outcast men more savage than lions, could spread the word in the wild places and bring many souls to the Throne. Also, I owed him my gratitude because he had saved my life. What could I offer him in payment more precious than the gift of eternal life? But when I tried to tell him how Christ died for us all, he looked at me with a strange expression on his face, and shook his head as if to say: “What you tell me is more than I can believe.”

It seemed that there was something between this man and his understanding. I asked him his name, but he said that he had no name. Once he had been known by a name, he said, but now he no longer had any need for a name since he had gone away from the world of men.

I said, “Go back! Go back! Brother without a name, go back into the world! Listen to me and believe! Having believed, return!”

He said, “I am glad to tell you that you will be ready to go on your way within seven days.”
He was right. For six days I wrestled with him and prayed for him, but he was obdurate. On the seventh, he gave me new sandals, and a new wallet full of food, and a large bottle of water, and took me out of the cave and down a hill, into a valley, where he covered my eyes with a cloth (begging my pardon) and conducted me to another place, and said, “You old fool, nothing I can say or do will help us now. Go! Go! Go!”

I felt his hands on my shoulders. He turned me around, and then round and round again until I was dizzy. I stood, staggering. Soon, when the blood had stopped singing in my head, I asked what was happening to me. But there was no answer, and a voice inside told me that I was alone. I took the bandage from my eyes and I was indeed alone in the sand, among the rocks. But I could see that I was not far from a trodden track. Of my host there was no sign. He had gone back into the wilderness and disappeared like a stone cast into the water. I mention this because if you or any other of us pass that way, the Old Man should be borne in mind. He is thin and sad, but very strong, and has a broken nose and the scars of the nails in his hands and feet; also a little puckered scar in his side. A better man than I may convert him. Pray tell any brother who passes that way.

From there I found my way to Meta. At Meta I rested and also worked seven months. I baptized Aslang, who, having seen the Light, ordered his whole tribe to be baptized in a tank one morning. I went on my way. The tribe of Ockang laughed at me, and the Chief Ockang slit my nostrils and toasted my feet at a fire, so that I crawled back to Meta. Aslang fell upon Ockang, slew him, and exterminated all his tribe.

WRITTEN FROM CAESAREA UNTO HIS BROTHER IN CHRIST JESUS JOCHANAAN IN ROME, BY SIMON.
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